

Statement from the SLSA Trustees

Dear Friends,

The SLSA Trustees, in consultation with the University of Portsmouth, have today taken the difficult decision to cancel our Annual Conference, due to take place on April 1-3, in light of the rapidly developing situation with COVID-19.

We are aware that, unlike many Governments around the world, the UK Government has not taken steps to require the cancellation of large events. The message to the public is that we should each, individually, seek to slow the spread of the virus through good hand hygiene, and self-isolation. We are also aware that modelling suggests that, if unchecked, the infection risk to conference delegates from travelling to and attending the conference in just under 3 weeks could be very high. The Government's announcement that it is no longer seeking to test possible infections in the community means that we will not be able to keep track of the level of infection risk.

There are some who will think that we have delayed too long, and should have taken this decision before now; others will think we have acted prematurely and should have waited until cancellation was imposed on us by others. The SLSA trustees and the organising team at Portsmouth have tried our best to find ways to enable our community to continue to meet and share our ideas and research in the face of this pandemic, whilst balancing our commitment to the health and safety of SLSA members and conference delegates.

Were we to continue with the conference, many delegates, especially those with underlying health conditions, or with family members, or caring responsibilities for others, who are particularly at risk of complications from COVID-19 will understandably choose not to attend our conference. Continuing with the SLSA conference would, therefore, place those members and delegates at a disadvantage as compared to others. As an academic community that values all our members, and that is committed to equality and diversity in our membership, we are confident cancelling the conference is the right thing to do.

There will be a range of consequences that follow from this decision, which we will have to find ways to mitigate in the coming months. Please bear with us as we seek new ways to support our members, and the socio-legal community as a whole, through this difficult and unprecedented situation. Two immediate issues that arise and are tied to our conference are the SLSA AGM, and SLSA Prize.

SLSA AGM

Our AGM was due to be held as part of the conference, at the University of Portsmouth on 2 April. This will no longer be possible. We will communicate with members through our usual channels (weekly e-bulletin, social media and our print newsletter), about alternative arrangements. We are investigating the possibility of using virtual means to host an AGM, but there will be an inevitable delay whilst we work through the logistical challenges of this.

SLSA Prizewinners

We will, as planned, announce the winners of the SLSA Book and Article prizes on Thursday 2 April 2020, but we will do so through our online channels. We will also work towards finding a way to bring members together to celebrate the achievements of all of our prize winners as soon as it is possible for us to do so.

We hope that members and conference delegates will understand why we have cancelled the conference and we very much hope to find a way to facilitate our members getting together very soon.

Rosie Harding, Chair, SLSA, on behalf of the SLSA Trustees.