



**Guy Beringer, Chair, The Legal Education Foundation**  
**Annual reception, Inner Temple Hall, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

Good evening.

My name is Guy Beringer and I am the Chair of the Legal Education Foundation. I am delighted to welcome you to our fifth annual reception.

Our recent annual receptions have taken us to Glasgow, Birmingham, Leeds and Bristol so we felt it was time to return to London. We are delighted to receive you here in Inner Temple, a few yards away from our London office in Paper Buildings. I must thank the Treasurer, Lord Hughes, the Reader, Guy Featherstone and the sub-Treasurer, Greg Dorey who are all here for allowing us to use this wonderful setting.

The main purpose of this evening's event is to answer a fairly simple question: What does the Foundation do? Simple questions rarely lead to simple answers and this is no exception.

One answer is to say that we exist to increase public understanding of the law and to increase public capability to use it. We believe that citizens should be able to find the law, should be able to understand the law, and should be able to use the law.

That explanation, whilst accurate, normally prompts a further question: Yes, but what do you **really** do? So let me try to answer that in two ways, firstly by reference to some of the broader themes which we have pursued in our work, and then in a more practical way.

My broader themes are people, knowledge and systems.

Let us start with people. Social welfare law (by which I mean areas such as housing, welfare benefits, debt, community care, immigration, and parts of family, employment, mental health and equality law) is the law of real life for the majority of citizens. It is perhaps the principal element which determines whether their rights are upheld, their interests are protected and their ambitions fulfilled. And yet social welfare law has been a Cinderella area of the law. It is often untaught by our universities, it is often undervalued by our profession and it is often a closed book to the public. We have begun from the simple premise that this will not change unless we can champion this area of the law as a career choice for the most able young lawyers, a career choice which is rewarding, fulfilling and respected. We have therefore created a scheme called the Justice First Fellowship Scheme. This funds training contracts and pupillages in areas of social welfare law. The scheme is in its fifth year and has fully funded the training of nearly 70 young lawyers in organisations which practise social welfare law. The scheme is gaining momentum and, in a few years, Justice First Fellows will be numbered in their hundreds and we hope this will help the law of real life to be given the status it deserves and to be a reality for many people.

My second theme relates to knowledge, and the role of research and data. Our Director of Research, Dr Natalie Byrom, has argued consistently for a commitment to the gathering of evidence to

underpin the many reforms which are now being proposed across all parts of the justice system. The law is a field which has not historically seen investment in the gathering of data and the assembly of evidence to evaluate legal need and assess proposals for meeting such need. We believe that is now changing, thanks in no small part to the work which Natalie has done. She has drawn together a global network of academics, judges, officials and practitioners to devise practical frameworks for measuring the impact of court reform on access to justice.

My third theme relates to broader systems and new settings in which the law is used to solve problems and here we have programmes of grants which set out to challenge thinking about the system which is currently in place.

At a policy level, we seek to avoid advocacy but we do try to ensure that policy is underpinned by an understanding of the law and of the importance of the law as a means of averting problems as well as solving them. Our Head of Policy, Swee Leng Harris has come here today hotfoot from giving evidence to a parliamentary Select Committee and I know she will have given them a better understanding of the legal environment in which they are developing legislation. We hope also to be able to support the Ministry of Justice in its new post LASPO Action Plan in ways which will promote greater understanding and wider use of the law.

We also have a series of programmes which examine ways in which the law can be used as a force for good. Many of the ideas sued are not new but the challenge is to ensure that they are adopted systemically and systematically. One of these programmes supports health justice partnerships. This is where the law is used in health

settings to deal with the underlying cause of health problems. A GP may, for example, wish to prescribe advice to resolve underlying debt, employment, family or benefits issues as a better way of resolving mental health problems than medication. Similarly, a resolution of housing issues with a landlord may be a swifter means of dealing with illness caused by a poor physical environment than medicine alone. This happens in many parts of the country on an ad hoc, localised basis.

We are supporting the work being done by Professor Dame Hazel Genn at UCL in this area and we believe it will be a mainstream way of resolving certain medical problems in the future but it will require structural and systemic change in the way in which some medical and legal services are delivered as well as becoming part of the funding structure of public services.

Those were my three themes, but if a few of you are still thinking: Yes, but what do you actually do?

My final and best answer is to invite you to look around this Hall and, when I finish talking, to take a tour round the stalls which surround you. Each of the people behind the stalls is here voluntarily and each of them represents an organisation which has been supported by an LEF grant. We have given 400 grants to a value of over £22 million in the five years since our launch so we could not fit them all in but this is an excellent representative sample of those grants.

You will find:

The British Institute of Human Rights - an established leader in bringing understanding of human rights to a wider audience.

You will find BAILII - the only free online case resource available to the public.

You will find Fair Trials International - working for a world where every person's right to a fair trial is respected.

You will find Child Poverty Action Group - a well known charity but ask them about their judicial review project.

You will find Maternity Action - a leader in supporting pregnant women, partners and young children.

You will find RCJ Advice - known to many of you but ask them about the project by their Justice First Fellow which contributed to their securing a £1million grant from government.

You will find Just for Kids Law - ask them about the Youth Justice Legal Centre.

You will find The Longford Trust - ask them about the Patrick Pakenham Awards enabling young serving and ex-serving prisoners to study law at university.

You will find Youth Access - the national organisation for youth advice, information and counselling services which is leading a project called Make Our Rights Reality.

You will find Refugee Action-who offer vital support for refugees from some of the world's worst regimes.

You will find Advice Now - the award winning website, run by Law for Life, which supported 900,000 people last year.

You will find Law Centres Network - another national network, this time for Law Centres across the country who are a central part of daily delivery of access to justice.

You will find the Legal Aid Practitioners Group - a vital support for hard pressed publicly funded lawyers.

You will find the Justice First Fellowship scheme, about which I have already spoken.

And finally, you will find Legal Advice Centre (University House) - this appears to be a law centre in Bethnal Green but ask them how they deliver advice clinics in Falmouth and how they run court duty desks in Truro and Bodmin, all without leaving East London and ask them if they could offer a cure for advice deserts across the country.

What do we do? In effect, we do what they do and without them we could not do it, so please go and ask them what that is. Feel free to take them a drink and have a chat with them. The law of real life is literally all around you.

To go back to my opening remark, I am not sufficiently naïve to believe that I will ever see the day when citizens can all find the law, understand it and use it. But I do believe that we at the Foundation have an inescapable duty to hasten the coming of that day. Perhaps some of you think the same.

Thank you for coming and enjoy the evening.