This document provides some steps to consider when preparing to research for, and write up practical legal research as undertaken by LPC or BPTC students. This is usually focused on current law. LLM students may wish to consider meeting with a Librarian for a Literature Review, or looking at the guidance provided for the Law Reform and Review module.

During your studies you will have been learning how to address legal research problems, and the Library and Information Service can help you find the information you need to do this.

As any legal research assessment should be an independent piece of work, you will need to put into practice the skills you’ve learned during your studies. Review any legal research guidance, or manuals, provided in your course materials and consider attending one of the many Digital Skills Sessions. At some point, your Librarian will offer a practical Legal Research session focusing on finding and using primary sources and secondary sources, and looking at the resources that can help you apply the law in a practical way.

**Secondary sources:** secondary sources are commentary on the law including analysis of, and reference to, primary sources (case law and legislation). When choosing secondary sources you need to use your own judgment as to whether a particular book or source should be used in your research. Students are encouraged to use more than one secondary source and specifically those recognised as practitioner texts.

**So what is a practitioner text?**

General guidance would be whether it is respected and used by lawyers out in practice. Although most practitioner texts tend to be bulky hardbacks or loose-leaf works, a number of other text books providing *detailed treatment of the law* can be just as useful and valid provided they are *regularly updated* - for example publishers often produce annual handbooks in several subject areas.
Remember to check books for when they were published and whether they provide any updated supplemental information (in hard copy or possibly by going online to a publisher's webpage). If you locate your primary sources via a practitioner text or Halsbury's Laws, it is essential to make sure you've used any supplements or updaters just in case the position has changed. In hard copy this might be in the form of a supplement to a main work, or online there may be some stop press or updated information. Books available via Online Resources will usually have updates incorporated. Always check the source information for how this is done and how frequently.

The library has a page of suggested materials arranged by subject area – see Online Library: Law: Practitioner Texts. Please note this list is not exhaustive and if a book addresses your subject area, and provides detailed and up-to-date information, there is no reason not to refer to it in your research. The links on this page should take you directly to the relevant text on Westlaw, LexisLibrary (or any other online resource that provides access to practitioner texts and commentary). Texts may also be available as hard copy on the shelves but may be reference copies only.

Halsbury's Laws of England is a large encyclopaedia covering all areas of the law and is another respected secondary source and can be used in hard copy or online via LexisLibrary.

Apart from any hard copy sources in the library, you can find commentary whilst searching Online Resources. Whilst in Westlaw UK, use the Books area to link to their practitioner texts online. Note the front search page of Westlaw does not search against this commentary. Please also note we may not subscribe to all of the online texts listed there, however we may hold the book in the library. Please check the Library Catalogue 'Find a book' via the Online Library.

LexisLibrary has a customisable bookshelf to hold key commentary such as Halsbury's Laws, but also under the Commentary section it is possible to search or browse to view sources listed alphabetically. Alternatively use the Practice Areas tab to find commentary by subject area.

Some sources are not technically books but provide detailed online guidance written up by practitioners who specialise in a particular area of the law. They may provide basic guidance, know how, commentary and so on. The text of their articles may also link to primary sources. An example is Practical Law (PL) previously referred to as PLC.
Primary sources

Using secondary sources and commentary could lead you to relevant primary sources: case law and legislation. However it isn't enough to just cite the case, or a section of a statute, if you think it may be relevant because you've read it in a secondary source. Secondary sources may only abstract a case in context so it is important to then check the case by reading it in full. It is also important to check it is still good law and whether or not the judgment you are relying on hasn't subsequently been appealed or overruled.

Legislation:

Westlaw UK and LexisLibrary both carry updated legislation i.e. it will have been amended to ensure you are looking at the law as it stands now. They also provide associated analysis in the form of annotations, commentary and so on.

Full annotations may go a long way to helping understand the background to a piece of legislation, what was the intention behind it (maybe even citing Hansard), and discussing how it has been applied in case law. Make sure you know how to find a piece of legislation and how to explore all the additional resources using online resources. Sometimes it is possible to look at historic versions of a statute and even prospective versions (not yet in force). It is also possible to find cases, commentary, journals etc. that have cited any particular piece of legislation, as a whole, or any specific section of an Act/SI.

Case law:

Westlaw UK and LexisLibrary both have a citator service i.e. they will provide an abstract or digest of a case, provide a detailed treatment/analysis as to whether it is still good law, and indicate whether it has been followed, distinguished, applied etc.

Both resources will provide links to full text of Law Reports where available and may also give additional links to commentary, legislation and so on.

Practical Skills

The library also offers training sessions on using Office 365 and all students have the opportunity to become a Microsoft Office Specialist in Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. For writing up and presenting Word documents, and following guidance on layout and style (fonts, paragraphs, footnotes etc.), you may find it helpful to take the MOS Word Certification. Exams run periodically throughout the academic year and it is possible to take one certificate at a time. See the Online Library for more information.

For further information please contact your library issue desk or email library@bpp.com
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