



Access to Justice

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‘For goodness sake can we not just teach them the actual law?’ Rohima felt her face flush. Two years into her teaching career and this was the last issue she could have imagined.

‘Rohima, I get it, I really do, but you have to understand the students have access to a whole suite of materials which make the occasional judgment, well, peripheral.’ ‘The law is not peripheral. The words that decide how our society works and operates are quoted in courts day by day and year by year. These words are not bloody peripheral!’

She tried to control her temper. In her years at Oxford, Rohima had learned many things. But she had never learned to temper her need to speak out when she saw something wrong happening and she was not going to change now. She looked at the clay elephant her partner Sophie had given her and tried to relax.

‘Charles.’

She tried to rein in her anger. This wasn’t about her, or Charles, or the (copy) rights they were arguing about. It was about the students and their access to the law. Why else teach law if access to justice didn’t even extend to law schools?

‘Charles, please listen. Listen to me. I understand the “suite”, I understand the financials, I even understand why you feel you have to put their case. But are you actually going to sit there and tell me that my students can’t read the actual law because your bosses made a deal elsewhere?’

Professor Charles Danquert pinched the bridge of his nose. Too late, he realised that the Zoom connectivity the university insisted on retaining was always on. Rohima could see him all of the time, not just when he spoke. He grimaced, then immediately tried to hide the grimace. He fixed his eyes on his son’s half-finished school project on the kitchen table.

‘Rohima, I do understand. I fought for the open access option at Council, I really did. My hands are tied. We’ve gone with Lawpro and that’s final.’

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‘But Lawpro means access to, at best, a third of the cases students need to read.’ Charles sighed. He wished he could agree. Perhaps a decade ago he would have done. He shared his screen instead.

‘Rohima, you can see the figures. Only 71% of your cohort last year even opened those judgments. Deduct the 20% who did so for less than 5 minutes, then take in the eye-tracking metrics, and at the end of the day maybe one in ten of your students actually sat and read and understood those case reports.’

Rohima bristled. ‘Even if that is accurate, which I question by the way, why deny our most committed students that access? Surely, it’s a few thousands for the university. For what, a possible future King’s Counsel?’

The call window flashed as Dean Claire Atkinson chose to intervene. ‘Rohima, Charles, I’ve been monitoring the call. I understand your frustration Rohima but none of the statistics support your case. Furthermore, LawPro is the only way we can access Chuldy & Smyth on contract and students with that textbook perform, on average, 8–9% better in assessments. There’s an even bigger increase among minority groups. Do you want to be a gatekeeper to those students, just for the sake of the words an old white man said two centuries ago?’

The call ended. Rohima swore, realised the camera would have picked that up, then realised that when you work remotely punching the wall only damages your own property.

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