



**Professor John Harrington (SLSA)**  
**Dr Emma Jones (ALT)**  
**Professor Paula Giliker (SLS)**

**3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024**

**Professor Penny Carey**  
**Chair, Committee of the Heads of University Law Schools**

Dear Professor Carey

**Re. Conference Support for Law Academics**

We write to express our urgent concern at the impact of funding cuts in UK universities, on the health of our field, its international standing, and on the careers of legal academics at all career stages. In particular, we note a growing trend to refuse or limit support for conference attendance by staff members.

The three learned societies in law - SLSA, SLS, and ALT - which we currently lead, each organizes a major annual conference. These are vibrant, inclusive and intellectually stimulating moments of mutual exchange and support.

Conferences enable the presentation of new work and ideas in a supportive environment. They provide formal and informal mentoring and feedback. They sustain community horizontally through new and renewed encounters, and vertically through thematic streams.

Conferences bring together postgraduate researchers and early career scholars, with experienced law teachers and researchers with specific early career sessions. Advice and support from editors of journals and book series, directors of research and teaching, REF-panelists, and reviewers for research funders, is invaluable and only available in the general conference setting.

Conferences marry the professional, the intellectual and the social. Plenaries allow the legal academic community to take stock of developments within the field as a whole, as regards regulation, the professions, international context and so on. Open calls for papers and panels showcase cutting edge developments in scholarship and methods.

Our executive boards and annual conference organizing teams work tirelessly to ensure the relevance and liveliness of conferences. Each of us has kept increases in fees for membership and conference attendance at below the level of inflation. Our bursary schemes have been greatly expanded to help colleagues otherwise impeded from joining us.

Smaller scale events are also vital to the community and to individual careers. Each of us organizes very successful events in this format. But they perform different functions to larger encounters and are not a substitute for them.

We appreciate the considerable constraints now being placed on heads of law schools. We support them in their work to secure the best conditions for academics working on law at all stages of their careers.

We urge them to recognize the essential contribution made by conferences to our community of research and teaching. We ask them to review and challenge allocation decisions which deny support for attendance at annual conferences.

Our learned societies are keen to work with heads of schools in supporting individual academics and the community as a whole.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Professor John Harrington, Chair, Socio-Legal Studies Association

Dr Emma Jones - Chair, Association of Law Teachers

Professor Paula Giliker – President, Society of Legal Scholars