Book Reviews

CLINCH, Peter and MULLAN, James. *Legal Research: a practitioner's handbook*. London: Wildy, Simmonds & Hill Publishing, 2010. ISBN 9780854900640: £39.00 443 p.

How do you teach lawyers to do legal research? How do you impart a lifetime's experience, your knowledge of resources, legal information and its organisation? Anyone who has taught legal research skills will have grappled with how best to explain the techniques that are second nature to librarians and make them relevant to lawyers.

Peter Clinch in his handbook has produced a publication which he believes is the first handbook of legal research information specifically designed for practitioners working in the UK. This is publicised as a practical "how-to" work designed to be dipped into and not read cover to cover, with hints and tips highlighted in handy text boxes and it is a guide to both print and online resources. It is aimed at practitioners, solicitors, barristers and professional support lawyers without access to a law librarian or information officer.

The handbook is divided into three sections, followed by appendices and indices. Part A, *Before Touching a Keyboard or Opening a Book* covers problem identification and analysis, research strategy, how to derive keywords, followed by advice on how to select the best sources and formats: print or electronic, with advice on evaluating web information and cross-checking where possible. Part B, *Selecting the Right Source and Using it Effectively* deals with law encyclopaedias nationally and worldwide; primary sources: legislation and cases, treaties and conventions; procedural law, legal definitions, legislative intent, commentary, tracking legislative proposals and lastly professional libraries for lawyers. Part C, *Presenting the Results Effectively* covers legal writing guides, legal style manuals and tools for citation checking and updating. The three sections are supplemented by extensive appendices, listing abbreviations for Acts and other publications; a glossary of legal terms used in the UK, EU, US and international law; excerpts from the Practice Directions relating to legal research, including tribunals; a table of database commands, and a popular names index to UK cases and EU legislation and cases (with acknowledgments to Justis).

James Mullan has contributed Chapter 14 *Business Information*; Chapter 15 *Information about People and Personalities connected with the Law* and Appendix 6 *Buying Legal Information*. James writes from the perspective of working in a city law firm and his contributions are well organised, current and informative.

Is a handbook a suitable format for the task in hand? I found the layout mildly irritating – being referred back to sections and told I had to read a previous paragraph before I could start on what I really wanted to read. There was also quite a bit of repetition. The indices cover publication titles and databases, but not subjects, so dipping in and out to find what you need is not always straightforward. Pepper and Hart research is in the *Words and Phrases* chapter, consultation papers are in a chapter after the one on tracking bills and there is a chapter entitled *Lucky Dip* with information that does not fit elsewhere. A book listing online sources with urls will go out of date quickly and all information here was correct as of November 2009, but to give the author his due, his mentions of developments, for example Justis's coverage of local acts has helped to keep the work lively. Some resources get quite dismissive treatment, for instance Bloomberg Law, and with others, e.g. Lexis Library he makes inconsistent assumptions on which resources are included with subscriptions.

Will the work reach its intended audience of legal practitioners? I am not sure that it will, as its emphasis on bibliographic descriptions, summaries of loose-leaf or encyclopaedia arrangements and citation specifications are all librarian preoccupations and at times I even had the feeling I was looking at content lifted from library "how to guides". Lawyers need information on their practice areas, information about their specialised associations, journals and blogs that they rely on to network and keep up-to-date with their peers. There is no information in here on databases such as Complinet, EGi, Kluwer, no mention of precedents, model agreements, checklists, no lists of associations in the indices and only the briefest mention of blogs and RSS feeds. Cutting costs and doing more with less is how we all have to get by these days and free RSS feeds from journals, blogs, and law firm newsletters are all essential to keep lawyers up-to-date and informed of legal developments. Even Twitter does not get a mention either in the *Updating known law* section, though this was my quickest route recently for updated publication information on the much delayed Localism Bill.

However, Peter Clinch's more natural audience – librarians and information officers, especially those involved in trainee training, will be delighted to see a new work and will find a wealth of information here to guide them. This is especially so if they are new to the legal sector or have not previously taught legal research. His advice on looking at the stages involved, such as identifying the facts, analysing the problem and area of law and putting this into a context and jurisdiction is excellent. He stresses the importance of recording, giving advice on

note taking and, most importantly, knowing when to stop and how to write up research. It is a shame he does not take this one step further and cover any aspect of capturing the research or saving research into know-how systems.

The handbook is excellent value for money, an affordable addition to any collection and Peter Clinch has been more than generous in passing on his own knowledge and sharing his own skills with future generations of law librarians.

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CARR (H.) CARTER (S.) and HORSEY (K.), *Skills for Law Students*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780199532193, 522pp. £35. Activate your online access via the code printed in the sealed card inside the book.

This work has been co-authored by three academics who have devoted much time and energy to producing a book and online resource, but even that description does not really begin to do it justice. In fact the cover describes it best, as an interactive online resource with an accompanying book. The book itself is impressive, containing 32 chapters addressing virtually every skill a law student is likely to need, of which more shortly. But it is the materials other than the book which make it really relevant by making excellent use of the online resources to teach legal skills. The preface says that, although it is recognised that learning skills is important in ensuring academic and vocational success, they envisage that the approach of this book could well be adopted by textbooks addressing substantive areas of law and they are probably right. A resource of this kind to teach land law, for example, would help to bring that demanding subject to life and force students to engage with it.

Even before the preface it can be seen that considerable thought has gone into the design of the book. The reader is told before anything else that everything including the text of the book is online, and purchasing the book gives the student four years' access to the online account, so in effect one buys the book and obtains a four year lease of the website. The site contains over 170 interactive activities, starting with a skills audit. These are complemented by some 50 video recordings demonstrating bad practice as well as good, an eminently suitable approach to practical skills acquisition in such areas as presentations and mooting. Additional elements include a reflective diary (encouraging the student to stop and think), and information made available via the hyperlinked glossary and cross referencing. Most of the activities provide scores so that the student is continually made aware of how well they are performing and what areas might need to be revisited.

So what kinds of skills are addressed? The book is divided into five main parts including an introduction, comprehensive glossary and list of common abbreviation and a helpful index. The first part deals with basic study skills beginning with time management, what and how to write when taking notes, working alone and in groups whilst avoiding plagiarism, thinking critically and creatively and reflecting on one's work, all of which comprise one quarter of the 522 page book. Part 2 covers research and technical skills, providing a comprehensive account of how to use the law library to begin research followed by advice on the various sources – law books, legal journals and databases and how to cite sources. Parts 1 and 2 comprise the first 18 chapters and 240 pages.

The second half of the book starts with legal method in Part 3. The student is shown how to read, understand and interpret statutes and no fewer than four separate chapters explain the skills and approaches required to understand case law. In Chapter 24, for example, an explanation is provided about how to tackle a difficult case, the one chosen being *A v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2005] 2 AC 68 and students are told that to take it seriously at least two or three hours should be given to reading it and not just prior to the seminar. The chapter explains the process in close detail with four main steps, a number of sub-steps and ten activities. Serious and conscientious students cannot fail to engage with this process if they access the available resources and the approach is infinitely more interesting than simply reading a textbook. The chapter ends by emphasising the importance of reflecting on one's work.

Part 4 contains four chapters on basic academic and assessment skills: how to write essays, extended essays and dissertations, how to tackle problem questions and the process of revising and preparing for examinations. In Part 5 the four major practical skills of making presentations, mooting, interviewing and negotiating are covered. Presentations, formal or informal, are what most people have to do in a variety of circumstances, whether for assessment or simply to disseminate information. For lawyers they are especially important, and students are encouraged by practical advice as to their purpose, how to set about preparing one, with videos showing how real law students fare. The text provides reassurance and advice and the chapter demonstrates graphically how useful and beneficial the interactive activities can be.

The starting point for the authors is that nowadays the student body is so diverse that law teachers cannot take much, if anything, for granted about student experience prior to commencing their law degree studies and the approach taken as a result of that absence of presupposition is an imaginative and diverse use of current technology and dependence on the computer. The preface shows that they consulted extensively, not only the academic community but many other people, which enabled them to produce a resource with encyclopaedic coverage.

For a final example, take the chapter on critical thinking, something which law teachers strive to explain to