Attendees: Daniel Bedford (Webmaster & 2024 Conference Organiser) (**DB**); Philip Bremner (Treasurer) (**PB**); Anna Bryson (**AB**); Marie Burton (**MB**); Beverley Clough (EDI Co-lead) (**BC**); Richard Craven (**RC**); Simon Flacks (Seminar Committee Chair & Open Access Lead) (**SF**); Marie Fox (2025 Conference Organiser) (**MF**); Elisabeth Griffiths (Social Media Officer) (**EG**); John Harrington (Chair) (**JH**); Emma Jones (Blog Co-editor) (**EJ**); Arwen Joyce (Precarity Rep & EDI Co-lead) (**AJ**); Smita Kheria (Vice Chair) (**SK**); Kay Lalor (Blog Co-editor) (**KL**); Kirsten McConnachie (Stream Secretary) (**KM**); Colin Moore (Membership) (**CM**); Alex Powell (**AP**); Andra Le Roux-Kemp (YouTube Channel Editor) (**ALRK**); Raza Saeed (Publisher Liaison/Archive Officer) (**RS**); Diksha Sanyal (PGR Rep) (**DS**); Mini Saxena (PGR Rep) (**MSa**); Marie Selwood (Newsletter, Ebulletin and Webeditor) (**MS**); Helen Stalford (**HS**) (2025 Conference Organiser); Mitchell Travis (Impact Lead) (**MT**)

Apologies: Matthew Howard; Emma Milne (Secretary); Rebecca Moosavian (Recruitment Secretary & Grants Committee Chair); Emily Walsh (2024 Conference Organiser)

**JH** began the meeting by working through some of the uncontentious reports on the meeting agenda:

5.17 International Liaison

5.16 Administrator

5.15 Stream Secretary

* **KM** spoke about proposals to change aspects of the policy on conference streams. These were approved by the board.

5.14 Open Access – report noted.

5.13 Publishers’ Liaison

* **RS**, who has been liaising with the Liverpool organising team, updated the board.
* **HS** spoke about a lack of response from publishers: one major publisher, Blackwells, has confirmed that it will not be supporting the conference. The Liverpool organising team are looking at ways in which journals or law firms might sponsor streams, and HS asked whether board members, with links to journals/law firms, might help with this.
* **RS** agreed with **HS** – publishers were not convinced that the investment is worth it.
* **JH** endorsed the above work and reiterated that if board members have useful links with journals (eg editorship) or legal practice, to use them.

5.11 Blog Editor

* **JH** congratulated **EJ** and **KL**.
* **EJ** noted that currently two series of blog posts are running, and that there will be a further post in March. They are planning to put out a further call for a blog series after this.

**JH** returned to the order of the meeting agenda.

2.1 Minutes 10/09/24

* The board approved the minutes

2.2 Action Points - noted.

6.2 Annual Conference: Liverpool 2025

* **MF** updated the board about preparations for the conference.
  + 952 abstracts have been submitted, and stream convenors have processed 840 of these. Emails have been sent to convenors to address the holdup.
  + One stream has received only three paper submissions, and the convenors are not responding to emails. If the convenors do not respond, papers will be moved into an alternative stream.
  + There have been 114 registrations with the early bird rate set to close on 5/2/25. There have been 28 applications for bursaries. **MF** wanted to take a strong line and not allow late registrations, and **JH** agreed. This conforms with past practice.
  + **MF** repeated the point above about stream sponsorship. They are chasing journals and law firms.
  + Dinner will be at St George’s Hall, which has accommodation for 600. There is a concern about capacity, as there may not be space for all those who register for the conference to attend the dinner. The cost of the dinner (approximately £80) is priced into the registration fee. The organising team is considering two options: (1) to offer refunds for the dinner (some who have registered have said that they are not planning to attend the dinner); (2) to not charge a late registration fee, if the number of registrations gets too high (they will need to keep an eye on registrations to make this work). **JH** preferred the latter option.
    - **SK** argued against the first option (refunds) to maintain the attractiveness of the all-inclusive early-bird option. **SK** argued that we should publicise that dinner places are limited (as was the approach taken for the Ulster conference). There was agreement with this in the online chat, and **HS** also noted that as the members of the plenary panel will be attending the dinner, attendance is likely to be more attractive. **AP** also agreed with **SK** and noted that refunds are risky given the financial context that universities are facing. **JH** agreed and advised **MF** to work according to option two.
* MF wanted to revisit idea of holding a drinks reception on the first evening of the conference, proposing one free welcome drink for attendees and a cash bar. The welcome drink for 500 attendees is costed at £2,500 (agreement from DB that 500 is a reasonable estimate). A cash bar for 90 minutes will cost £540 to cover staff time. **JH** and **SK** supported the proposal, particularly given the high number of abstract submissions. **DB** asked if canapes will be served. **JH** asked MF to investigate the cost of canapes, which if it is a modest amount will be approved.
* **SK** noted that the deadline for applications for bursaries falls on the same date as the publication of the conference programme. **SK** asked if updated versions of the programme will be published and whether information about this can be shared with convenors. According to **MF**, there will be a second and final draft of the programme. **HS** stated that they will provide convenors with the relevant dates.
* **JH** asked **MF** and **HS** to inform **JH**, **SK** and **PB** about decision-making on bursaries, specifically with a view to how much funding can be allocated to this in light of conference registrations and SLSA’s overall financial position.
* **MF** explained that two PGR representatives will be involved in the assessment of the bursary awards. These will come from the Liverpool PGR community due to the potential for conflicts of interest with SLSA PGR reps. **DS** agreed.
* **JH** thanked **MF** and **HS** for their work. Further discussion about arrangements for the hybrid AGM could take place after the meeting.

5.3 Treasurer’s Report

* In addition to the report, in relation to the savings account, **PB** highlighted that he is still waiting for one trustee’s signature. He has emailed the trustee. In addition, in relation to the third account with Unity Trust Bank, identity checks are being carried out on some board members. He has contacted the board members concerned separately about this.
* **PB** noted that the SLSA’s expenses from the Northumbria PGR conference are not yet showing in the accounts because Northumbria have yet to contact him about this. **PB** will follow this up with Laura Graham at Northumbria, and he expects that this cost will show in next year’s accounts (ie costs for the Northumbria conference as well as the 2025 PGR conference).
* **PB** asked the board for their views on what to do with the SLSA’s surplus funds, resulting from the successful conferences in Ulster and Portsmouth and Emma Milne’s work on memberships. **PB** noted that in 2018/19 SLSA funding schemes were more generous, eg £27,000 was available under the small grants and fieldwork schemes, compared with £17,000 currently, and £10,000 was available under the seminars scheme, compared with £7,000 currently. **PB** noted that the pots may have been cut due to the SLSA’s change to charity status and in response to the pandemic, and they have stayed at the lower level.
  + **JH** called for a discussion about whether the maximum amount available in each of the funding pots needed increasing and/or whether the money might be put toward conference bursaries, including for convenors of streams and current topics.
  + **SK** argued that the funds should be put towards the funding schemes, whilst being open-minded about conference bursaries. **SK** also noted that whilst the membership increase is positive it may not continue, so there is a need for some caution.
  + **KM** noted that not all institutions are affected in the same way in the current university financial crisis. **KM** argued that stream convenors need resources to draw upon if their institution is not prepared to provide support (eg waiving the registration fee for convenors). **JH** linked this suggestion to the EDI Committee report, item 5.6, as waiving the fee may be more inclusive. **AP** agreed with **KM**, noting that convenors can be put in a difficult situation if they are not supported by their institution, and that a fee waiver would recognise the service that they provide for the SLSA. **SK** noted that, whilst convenorship is hard work, a fee waiver would need to be equitable (eg involving a change to the bursaries scheme). For the Liverpool conference, a more informal/ad hoc approach may be appropriate. **RS** agreed with the comments above, convenorship does benefit the conference, but some institutions are not badly affected, so we do need an equitable approach. **RS** also agreed with **PB** that we should allocate more funding towards the competitive schemes. **KM** argued that rather than using bursaries a fixed rule is preferable, to provide clarity. **AP** agreed that advanced knowledge of support is important, and that this should be a protected category, separate from the bursaries scheme. **AJ** agreed, noting that this could also make stream convenorship more attractive. **SK** agreed with **KM**’s point and suggested that this could be part of the recruitment of stream convenors, particularly as we need to get an idea of numbers seeking to use the support early in the cycle (eg asking questions about whether they anticipate needing support to attend the conference). **JH** summarised the online chat bar – where it was suggested that one fee waiver should be available for each stream/current topic (**MF** noted that the cost of this would be around £7,500), with flexibility so that if one stream does not need the waiver it can be used elsewhere. JH noted that for this year it is down to Liverpool and the bursaries scheme may also provide the necessary support (eg if convenors are PGRs).
  + **JH** thanked PB for the paper**.**
  + **Action: PB to propose new maximum amounts for the competitive schemes (small grants, fieldwork, seminars, impact and international) for the board to vote on the proposals at the next meeting. PB’s proposal should be informed by data on the number of applications for each pot along with how many applications are funded/not funded. PB will liaise with the relevant committees about this.**
  + **Action: the board will need to vote on whether to introduce a fee waiver for stream convenors, and we want to go into the next conference with the rule in place. KM, AP and AB to prepare a voteable paper for the May board.**

3.1 Future Conference EOIs/Hybrid Delivery (Matthew Howard gave apologies, not at meeting to present)

* **SK** provided an update about work on the drafting of the conference EOI, which has been informed by work of the EDI committee on the benefits of capacity for hybrid (or part-hybrid) delivery. The call for EOIs does not rule out hybrid. It seeks to keep options open and is framed to get institutions to tell us what about they are able to offer. There is also suggested wording regarding the approach to unanticipated costs and profit-sharing arrangements, which the board will need to vote on.
  + **JH** clarified that for information board members should refer to the minutes of the most recent EDI committee meeting, item 5.6. **JH** also noted that, having attended a meeting of the Academy of Social Sciences Learned Societies Committee, it seems generally that other learned societies are not offering hybrid at conferences. The proposed wording in the paper is about gathering information, which the SLSA can then consider in light of the financial situation.
  + **BC**, offering the EDI perspective, noted that there is strong feeling that the option of hybrid in some form should be available. The results of the EDI survey show disappointment about the lack of hybrid at last year’s conference. **BC** asked whether we might want to signal a preference for hybrid in the wording of the EOI.
  + **EJ** reported that the Assoc of Law Teachers (ALT) conference this year will be fully hybrid. This was stated in the original call for tenders and is to promote inclusivity.
  + **AP** reported that the Society of Legal Scholars (SLS) conference will not be hybrid, but individual requests for hybrid will be considered (ie where particular speakers can only attend online).
  + **MF** asked whether, given the high numbers expected at conferences, this puts too much weight on conference organisers. **MF** noted that the SLSA must think about the incentives for hosting the conference and that the EOI needs to be attractive. **MF** recognised that ideally conferences will provide hybrid options, but there are work implications to this. With this in mind, **MF** asked whether this should be part of a broader debate – eg should the SLSA consider outsourcing conference organisation, as the SLS does.
  + **SK** clarified that the wording of the EOI keeps options open, serving to gather information about what is possible and the costs involved. **SK** reflected on how to factor it all in – the criteria set a minimum threshold relating to disability. Is more on aspects to do with financial viability on the part of the host needed in the criteria?
  + **CM** argued that the wording is a good compromise. If hybrid is a standard option, institutions, given financial pressures, may insist on (cheaper) online attendance by their staff. It was a difficult balance. Hybrid should not be too easily available. If the institution can offer a form of hybrid at a reasonable price, it is something that we can look at, but it is not definite.
  + **KM** argued that a clear requirement that online attendance can be facilitated as a reasonable adjustment should capture the most critical EDI issues.
  + **AP** responded by noting that we don’t want to exclude members from certain institutions by trying to be inclusive. The wording on this is therefore important, if the online price is going to be lower than the in-person price. The SLS is having an in-person conference, and hybrid is available for those that ask. **AP** is worried about a broadbrush approach.
  + **AJ** agreed with **KM**. **AJ** does not see reasonable adjustments in the language of the EOI. **AJ** would be more comfortable with the EOI if this was in there.
  + **JH** stated that the text should include reasonable adjustments as a requirement, whilst the rest of the text, focussed on information gathering, is good as is. The SLSA shouldn’t just follow. It should do as much as is practicable and sustainable as regards inclusivity.
  + **ACTION** – working group to revise text and come back to Chair (**JH**) for approval.
* **JH** moved on to consider the second question about costs and the retention of surplus.
  + **PB** regarded the third option as a good compromise. **SK** agreed with PB.
  + **JH** had concerns that if we make the possibility of sharing the surplus possible, institutions will do so for their own ends, which might diminish resources for SLSA without investment in socio-legal studies.
  + **AP** agreed that there is a risk of this, but it is important that a diverse range of institutions come forward. From a financial officer lens, they are seeing a lot of staff time being invested in conference organisation. The wording recognises this context and manages it, the risk otherwise is that we lose control (ie with an ad hoc approach).
  + **PB** recommended a change to the language – rather than retention of surplus, it should be in the form of a grant.
  + **DB** noted that it is fairer to have this wording in the EOI. They must first express an interest in retaining the surplus and second must achieve the required amount of surplus.
  + **JH** recommended the grey option, with adjustments to the language based on **PB**’s comment to ensure capacity building in socio-legal studies. Emphasis that the ‘retention’ should be characterized as an investment in the host school by SLSA (JH later commented that in relation to the expected surplus the percentage should be increased to 30% to reflection inflation).
  + This was followed by some discussion about how precisely the EOI would be worded. The meeting agreed to adopt the ‘grey’ option on the paper, to raise the minimum expected surplus to £35,000, and to set the threshold above which 20% of the surplus might be retained/invested at £50,000.
  + ACTION – committee to revise text and come back to Chair (**JH)** for approval.
  + ACTION – group to review EOIs to include **JH, SK, PB, CM** and **DB**.

3.2 Review of Policies

* Fundraising – Board approved.
* Media – Board approved.
* Conflicts of interest – Board approved. (**SK** noted that there was no date on the document for when it was previously approved. **MS** stated that she had the information and would make sure that it was included on all documents).
* Complaints – Board approved.
* EDI – Board approved.
* Financial procedures – Board approved.
* Risk Management – Board approved. (It was agreed that, though not needed strictly speaking, it would be very useful).
* Code of Conduct – Board approved.
* Serious Incident.
  + **RC** provided background on the report. **MB** and **RC** agreed that a policy is needed.
  + **RS** queried whether projects funded by the SLSA that give rise to serious incidents might require a serious incident report. RC thinks that this might be a possibility. **JH** noted that such projects will generally require ethical approval, but that it might be worth looking at the wording of our offer letters in relation to projects supported by the SLSA (eg do offer letters require awardees to notify the SLSA of serious incidents?).
  + ACTION – **RC** to draft a serious incidents reporting policy, and to investigate what other learned societies are doing in relation to the matters discussed.
* Harassment and Bullying.
  + ACTION – paper received to be discussed and voted on at the next board meeting.

Noting in addition that the revised Stream and Current Topic Convenor Policy was approved under item 5.15.

3.3 Website and CRM overhaul

* **DB** provided an update.
  + There is an option to create SLSA-run courses – a virtual learning environment. **DB** told the board that if anyone wanted to, they could provide a course that showed users what the new website offers. **JH** advised **DB** to email the board members as a whole to request ‘head shots’ for the website’s “about page”, to contact **KM** for updated information about conference streams, to contact **CM** about the SLSA’s privacy policy, and to contact the EDI committee (**BC**) for the accessibility statement.
  + **DB** noted that Emma Milne is advising on how to progress the website. **JH** also noted that **MS** can help **DB** work on certain parts of the website before moving to the CRM elements later, as planned.

3.4 Archive Project

* **RS** explained that an advert for an archivist will be going out imminently. **RS** expected to have more updates at the next board meeting/conference.

4 Prizes and Competitions

* 4.1 Book Prizes – **SK** noted that scores are completed. **SK** expected to have the shortlist ready shortly.
* 4.2 Article Prizes – **JH** noted that the scoring had been done. There is a shortlist of three, which will be put to a final vote. Fourth place narrowly missed out on the top three, so JH asked the board if they wanted to extend the shortlist. The board agreed that the shortlist should remain at three. **SK** will follow the same approach with the book prize award.
* **JH** noted that **AB** (who left the meeting early) has emailed him to raise concerns about how the article prize is assessed. These mainly relate to workload (ie that each article is read by as many as 12 reviewers at a busy time in the academic year) and inconsistent application of the REF criteria (eg the way in which socio-legal studies is promoted in the application of that criteria). The Board agreed that the latter should be rectified.
  + **SK** argued that the assessments for the article and book prizes are shared by the board, so we should stick to the same approach. The Board agreed.

ACTION: article prize scorers will be asked to provide brief comments on nominated pieces with reference to the REF criteria of rigour, originality, and significance.

4.3 Grants

* **JH** noted that Rebecca Moosavian (not in attendance) has raised several questions:
  + Should PhD students be excluded from the research grants scheme due to the availability of the fieldwork grants scheme?
    - **MSa**, providing a current PhD student’s perspective, argued that PhD students do not just do fieldwork and may want to access a separate grant. **MSa** noted that this is how the research councils operate as regards their funded PhDs.
    - **SK** agreed, arguing that as much as possible awards should be based on merit.
    - **MT** put forward the opposing view – stating that he would like to see more assurances about the feasibility of the research grant (eg supervisor approval if, for instance, multiple projects are being undertaken at the same time). **MT** would agree with **SK** if there were such assurances.
    - **JH** concluded the discussion, agreeing that the research councils do have different funding pots, but PhD students should have to demonstrate a need for the funding (no duplication) and feasibility. He asked if the forms address these points.
    - ACTION – Grants committee to review forms to ensure that PhD students are not excluded from the different schemes, but the wording of the forms ensures the assurances needed.
  + Do we want to take a particular approach regarding long-haul flights for fieldwork grants (as we do under the international collaboration scheme)?
    - **EG** noted that as part of the international collaboration scheme applicants must comment on mitigation and sustainability. The application form for the fieldwork grants does not ask for this, but there were multiple applications that involved long-haul flights. **EG** argued that we should ask the same question.
    - **MSa** agreed – it is worth asking the question in the application form. JH also agreed.
    - ACTION –The form should be amended. **MS** notes the **DB** requires a review of the forms anyway for the new website. **EG** to discuss this with grants committee.
    - **JH** discussed the workload of the committee. **SF** noted that a bigger committee will not solve the problem – the number of applications is increasing, and each committee member needs to look at each application. It is important to encourage applications, but the more applications there are the harder it is to give time to each application. JH suggested that the committees need to rethink their approach – eg each application is reviewed by only four committee members. **EG** agreed – noting that in addition to the increasing number of applications, the standard is higher, and whilst smaller groups of reviewers sounds good it raises problems about marking consistency.
    - **JH** noted that applications are better because of **MS**’s work on gathering grant reports and the guidance on how to write applications.
    - **SK** supported **JH**’s subdivision idea and noted that we should do more to avoid overlaps on committees. **JH** agreed that we should keep an eye on this.
    - Rebecca Moosavian’s recommendations for additional awards were approved. RC to email the successful and unsuccessful applicants.
    - Action: Grant and seminar committees to move to a 4-person per application review system, prefaced by a calibration exercise on one or two applications to ensure consistency.
  1. Seminars
* **SF** noted that the committee had made 5 awards.
* **SF** had similar comments to Rebecca Moosavian. **SF** will send a full report.
* **SK** to email the successful and unsuccessful applicants. JH listed one additional award for each competition (grants and seminars) (costing a total of approximately £10,000) which could be approved. PB had indicated that this was sustainable with a view to SLSA finances. The additional awards were agreed by the board.

ACTION: SF and RC to write to award winners, notifying MS for publicity purposes.

4.6 Contributions to the Socio-Legal Community – **JH** informed the board that Joanne Conaghan has been awarded the lifetime contribution award.

5 Officer Reports

* 5.1 **JH** noted that the SLSA will need to recruit new trustees, as well as a new chair and new secretary. **JH** will follow-up this up after the meeting via email.

SQE Proposal

* Further to item in Chair’s report, **JH** invited **EJ**, as chair of the ALT, to talk about the ALT’s project on the SQE’s impact on legal education, law students and staff, and employers. The costs of this project involve a research assistant and formatting for a publishable report (approximately £6,000). The ALT want the SLSA to contribute £1,500.
  + **SK** asked about the extent to which socio-legal studies is a feature of the project. **EJ** explained that the project will provide information about whether socio-legal subjects are suffering as a result of the SQE, and there will be potential to engage with the SRA on this. The project, in many ways, follows-on from the work carried out by the Portsmouth organising team. **SK** wanted socio-legal studies to be a focus and part of the research questions. **JH** agreed that the socio-legal element and SLSA contribution should be visible, eg in project summaries etc.
  + The board approved the proposal and allocation of funds. **JH** asked **EJ** to keep the board briefed about the project. **EJ** noted that **EG** will also be involved in the project.

5.10 Social Media

* **JH** explained that a member has emailed to ask the board to consider leaving X/Twitter.
  + **MT** agreed that we should leave, but noted that the SLSA should keep its X/Twitter handle to ensure that it is not misused.
  + **JH** noted that the SLSA is already on Bluesky and that it has a closed group on LinkedIn. It makes sense to streamline by leaving X/Twitter.
  + **EG** noted that we have around 7,500 followers on X/Twitter, whilst on Bluesky we have only 350 followers. The SLSA does not have the same presence there, but she is working to address that.
  + **SK** was concerned about the SLSA’s visibility if it were to leave X/Twitter (however, noting that LinkedIn is preferable).
  + **EG** explained that she is now an administrator for the LinkedIn group. She is in the process of setting up a follow page.
  + **SK** pointed out the SLSA X/Twitter handle needed to include a pinned Tweet explaining where the SLSA is active on social media.
  + **EG** wanted the PGR board members to be administrators of the LinkedIn group and page, as PGRs appear to be particularly active on LinkedIn. **MSa** and **DS** agree.

ACTION: EG to post ‘closing note’ on X, to cease actively posting on that platform, and to focus on LinkedIn and Bluesky.

5.6 EDI

5.5 Recruitment

5.4 Membership

5.8 Newsletter

* + All reports noted with thanks.

AOB: None

Date and time of meeting: Thursday 29 May 2025 from 12:30 to 16:00 This will be in-person.