

EDUCATION ADVISERS LTD eGUIDE TO STUDYING LAW.



About our expert author: Fiona Sanderson

Fiona attended a high performing girls' selective grammar school in the southeast of England. She then won an academic scholarship for exceptional GCSE performance and attended a boarding school for her A Levels, where she became Head Girl and obtained outstanding grades.

Fiona then studied Law at the University of Cambridge, as a member of a top "Tompkin's Table" college. She graduated with 1st class honours, won the College Law prize and was awarded a Post Graduate Scholarship by the Fellows of her College. She now works for a well-established legal practice in London, dealing with complex criminal law cases. Fiona has recent experience of the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS), the Oxbridge application process, Law course selection for other top universities and the Law National Aptitude Test (LNAT).

While not being an employee of Education Advisers, Fiona may have time to be an exceptional resource on assignments requiring assistance in obtaining placements in top UK Law Schools.

What is Law?

A simple Google search informs us that 'law' is the system of rules which a particular country or community recognises as regulating the actions of its members and which it may enforce by the imposition of penalties.

Often people think of the laws and criminal law as synonymous – with the former occupying the whole of the latter but this is not the truth of it at all. The law touches all of our lives on a daily basis regardless of whether we have had any contact with the criminal justice system. Every day in our lives we make contracts with others – whether that be a simple transaction at a supermarket or entering into a contract for services with a tradesperson or even a contract for your favourite sports trainer. Furthermore, our family lives may be regulated by the law – whether that be through an order regulating when each of our parents have custody over us or how much child support they pay. Even subconsciously we adhere to the laws imposed on us (in the majority).

The law is intertwined into every facet of our lives and society.

Which UK universities are the best for Law?

Various "league tables" (which use different criteria) are publicly available and offer applicants additional information in selecting the level of university they may wish to apply to. Our own Top 10 UK universities for law include:

Oxford
Cambridge
York
UCL
LSE
Durham
Leeds
Bristol
Queens Belfast
Glasgow

Do you have to study A-Levels or are there alternatives?

The International Baccalaureate Diploma is a great qualification and individual universities will list a comparable offer based on IBDP points. If you are a Scottish student then Highers/Advanced Higher equivalents will be stated on the relevant university's page (if you are applying in England), and the inverse for English and Welsh students studying in Scotland. You can also take BTEC courses, some which equate to 2 or 3 A-Levels.

In 2020, the UK Government announced the intention for a new qualification called T Levels – a 2-year course to follow GCSEs and the equivalent of 3 A Levels. These will combine classroom learning with a 300+ hour industry placement. The legal profession is one of the intended subjects, but as yet nothing has been announced.

What type of university courses are there and how do you pick them?

To obtain a "qualifying" law degree you need to ensure you are completing a Bachelor of Law (LLB) degree. The university webpage should stipulate whether the degree is qualifying or not. If you wish to practice as a solicitor or barrister there is a need to complete this type of degree. If you do not undertake an LLB you would then need to complete a Graduate Diploma in Law - GDL (or part of it dependent on the nature of the degree you undertook) and then go onto qualify.

However, if you are interested in law but do not want to pursue a career as a solicitor or barrister you can undertake a non-qualifying law degree. These courses tend to come in the form of law coupled with another subject such as a language (French, German, Spanish etc), social science (criminology, psychology, forensic science etc) or humanity (history, geography etc).

Ultimately the course you choose needs to reflect your interest – but just be aware of the qualifying law degree caveat.

Which universities offer what?

Each university will offer their own courses for law – usually a straight law LLB course (qualifying law degree) and others will offer law and another subject as a combined degree. You can apply for different types of law courses at the same university if you are set on studying there and doing law or equally you could apply for these courses across your 5 different university options.

What is the competition for places?

Like any university course there is competition for places. According to the Law Society, in 2019-20, 30,000 applications were received with 21,000 gaining places on their respective courses. Law is therefore a competitive course. There is more competition for places at the top ranked universities and the Russell Group members but no matter where you go, the university will have a limited number of spaces which they can offer and if they receive applications over that amount – their process of designating these spaces will be based on the grades you are predicted/have achieved and your interest in the subject.

How to successfully apply?

Subjects

There is no set subject list for studying law although universities usually require one essay-based subject. Some people take A-Level law however it is not essential. A majority of students will do predominantly essay based subjects such as English, History, Geography, Politics, Religious Studies/Philosophy, Psychology etc. However, others may only have taken one essay-based subject and done STEM subjects. Essentially there is no set formula. It is advised that you should do subjects that you enjoy – bearing in mind the general requirement for one essay-based subject.

Grades

The grades required to study law again vary with the university that you apply to and can be subject to variation based on the nature of the offer. The top end of the range is Cambridge which requires A*AA, however other very good universities will generally have grade requirements of AAA/AAB. The range in entry requirements sits between A*AA and BBC There are universities with lower requirements than these – however the top law schools in the UK generally sit in this range.

International Baccalaureate grades are also subject to equivalent offers, with the best universities seeking top grades. For example, Cambridge requires 40-42, with other Russell Group universities requiring high 30s.

Personal Statements

Your personal statement should set out why you want to study law. You should really consider your reasons – the generic ones constitute ‘helping people’ and ‘defending the principles of law’ – but it is advised you really consider why you want to do law. It may be that you are just curious about the law and about the legal system, and it is this that has drawn you to law, it may be that you yourself have had contact with the legal system – whether that be direct/indirect and in whichever sector (be it family, criminal, employment etc).

Perhaps don't say watching 'Suits' or 'Better Call Saul' inspired your application (both for the fact they are TV dramas, and the latter is an example of how not to practice law) – but you can definitely reference legal dramas or films rooted in fact, podcasts, articles or news stories you have been exposed to.

Indeed, heighten your exposure though following legal accounts on social media – some good Twitter accounts are the Secret Barrister, the Good Law Project as well as following different lawyers and firms that you are interested in. These accounts often comment on legal developments – whether that be in a recently decided case of government policy. Even if you are not sure you want to go into criminal law or employment law or commercial law – gaining exposure to what is going on in the relevant sectors (much of which misses the headlines on the news) will give you a greater edge in your personal statement (and interview if the university requires it). By keeping your 'finger on the pulse' so to speak you are able to show a heightened awareness and interest in the law and developments in it. You certainly don't have to read everything in depth, but just having a look at some legal issues at the end of a week could really help you stand out.

The general template of a personal statement is to open with the reasons why you want to study what is it you are applying for and then discuss your A-Level choices as well as extra-curricular activities and express how the skills and attributes you have developed through these outlets have either driven you to pursue this course or equally equip you to undertake this course.

For Oxbridge applications, it is recommended that the focus is on your academic drive and achievements, with perhaps a paragraph or so being dedicated to your other interests and endeavours – however for other universities which do not include an interview process, showing your well-roundedness as an individual is definitely advantageous. Extra-curricular activities may include sports, music, clubs, and activities through and outside of school such as debating club or volunteering at a charity etc.

There is no set formula for writing a personal statement, and in many ways the aim of your application and your circumstances write the application for you – as they shape the balance you seek to pursue. With regards to Oxbridge applications or applications to other competitive universities, you may wish to evidence your desire to study law by showing engagement with it outside of your studies. For instance, you may go along to your local Crown or Magistrates Court and watch some proceedings or apply to a local firm to do some work experience – whatever area of law that is in. You may also wish to read some legal books – some classics are 'Letters to a Law Student' and 'What About Law'. You can also find lots of free legal resources online such as McBride's Legal Guides and various blogs and journals. These latter suggestions are merely that – suggestions but may be an asset in making your application stand out from the crowd, by showing a real interest in the subject you are applying to study.

Interviews and LNAT

As mentioned above some universities interview applicants and others require applicants to undertake the LNAT. These are: *Bristol University, Glasgow University, King's College London, Nottingham University, Oxford University, SOAS University of London, University College London*. If you are not applying to any of these universities then there is no need to undertake this assessment.

The LNAT is the Law National Aptitude Test and can be sat at your local Pearson's test centre (where you sit your driving theory test). There are mock papers online at (<https://lnat.ac.uk/how-to-prepare/practice-test/>) – but essentially the test comprises of 2 sections, a multiple-choice section

and a written assessment. The questions and the essay titles are not directly related to the law – hence a legal knowledge does not give you any material advantage. The assessment seeks to identify the manner you process and comprehend information as well as the ability to form arguments. There is no actual ‘revision’ as such that you can do. Further there is no ‘pass mark’ – each university which requires the test for application sets a benchmark for the intake.

Interviews are only relevant to top universities – primarily Oxford, Cambridge and York. The interview process is usually made up of in person ‘interviews’ (discussions) with fellows from the college you have applied to as well as a written examination. The interview process usually lasts a day. The time scale for the interviews will be set by the respective universities however they are usually between November and December with the outcomes being released in January.

What does the undergraduate course involve?

The form of the undergraduate law course at different universities varies however the core is consistent throughout. The universal hallmarks of a law degree are criminal law, tort law, constitutional law, contract law, land law, EU law and the law of equity. Different universities distribute the study and combination which are studies in the respective years, but all are necessary to graduate with a qualifying law degree.

In addition to these 7 core modules, you will be able to choose elective modules which reflect your interests and passions. The range and nicheness of these modules will vary dependent on the university – and hence is something worth considering when applying. For instance, family law, commercial law and employment law are relatively conventional and prevalent in most universities, but some offer more specialist focused subjects such as sports law, animal rights law, mental health law. Although the completion of any of these subjects does not define the stature of your degree or the direction which you will go following university, most students tend to craft their options to reflect their interests.

Alternatively, if you are unsure as to where your interests lie then you can choose a variety such as more commercial/company-based aspects of law with others such as human rights law or more people-based subjects. The composition of every law course in terms of how you are assessed is different – with some universities placing all of the weight on finals (exams at the end of every academic year) and some assessing continuously (through module-based tests and assignment). Again, this may be something that helps you decide where to apply.

Career prospects?

Although law is a vocational subject, you are not pigeonholed into becoming a lawyer. Indeed, you need to undertake an additional qualification to become either a solicitor or a barrister.

Those aspiring to be solicitors need to undertake the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) and aspiring barristers need to undertake the bar course. These professional qualifications allow you to practice as a lawyer. However, you can go into many other professions including but not limited to consulting, teaching, marketing, finance.

Further, you may not wish to join a law firm directly, but you have the option to join different companies/institutions that need lawyers. For example, you could work in government institutions such as M15/6, the Government Legal Department, NHS etc or work in private companies that deal in matters such as pharmaceuticals, real estate, rail etc. Doing a law degree, whilst in some sense vocational is not restrictive. It opens up a whole host of career prospects. You may want to go into

something completely non-law related by the end of your degree but the skills you will have gained will be transferrable into so many other professions. The skills you will gain and develop will be those of analysis, problem solving, creating links, forming opinions and arguments.

Studying Law in the USA.

There are many rankings for USA universities but these are reckoned to be the top for law:

1. *Duke University, North Carolina*
2. *Stanford, California*
3. *Yale University, Connecticut*
4. *University of Chicago, Illinois*
5. *Harvard, Massachusetts*
6. *Pennsylvania, Pa*
7. *New York Uni, NY*
8. *University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Michigan*
9. *Columbia Uni*
10. *Berkeley, California*

Aspiring US lawyers need to study for a 3-year “Juris Doctor”(JD). To pursue this, you must first have obtained an undergraduate bachelor’s degree and have obtained Law School Admissions test (LSAT) scores.

JD courses comprises of contract, property, tort, criminal, and public law modules. Other elective modules are available.

Following completion of the JD, further professional qualification must be sought through the bar exam – each state has its own exam, which allows legal practice

Further academic study can be pursued through the 9-month long LLM (master’s degree in Law) and can be available upon completion of a JD.

International students should contact providers to ascertain if their bachelor’s degree is suitable for the LLM. There is no requirement for LSAT. International students can also undertake the New York and California bar exams, provided they meet American Bar Association (ABA) requirements.

For international students, study in the US is depended upon meeting visa requirements. Financial, residential, transport and healthcare costings should also be considered in great detail.

Worthwhile websites

www.lawsociety.org.uk

www.barcouncil.org.uk

www.cilex.org.uk Legal Executives

www.citma.org.uk/home Trademark attorneys

www.legal500.com Survey of UK legal profession

www.justice.gov.uk Ministry of Justice

www.cps.gov.uk Crown Prosecution Service

www.lnat.ac.uk

www.law.cam.ac.uk University of Cambridge

www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applyinginterviews Cambridge Interviews

www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/interviews

www.york.ac.uk/law/undergraduate/interview

www.lawcareers.net

www.lawgazette.co.uk

Education Advisers can advise you on all these admissions issues and more, so do not hesitate to email Steven Saunderson on steven@educationadvisers.co.uk

This eguide on law school is published by: Education Advisers Ltd for its website
www.universityadvice.co.uk

*New Barn
Home Farm
Red Hill
Wateringbury
Kent
ME 18 5NN
Tel: 01622 813870*

Copyright 2022 ©