

GDL 001 INTRODUCTION TO LAW AND LEGAL RESEARCH

Module Number: GDL 001

Module Title: Introduction to Law and Legal Research

Number of Aston Credits: 20

Total Number of ECTS Credits: 5
(European Credit Transfer)

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Pre-Requisite(s) for the Module: None

Module Learning Outcomes:

This front loaded foundation module equips students with the intellectual and practical skills necessary for the successful study of law on the Graduate Diploma in Law. The aim of this module is to reinforce the interrelationships between core legal subjects and to provide the basis for students' subsequent legal study.

Upon successful completion of the module students will be able to:

- (a) Understand rule making and the distinctiveness of legal rule making;
- (b) Understand the role of Parliament in legal rule making;
- (c) Understand the history and function of common law and court hierarchy;
- (d) Understand the European dimension to legal rule making;
- (e) Explain the concept of the natural legal person and artificial legal persons;
- (f) Evaluate critically the trial process, justice system, and the role of the judge and jury;



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- (g) Critically evaluate alternative means of dispute settlement;
- (h) Research legal problems through the identification and location of relevant legal sources and materials (statutes, cases, journal articles) using electronic and paper based research tools including Westlaw, Lexis-Nexis, Lawtel and Halsbury's;
- (i) Develop skills of synthesis, interpretation and evaluation with regard to legal sources and materials;
- (j) Understand the qualities of good communication (including legal writing and oral presentation) together with the appropriate form of referencing and citation.

Module Content:

The organisation, content and teaching methods for this GDL module reflect QAA Benchmark standards for Law and are designed to meet the learning outcomes specified above. The module is designed to ensure that outcomes meet the professional standards (Joint Announcement) required for this foundation subject at the academic stage.

- (a) Law and society: the purpose and function of law; the nature of the common law tradition; legal personality.
- (b) Institutions; The role and operation of courts.
- (c) Sources of law: principles of legal research, primary and secondary source.
- (d) Judicial reasoning in relation to (i) cases, and (ii) statutes.
- (e) Personnel in the Legal System; the judiciary, magistracy and juries.
- (f) Criminal process; The criminal justice process (in outline) and the role of rights in the process with particular attention to the jury and the impact of the Human Rights Act.





- (g) Civil process; The civil justice process (in outline) with particular attention to reform; alternative dispute resolution.
- (h) Funding; Legal services and access to justice with particular attention to the legal profession and legal aid.
- (i) Legal research: electronic and paper based resources; conduct of legal research and retrieval of legal information, with particular reference to the use of Aston online library and web based resources. WestLaw, LawTel, LexisNexis Certification.
- (j) Basic computer and numeracy refresher; Microsoft Office; European Computer Driving Licence Certification.
- (k) Critical thinking
- (l) Legal writing: essays and problem based questions
- (m) Advocacy and presentation skills

International Dimensions:

This module is concerned with English law, but comparisons with other legal jurisdictions are made.

Corporate Connections:

Actual case examples and practical illustrations are used throughout. Questions are based on hypothetical evidential documents and statements. Workshops rely heavily on the case law technique to ensure understanding of legal principle through a process of self-learning of principle

Method of Learning and Teaching:

Method of teaching – Lectures, workshops and seminars, practical research exercises and independent study.





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Recorded Lectures are used to introduce the legal principles, primary and secondary sources of relevant law, and to explain their practical operation whilst highlighting areas of difficulty and reform. Their aim is to provide a framework for students' independent study and research.

Workshops have two aims: (i) To direct students to their own identification of the applicable legal principles through analysis of primary source materials and (ii) To develop understanding of the application and operation of legal principles in particular contexts. Workshops can take a variety of forms with a range of both individual and group tasks being undertaken.

Seminars are designed to focus on application and analysis of specific legal principles already identified in lectures and workshops. The focus is on student contributions and on detailed, tight, analysis and discussion in order to prepare students for the examination assessment and the development of skills required for workshop assessments. Students will be required to apply their knowledge to practical case studies, identify relevant issues, sources and legal principles and present the results of their research and study either independently or in groups. In addition, seminars will assist students to develop skills of critical evaluation of a selection of secondary sources of English law and to consider comparative solutions to particular legal problems.

Self-test questions and **multiple choice questions** for each topic are made available on the VLE, together with guidance on answering problem questions on the English legal system and legal research and some worked answers (with reasoning processes).

Online/Class Discussion Activities At various points in the course, students will be introduced to areas where further reading and independent research will be necessary. The VLE will provide students with the opportunity to raise questions, discuss subject areas and approaches to set questions. This area of study is challenging, dynamic and diverse, and students will be encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own learning experience.



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Contact and Directed Learning:

Recorded Lectures	10 hours
Student led seminars and tutorials	32 hours
Assessed coursework and MCQ test	44 hours
Private study/group work	114 hours
Total	200 hours

Programme Outcomes:

The table below shows how this module contributes towards the achievement of the overall programme outcomes

Module Code	Module Name	A1	A2	A3	A4	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
GDL001	Introduction to law and legal research [foundation]	√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√

Ethical Approval:

This module does not require any primary research and no ethical approval will be necessary.

Assessment and Feedback:

The assessment for this module is via a one and a half hour multiple choice examination.

The second element of the assessment package consists of a 2,000 word coursework assignment. It is designed to allow students to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes for this module through application of their legal research skills. .

Students must pass this module in order to proceed onto the next stage of assessment. Feedback for this module is available through a variety of mediums including oral feedback during tutorials and office



hours and written feedback on formative assessments and research tasks.

Further information concerning the coursework assessment will be distributed at the start of the course.

Indicative Reading

- Carr. H, Carter. S & Horsey. K *Skills for Law Students* Oxford University Press 2009
- Huxley-Binns R. and Martin, J., *Unlocking the English Legal System*, Hodder Education, London, 2010.
- Ingman, T., *The English Legal Process*, OUP, Oxford, 2010.

Background Reading:

- Finch, E & Fafanski, S *Legal Skills* (2009) OUP
- Foster. S, *How to Write Better Law Essays*, Longman, 2010.
- Holland. J, & Webb. J *Learning Legal Rules*, OUP, 2010.
- Partington, M., *Introduction to the English Legal System*, OUP, Oxford, 2010.
- Slapper, G. and Kelly, D., *The English Legal System*, Routledge, London, 2010.



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Useful Online Sources:

- Westlaw UK [contains electronic access to practitioner work on Contract Law, *Chitty on Contracts*, 30th edn, Sweet & Maxwell, 2008]
- LexisNexis
- Lawtel
- Hein Online [Law Journals]
- The British and Irish Legal Information Institute: <http://www.bailii.org/>
- Cardiff Index of Legal Abbreviations: <http://www.legalabbrevs.cardiff.ac.uk/>
- Statute Law Database: <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk>
- Office of Public Sector Information: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk>
- Online resources for Jill Poole's OUP contract law texts: <http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/law/contract/>
- The European Union, contract law project: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/fair_bus_pract/cont_law/index_en.htm



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