When I spoke at the opening of the University of Hertfordshire’s Centre for International Law I stressed the importance today of International Law. It is not just for the specialist, it is equally important for all law students and for all practitioners in ‘commercial law’ broadly interpreted. There is an increased workload at the International Court of Justice at the Hague: there is an increase in the number and role of international tribunals: ever more in many areas courts are concerned with international law questions. This is not just to do with our membership of the European Union (itself a regional system of law rather than a part of ‘international law’ as usually understood), but comes even more from increasing globalisation, from our increasing awareness that international law principles can have relevance in the development of national law rules and perceptions.

Lawyers need to know what is happening, what is being proposed, at UNIDROIT and UNCITRAL, what the Hague Conference on Private International Law is looking at, what interests the International Chamber of Commerce. And there has to be much new thinking and re-thinking on the challenges coming from the electronic age – the E-Commerce Directive of the European Community is only a beginning and we are far from knowing all the effects of the Internet on existing private international law.

We cannot all attend lectures in these subjects and students have many other branches of the law to contend with so that published articles are our main source of learning and our main way of keeping up to date. It is therefore very gratifying that the Centre should have its own Journal. In America the Law Review is a significant factor in the reputation of the law schools. So this Journal will be important not just for the ‘student’ but also for the standing and reputation of the Centre. The Journal will not just publish articles by established and well-known faculty members. It will encourage students and perhaps particularly postgraduate students to seek to prepare material of the necessary quality on relevant topics as it has done in this first issue. It is of course no small task to produce such a journal but if it is, as I am sure it will be, well done, it will add greatly to the University’s prestige.

The first issue augers well for the future. The range of topics in the first place is very ‘contemporary’ – the mod chip cases, the problems raised by digital signatures, the European Union’s Consumer Credit Directive and software licence grants. But it looks outside commercial law at the International Criminal Court, and at the power sharing regime in the Sudan. The Attorney General’s opinion on the legality of the coalition’s intervention in Iraq has already provoked much discussion and it is hardly surprising that one of the major articles in this first issue should look at the Attorney General’s role – another example of international law’s relevance to domestic issues.

The articles are substantial and of a high standard, showing careful research and thought. It gives me great pleasure to wish the Journal success in this and subsequent issues.