

Frequently Asked Legal Research Questions: Researching UK Law

This guide aims to answer questions frequently asked of the staff at the Inner Temple Library. The sources suggested are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather they are sources that the staff have found to be most useful and which are likely to be found in a chambers library or a public library with a law collection. The sources include free web-based sources, hard copy materials and subscription-based databases. Details of the coverage of the subscription-based databases and other websites can be found at the end of this guide.

Please note that the subscription-based databases mentioned are available for use in the Inner Temple Library by members of the Inns of Court only. These databases cannot be accessed remotely because of restrictions in our licence agreements. Members of the public are advised to contact a public reference library to enquire if these databases are available locally. (Quick Reference Guides to some of the subscription-based databases can be found in the [Library Guides](#) section of the website.)

Researching UK Legislation

Researching Public General Acts

What are Public General Acts?

How do I find when an Act has come into force?

How do I check if an Act has been amended?

How do I find an Act if I only have the citation?

How do I find an Act that has been repealed?

How do I find historic and prospective versions of an Act?

Researching Statutory Instruments

What are Statutory Instruments?

How do I find an SI by title?

How do I find an SI if I only have the citation?

How do I find what SIs have been made under an Act?

How do I find the commencement date for an SI?

Researching Devolved Legislation

How do I find primary legislation from the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies of the UK?

How do I find secondary legislation from the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies of the UK?

Researching UK Case Law

What is a neutral citation?

What is the difference between a judgment and a law report of a case?

How do I find an unreported case?

If a case is reported in several series of law reports, which report should I use in court?

How do I find a judgment or law report of a case if I only have the party names?

How do I find a judgment or law report of a case if I only have a citation?

How do I find a judgment or law report of a case if I only know the subject matter?

How do I track the judicial history of a case?

How do I find cases that have cited a particular piece of legislation?

Database Coverage

What are the coverage dates for databases and websites?

Researching UK Legislation

Researching Public General Acts

What are Public General Acts (PGAs)?

PGAs are Acts of Parliament which apply to the whole country (i.e. the UK or at least one of its constituent countries). They are distinct from Local and Personal Acts, which apply to a particular individual or to organisations such as local authorities.

How do I find when an Act has come into force?

Many Acts have a section which sets out how they will come into force. This is usually placed at or near the end of the main numbered sections, before any appendices. An Act without any commencement provision comes into force straightforwardly on its date of Royal Assent, but if there is such a provision, it may take one or more of various different forms. Some Acts come into force on a specific future date stated in their commencement section, but many are brought into force on one or more unspecified future dates by means of “commencement orders”, which are published as Statutory Instruments.

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - use the **Browse** or **Search** options to find the Act. Then check the text of the Act to see if it has a commencement section. A further search of the Secondary Legislation on the site may be necessary to track down any commencement orders.

Hard copy sources

- Is it in force? volume of Halsbury’s Statutes gives commencement dates of Acts passed since 1 January 1960. This is an annual publication so use the Noter–Up service volume to bring the information up to date.

Subscription-based databases

- Lawtel - select **Statutes** from the **Legislation database**. Find the Act and select **Statutory Status Table**.
- Lexis Library - find the Act using the **Legislation database**. The notes that accompany the text give commencement details. You can also use the **Is it in force?** facility. Once you have found the Act, a **Find out more** box appears on the right of the screen. **Is it in force?** is found here.
- Westlaw UK - find the Act in the **Legislation database**. The **Legislation Analysis** that accompanies each section of an Act will give commencement information.

How do I check if an Act has been amended?

Acts may be amended by subsequent legislation, most commonly by later Acts but sometimes by Statutory Instruments.

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - once you have found your Act, there is a **What Version** option, where you view the Act as revised or as enacted.

Hard copy sources

- Halsbury's Statutes - contains the text of Acts as amended. **Remember** the bound volumes may be out of date so use the Cumulative Supplement and Noter-Up to bring information up to date. The notes give details of the amendments. There is also a Statute Citator volume which gives information on amendments.
- Current Law Legislation Citators - list details of amendments 1947 onwards for each Act, section by section.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - the text of the Acts is as originally enacted but there is an **Amending Items** tab that gives details of amending legislation.
- Lawtel - once you have found the Act in the **Legislation database** the **Statutory Status Table** gives details of amendments.
- Lexis Library - in the **Legislation database** the Acts are shown as amended and the notes that accompany the text give details of amendments. Alternatively, once you have found the legislation, the **Find out more** box on the right of the screen contains a **Status Snapshot** and **Halsbury's Statutes Citator**. Both of these give details of amendments.
- Westlaw UK - the Acts are as amended. Find the Act in the **Legislation database**. The **Legislation Analysis** option that accompanies each section of an Act contains a **Table of Amendments**.

How do I find an Act if I only have the citation?

Public General Acts are cited by the calendar year and a chapter number e.g. 2006 c. 4, with the chapter number being in Arabic numerals. Before 1963 Acts were cited by the regnal year e.g. 30 & 31 Vic c.27.

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - from the **Search** screen enter the year in the **Year** box and chapter number in the **Number** box.

Hard copy sources

- Halsbury's Statutes Chronological Index.
- Current Law Legislation Citators.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - select the **Legislation database**. Type the year and chapter number in the **Reference** box using this formula 1991 c.65.
- Lexis Library - in the **Legislation database**, enter the chapter number in the **Series** box and the year in the **Year** box.
- Westlaw UK - select the **Legislation database**. Type the year and chapter number in the **Act/SI Title** box using this formula 1991 c.65.

How do I find an Act that has been repealed?

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - this has the original versions of Acts back to 1988 including those that have been repealed. There are also selected Acts back to 1801.

Hard copy sources

- Bound volumes of Public General Acts - consult the Index to Statutes and the Chronological Index to Statutes if you do not have a complete reference for the Act.
- Halsbury's Statutes - the earlier editions may have a copy of the Act.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - contains Acts going back to 1235 even if they have been repealed.
- Lawtel - a link will take you to the legislation.gov.uk website and then to the original version of the repealed Act. Remember the coverage restrictions on legislation.gov.uk.

How do I find historic and prospective versions of an Act?

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - this site has Acts as originally enacted. Coverage is from 1988 onwards with selected Acts back to 1801. In addition, once you have found the section of an Act, there will be an option on the left of the screen to **Show Timeline of Changes**. This shows changes to legislation over time.

Hard copy sources

- Halsbury's Statutes - old editions. All the Inns of Court Libraries hold editions of Halsbury's Statutes.
- Textbooks - old editions may have the full text of Acts which were current at the time of the book's publication.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - the Acts (on Justis) are as originally enacted. Coverage is from 1235 onwards.
- Lexis Library - a **Historical Versions** service is available via the **Legislation database**. This option is on the right of the search screen. Subscribers can email a request for an historic version of a piece of legislation. This service extends back to 1998. Alternatively, once you have found the legislation you need, a **historical version** can be requested via the **Other formats available** option.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Legislation database**, the **Advance Search** option allows you to search for historic versions of Acts (back to 1991) and also to view prospective versions.

Researching Statutory Instruments

What are Statutory Instruments?

Statutory Instruments (SIs) are the means by which delegated or secondary legislation is made in the UK. Parliament does not have time to administer all the rules and regulations necessary to run the country so it delegates that power to a minister or local authority. The term Statutory Instrument is generic and covers rules, regulations, orders and schemes. Before 1948 delegated legislation was known as Statutory Rules and Orders (SR&Os).

How do I find an SI by title?

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - from the **Search** option enter the title in the **Title** box.

Hard copy sources

- Alphabetical Index of SIs in the Index to Halsbury's Statutory Instruments.
- If it is after 1993, use the alphabetical list in the Current Law SI Citators.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - select the **Legislation database** and enter the title in the **Title** box.
- Lawtel - from the **Legislation database**, select **Statutory Instruments** and enter the title in the **Title** box.
- Lexis Library - in the **Legislation database**, enter the title in the **Title** box.
- Westlaw UK - select the **Legislation database** and enter the title in the **Title** box.

How do I find an SI if I only have the citation?

SIs are cited by calendar year and serial number e.g. 1999/202.

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - from the **Search** option enter the year in the **Year** box and number in the **Number** box.

Hard copy sources

- Use Halsbury's Statutory Instruments Chronological Index – in the loose-leaf service binder.
- Current Law Legislation Citators are arranged by year and SI number – from 1993 onwards.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - select the **Legislation database** and in the **Reference** box use the formula year/SI number e.g. 1998/3132.
- Lawtel - select **Statutory Instruments** from the **Legislation database**. Enter the SI year and number in the **SI Number** box using the formula year/SI number e.g. 1998/3132.
- Lexis Library - in the **Legislation database** enter the year in the **Year** box and number in the **Series** box.
- Westlaw UK - select the **Legislation database** and in the **Title** box use the formula year/SI number e.g. 1998/3132.

How do I find what SIs have been made under an Act?

Hard copy sources

- Halsbury's Statutes - the enabled orders are referred to in the footnotes to each section of the Act.
- Current Law Legislation Citators - from 1947 onwards – details of the enabled SIs can be found under the entry for the Act.

Subscription based databases

- Lawtel - within the **Statutes database**, find the Act. The accompanying **Statutory Status Table** gives links to enabled SIs.
- Lexis Library - in the **Legislation database**, the notes that accompany the text of the Act give details of SIs made under it. Also **Halsbury's Annotations** will give information about subordinate legislation made under the Act.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Legislation database**, the **Overview Document** for each Act lists SIs made under it. Alternatively, the **Legislation Analysis** document that accompanies each section of an Act, will list SIs made under that section.

How do I find the commencement date for an SI?

Commencement information is clearly stated on the first page of the SI, below the title.

Free web sources

- legislation.gov.uk - find the SI and look at the **Coming into force** section on the front page of the SI.

Hard copy sources

- Halsbury's Statutory Instruments - the summary gives the commencement date.

Subscription-based databases

- Lawtel **Statutory Instrument database** - this is within the main **Legislation database**. There is a **Coming into force** section for each SI.
- Lexis Library - find the SI in the **Legislation database**. The notes that accompany the text give details of commencement. This information is also given in the text of the SI after the title.
- Westlaw UK - find the SI in the **Legislation database**. Commencement information is in the **Legislation Analysis** section that accompanies each SI.

Researching Devolved Legislation

How do I find primary legislation from the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies of the UK?

The Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly can all make primary legislation in some areas.

Free web sources

- [BAILII](#) - includes Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly 2000 onwards; Acts of the Scottish Parliament (ASPs) 1999 onwards; Acts and Measures of the National Assembly for Wales (NAWMs) 2008 onwards.
- [legislation.gov.uk: Northern Ireland](#) - includes Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly 2000 onwards.
- [legislation.gov.uk: Scotland](#) - includes Acts of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards.
- [legislation.gov.uk: Wales](#) - includes Acts and Measures of the National Assembly for Wales 2008 onwards.

Subscription-based databases

- Westlaw UK - includes all Northern Ireland legislation 1991 onwards; Acts of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards; and Acts and Measures of the National Assembly for Wales 2008 onwards.

How do I find secondary legislation from the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies of the UK?

The Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly can all make secondary legislation in some areas.

Free web sources

- [BAILII](#) - includes Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland 1989 onwards; Statutory Instruments of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards; Statutory Instruments of the National Assembly for Wales 1999 onwards.
- [legislation.gov.uk: Northern Ireland](#) - includes Statutory Rules for Northern Ireland 1989 onwards.
- [legislation.gov.uk: Scotland](#) - includes Statutory Instruments of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards.
- [legislation.gov.uk: Wales](#) - includes Statutory Instruments made by the National Assembly for Wales 1998 onwards.

Subscription-based databases

- Westlaw UK - includes Statutory Rules of the Northern Ireland Assembly 2000 onwards and Statutory Instruments of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards.

Researching UK Case Law

What is a neutral citation?

A neutral citation of a judgment identifies it independently of any law report series or other medium or context. It generally consists of the following: year, court, case number, and where appropriate the court division, e.g. [2003] EWHC 161 (Admin) – referring to case number 161 of 2003 in the High Court (Administrative Court). Many other jurisdictions now have their own systems of neutral citation, which facilitate the retrieval of judgments published on the internet.

What is the difference between a judgment and a law report of a case?

A judgment is the decision of the judge or judges in a court of law. This is distinct from a law report which is produced by a legal publisher with added content such as headnotes and catchwords.

How do I find an unreported case?

Unreported cases can be cited in court and the internet is the best place to look for such judgments. If you cannot find the case via the internet, the Inner Temple Library has produced a guide to locating transcripts of cases. This is called **Transcripts of Judicial Proceedings in England and Wales: a Guide to Sources**. The guide is available for members of the Inns of Court to consult at the Enquiry Point of the Inner Temple Library. Alternatively it is available to purchase from the [website](#).

Free web sources

- **BAILII** - contains judgments from HM Court Service, the House of Lords and Supreme Court. The judgments date from the early 1980s with a selection of earlier cases.

Subscription-based databases

- **Justis** - within the Cases database there is an archive of Court of Appeal (Civil Division) judgments covering the period 1951 onwards and Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) judgments 1963-1989, 1993 onwards.
- **Lawtel** - includes judgments from 1980 onwards.
- **Lexis Library** - contains Supreme Court, House of Lords, Privy Council, and Court of Appeal (Civil Division) judgments and selected High Court decisions 1980 onwards.
- **Westlaw UK** - contains Supreme Court and House of Lords judgments, Court of Appeal (Civil Division) judgments from the 1980s onwards, and Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) judgments from 2000 onwards.

If a case is reported in several series of law reports, which report should I use in court?

The most authoritative reports are The Law Reports, which have been produced by the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting (ICLR) since 1865. These should always be used in preference to any other series. The ICLR also produces the Weekly Law Reports (WLRs). The WLRs and All England Law Reports are of equivalent status. If the case is not reported in any of these, you should cite the fullest report you can find. Avoid cases summaries in journals and, where there is no full report, use the official transcript instead.

How do I find a judgment or law report of a case if I only have the party names?

Free web sources

- **BAILII** - you can use the **Case Law Search** section and fill in the **Case Name** box. Alternatively browse the alphabetical lists of case names under each individual court. Full text judgments will be retrieved.
- **House of Lords** - includes judgments from November 1996 to July 2009. Cases are listed by year and then alphabetical order. Full text judgments will be retrieved.
- **Supreme Court** - includes judgments from October 2009 onwards. You can search by case name. Full text judgments will be retrieved.

Hard copy sources

Current Law Monthly Digest or Current Law Yearbooks.

Subscription-based databases

- **Justis** - in the **Cases database** enter the party names in the **Parties** box. This will retrieve law reports of the case.
- **Lawtel** - in the **Cases database** enter the party names in the **Case Name** box. This will retrieve law reports and full text judgments.
- **Lexis Library** - in the **Cases database** enter the party names in the **Case name** box.
- **Westlaw UK** - in the **Cases database**, enter the party names in the **Party Names** box. This will retrieve law reports and full text judgments.

How do I find a judgment or law report of a case if I only have the citation?

Free web sources

- **BAILII** - in **Case Law Search**, enter the citation in the **Search** box or go directly to **Find a Case by Citation**. Full text judgments will be retrieved.

Subscription based databases

- **Justis** - in the **Cases database**, enter the citation in the **Citation** box. This will retrieve law reports.
- **Lexis Library** - in the **Cases database**, enter the citation in the **Citation** box.
- **Westlaw UK** - in the **Cases database**, enter the citation in the **Citation** box. This will retrieve law reports and full text judgments.

How do I find a judgment or law report of a case if I only know the subject matter?

Free web sources

- **BAILII** - select **Case Law Search** and then type the subject terms in the relevant box. This will retrieve full text judgments.

Hard copy sources

- Current Law Monthly or Current Law Yearbooks.

Subscription-based databases

- **Justis** - in the **Cases database**, use either the **Subject** box or **Free Text** box. This will retrieve law reports.
- **Lawtel** - in the **Cases database**, select terms from the list in the **Subject** box. This will retrieve law reports and full text judgments. Alternatively, enter search terms in the **Free Text** box.
- **Lexis Library** - in the **Cases database** you can enter subjects in the **Search terms** box or select terms from the **Add topics to search** option.
- **Westlaw UK** - in the **Cases database** there is an **Advanced Search** option. Here you can select terms from the **List of Terms** (under the Subject box). This will retrieve law reports and full text judgments. Alternatively, enter subject terms in the **Free Text** box.

How do I track the judicial history of a case?

Knowing the judicial history of a case is important as cases which are no longer regarded as “good law” (e.g. overruled cases) should not be cited in court.

Hard copy sources

- Current Law Case Citators - these give details of the history of a case from 1947 onwards.

Subscription based databases

- Justis - once you have found your case in the **Cases database** use the **Subsequent Cases** tab.
- Lawtel - the **Case Law database** will give details of cases that subsequently refer to the original case and any case that overrules it. Also some cases have a **Case History** at the top right of the summary.
- Lexis Library - in the **Cases database** select the **Case Overview** option on the left of the screen. This will display a **Case History** for the case searched.
- Westlaw UK - once you have found your case in the **Cases database**, the **Case Analysis** will give the history of the case.

How do I find cases that have cited a particular piece of legislation?

Free web sources

- **BAILII** - select **Case Law Search** and then type the details of the legislation in the search box or if you know the specific court you are searching for, select the court and then use the search box.

Hard copy sources

- Current Law Legislation Citators - under each Act or SI a list of cases that refer to the legislation will be shown.

Subscription-based databases

- Justis - find the Act in the **Legislation database**. For each Act there is a **Citing Cases** tab for cases that refer to the legislation.
- Lawtel - from the **Legislation database**, select **Browsable Legislation**. Find your Act. You will be given the option to view cases citing the whole Act or sections of the Act.
- Lexis Library - Find the Act in the **Legislation database**. In the **Find out more** box on the right of the screen, there is a **Cases** option, which finds cases that might refer to the Act. Also within **Halsbury's Annotations**, there may be references to cases that interpret the Act.
- Westlaw UK - find the Act in the **Legislation database**. The **Legislation Analysis** section will list cases that cite the Act.

Database Coverage

What are the coverage dates for databases and websites?

Free websites

BAILII - BAILII databases contain British and Irish case law. Most of the databases contain predominantly recent material, but the coverage varies and both old and new content is being added on an ongoing basis.

House of Lords - House of Lords judgments from 14 November 1996 to 30 July 2009.

Legislation.gov.uk - Public General Acts - complete 1988 onwards, partial 1801-1987; Local Acts - complete 1991 onwards, partial 1857-1990; Statutory Instruments - complete 1987 onwards, partial 1948-1986. Other content accessible from this page includes Acts of the Parliament of Great Britain (partial 1707-1800). Most primary legislation is available as revised at least up to 2002, with about half of it updated further to the present. Most secondary legislation is not revised.

Legislation.gov.uk: Northern Ireland - includes Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly 2000 onwards; Northern Ireland Orders in Council partial 1972-1986; complete 1987 onwards.

Legislation.gov.uk: Scotland - includes Acts of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards; Scottish Statutory Instruments 1999 onwards.

Legislation.gov.uk: Wales - includes Acts and Measures of the National Assembly for Wales 2008 onwards; Wales Statutory Instruments 1999 onwards.

Supreme Court - has judgments from October 2009 onwards.

Subscription-based databases

Justis - Case Law: full text version of a number of law report series; a range of Court of Appeal Civil and Criminal Judgments; Legislation: full text databases covering UK Statutes and SIs. The coverage of the Statutes is from Magna Carta to the present. All repealed Acts are included. Acts are presented as enacted with links to amended and amending legislation. SIs and draft SIs are covered from 1987 onwards, while the SI archive provides access to subsidiary legislation 1671 onwards.

Lawtel UK - includes: summaries of reported and unreported cases 1980 onwards, most with links to full text transcripts; summaries of Statutes 1984 onwards with links to full text 1987 onwards; Local Acts 1991 onwards; summaries of Statutory Instruments 1984 onwards with links to full text 1987 onwards.

Lexis Library - provides access to the content previously available from All England Direct, Halsbury's Laws Direct, Legislation Direct and LexisNexis Professional. Coverage: full text of case reports from over 40 series of law reports including the All England Law Reports, Weekly Law Reports and Industrial Relations Law Reports; transcripts of all cases from the Supreme Court, House of Lords, Privy Council and Court of Appeal (Civil Division) 1980 onwards, of the Administrative Court 1983 onwards, and of selected cases from other divisions of the High Court; full and amended text of all UK Statutes and SIs that are in force; Scottish Acts and SIs; Church of England Measures; an electronic version of Halsbury's Laws of England; an electronic version of Is It In Force?; full text of over 80 legal journals; law reports and legislation from the EU; law reports and legislation from several Commonwealth jurisdictions, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Westlaw UK - case law: coverage from 1865 onwards, including full text of the ICLR's Law Reports and many of Sweet & Maxwell's specialised series including the Criminal Appeal Reports, as well as access to unreported cases. Legislation: full text of consolidated Public Acts 1267 onwards and Statutory Instruments in force, 1948 onwards, that are in force; databases of repealed legislation 1992 onwards and of current and historical versions of Statutes and SIs.