

# **GUIDE TO STUDYING LAW**



Queen Anne's  
CAVERSHAM



## Queen Anne's Guide to Studying Law

Competition for places at law schools is high, and law is a popular choice of degree for students due to the opportunities and career options that it provides. Law is a field that keeps changing and the fact it is constantly developing makes it an interesting and challenging, yet rewarding experience as a degree.

Studying law is not about learning and regurgitating rules and cases. A law degree provides students with an ability to critically analyse and argue, solving problems and questions through applying different ideas and legal concepts. Law degrees are recognised as being both academically challenging and rewarding, enabling students to broaden their knowledge, and opens gateways into not only legal careers, but jobs in business, marketing, advertising and many more. Law is also available as a conversion course, taken after another degree has been completed (for example, History) and this will be discussed further later.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Barristers and solicitors

Many law degrees (the LLB for example) include modules that enable students to bypass the first part of the intensive training required in order to become a solicitor or a barrister. Once this degree is obtained, aspiring barristers can take the BVC (Bar Vocational Course) and solicitors can take the LPC (Legal Practice Course). Two years of a training contract follows this one year course, and then the student becomes a fully qualified lawyer. So, if you're interested in being a lawyer, including a law degree you can expect around six years of training, three of that being the degree.

However, there is nothing to say that you must become a lawyer simply because you have studied law. A law degree opens doors into many subject areas (for example, business or marketing) as it provides you with a variety of skills that are useful in many areas as well as law.

#### What is studied in the law degree?

The topics that are typically studied in order to qualify as the first parts of the necessary training in becoming a lawyer (as in the LLB degree) include:

- Law of the European Union
- Criminal Law
- Contract Law
- Tort Law
- Land Law
- Law of Trusts
- Constitutional and Administrative Law

There are plenty of optional modules available at different universities too depending on the lecturers' specialities. These include family law, commercial law, philosophy of law, employment law, human rights law, Roman law, environmental law and many more!

Many universities also allow optional modules to be taken from outside the field of Law, so there will often be the opportunity to study something other than that related to the legal world!

## SO, HOW DO I GAIN A PLACE AT LAW SCHOOL?

### GCSE

Both GCSEs and AS grades are important, since they are the only representation of your academic ability that is recorded when you send off your UCAS form, but they are not the only important factors that law schools look for in a suitable candidate. A set of results comprising of mostly A\*s, As and Bs will stand you in good stead however, since law is academically one of the most challenging degrees, so students need to be able to show that they are prepared for the challenge ahead of them.

### A Level

In terms of choice of A Level subjects, students are free to choose what they like. Subjects such as English, History or Politics can help develop essay skills and arguing abilities at an early stage, but on the other hand a scientific choice such as Physics or Maths demonstrates an ability to apply concepts logically and efficiently. Universities do not generally ask for any specific subject to be studied but due to the highly competitive nature of law, offers are likely to be made in the AAA-ABB category.

### Personal Statement

This is your chance to show off! Let the admissions tutor know why you wish to study law, how it inspires you, and if there are any particularly areas of law you find particularly interesting. Give details of any work experience in which you have participated, and you should start reading a law journal or newspaper – for example, the weekly law supplement of *The Times*, or check out [www.lawgazette.co.uk](http://www.lawgazette.co.uk) and [www.thelawyer.com](http://www.thelawyer.com). These will be helpful in picking out topics you find particularly interesting that you can describe in your statement or in interviews. Touch upon your hobbies and extra-curricular activities also, and emphasise any ways in which these would help you not only be a good lawyer, but a good student as well. It is also advisable to try and describe how your A Level subjects help you increase your abilities and skills, and how they would be helpful when studying law.

### Work Experience

Any experience working in any law firm will be useful. Organise some work experience, either yourself or through school, and watch how law firms and lawyers themselves work. This will not only give you an insight into the legal profession, but will also provide you with knowledge of how law firms work and operate with a variety of different people from lawyers to administrative workers.

## LNAT

Some universities require the LNAT to be taken, including:

- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- Durham University
- University of Glasgow
- King's College London
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford
- University College London

Cambridge University used to require LNAT but this year, for the first time, law applicants will have to take Cambridge's own law exam. The reason for this is that they do not value the multiple-choice section of the test and claim that the numerical scores are not sufficiently distinctive and, therefore, do not provide useful information within the not provide Cambridge admissions process to justify applicants being required to sit the LNAT and pay the fee involved in doing so. A recent study showed that those students who gained a high numerical score in the LNAT did not necessarily proceed to do noticeably better in Tripos exams.

The Cambridge Law Test, the new exam, no longer has a multiple-choice section. Applicants will be required to answer one question in one hour from a choice of two or three. The questions will either be essays, problem solving or comprehensions, depending on the college that the candidate applies to. The new test was designed by Cambridge colleges and will be used by most of them in the admissions process this year. All colleges except for Churchill will use the test. The exam will be taken when the applicant is in Cambridge for their interview. Like the LNAT, the Cambridge Law Test will not require any prior knowledge of the law. But, unlike the LNAT, applicants do not need to register for the test and there will be no fee involved.

The LNAT is a computerised test comprising of multiple choice questions and essay questions. They are to test analytical and essay skills for admissions tutors to look at. Details can be found at: [www.lnat.ac.uk/lnat-registration.aspx](http://www.lnat.ac.uk/lnat-registration.aspx) as well as practice questions and guidelines. You need to register online to take the test, and a small fee is required, though under certain bursary schemes you may be eligible for free entry.

## Interviews

If asked to interview for entry into a law school (rare, other than Oxbridge), it is important to recognise that no prior knowledge of law is required. The interviewers are looking for certain skills in a candidate, such as the ability to think on your feet. Skills to work at in preparation for a law interview include:

- Thinking on your feet
- Not jumping in head first into a blind conclusion
  - Think through the question
  - Argue both sides
  - Use the evidence you've provided to give your own opinion
- Answering the question
  - Don't ramble!
  - If you don't know something, admit that you don't know it

You may be given a problem question. For example:

There are three men, **A**, **B** and **C** who have survived a boat sinking, and are on a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean. They have no food, and figure out the only way that two of them can survive is to kill the other and eat him, although it is unlikely that any of them will eventually survive. **A** and **B** agree to the plan, but **C** does not want anything to do with it. **A** draws the short straw, and is killed and eaten by **B**. **C** does not stop the process happening. A ship then appears and saves **B** and **C**. Can either, or both, of them be charged with murder?

Rather than leaping straight in with an answer, think it through and most importantly **TELL THE INTERVIEWER WHAT YOU ARE THINKING!** Discuss things with him/her and ask questions about anything that you are unsure of. Then give your opinion on the conclusion, backing it up with suitable evidence and argument.

Keep up-to-date with current affairs – for example, you could do some research on recent famous cases and pick out points of law that could be discussed easily. You might find an area of law that you think is confusing and unclear – here you could discuss how you think it could be improved. Although no large extent of knowledge is needed in interview, you want to show that you can think things through and back up ideas with evidence and strong reason. The interviewer is looking for qualities such as being able to think rationally and on your feet. There is no need to panic though – often in law there are no right or wrong answers, and the interviewer is not there to catch you out.

## WRITING ESSAYS

### Where should I apply?

There are many law schools in the UK. Some, as mentioned above, require the LNAT but many do not. Many students find the league tables useful (for example, *The Times*' "Good University Guides"). The best way of finding out where you should apply, however, is to visit the universities you think that you would like to apply to and ask questions. Although the quality of the law teaching and researching is important, so is learning to live as a student, and so you must believe that you would be happy attending the universities that you plan to apply to.

### Law Essays

Studying law involves writing essays. This is not all, however, as it also involves problem solving, which is a different skill entirely, and is likely to include different techniques that are not generally used in essay subjects at A Level or GCSE.

Here are some guidelines on essay writing and problem solving and the following website provides excellent guidance on a variety of topics:

[http://www.lawteacher.net/essay\\_help/](http://www.lawteacher.net/essay_help/)

### Understanding the Task

Read the question carefully to make sure you understand what is required. Look carefully at the key words and phrases, which indicate the sort of answer you are expected to give. For example:

- **DISCUSS** - Give facts and their interpretation from all sides of the argument. Try to arrive at a conclusion.
- **EVALUATE** - Give your opinion of the worth of something in the light of its truth and usefulness.
- **ANALYSE** - Examine the topic in question; find or show the essence or structure of the topic.
- **ASSESS** - Judge the worth or importance, etc of something; evaluate the subject in question.

### Planning

Now think about the question and how it could be answered. Then write down a plan so that you can see the beginning, middle and end of your answer before you start in detail. The plan will concentrate your mind on the whole of the question, helping you to omit irrelevant information and to answer the question more logically, and it will give you confidence. Keep jotting down ideas as they come to you. Order your points in a logical sequence to form an essay plan.

### Writing the Essay

The first paragraph should be an introduction where you indicate what will follow and how you propose to approach the topic.

In the middle part of the essay you will consider all main points and arguments. Write in continuous prose. Make sure everything you say is relevant and answers part of the question. Start a new paragraph for each main idea. Use short, clear sentences in preference to long, rambling ones. Try to support each main idea with examples, relevant facts or legal authorities, making clear where it was that information or quotations you use came from.

The last part of the essay will be a conclusion where you sum up the main points and state your opinions if relevant. You may also recommend proposals for reform of the law. Make sure that you keep referring to any quotations in the question title.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

In many subjects you will be expected to write answers to “problem” questions. A hypothetical set of facts will be given and you will be asked to “discuss” the matter or “advise” one of the characters in the problem.

The answering of problem-type questions demands a special technique of its own and is a skill, which can improve considerably with practice. The basic requirement is to apply the law to the given fact situation. All the different possibilities must be considered before you give your own opinion as to the most likely conclusion, with reasons.

### Procedure in Problem-Solving

The preliminary stages in answering a problem question are much the same as in answering an essay question. Follow this or a similar procedure:

- Make a plan noting the important factual occurrences, the relevant areas of law, and any important cases or statutes. This will also form the basis of your introduction.
- Work through the facts according to each situation, normally in chronological order. Re-state the facts briefly and state the law which applies citing any relevant case or statute.
- Give a conclusion to each situation, but leave all options open and consider all alternatives.
- Move onto the next situation and repeat the procedure, briefly referring back to previous facts or cases if necessary (there is no need to be repetitive).
- Summarise, drawing all the situations together. Re-state briefly all the possibilities you have considered, and the possible alternatives, citing the main legal authorities again, by name only.
- Finally, give your opinion and conclusion in the terms asked for by the question (e.g., “advise X”, “what defences are available to Y”, etc). Give your reasons for your conclusion. Make sure that your arguments are legally tenable.
- Throughout your answer, bear in mind that the important skill is applying the law to the facts, and not merely stating the principles.

### Always

- Use appropriate legal terminology accurately.
- Read through your work to check for errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

## SUGGESTED READING

Those books with reference numbers are available in the school library.

A Certain Justice by P. D. James

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Bleak House by Charles Dickens

Understanding the Law by Geoffrey Rivlin  
(349.41 RIV)

Letters to a Law Student by Nicholas J. McBride  
(340.0711 MCB)

Critical Thinking Skills by Stella Cottrell  
(160 COT)

Critical Reasoning by Anne Thomson  
(160 THO)

Law by Raymond Wacks  
(340 WAC)

What about Law? Edited by Catherine Barnard  
(340 WHA)

Learning the Law by Glanville Williams  
(340.07 WIL)

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