From the Head of School

As the time arrives once again to introduce this latest edition of Holdsworth, our annual alumni newsletter, I can’t help but reflect that this past year has been an exceptionally busy one for the Birmingham Law School.

This September, we officially launch our new initiative, the Centre for Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER). The Centre will offer all students the opportunity to benefit from high quality professional legal education, delivered in collaboration with some of the region’s leading firms of solicitors and with input from a national set of barristers’ chambers. We want to ensure that our students graduate with the skills that will make them stand out in a very competitive job market, and to foster research opportunities with the legal profession through close collaboration with the Birmingham-based lawyers. CEPLER represents a significant new venture in the Law School and I greatly look forward to announcing its first achievements to you in the coming months. Later in this newsletter there is information on how you may get involved, should you be interested, as CEPLER engages with the local legal community.

In the meantime, I am delighted to welcome Professor Satnam Choongh, a barrister from No 5. Chambers, as CEPLER’s Director of Education, and the Law School’s Professor Sonia Harris-Short as CEPLER’s Director of Research.

I would also like to extend a most warm welcome to members of lecturing staff who have joined us elsewhere in the Law School this year. They include Professor Sean Coyle, Professor Marie Fox, Rosa Freedman, Theresa Lynch, Leon McRae and Jane Norton. In the last year or so we have unfortunately said goodbye to Jonathan Harris (who is pursuing his career at the Bar in London), Geoff Morse (who is retiring but, we hope, will continue to do some teaching for us), and Celine Tan who took up a lecturing post at Warwick.

I am pleased to say that, so far, it seems that none of my academic colleagues will be leaving us at the end of this academic year. We are, nonetheless, expanding staff numbers. This is partly to ensure that we can teach our increasing student numbers properly, and partly to provide support for Satnam and Sonia’s work in CEPLER. In September we shall therefore be welcoming Rilka Dragneva-Lewens, Rosie Harding, Imogen Jones, Dominic da Cogan, Kim Barker and Hannah Gorman.

In addition, the University has introduced a new ‘Birmingham Fellows’ scheme, aimed at attracting the best post doctoral scholars. Out of fewer than 40 appointments, the Law School secured two: Sheelagh McGuinness (a specialist in health care law and ethics) and, in a joint appointment with the School of Social Policy, Simon Pemberton (a specialist in criminal justice, criminology and social harm).

The School has increased its provision of taught masters programmes: we are adding an LLM in International Law, Crime, Justice and Human Rights that showcases our increased teaching and research strength in these areas. We will also be collaborating with other Schools in inter-disciplinary Masters programmes on Health Care Law and Ethics; International Law, International Politics and Global Ethics; and European Studies. We’ve also taken the opportunity to restructure our existing masters programmes to allow students to study more modules and our academics to teach more specialist areas that relate directly to their current research.

I am most pleased to note, finally, that through the support of alumni funding, we are investing this summer in the creation of a new social learning area in the law building. Returning students and those starting their degrees in September will reap great benefits from this new facility.

As you can see, the School is going from strength to strength. Keeping these plans on track would be very difficult were it not for the advice and enthusiastic support I get from everyone in the School office as well as from the academics. I invite you to pay a visit to campus and come take a look around the School should you so wish – we would be delighted as always to see you.

Professor Andrew Sanders

Students and alumni working together to increase employability skills

This summer, our first summer placement with Piper Smith Watton LLP (PSW) is offering a fantastic opportunity for an undergraduate to gain professional work experience, working directly alongside PSW Partner Ian Insley.

Birmingham alumnus Ian graduated from the Law School in 1977 and started his legal career at Coward Chance (now Clifford Chance). Ian joined PSW in October 2008, having developed his areas of specialisation in construction and aviation over the course of his career (he is a keen pilot in his spare time). Our student will work within Ian’s team, gaining invaluable experience of these niche areas of law.

Vacation placements at PSW are a rare opportunity, and we were fortunate that Ian’s support allowed this placement to be brokered purely for a Birmingham Law School student. Ian spent a day on campus interviewing students for the role, before appointing Lauren Carradice, a Law with French student currently completing her second year.

Lauren said, ‘I am extremely lucky to have been offered this opportunity and I know it will be beneficial. Whilst working with a well-respected professional will be helpful in deciding which area of law I would like to go into, it will certainly increase my chances of future employment as well as improving the confidence I need to be successful in starting my legal career.’

If you think you could help us source work placements and internships for current students, please contact Alumni Relations Manager Natasha Sweet on 0121 414 2787 or email n.i.sweet@bham.ac.uk. We’d love to hear from you.
Since it began in 1928, the Holdsworth Club has been fortunate enough to attract some of the most distinguished judges and academics in the UK as its annual President. The list of past Holdsworth Presidents reads like a Who’s Who of the most prominent lawyers of the past 84 years.

Lord Denning was the President on no less than three occasions.

This year has been no exception. On Friday 2 March 2012, the Holdsworth Presidential Address was given by the Rt. Hon. Lord Neuberger of Abbotsbury, Master of the Rolls and head of the civil justice system of England and Wales. Lord Neuberger summarised the lecture as follows: "In my view, the development of judicial comment on a wide range of legal and constitutional issues through speeches, lectures and articles, carries with it more benefits than drawbacks, but it calls for much care, circumspection, rationing, and even self-denial, when it comes to considering whether to speak, what to say and how to say it."

The controversial topic did not pass unnoted by the media, with both The Telegraph and The Guardian running stories highlighting the impact of the increased prominence of senior judges in public life and how this may compromise the impartiality of the judiciary.

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The Christmas trip to Prague was an unqualified success, the January Theatre evening to watch Wicked in the West End, and the annual West End theatre trip is always a favourite, reminding us why the annual West End theatre trip is always a favourite. The Law Ball, inspired by the Tales of the Brothers Grimm, was described by staff and students as one of the best ever.

March saw the close of another hugely successful Holdsworth Year and the tenure of its 2011/12 Committee. Once again we have been hugely fortunate as members to enjoy some exceptional offerings. The Christmas trip to Prague was an unqualified success. The January Theatre evening to watch Wicked in the West End, inspired by the Tales of the Brothers Grimm, was described by staff and students as one of the best ever.

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Graduates make waves in charity world

Law School graduates pursue third sector careers

The charity sector in the UK is vibrant and dynamic, with charities playing a big role in meeting the needs of a fast-changing society. It is growing at a significant rate as a provider of services and as an employer.

We spoke to some of Birmingham Law School’s alumni who are now working in the voluntary sector, to find out what they are doing, what opportunities exist and why the charity sector is an attractive career path for today’s graduates.

Jon Siddall, LLB, 1976
Former Chief Executive of LandAid Charitable Trust

After graduating, Jon qualified as a barrister and then pursued his passion for sport as in-house lawyer for IMG, the leading sports management group before moving into the not for profit sector as General Secretary of the British Universities Sports Federation. He subsequently became involved directly with charity work setting up LawAid, a charity joint venture between the Bar Council and the Law Society. Jon spearheaded LawAid ’90, raising over £350,000 for the homeless in less than six months. He has gone on to run a number of smaller national charitable organisations.

Jon’s most recent involvement was as the first full time Chief Executive of LandAid, the charity of the UK commercial property industry, which he re-positioned as the recognised charitable investment vehicle of the property industry. LandAid helps disadvantaged young people across the UK access the facilities, skills and opportunities they need to achieve their potential by making effective use of the industry’s resources, expertise and influence. Jon saw through the initial goal of enlisting strong support of major industry players including Land Securities, Grosvenor and British Land prior to standing down at the end of 2011.

We asked Jon about the path his career has taken since Birmingham. The specifics of my study in the Law School did not lead me directly to the charity sector, apart from a dissertation on charity law, although my legal training gave me a good grounding for governance and regulatory work. It also gave me the skills I needed to get to grip with challenges and complexities quickly – I’ve got the Law School to thank for a strong analytical grounding and approach.

What is the best thing about working in the charity sector?

It’s all about the outcome – working for the benefit of others less fortunate than oneself, whether those effects be financial, physical, or however else they present themselves, is incredibly satisfying.

What is the biggest challenge in your area of the sector?

‘Funding. Industry-based charities cannot rely on grants. Organisations have to be incredibly resourceful. At both LandAid and LawAid, for example, I was looking at services spread right across the UK. It’s important to focus on a set of priorities, establish a strong structure and manage it well. Efficiently run organisations are far more likely to be utilised well and attract support, and rightly so.

What advice would you give to current law students interested in working for a charity after they graduate?

There are several things to consider. Firstly, which area of the sector interests you? International development, homelessness, cancer – you’ll be most successful where you can match your interests to a cause and allow your natural passion to bloom. Secondly, consider the size of the organisation you would like to work for – large charities can have a very different employee culture to small charities. Law graduates are of course well-placed to enter the legal side of charity operations, or have the analytical skills that may lend themselves well to working in research functions. There are so many routes into charity work – operations, fundraising, communications, front-line services, umbrella associations... it is a hugely dynamic and varied sector. Get two or three years experience in your first organisation and move on, get a varied experience. It’s a competitive field, there is the common difficulty of getting ‘a foot in the door’. An internship or work placement will go a long way – I recall an intern who took on a junior administrative role but quickly progressed to a Communications Officer post. Once you’re through the door, there are always people willing to help you, inspire you.
Anna Thorne, LLB, 1983
Oxfordshire Development Manager, Oxfam GB

After graduating from Birmingham, Anna Thorne trained as a corporate lawyer with what is now DAC Beachcroft, spent a couple of years as a practising lawyer, and 15 years working in HR and Business Development with firms like Linklaters and Shoosmiths. After a short stint as a teacher, she joined Oxfam five years ago, where she has worked principally as Head of Corporate Engagement for the Trading Division.

‘Oxfam has 700 shops around the country and an enormous online shop. I work with businesses like Marks & Spencer and Sainsbury’s (as well as many others) to create innovative ways of increasing the stock in our shops as well as developing ideas like Oxfam Collects at Work that make it easy for people to give Oxfam things they no longer want.

This year, though, I am leading our work in Oxfordshire celebrating our 70th anniversary and reconnecting Oxfam with the county in which it all began. It’s a privilege to connect people here with poor people around the world and to witness the transformational change that individuals make happen every day.’ So my degree and subsequent legal background have equipped me to structure and run the projects I now work on and my approach to work and relationships is framed by my business experience, she says.

We asked Anna what she finds is the best thing about working in the charity world. Undoubtedly the best thing is the opportunity to work with others (here at home) to help them to make a significant difference to the lives of poor people. Providing a way in for people to see others’ lives and for them to develop their thinking about the enormous power they have to make a difference is very motivating.

What is the biggest challenge to your sector?
Aside from caps on tax relief for charitable giving, a huge issue at time of writing for major giving, the economy as a whole is a natural inhibitor on people’s giving, through uncertainty as to their own futures. Oxfam and other international agencies face the extra hurdle of the majority of our beneficiaries being overseas so maintaining visibility and connection with the public is a challenge. It’s therefore imperative that we demonstrate the impact we have and the continuing need for us all to work together.

What advice would you give to law students interested in working for a charity?
Working in the charity sector is enormously popular, so you’ve got to work at it. Get involved: volunteer, campaign, lobby, fundraise, and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of an aspect of the area you are interested in. Use your optional modules to demonstrate your interest. Don’t lose sight of the fact that running a charity is just like running a business, it needs well qualified people: lawyers, accountants, IT, marketing and HR professionals, communications and fundraising professionals as well as those who work in the field, be they logisticians, humanitarian or social workers.

Most importantly, get to know yourself and what really motivates you, your values and ambitions. Remember that there are many ways of contributing: running an ethical business, working for a business with third sector clients, or else earning money with a view to developing your own philanthropic giving might be a preferred angle for you.

Portfolio careers are increasingly the norm, don’t be afraid to use your first job as a starting point, not an end destination, it worked for me!

Stephen Evans, LLB, 2003 and LLM, 2004
Legacy Administration Officer, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

After finishing his Masters at Birmingham in 2004, Stephen worked on a gap-year scheme for City Evangelical Church and then for a transport consultancy on Traffic Regulation Orders. In 2007, he joined Guide Dogs and has developed expertise in probate and inheritance tax law. ‘Gifts in wills pay for two out of three guide dogs and it is my job to ensure the charity receives its correct and full entitlement,’ he explains.

We asked Stephen how his law degree has lent a hand in his career. It demonstrated I had the skills and aptitude to learn and apply a specialist area of law. It was also a passport onto the Legal Practice Course which I have done part-time since 2010. I finish in 3 weeks!

What is the best thing about working in the charity world?
The knowledge that my efforts indirectly help blind and partially sighted people. Guide Dogs is committed to helping more and more people become independent and mobile.

What are the biggest challenges in your current job?
Balancing full-time work and part-time study is top of the list right now! The biggest challenge is making sure we allow executors to get on with their job while at the same time ensuring the charity’s interests are protected. This is not an easy balance to maintain.

What advice would you give to current students interested in working for a charity?
A charity needs to be run efficiently, ensure it connects with its supporters and, above all, focus at all times on the needs of its beneficiaries. Despite the fact that charities are non-profit making organisations, commercial awareness is very important.
Launch of Centre for Professional Legal Education and Research

Birmingham Law School has a tradition of leading the way and has always been among the first to recognise that the world is changing. With tuition fees rising, students will rightly expect more from their university to ensure that they are attractive to potential employers when they graduate, especially in the current job market. Not only have we recognised this, but we have already acted upon it.

At the start of the 2012 academic year, Birmingham Law School will be launching the Centre for Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER). We have appointed Professor Satnam Choongh, a noted barrister at No5 Chambers, as the Director of Education for the Centre. We asked him to explain the purpose of CEPLER:

‘CEPLER will benefit students by enhancing the vocational activities which the School can offer. More moots will be overseen by members of the profession, Pro Bono activity will be expanded and made available to a larger cohort and our strong relationship with the profession will lead to a greater number of unique placement opportunities, vastly improving the long-term job prospects of Birmingham students.’

The Centre will be launched in collaboration with the Birmingham-based legal profession, and its objectives will be to promote professional legal education at both undergraduate and graduate level, and to foster research opportunities with and on the legal profession.

Professional legal education

CEPLER will extend and enhance the vocational training elements available to its students, so as to improve their employability and make them distinctive from graduates from other law schools. This will be done with the input of solicitors firms, and with assistance from a national set of barristers chambers. Birmingham Law School already works with the legal community to provide career guidance and opportunities with our Director of Careers, Mr James Lee, and CEPLER will increase the resources and opportunities available to students.

Other career-related activities such as skills workshops will be organised, and CEPLER will provide dedicated legal and legally-related careers advice.

In addition to this, CEPLER will investigate the potential for ‘clinical’ legal education as a supplement to our existing course structure. This would increase practitioner input in our teaching so that a practice and policy perspective pervades subjects where appropriate.

Professional legal research

We have appointed Professor Sonia Harris-Short as Director of Research for CEPLER; and asked her how she views the research agenda:

‘By facilitating relationships between academics and legal practitioners, CEPLER will enable Birmingham Law School to become a renowned centre for research with and on the legal profession.’

CEPLER will have a steering committee comprised of a national set of chambers, leading firms of solicitors, judges and academics who will be working to identify opportunities for practitioners and academics to collaborate on writing and research. Further, the closer links between the legal profession and BLS will help facilitate privileged access to firms and practices so as to enable high quality research on areas such as legal aid, the impacts of Codes of Practice, the impact...
of Sharia law, the introduction of public access for the Bar, public interest litigation and the law on protective costs orders, changes to conditional fee arrangements, the introduction of contingency fees, litigants in person, ADR, the changing role of the judiciary and judicial independence.

Staff
CEPLER represents a substantial investment by the University, recognising the importance of creating even closer links with the profession for both staff and students. As well as the Directors of Education and Research we have appointed two CEPLER-focused fellows, Theresa Lynch, who is already a teaching fellow in the Law School, and Hannah Gorman. Also joining us are two CEPLER-focused postgraduate teaching assistants and a dedicated CEPLER administrator, Lesley Griffiths.

Pro Bono
The Birmingham Free Legal Advice Group (Birmingham FLAG) has been featured in the last two editions of Holdsworth and has completed another year providing free legal advice to the local community, with requests for help trebling from the previous year. Over 100 people from the local community sought legal help from this innovative project run by Birmingham Law School, in conjunction with the Birmingham offices of Mills & Reeve LLP. CEPLER will allow the FLAG to increase its case load by offering advice in a greater number of legal subjects; the StreetLaw project (whereby students have the opportunity to address groups and organisations within the community on law related subjects) will grow and the lecture series ran by the Group (allowing individuals, groups and organisations from within the community to give lectures to students on law related areas) will be expanded.

Mooting
Birmingham Law School currently operates four mooting competitions: the Allen and Overy First Year Competition; the Camm Cup, sponsored by No. 5 Chambers, for second and final year students; the Postgraduate Competition and the new Alumni Cup competition, introduced in 2011/12. We also send teams to take part in many national competitions – for a report on our entry in the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition see page 9.

Help the Law School expand its mooting programme
As a graduate of the Law School, you could make a valuable contribution to the success of CEPLER. If you are a practising lawyer, would you be interested in contributing towards improving our students’ presentational skills and confidence by helping to judge our moots? The School currently holds four mooting competitions per year, offering 96 students the opportunity to gain experience. However, demand for student places far outstrips supply – last year we had 320 students apply.

Volunteer judges are asked to judge one moot (or more should they wish), which will last two hours and take place one weekday evening during our upcoming mooting period of October 2012 to March 2013.

If you are interested in helping us by judging a moot, or perhaps you have colleagues who may be interested, please contact Natasha Sweet, Alumni Relations Manager, in the first instance on n.i.sweet@bham.ac.uk, 0121 414 2787.

Head of School’s Award for Excellence in Teaching or Supporting Student Learning

Every year the Law School invites students to nominate members of staff for the Head of School’s Award for Excellence in Teaching or Supporting Student Learning. The award rewards staff and raises the profile of learning and teaching activity throughout the University. This year students overwhelmingly nominated Lecturer James Lee as recipient of the award, reflecting the excellent careers support and guidance that we already provide to students.

‘I am delighted and honoured to have been awarded this year’s prize. I am very grateful to all the students for voting. I enjoy teaching the core private law modules of Tort and Trusts, and I greatly appreciate the support and advice of colleagues on those modules.

The prize recognises Birmingham Law School’s commitment to excellence in research-informed teaching, of which we are all very proud,’ James comments.
An international law school

In the past twelve months, Birmingham Law School has visited Canada, Mauritius, India, Nigeria and Singapore to meet with prospective students and talk about the range of courses we offer. However, these countries are just the tip of the iceberg; our current cohort includes students from thirty-four countries outside the EU, from as far afield as Zambia, South Korea, Jordan and Trinidad and Tobago.

‘Having such an internationally diverse student population benefits the whole School. Having international students in teaching groups brings different cultural perspectives to the group discussion, which is invaluable to both home and overseas students. International students help the School to foster strong ties with overseas partners, to support the development of opportunities such as international work placements and internships. The development of a truly international alumni community that supports the objectives of the School is of great value to today’s students and academics.’

Mr Stephen Webley
Recruitment and Admissions Manager,
Birmingham Law School

Healthy ageing commission

Professor Jean McHale, Birmingham Law School, has been appointed a commissioner on the third Birmingham Policy Commission, entitled Healthy Ageing in the 21st Century. The Commission will explore different expectations for ‘graceful’ ageing in a multicultural society and how good health in later life can be promoted. Its aim is to highlight the pertinent issues for UK policymakers and regulators in the next decade and it will connect to the EU’s increasing policy engagement with health and healthy ageing. Professor McHale took part in a debate ‘Healthy ageing in the 21st Century: a question of individual rights, state responsibility, or something we simply can’t afford?’ to launch the Policy Commission at a fringe event of the Labour Party conference in Liverpool last autumn.

Facts:
Percentage of students from outside the EU in the current first year:
- LLB: 10%
- LLM: 36%
- LLB for Graduates: 70%

Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Bulgaria
Canada
China
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iran
Israel
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Malawi
Malaysia
Mauritius
Nigeria
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
South Korea
St Kitts and Nevis
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Uganda
USA
Vietnam
Zambia
Birmingham students on road to success

The climax of Birmingham Law School’s Mooting competitions is the Camm Cup Final, which took place in March 2012. The final is always judged by the Holdsworth President, and so, after delivering his Presidential Address in the morning, Lord Neuberger of Abbotsbury spent the afternoon judging the final. Mr Paul Bleasdale QC (Head of No.5 Chambers), Mr Satinder Hunjan QC (also from No.5 Chambers) and Birmingham lecturers Mr James Lee and Mr Martin George.

The winner of the Cup this year was Arrin Nouri, a second year student on the LLB programme. The runner-up was Christopher Pask.

We spoke to Arrin after the final, who said: “I was delighted to be crowned winner of the Camm Cup Mooting Tournament 2012. When I applied to participate, I never thought that I would get so far! The legal problems were challenging and each round required many hours of preparation, but I thoroughly enjoyed taking part.

Mooting has been an excellent experience, assisting me in improving my advocacy skills as well as my legal research. Winning was a very special occasion, with Lord Neuberger heading the panel of judges and presenting me with the trophy.”

Current Law student Natalie Hearn talks about her placement on a highly-competitive Japanese teaching exchange programme she will be embarking upon this summer.

At the end of July 2012, I will be moving to Japan for a year to work as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) on the JET Programme. The JET Programme is run by the Japanese government to promote international relations within the local community. The ALT position is a placement alongside the teaching staff to help students improve their English speaking and listening skills, as it is traditionally taught with a focus on reading and writing.

My interest stemmed from my two week travels around Japan as part of my gap year and from completing an Open Access course in beginners’ Japanese at Birmingham in my second year. After a final interview at the Japanese Embassy in London, I was lucky enough to be offered a place on the scheme.

Inaugural University of Birmingham Jessup Moot Court team is a true success story

The Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition is the world’s largest, most popular and prestigious moot court competition, with participants from over 500 law schools in more than 80 countries. The Jessup Moot is a specific-topic external moot in the field of Public International Law. This year the University of Birmingham was represented at the Jessup Competition by Nivedita S (LLB, third year), Nicholas Truelove (LLB for Grads, second year), James Morrison (LLB, second year) and Matthew Low (LLB for Grads, first year) with Matthew Burton and Stoyan Panov, PTAs and PhD Candidates at the University of Birmingham Law School serving as Team Advisors.

The team prepared and trained for the competition throughout the entire autumn term, including the Christmas holidays, and produced two extensive and highly complex 9000-word legal memorials relating to complicated legal topics of recognition of governments, jurisdiction of the World Court, use of force, state immunities, and destruction of cultural property. After several months of devoted and persistent preparation and practicing several times a week, the team performed strongly at the three-day, demanding and highly competitive UK National Rounds. The team placed 5th in the Written Memorials section and finished 9th overall in the whole competition. Through their admirable level of research, excellent pleading and drafting style, and high quality of legal substance, the inaugural Jessup Team has laid down the foundation for a long-lasting legacy and tradition in representing the University of Birmingham at the most prestigious moot court competition in the world.

Student profile: Nivedita S

Nivedita S, a final year student on our LLB programme from Singapore, has been an active member of the Law School throughout her time here. In her first year she won the Allen & Overy Mooting Cup; in her second year she was co-chair of the Staff-Student Consultative Committee, and in her final year she was part of our team in the Philip C. Jessup Mooting Competition. She has been a student guide at our open days and applicant visit days and a member of the Holdsworth Drama Club.

In her spare time Nivedita is the Head of Arts and Culture at Burn FM, the student radio station run by our Guild of Students. In addition to coordinating the arts coverage, she presented the weekly Arts and Culture show.

‘My radio show covered the artistic and cultural events around campus and the Birmingham area. The show was an invaluable outlet for me during my Law degree and also helped me improve my presentation and public speaking skills. This opportunity has been one of the many reasons that I love the University.’

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Professor Marie Fox was appointed Chair in Socio-Legal Studies at Birmingham in 2011. Educated at Queen’s University, Belfast and the University of Manchester, she has previously worked at the Universities of Lancaster, Queen’s Belfast, Manchester and Keele. She has served on the Medical Ethics Committee of the British Medical Association and the Governing Body of Women’s Aid Northern Ireland. Marie is currently working on projects concerning the regulation of animal and human bodies and the policing of human/non-human boundary, as well as the ethics and legality of genital cutting. She currently teaches on our Women and Criminal Justice, Legal Issues in Healthcare, Bioethics, and Health Care and Human Rights modules.

Why did you choose to join Birmingham Law School? I’d had a great eight years at Keele but it felt like time for a change; the Chair was in an interesting field of legal studies and all the reports I heard about Birmingham and the Law School were really positive. In addition, the new Centre for Health Law, Science and Policy offers lots of opportunities for interdisciplinary research in my field, and it was an opportunity to build on pre-existing research collaborations with colleagues like Jean McHale.

How are you enjoying it so far? It’s been busy! I’ve enjoyed teaching Legal Issues in Heath Care to undergraduates in particular, as Jean and I have plans to write a new edition of our text and materials on Health Care Law. I’ve also been teaching a new module on Women and Criminal Justice which took me back to research interests from years ago – and made me aware of how much has happened in that field. The Law School is a very collegiate environment to work in. There are a lot of exciting developments, such as the new Birmingham Fellowship scheme, as well as the various research Centres, which make for a vibrant atmosphere.

Tell us about the research you’re currently engaged in. I’ve been working for some time on a project (with Michael Thomson, Keele University) which examines various forms of genital cutting – male and female circumcision and gender assignment surgery, and explores parallels with other forms of body modification. The promotion of male circumcision as a potential solution to the HIV pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa has required us to explore new issues of risk, public health and social justice, incorporating new strands of cross-disciplinary work at Birmingham on the themes of ‘perfect people’ and justice. Other work focuses on the legal regulation of the veterinary profession, which has an important history at Birmingham, as it is where Professor David Morton did ground breaking work on veterinary ethics and animal pain. I’m also working on the issue of Dangerous Dogs, and how the law should be reformed – an issue very dear to my heart. Breed-specific and unworkable legislation like the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act is implicated in the demonisation and perverse over-breeding of the bull breeds, which is responsible for much of the voluntary work I do with abandoned dogs.

Those projects probably sound quite diverse but I think there is a unifying theme, which concerns how we define and regulate bodies (both human and non-human) and who we entrust with policing them.

What are your plans for the future? I think all of this is going to keep me busy for the next couple of years! I do want to write up the genital cutting material for a monograph that would bring the various strands of the arguments together. When that project is finally completed I see my work as being more firmly located in the field of animal law as I think that tells us so much about what we mean by the human. In particular, I am interested in unpacking how law legally regulates different types of animals. Dogs and primates I think raise particularly interesting ethico-legal issues.

I’d be interested in introducing a module in animal law to the Birmingham curriculum. The subject is fast developing as an optional subject especially in North American law schools and it would be good to develop an option in that field.
June 2012 saw our usual strong turnout at the annual University Reunions Day, with classes of 1987, 1977, 1972, 1967, 1962 and the pre-1962 ‘Golden Classes’. Over 500 alumni from across all departments attended on the day, which kicked off with a welcome from the Vice-Chancellor Professor David Eastwood in the Great Hall in Aston Webb. Activities throughout the day included University Question Time, walking and minibus tours around campus, tours of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, the Guild of Students, Winterbourne House and Gardens and Special Collections, and an evening lecture at the Barber. Many guests stayed to enjoy a special reunions dinner in the evening.

For many, the highlight of the day was a visit to their old department to meet current staff and students, not to mention enjoy a good reminisce with their old classmates!

The Law School welcomed through its doors 13 guests, who were treated to a special tour of the led by staff and students.

Supported by alumni donations, this project results from a successful bid to the Annual Giving Fund. The fund distributes donations made by former students to projects across the University which demonstrate a positive impact on the student experience.

For information on all the projects supported by alumni donations, please visit [www.birmingham.ac.uk/giving](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/giving).

Two of our final year students have been awarded scholarships by the Inner Temple to train for the Bar next year. The Inner Temple will fund their £17,000 Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) and has also awarded both students the Duke of Edinburgh Entrance Award, which will cover the Inn’s fees for admission and call. The two scholarship recipients are final year Law with French student Asha Pearce-Groves, and LLB student Corinna Thompson, who was also this year’s Mistress of the Moots.

Birmingham Law School’s Professor of Health Care Law, Jean McHale, took part in the David Price Memorial Debate with the biomedical ethicist Professor John Harris of the University of Manchester. The debate, which took place at the NHS Blood and Transplant 1st National Donation Congress in March, was on the motion ‘Consent for Donation is a Luxury that we cannot afford’, and Professor McHale was victorious.
’People think lawyers spend their time getting clients what they want,’ reasons Professor Satnam Choongh between bites of a chocolate brownie for his brunch after an early start invigilating a Law School exam. ‘We spend much more of our time delivering bad news and therefore it becomes a job of managing expectations,’ he explains, drawing from more than 20 years of experience in the profession.

Moving to Birmingham from rural India as a young boy, he credits his drive and determination to succeed to his humble roots. Aged seven and yet to begin his schooling, it was Sherlock Holmes who taught him English and piqued his interest in law and order. ‘I really got into reading and became quite interested in detective novels, especially Sherlock Holmes – the traditional version, not today’s Jackie Chan-esque hero, that is,’ he explains.

A barrister at the city’s No5 Chambers, Professor Choongh joined the University in January as Professor of Law and Director of Education and Research (CEPLER) at the Birmingham Law School. Specialising in planning, public and environmental law, he says this vocation found him. ‘When you’re a student, you don’t appreciate how it works, but my specialism definitely chose me. A combination of luck, chances and trying new things led me down a path I never imagined for myself.

‘I always thought I wanted to do commercial law but after a placement in the city I realised I had found myself sitting behind a desk in an office job and I hated it. With planning you’re not constrained in one room, spending lots of time on the road doing site visits and working alongside experts from a variety of disciplines which continues to fascinate me,’ he explains.

During his long career in law, Professor Choongh has been fortunate enough to work on numerous high profile and interesting cases and the one that sticks out most in his mind? ‘Coventry Airport,’ he exclaims. ‘It was the longest running enforcement inquiry in the history of the planning system, lasting for more than six months which was really unusual.

‘It’s not every day that an airport operator decides they don’t need planning permission to become a passenger airport,’ he remembers.

‘We were never going to please both the gung ho developers and the local residents absolutely opposed to changes and so we focused on getting the best outcome for the case regardless.’ And that is what they were able to achieve: a development which delivered protections for local people that the developer would never have agreed to left to their own devices.

Whether you go on to practice law or not: if you equip yourself to get on with people from different backgrounds, you will go a long way.

It’s also not every day that you find yourself designing a law school from scratch, but Satnam lists that as his career highlight. ‘Having the opportunity to plan a law school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was really exciting. I was very hands-on in developing the programmes in what was for me, a new and exotic location, and I’m pleased to say the school has been a huge success.’

The next step in his diverse career sees Satnam seeking closer collaboration between academics, students and legal practitioners through CEPLER, and the three words he chooses to describe himself and what he is brings to this new role? ‘I would say I’m hardworking; I had to be to get this far in my career. I am thoughtful; I may not always be the first to spot a point, but once I do I make sure it’s analysed properly, and I would like to think I am approachable.

‘That’s one thing that life, and law, teaches you, whether you go on to practice law or enter an entirely different profession: if you equip yourself with the skills to be able to get on with people from all different backgrounds and put them at ease, you will go a long way to being a success,’ he concludes, washing down his brownie with a swig of coffee.

Stay in touch!

We always want to hear your news — whether it’s a new job, a new programme of study, or perhaps you just got married. If you would like to find out more about volunteering for the Law School, or make suggestions about the content of the newsletter we would love to hear from you.

To stay in touch and receive regular events notifications, please make sure we have your current email address. Join your.bham, the online Birmingham alumni community, at www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni and join 9000+ of your fellow alumni in our LinkedIn group, called ‘University of Birmingham Alumni and Friends.’

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