

## **Report: AJC Pop-Up Event, Freshfields, 12 February 2019**

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The AJC pop-up event that was organized by the academic panel and hosted at Freshfields. The aim was to bring together practitioners to identify research that is needed in their areas and to give academics the opportunity to follow this up with a conversation and potential collaboration.

Academics always complain about the lack of data made available by practitioners to be able to empirically study certain phenomena. Practitioners complain about the demands of academics and there is no constructive communication and exchange. So, moving beyond these complaints we are providing a platform here for exchange. Exchange of ideas, identifying gaps in knowledge and exploring where academics and practitioners can best help each other and develop collaborations: small or big, short or longer term.

Seven panellists outlined areas in their everyday practise that would benefit from research, an independent look, an empirical analysis.

Naomi Creutzfeldt chaired the panel discussion. After brief presentations of each of the panellists the audience had the opportunity to chat to the practitioners about potential projects in a more informal setting. Here is a summary of research areas identified by the panellists.

### **Cris Coxon** – Principal Analyst, Access to Justice Analytical Services, MoJ

Cris spoke about the background of the Access to Justice Analytical Services: it advises the government directly. They advise across the court system. The data held is not great and this is an area they wish to improve upon – basic information is lacking. Here is a real opportunity to add value and to be innovative. He is very open to discussing research opportunities, they can provide access to files, data and funder relationships. There is also some forward looking work coming out of the LASPO review.

### **Kate Eisenstein** – Assistant Director of Insight and Public Affairs, Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman

The Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman deals with unresolved complaints against the NHS and the UK Government, 85% of their work relates to complaints against the NHS. They are looking for assistance with specific research into improving the impact of their frontline complaints process. Ombudsman in other countries have legal powers to set standards, whereas here Ombudsman only set voluntary standards. Here research / literature review is needed to find out what those powers are, how are they used, what learning we can draw from all of that. This is a current public service debate: ombuds reform, the draft bill exists but does not go far enough.

### **John Aitken** – Judge (Chamber President, Social Entitlement Chamber, Social Security and Child Support, Criminal Injuries Compensation, Asylum Support)

John believes the online hearings are the holy grail of judicial reform. Evidence shows that the public do not want oral hearings. British Columbia is an example of an online system that is working well, they do not have oral hearings as standard there, and have a satisfaction rate of 85%. Here work needs to be done to ensure the online system is both quicker and fairer, there needs to be a feedback loop for better decision-making. Research into how fair appellants thought the process was is necessary.

**Luc Altmann** – Deputy Head of Insight, HMCTS

Luc highlighted research gaps and opportunities in tribunals. HMCTS has some data sets they can make available- User Experience survey data (available immediately), digital capability in SSCS and some geodemographic data sets for civil and tribunal users (to follow). Digital data from SSCS and I&A tribunals will be made available. Initially the data from the evaluation of the private beta will be made public around the summer when it completes. They are currently exploring the best way to publish all of their user research but it's a big task. They have exec board sign off to capture equalities data as part of service design. Luc is personally open to contact from the academic community. We are attending the AJC academic panel on the 28<sup>th</sup> Feb to share in detail our evaluation plan for SSCS.

**Diane Sechi** – Pro-Bono lawyer, Simmons & Simmons (AJC Pro Bono Panel)

Diane set up an Access to Justice department at Simmons & Simmons. The digitisation of the court process is a concern because we are dealing with the most vulnerable in society. They are therefore reliant upon front-line agencies – it is not known whether these agencies have the capacity, knowledge and expertise to cope with this, as they are already struggling. Diane is undertaking a survey of front-line agencies, for example local authorities, housing association frontline teams, community centres. It will be sent out soon across the UK. Assistance required: they require help with the analysis of this data and the production of a report.

**Joe Tomlinson** – Kings College, London (AJC Academic Panel and Public Law Project)

Joe introduced the Public Law Project - they are growing their research team, and working across Universities, setting up an academic panel. They have identified following areas of focus : Brexit – including settled status (decision-making, challenging decisions) effects on administration, and effects on immigration; Benefit Sanctions; Online Courts and Tribunals – effects of court closures; Legal Aid – research on positive solutions; and Access to Judicial Review – role of evidence in judicial review claims. PLP are very interested in further research being undertaken on financial barriers.

**Lindsey Poole** – Director, Advice Services Alliance

Lindsey highlighted the lack of research that has been undertaken in the advice services sector. She is very keen for any help/research to be undertaken, there is a huge lack of resources for advice centres at present. The priority areas that have been identified by the AJC Advice Sector Panel are: Tribunals and access to representation; Lesson learning; Assisted digital; and Access to specialist early legal advice – how can we get them access to the advice they need. It is essential to understand how this advice is delivered and collect the empirical evidence.

The event was very well received and feedback was positive. Academics said they would spread the word to their colleagues about the research areas identified. A few collaborations were formed, Nuffield and the ESRC showed a great interest and already engaged – the event helped shape their research funding priorities agenda for the next few years. Practitioners felt it was a good format to engage with the academic community.

Overall a success and we should think about organizing another one.