Great Expectations – When Law Meets Reality

19 – 20 April 2021, Virtual Conference

Call for Papers: Oral and Poster Presentations

In a perfect world, law would be unambiguous. It would be clear and comprehensive, and capable of meeting all expectations placed upon it. But law does not exist in such a world. Instead, it sits inside a complex factual matrix – the reality of life. That reality impacts the law in multiple ways. For example, numerous people and entities are involved in making the law, from lobbyists and lawyers to judges and parliamentarians. More people still are involved in interpreting and applying the law, such as the police and civil service. Law can be made in a rush, via statute as a result of an emergency, or it can grow slowly over time as a result of judicial precedent. Legal principles can be borrowed from other jurisdictions, or a jurisdiction may come up with its own novel legal solutions to a problem. Because of these factors – and many more – the law is not always clear and unambiguous. It can be problematic and uncertain. It also prompts the question: is the law capable or able to bear the expectations we place upon it? Or is that, itself, too great an expectation?

The Edinburgh Postgraduate Law Conference (EPLC) 2021 aims to explore these questions by looking at the relationship between the expectations we have of the law, and how the legal system operates in reality. We therefore invite proposals that address this topic. The proposals could take a contemporary or historical perspective, and can be in relation to any area of law: tax,
commercial, criminal, public, comparative, critical theory, etc. Proposals from the field of criminology, which discuss reality and expectations in relation to non-legal as well as legal institutions, are also welcome.

This theme is deliberately broad and open to interpretation. “Expectations”, for example, could relate to general values we place upon the law, such as certainty or fairness; specific reasons for implementing a particular law; or the objectives that a law was meant to achieve. “Reality” is similarly broad and could relate to how law is applied in practice; how it has been interpreted by judges; or unintended side effects of that law. Specific questions or topics that fit within the theme of this conference include:

- Is the way a law applied different to how it was envisaged or intended to work by the law maker?
  
  Example: Are principles such as the welfare of the child upheld in family law? Do government officials properly apply statutory criteria for decision making?

- Are there laws that intend to resolve a problem but have made the situation worse or created another problem?
  
  Example: Can hate speech laws that are designed to protect minorities also be used to censor them? What are the ethical implications of allowing AI to make legal decisions?

- Are assumptions about a law – concerning either its history or the policy reasons behind it – correct?
  
  Example: Is it inevitable that law “catches up” with social progress to allow marginalised groups access to legal rights, or do these groups need to push and put real pressure on legislature for legal change?

- What legal or policy measures are best suited to bring about change in society?
  
  Example: Is prison reform during a global pandemic best achieved through short-term solutions or long-term change? What level of change can we legitimately expect from legal or policy measures?

Oral presentations will be 15 minutes each in length while posters will be limited to A2 in size.
To apply to present, please send the following to edlawpgconference@ed.ac.uk with the subject heading “EPLC 2021 Abstract Submission”:

- Abstract of no more than 300 words.
- Completed Biographical Details Form (attached to this Call for Papers). This will, among other things, ask you to indicate whether you would like to present a poster or an oral presentation.

Post-graduate students, early career researchers and legal practitioners are all welcome to apply.

The submitted abstracts will be evaluated on their relevance to the conference theme and clarity of ideas. While the theme of the conference can be interpreted broadly – and the EPLC 2021 committee encourages applicants to do so – we would still like to understand how your proposal relates to the theme described above.

**Abstract Submission Timeline:**

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