Conclusion

This book has argued that the law must do more to protect those defamed on the internet. By considering English defamation law using a number of different '*data-dissemination* scenarios', it has argued that the law is currently deficient in safeguarding against the rise in defamatory content posted to the web. In making this argument, Chapter 1 considered the technological shift that has taken place in society, transforming the UK into a truly digital world. Cloud computing has made this shift possible, enabling websites to grow exponentially, storing and transmitting vast amounts of information – including personal data. Social media usage is now societally acceptable and even expected, with individuals posting potentially defamatory content about others at a click of a button. Perhaps the most prevailing threat to reputation circa 2025 is that posed by artificial intelligence (AI)-powered technologies. The disturbing creation of 'deepfakes' poses a particularly significant reputational threat. This monograph then evaluated the philosophical underpinnings of reputation and concluded that the fundamental human interest that reputation safeguards is personal dignity (including self-perception). This is the interest that is violated when a defamatory statement about an individual is publicized online. Chapter 3, Part I demonstrated that far from protecting those defamed online, the reform of the Defamation Act 2013 has resulted in new obstacles for those seeking redress under English defamation law. The s 1 'serious harm' threshold raises the bar for all claimants in defamation, but particularly negatively affects those defamed online when arguing an 'inferential' case. Section 8's one-year limitation period for the repetition of defamatory statements by the same publisher impedes claimants in bringing a second action over

material that is in substantially the same form, at a time when more (not less) litigation in libel law is necessary to combat reputationally damaging statements on the web. Chapter 3, Part II moved to discuss online phenomena, such as the s 5 defence for host websites and the risk to reputational harm rendered by advancements in AI. Finally, Chapter 4 argued that the 'right to be forgotten' (RTBF) in Article 17 of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) presents a more comprehensive and effective route to redress than that presently offered by English defamation law. This is due to the RTBF's ease, speed, lack of reliance on the court system and breadth, encompassing many different online defamation scenarios. It is important to finish with a warning. It is crucial that academics, practitioners and politicians realize the considerable threat to reputation and personal dignity that online technologies pose. For this reason, the RTBF must be safeguarded in the UK's legal system, as it represents one of the few current ways a balance between freedom of expression and individual reputation can be restored online. This is particularly pertinent as the UK GDPR is now vulnerable to legislative change after Brexit. The right is a safe haven for those defamed on the web and it must be given the space to flourish.