



## **United Kingdom Administrative Justice Institute**

The UK Administrative Justice Institute (UKAJI) has been established to kick start the expansion of empirical research into administrative justice issues. Led by Professor Maurice Sunkin at the University of Essex School of Law, the UKAJI will be funded by the Nuffield Foundation for three years from October 2014.

### **What is administrative justice?**

Public bodies make millions of decisions each year that directly affect the rights and interests of individuals. These can relate to matters as wide-ranging as family incomes, jobs, welfare benefits, health care, housing, and education. Individuals have the right to seek redress if they believe the wrong decision has been made. For example they may be able to ask the public body to consider the matter again, complain to an ombudsman, appeal to a tribunal, or challenge the decision in judicial review proceedings. These avenues of redress are intended to ensure administrative justice.

The 'administrative justice system' encompasses the procedure, law, and mechanisms for resolving disputes between individuals and public bodies. This 'system' deals with more cases than the criminal and civil justice systems combined. In 2010 there were around 63,000 civil trials and 200,000 criminal trials in England and Wales. In the same year there were over 650,000 hearings before tribunals, in addition to innumerable internal and ombudsman complaints.

### **What will the UKAJI do?**

Despite the importance of administrative justice, there has been comparatively little sustained empirical research on the operation of its mechanisms. Areas in need of research include encouraging early decision-making, the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative justice systems, access to justice, and enforcement and outcomes.

The UKAJI will address this by:

- Creating links between the policy, practice and research communities by providing a forum for the exchange and stimulation of new ideas
- Developing a coordinated research agenda
- Identifying and tackling capacity constraints

It is to be an independent, broad-based, cross-disciplinary body focusing on research relating to administrative justice across the UK.

The UKAJI will undertake stakeholder mapping to identify those with interests in using, commissioning or facilitating research on administrative justice. It will develop a searchable database of information about researchers from a range of disciplines who are working on administrative justice issues.

The UKAJI will consult stakeholders on its mission, including inviting views on what resources it will need and how it will be sustained beyond the end of the initial grant from the Nuffield Foundation.

## Developing the research agenda

The UKAJI will undertake a **review of national and international research literature** on administrative justice. This will identify gaps in the evidence as well as identify relevant work from other disciplines, such as economics, social policy, public administration, and the psychology of decision-making.

The UKAJI will organise **inter-disciplinary workshops** to bring together researchers across disciplines, and theme-based workshops involving policy-makers and practitioners to identify priority areas for research evidence. The workshops will also provide a vehicle for introducing the importance of administrative justice issues to those unfamiliar with the field; enable discussion of areas of interest and potential methods; and help to identify how best to reach stakeholders, such as relevant networks, potential key researchers, and conferences.

## Tackling capacity constraints

The UKAJI will identify and develop strategies to tackle capacity constraints within administrative justice research in the UK. Administrative justice issues are relevant to researchers in a number of fields who may not be aware of it as a potential area for study. For example the issue of redress affects the most disadvantaged members of society and would be a relevant subject for researchers working in inequality and poverty.

UKAJI's work to **extend the disciplinary research base** will help increase capacity, as well as providing new insights into the existing body of research and generate new avenues for study. UKAJI will make direct contact with 'new' disciplines and work on methods issues, especially relating to improving available information. It will also seek opportunities for cross disciplinary involvement, especially in relation to the overlapping interests of economists, lawyers and social policy specialists.

A priority will be to improve the **availability of information** on administrative justice to researchers and other stakeholders. Working with the Institute of Economic and Social Research and the ESRC Business and Local Government Data Research Centre at the University of Essex, UKAJI will undertake a preliminary scoping study to identify relevant data across the public and private sectors and determine how these may be best collected, stored and made available, including the need for training in data analysis, collation and linkage.

In addition, UKAJI aims to improve data about those with unmet need for redress, and will work with the UK household longitudinal study *Understanding Society* to establish ways of capturing information on access to administrative justice relating to the population at large.

**Engaging early career researchers** across disciplines is another priority. UKAJI will work to establish a programme of early career conferences and bursaries and explore ways to sustain this engagement over time.

## Core team

UKAJI has a core team of 11 and is supported by post-doctoral research assistants and an administrative assistant. The core team will work with a wider group of experts and its work is overseen by an advisory group.

**Further information can be found on the UKAJI website [www.ukaji.org](http://www.ukaji.org). A blog covering all aspects of administrative justice will be launched in October.**