

FREQUENTLY ASKED  
LEGAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS



RESEARCHING  
UK LAW



INNER TEMPLE LIBRARY

## 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How do I find an Act that has been repealed?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](https://www.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

- Lexis+ - find the Act using the **Legislation database**. The notes that accompany the text give commencement details for each section. The **Supporting Materials** option on the right of the screen contains Halsbury’s Annotations which also give commencement details. There is also an online version of Is It In Force – use the My Sources tab to find this.
- Westlaw UK - find the Act in the **Legislation database**. The **Provision Details** 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](https://www.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

- Lexis+ - 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 **Supporting Materials** on the right of the screen contains a **Status Snapshot** which gives details of amendments. There is also an online version of Halsbury's Statutes Citator – use My Sources to find this.
- vLexJustis - the text of the Acts is as originally enacted but there are notes under each section giving details of amendments.
- Westlaw UK - the Acts are as amended. Find the Act in the **Legislation database**. The **Provision Details** 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](https://www.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

- Lexis+ - in the **Legislation database**, use the main search box using this formula 1991 c.65
- vLexJustis - select the **Statutes and Regulations database**. In the **Advanced** search box type the year and chapter number in the **Reference** box using this formula 1991 c.65
- Westlaw UK - select the **Legislation database**. In the **Title** box type the year and chapter number using this formula 1991 c.65

## How do I find an Act that has been repealed?

### Free web sources

- [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.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

- vLexJustis - contains Acts going back to 1235 even if they have been repealed.



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

### Free web sources

- [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.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

- Lexis+ - the **Historical Versions** of Acts go back to 1998. Once you have found the Act and section, there will be a **Versions** tab at the top of the screen. From here you can enter a specific date or move along a timeline.
- vLexJustis - the Acts are as originally enacted. Coverage is from 1235 onwards.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Legislation database**, **More** 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](https://www.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

- Lexis+ - in the **Legislation database**, enter the title in the main search box or select from A-Z lists.
- vLexJustis - from **Advanced** search select the **Statutes and Regulations database** and 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](http://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

- Lexis+ - in the **Legislation database** use the main search box using this formula 1998/3132. There are also numerical lists to browse through.
- vLexJustis - from **Advanced** search select the **Statutes and Regulations database** and in the **Reference** box use the formula year/SI number e.g. 1998/3132
- 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

- Lexis+ - in the **Legislation database**, the notes that accompany the text of the Act give details of SIs made under it. Also **Halsbury's Annotations** (found within **Supporting Materials**) will give information about subordinate legislation made under the Act.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Legislation database**, the **Act Details** for each Act lists SIs made under it. Alternatively, the **Provision Details** 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](https://www.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

- Lexis+ - 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 **Provision Details** 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

- Lexis+ - includes Acts of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards; and Acts and Measures of the National Assembly for Wales 2008 onwards.
- 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 1996 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

- Lexis+ - Statutory Instruments of the Scottish Parliament 1999 onwards.
- 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

- vLexJustis - within the Case Law 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.
- Lexis+ and Westlaw UK - contain judgments from the High Court and above. Check both when looking for a judgment of unreported decisions.

## 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

- Lexis+ - in the **Cases database** enter the party names in the main search box. Within Advanced search there is a **Case Name** field.
- vLexJustis - from **Advanced** search, select the **Case Law database**. Enter the party names in the **Party Names** box.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Cases database**, enter the party names in the **Parties** box.

## 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

- Lexis+ - in the **Cases database**, enter the citation in the main search box. Within Advanced search there is a Citation field.
- vLexJustis - from Advanced search, select the **Case Law database**. Enter the citation in the **Citation** box.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Cases database**, enter the citation in the **Citation** box.

## 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

- vLexJustis - from Advanced search choose the **Case Law database**. Use the options in the fields provided.
- Lexis+ - in the **Cases database** you can enter subjects in the **Search** box or select a subject from the options under **Topics**.
- Westlaw UK - in the **Cases database** enter subject terms in the **Free Text** box or the **Subject/Keyword** 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

- Lexis+ - once you have found your case, there will be a **Case History** section to click on.
- vLexJustis - once you have found your case in the **Case Law database** a warning will appear if it was heard in a higher court.
- 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

- Lexis+ - Find the Act in the **Legislation database**. In the **Related Documents** section 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.
- vLexJustis - find the Act in the **Statutes and Regulations database**. For each Act there is a **Citing Cases** tab for cases that refer to the legislation.
- Westlaw UK - find the Act in the **Legislation database**. The **Provision Details** section will list cases that cite the Act.

## Database Coverage

Details about the databases are available on the [website](#).