

Teaching guidance and handouts

A practical guide to public legal education

Contents

Introduction	3	
About Law for Life	4	
Section 1	What is public and legal education? 5	
	What is legal capability?	6
	The four domains of legal capability	6
	Why is public legal education needed?	7
Section 2	What does public legal education look like? 8	
	What do people learn in public legal education?	8
	How do you teach public legal education?	8
	How do you plan a public legal education course?	9
	What does a typical session look like?	11
	Practical facilitation tips	12
Section 3	Materials, suggestions and ideas 15	
	Preparation	15
	Opening: Introductions and practical matters	16
	Teaching materials	17
	Preparing your own materials.....	20
Section 4	How to evaluate a public legal education course? 22	
Appendix 1	23	
Appendix 2	24	

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

It is written to provide guidance and materials for anyone wishing to develop some form of public legal education (PLE) within a charitable, work, or educational setting.

This guide is for you if you are a legal professional, advice worker, or community leader and you want to develop teaching skills to transfer your law-related knowledge to people in ways that are relevant to their everyday experiences and challenges.

What does the guide aim to do?

This guide explains the nature and value of public legal education and provides some simple techniques and materials through which people's understanding about the law and their skills to use legal remedies might be developed.

Why has the guide been written?

Many people are unaware of basic legal rights or the processes by which they are enforced. Helping them to understand their rights and to develop the skills and confidence to assert them not only helps people seek redress when things go wrong, it also helps avoid legal difficulties in the first place. Understanding and participating in legal processes is also a crucial part of encouraging accountable public services and building healthy democracies.

How is the guide organised?

It is divided into four sections.

Section one explains the nature of public legal education: what it is – and what it is not.

Section two indicates ways of developing and teaching public education.

Section three provides examples and links to some of the materials already developed by Law for Life, with guidance on ways in which they may be used to develop standalone courses.

Section four offers some good practice ideas when evaluating public legal education courses.

About Law for Life

This guide has been developed by Law for Life: the Foundation for Public Legal Education. Law for Life is a charity dedicated to ensuring that people have the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to deal with law-related problems.

Our services include:

- ✓ The multi award-winning Advicenow website providing the best up-to-date information about the law and rights available on the internet and effective information materials that offer practical help on how to manage and resolve life's legal problems.
- ✓ Community-based education and training that helps people understand how the law works and builds their skills and confidence.
- ✓ Support for an international network of practitioners and researchers, sharing knowledge about how and why legal education and information for a wider public is an important part of access to justice.

This guide belongs to a series of teaching guides. Four further guides have been developed and they focus on the development of legal capability. In them, we cover four different legal topics which have been paired with particular skills:

- **Finding out about the law:** where to get information and help
- **Housing disrepair:** assessing courses of action and developing communication skills
- **Employment and discrimination:** developing confidence and getting organised
- **Section 21 eviction notices:** learning about the process and developing strategies for dealing with private rented housing problems.

The topics are designed to be taught consecutively but they can easily be adapted and delivered independently. Each one has specific learning aims as well as detailed guidance notes for each activity.

Dada Felja, Tony Thorpe, Francesca Feruglio and Rowan Milligan

Authors

Acknowledgements

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What is public legal education?

Public legal education, often known as PLE, is a relatively new discipline in the UK. The terminology surrounding the subject can be confusing. Also sometimes referred to as legal capability or literacy, legal empowerment, law-related education or Street Law, its fundamental tenet is to improve the level of legal understanding amongst the general public, rather than professionals.

Public legal education covers a wide range of activities aimed at developing **legal capability**. These extend from community-based courses, films, and theatre performances to step-by-step guides, and campaigns to reform the law.

In this guide, we mainly focus on community-based courses.

The image displays two overlapping screenshots of the Law for Life website. The top screenshot shows the 'Strategic Forums on Housing' page, featuring a banner for 'Strategic Forums on Housing Autumn 2020' and a search bar. The bottom screenshot shows the 'Multimedia Toolkit for Roma Parents' page, which includes a video thumbnail, text describing the project's aim to address the need for legal knowledge among Roma parents, and a list of related activities like 'International work' and 'Litigant in Person Support Strategy'.

1.1. What is legal capability?

At Law for Life we think of legal capability as the personal attributes that someone needs in order to deal effectively with a law-related problem. More specifically, this means having:

a/ the knowledge to recognise a legal issue, to find out more about it, and where to get further help and advice,

b/ the skills to be able to communicate effectively, to negotiate, and to keep track of calls and correspondence, and

c/ the attitudes and frame of mind to help reach a satisfactory conclusion. These characteristics are likely to include confidence, perseverance and a degree of emotional detachment.

These personal attributes often arise in combination depending on the law-related situation a person is facing. The following case study describes a potential range of personal attributes needed to deal with an everyday legal problem.

In brief: *Amina is nineteen years old and in her first job. She wants to leave home and move into a flat which she will share with two friends.*

Amina will need to understand her rights and responsibilities as a tenant. Before signing, she and her flatmates should read the tenancy agreement very carefully and seek clarification about anything that concerns them or that they do not understand.

She, and her flatmates, will need to plan ahead to manage the rent and utility bills, and also check the condition of the property before they move in, reporting any matters of concern to the landlord or letting agent.

1.2. The four domains of legal capability

Helping to develop people's legal capability therefore involves more than simply explaining the law. We need to help people to:

- recognise and frame the legal dimensions of issues and situations,
- know where and how to seek further legal information and help,
- have the confidence and motivation to apply this to their own individual legal situation, and
- be empowered to critically engage with the law.

These are known as key domains of legal capability.¹ They are particularly useful when developing teaching materials and when deciding how to evaluate PLE courses. However, in reality, things are a lot less structured or well defined. When dealing with legal problems, people might require different domains of the legal capability at the same time or just one of them, depending on the complexity of a problem they face. We do not expect all of the domains will be needed at the same time. However, they help to guide PLE practitioners to create building blocks of legal knowledge and skills as they design courses that will help people who are not legally trained to deal with their law-related problems.

¹ Collard Sharon, Deeming Chris, Wintersteiger Lisa, Jones Martin, *Public Legal Education Evaluation Framework*, Law for Life in partnership with Bristol University, 2011.

1.3. Why is public legal education needed?

Research² shows that peoples' knowledge about the law is limited. Almost two-thirds of the UK population are unaware of basic legal rights or the processes by which they are enforced. Many people misinterpret or misunderstand their rights. Some groups, such as younger and older people, migrants and people on low income have less knowledge about the law than other groups.

Similarly, certain groups are more likely to experience legal problems than others. Often, the people who are hardest hit are those who already experience some disadvantage, for example, people with a disability, those with literacy problems, people who are homeless, and younger and older people.

Whilst around fifty percent of people feel confident that they can achieve a fair

resolution to a potential legal problem, levels of confidence decline significantly when a real legal problem occurs, with an even greater decline as more legal problems are experienced.

As a result, over half of the people facing legal difficulties describe negative impacts including stress-related ill-health, loss of income or confidence, physical ill-health and family breakdown. The collective impact on the wellbeing of individuals and the economy is huge.

We also know that most people handle their legal problems alone. For instance, only six percent of people use a lawyer for their legal problems and a further four percent use advice agencies. As legal aid and advice services continue to be subject to significant cuts, with some areas in the country described as "advice deserts", improving people's awareness about their rights becomes more important than ever.



² Wintersteiger Lisa, *Legal Needs, Legal Capability and the Role of Public Legal Education*, Law for Life: the Foundation for Public Legal Education, 2015.

What does public legal education look like?

2.1. What do people learn in public legal education?

Broadly speaking, each legal topic we cover has a similar teaching framework, in which we try to cover the following:

- **how to recognise the legal component** of a situation,
- **basic details and principles** of law applying to the area under discussion,
- sources of **further legal information**,
- suitable **remedies** for certain legal problems,
- the **circumstances in which more specialised guidance may be required**,
- **agencies able to provide support and advice**,
- **actions that clients should (and should not) take** when dealing with law-related issues,
- **priorities** for action.

At times it may be better to break down the learning process and focus on just one or two aspects of this teaching structure at a time. This can be done by running several shorter courses in order to slowly develop the legal capability at a pace that is more suitable for group members.

2.2. How do you teach public legal education?

At Law for Life, we have run PLE courses in a wide range of settings for a number of years. Here are some of our top tips:

✓ **Be inclusive**

Try to start from the idea that even though law is practised primarily by highly skilled professionals, this does not mean that it must be inaccessible to everyone else. This requires believing that even the most complicated or mundane things can be made understandable and interesting.

✓ **Adopt an active approach: do, don't tell**

The learning process is always more effective if you involve participants. Instead of telling people what they need to know (for example, explaining how a law, rule or process works), try to find a way to discover it together.

✓ **Use plain language**

Legal language can be confusing and intimidating for people who are not legally trained. Some legal terminology can also have completely different meanings in everyday language. Whenever possible, avoid legal jargon. However, where a legal concept is important (for instance, contract or tenancy agreement) it is good to explain it and use it as part of the discussion. It can be surprising how quickly group members can pick up key ideas in this way.

³ Thorpe Tony and Mulqueen, [Tara, How do we teach about the law?](#)

✓ Design activities for group work and cooperative learning

Group activities can be done in pairs, small, or large groups and you may wish to design activities which are appropriate for different group dynamics. This is a great way of encouraging contribution as some participants may feel more comfortable speaking in small groups whilst others prefer big group discussions. During group work, participants (and trainers) will learn from each other. Some people might share their knowledge about the law whilst others might bring valuable experiences about how a specific law is (or is not) applied in practice. Hearing different voices also keeps sessions varied and interesting. So, it is a good idea to structure interaction into all your sessions.

✓ Encourage discussion through open questions

Try to use open questions to encourage discussions, knowledge sharing, and active learning. Instead of telling people that they are right or wrong, you may prefer to ask: What makes you think that? Why did you choose this example? How did you arrive at this conclusion?

✓ Encourage questioning and critical thinking

Try to design activities that encourage questioning and critical thinking. Some of our activities include examples that might be counterintuitive and challenge participants about what they think they know, or how law applies in certain situations.

✓ Encourage group members to participate in all aspects of the learning process

Although some participants may feel more comfortable to sit back and listen to others, try to find ways for everybody to participate in all aspects of the learning process, but without putting people on the spot.

✓ Make it relevant

We find that people learn best when they can relate their personal experiences and knowledge to what you are trying to teach. Therefore, activities you design throughout the course should generally reflect the experiences participants may have had in relation to the issue you are teaching about.

2.3. How do you plan a public legal education course?

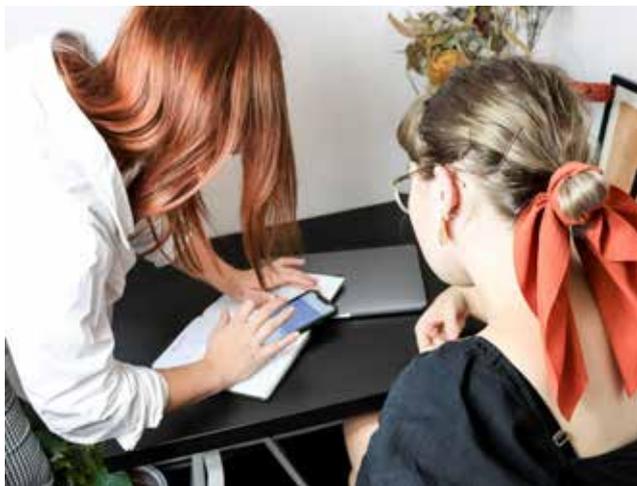
Planning a course can be a daunting task especially if you are not a teacher and have very little experience as a trainer. Here are some useful steps that will help you to prepare your course:

✓ Understand your audience/ participants

Before we start developing teaching materials, we carry out a needs assessment by consulting with the group we will work with to find out their legal needs and the issues that they may struggle with.

You may find it helpful to look at our needs assessment pro forma (on **page 23**) in your consultation with a community group before starting to develop the course.

Needs assessment will also be useful in your understanding of participants' specific requirements, such as their level of English, literacy, professional and cultural backgrounds, or additional needs.



✓ Be clear about what you want to achieve

Before devising teaching materials, it is important to be clear what you want people to be able to do at the end of the course, for example, your learning objectives.

This should help you develop appropriate activities and materials.

✓ Use activities that develop all aspects of legal capability

The activities we use in our courses often simulate real-life situations and encourage people to develop all aspects of their legal capability (knowledge, skills, confidence). Some methods we use to achieve this include:

- investigation and problem-solving,
- case studies, with answers and outcomes,
- group activities and discussion in pairs, small or whole groups,
- role play and drama,
- reading and discussion,
- artwork,
- games and simulations,
- research exercises, and
- presentations.

✓ Allow enough time

Allow enough time for participants to consider questions, work through material and complete exercises. You may wish to have some extra material as a back-up, but you will often find that interactive exercises take more time than you expect. In addition, it is useful to remember that you do not need to provide information on every legal detail on the subject you are covering. You can cover one legal option in your exercise and provide a more detailed outline as a handout.

✓ Make space for regular breaks

Allow participants to take regular breaks (approximately every 1.5 - 2 hours or even more frequently, depending on a group) as absorbing legal information can be tiring.

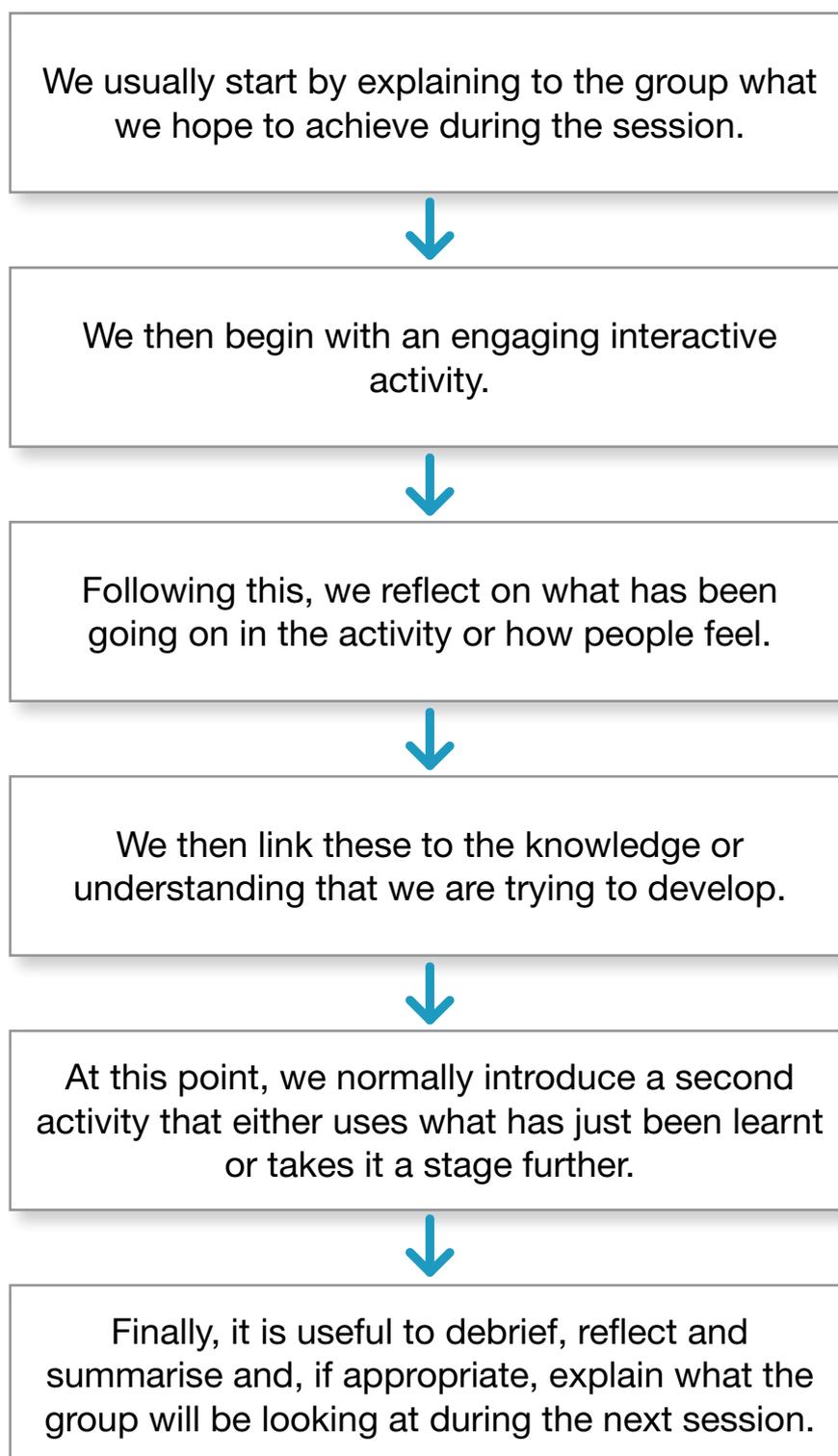
✓ Have the optimum group size

In order to ensure that your participants take part in all aspects of the learning process, you may need to decide on how many people can participate in the course. We would not recommend more than twenty participants, ideally. We also find that smaller groups work better for direct service users, to allow a slower pace and enough time for exercises that develop their skills and confidence.

✓ Test your materials

It is helpful to show your teaching materials to some of your participants, or a representative from the organisation you are working with. They will be able to tell you if the content is too complex or if something needs clarifying. If you are working with a particular community, this is a great opportunity to check if your materials are appropriate and culturally sensitive. Use their feedback to improve the content.

2.4. What does a typical session look like?



2.5. Practical facilitation tips

At the start of the course

It is important to **create the right tone and atmosphere** at the beginning of the course. For example, you can explain that you would like the learning experience to be informal, that you will value everyone's contribution and that you would like participants, and yourself, to learn from each other. It is also useful to explain the importance of confidentiality right at the beginning so that people feel reassured that their contributions will remain within the room. If you are taking photographs, remember to ask people for their permission as well.

It is also good to **set some simple ground rules** from the outset. For instance, you can encourage your participants to ask questions, to feel free to say when they do not understand something but to monitor how much they say as everyone should have a chance to speak. You may wish to ask participants to keep their mobile phones on silent but add that they are welcome to take calls outside if they need to.

As a general rule, try to start your course on time and **keep to the timetable**. Allow some flexibility in delivery but if you find that participants have too many questions, you can always ask that they speak to you during lunch break, at the end of the session or to email you their questions after the course.

You should find out if your participants have any additional needs in advance and make every effort to ensure **your venue, refreshments, and teaching materials are accessible**. For instance, there may be difficulties associated with literacy levels or language, as well as wider access needs such as adjusting to reading the text, teaching through interpreters or working with people who have a hearing impairment. Your needs assessment should help you to identify accessibility issues. Working closely

with a community intermediary or community leaders will also help you to prepare for any necessary adjustments.

There are some helpful resources you may wish to look at as well:

<https://abilitynet.org.uk/workplace/what-are-reasonable-adjustments>

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/multipage-guide/reasonable-adjustments-practice>

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/adjustments-disabled-students>

How to manage a group

You will often have **dominant group members** who tend to contribute a lot to discussions. This can be great as they may have valuable information to share and their contribution sometimes encourages a wider discussion. However, you may have to limit their involvement if you feel that this restricts how much other participants take part. You could ask them to speak to you during breaks or try saying something like this: "I am going to ask you to hold on for a moment because I would like to get a few new voices here." Then address another member of the group and ask for their opinion. Breaking into smaller groups or pairs can be a really simple way of changing group dynamics to encourage less confident members to contribute. Another option might be to ask them privately to help you to encourage other, more silent group members, to take part.

Try also to encourage **quiet group members** to take part but without putting them on the spot. Whenever appropriate, you could go around the room asking each person in turn to share a comment or ask the quiet person specific questions related to their expertise. You may also try and encourage them to do a specific task by asking them: "Would you mind presenting your group's work / reading this case study to the rest of us?"

In order to encourage discussion and participation, it is important to **ask the right questions, in the right way**. For instance, avoid questions that can simply be answered by “yes” or “no”. But if you have to ask them, follow with a further question, “Why do you say that?” or “What is your reasoning?” It is also good to ask questions that allow a range of answers or thoughts, such as “What options are available?” Another idea might be to ask “stepped questions”, such as:

- What could she do in this situation?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of these ideas?
- Which option do you prefer?
- Why do you say this?
- Does anyone have an alternative view?

You may sometimes come across **inappropriate behaviour or comments** from your participants. This is rare so please try not to worry too much about this. However, it is good to have a few ideas in your mind in case this happens. Firstly, gently set some ground rules from the outset. This means immediately establishing a learning environment that communicates and models respect and safety.

However, despite your best efforts, you may come across difficult behaviour or comments. For instance, aggressive questioning, behaviour aimed at distracting and taking the session off topic or saying something that offends other people. We find that the best way to respond is to remain positive. You may ask that participant directly if there is anything you can do to help; check if there is a point that can be clarified or ask them if you could have a chat separately during a break - to try to understand what lies behind this difficult behaviour or negative comments.

Our model of teaching often involves two facilitators. For instance, a legal expert and a community leader. In this way, one facilitator can take someone aside and deal with issues directly while the group continues with their learning.

As part of your planning and preparation, you would have already asked if your participants have any additional learning needs, including limited English or literacy. But if any of these issues come as a surprise during the teaching session, try to **accommodate people’s additional needs** by taking time to explain issues during the breaks, mixing participants who have more skills to work in pairs with those who are less confident to perform certain tasks (such as read a case study or perform online research).

We also find it is important to **check if people understand** everything we teach throughout the course. This can be done by asking your participants if everything is clear at the end of each task or by summarising the main points of each session in the course after the breaks.

Teaching the law

Public legal education is different from the education of students seeking a degree in law or from the continuing professional education of lawyers and judges. Public legal education is mainly aimed at the general public. They may be either intermediaries helping others to resolve their legal issues (such as community champions, volunteers, key workers, or faith leaders) or people who are experiencing legal problems themselves.

We are often asked, **is law too complicated to teach?** Whilst offering some foundations of legal knowledge in our courses, we emphasise developing peoples’ skills and confidence that will enable them to prevent and deal with legal issues as they arise, and crucially the ability to find out more about the legal situation they are in.

With laws and regulations often changing rapidly, these skills are the most important. In other words, people we teach will not suddenly become as knowledgeable as lawyers but they should be able to:

- recognise the legal nature of a problem
- find out more about the legal dimensions of that problem, and
- pursue a course of action to resolve the problem (including getting expert help where possible).

If you are a lawyer or an advice worker **you might be worried that you could be asked for legal advice during a course.** This does not happen as often as you might think. But if it does, try to move on from the particular case and the detail it involves. You can also make it clear that you will not be able to deal with individual cases during a teaching session, but can address generally the sorts of problems that are being experienced and provide general answers rather than tailored advice. In addition, teaching can also point to resources for individual cases.

When somebody asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, **it is ok to simply say that you do not know the answer.** Even the most knowledgeable lawyers do not know the answers to every question. You might offer to look up this particular issue and get back to this person at a later stage or advise them where they might be able to find an answer to their question.

Legal changes happen frequently in social welfare law, so we find it is useful to **keep checking for legal updates** in case we need to amend or change some elements of our courses. This is important as we want to offer up-to-date information. However, it is worth remembering that the emphasis in public legal education is often on skills and confidence - qualities that are always useful when dealing with legal problems.

If you are not a lawyer, **having a legal specialist in the group or co-facilitating the session** can be useful in a number of ways. Apart from responding to legal questions, they can also guide group members in thinking in a “lawyerly fashion”, for example by unwrapping the legal elements of a particular situation. They can provide a useful insight into the way the law works in practice and can also be helpful in prompting or stimulating further examination of a topic. Simply talking about cases in which they were involved and what did (or did not) happen can be useful in developing group members’ understanding.

In brief: I helped out at a Law for Life PLE session run specifically for women going through the immigration process. Initially some participants were timid and reticent but, as we worked our way through some of the scenarios, a lively discussion ensued. The women talked about feeling overwhelmed by legal issues and how, when a letter from the Home Office arrives, the temptation is to hide it away. We talked about how a complex problem can be made easier to tackle by breaking it down into manageable pieces, how putting paperwork in order will make things less daunting, the importance of putting deadlines in your calendar, of checking the meaning of words we are unsure of and knowing when to ask for help. When it came to the research task the women worked together, learning from each other as they went along, growing in confidence. What was noticeable was that each member of the group was able to tackle the issues – what the session gave them were skills and self-belief.

Lucy Grey, Senior Associate, Real Estate Litigation, Allen & Overy LLP

Materials, suggestions and ideas

In this section we look in more detail at some of the activities we have developed in our free teaching resources and give you some ideas about how they can be adapted to different contexts. They are grouped in order of complexity, starting from introductory activities about the basic legal principles, and finishing with exercises that help people develop confidence to assert their rights.

3.1. Preparation

● Equipment

Try to have the following items available:

- ★ name tags or labels on which people can write their name,
- ★ flip chart or whiteboard with markers,
- ★ sheets of display paper and felt tips for small group use,
- ★ adhesive tack to display group charts,
- ★ power-point facilities,

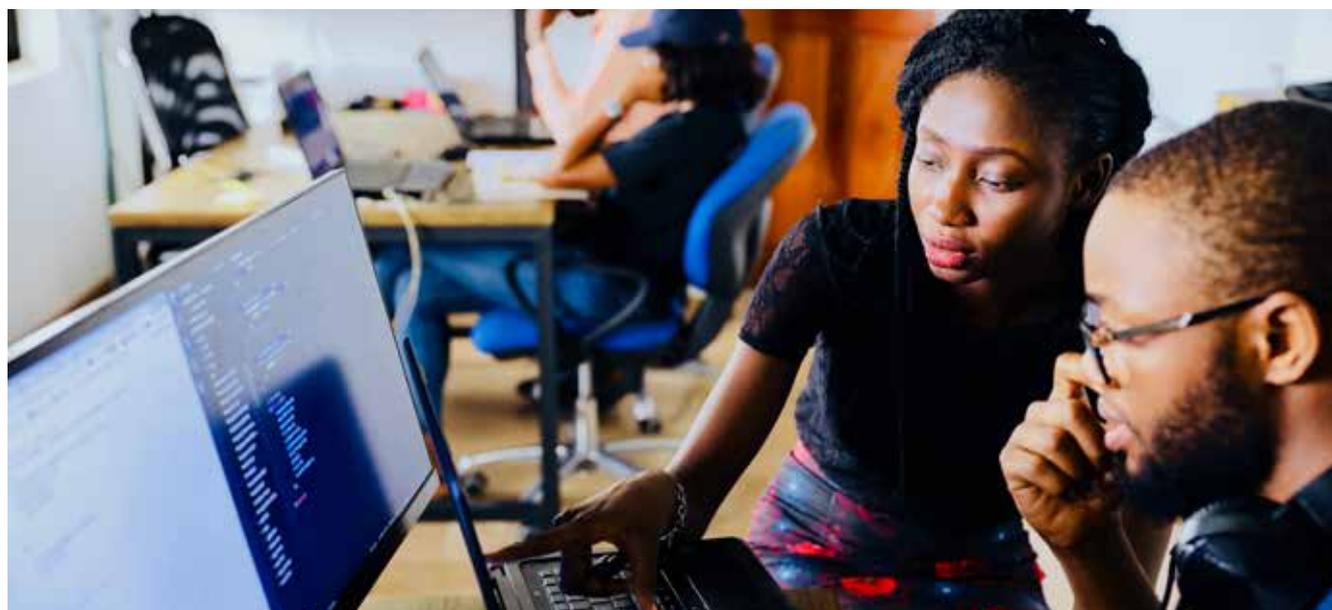
- ★ internet access and computers/mobile phones for research work
- ★ teaching materials which you have photocopied in advance
- ★ stapler and hole puncher to keep handouts together (On longer courses group members commonly build up a folder of activity, information, and answer sheets, particularly if they will be going on to teach the course themselves.)

● Room layout

If possible, we suggest that group members sit in pairs or small groups in a semi-circle arrangement, with access to tables, cabaret-style.

● Breaks and timing

We indicate how much time the group is likely to require at the start of each activity. We suggest that you give the group a short break every 1.5- 2 hours. If you are running a full day teaching session, we recommend that you also have a lunch break.



3.2. Opening: Introductions and practical matters

If this is the first time that the group has met, we suggest that you open by introducing yourselves and asking group members to do the same; giving their name and perhaps brief details of their work role, location, and their reason for coming along. It may be useful to make a note on the board/flip chart of how group members are hoping to benefit from the course, and to comment on any patterns or characteristics that seem to emerge. You can use this list to help guide the discussion at the end of the course or put it up on the wall and refer to it.

Briefly run through the course outline with the group, using it as an opportunity to clarify the aims and objectives and to check on how they link to group members' needs and wishes. Clarify and deal with any mismatch between what the group is hoping to get from the course and what you are able to provide.

Stress that the session does not amount to a legal training course but focuses instead on developing legal capability. You are not expecting group members to have or to develop specialised legal knowledge.

Encourage group members to engage in the sessions by suggesting that they ask questions and seek clarification preferably when their query arises. Stress that you would like members to share their knowledge and for the learning experience to be informal. Finally, check and clarify with the group any practical arrangements, such as break and end times, refreshment arrangements (if any), the location of toilets and fire exits.

If you are delivering your session after some of our other modules, we suggest that you open the session with a brief summary of the main ideas covered in the previous session/s, followed by an outline of the work that you intend to cover this time.



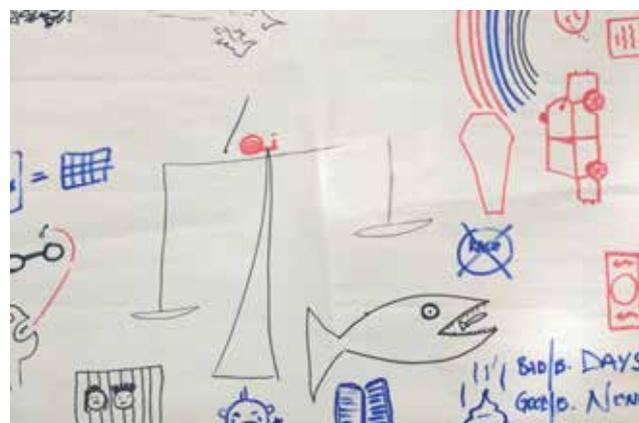
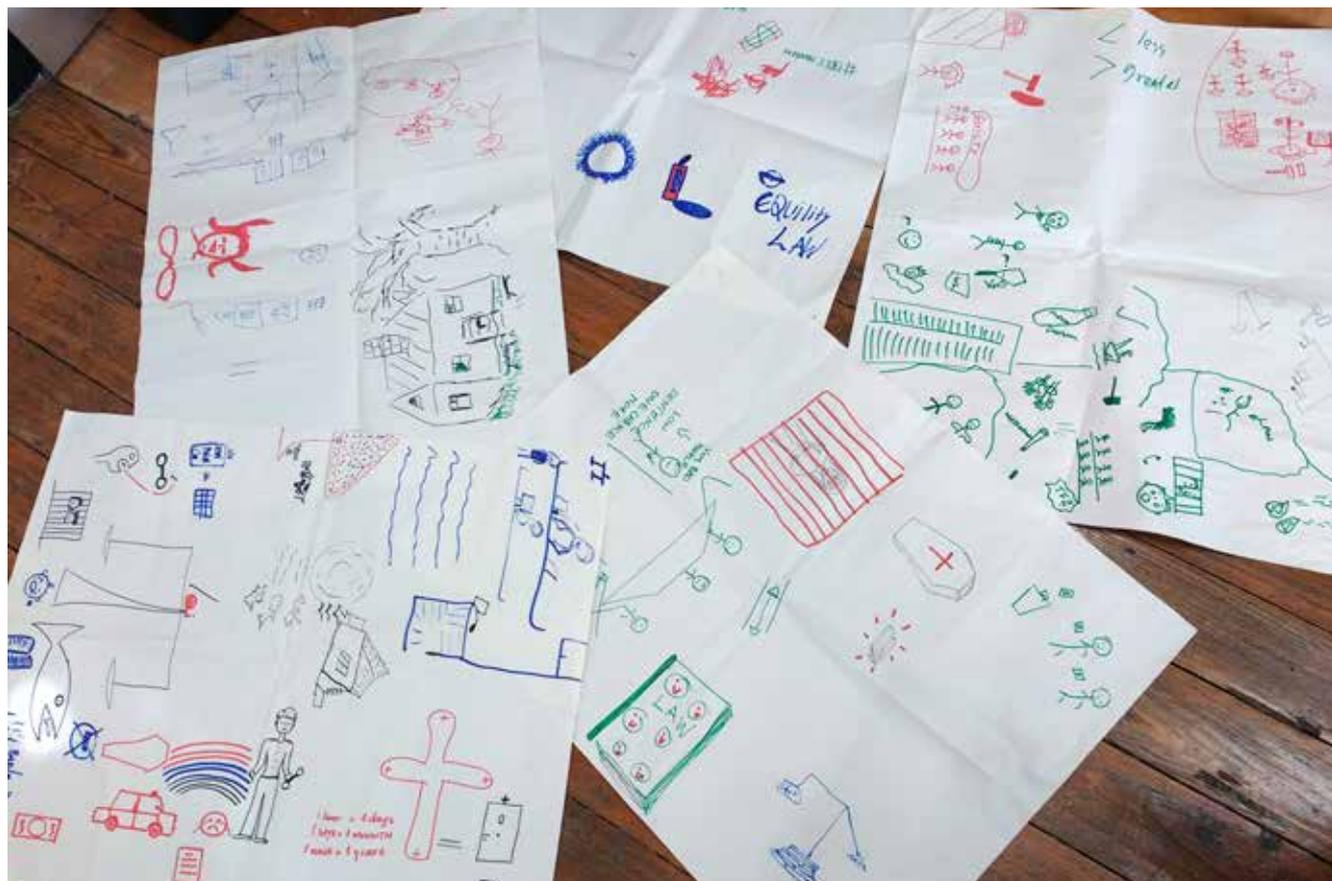
3.3. Teaching materials

3.3.1. Starting to think about the law

It is usually helpful to begin with a short activity that helps participants to feel at ease and direct their attention to the subject in question in a creative way. If group members are meeting each other for the first time, this is a useful way of breaking down barriers and getting people used to talking to one another.

Draw the law

Our first example is the exercise *Draw the law*, which invites participants to illustrate how they themselves see or imagine the law. It is a simple, collaborative but engaging 30- minute exercise that provides a useful opportunity to discuss group members' perception and experiences of the law.



With participants sitting in groups of 2,3, or 4, give each group a large sheet of display paper and a marker pen and ask them to 'draw the law'. They may be a little uncertain as to how to proceed but explain that there is only one rule in this exercise, and that is that no words may be written on the paper.

It can also be useful at this stage to say that when all the groups have had time to finish, each drawing will be shown to the whole group who will try to work out what aspects of the law are being illustrated in each picture.

When groups have had enough time, ask someone from each group to hold up their group drawing and invite members who are not from this group to interpret or describe what's going on in the pictures. As you are doing this, make a note of the key points on the flipchart and try to question and unpick some of the thoughts, motives, and ideas behind the illustrations. For instance, you might ask further probing questions such as: "What made you say this?" and "What does this say about the law?"

Points that come out of the discussion might include:

- **Fear or stigma:** there are often a lot of negative connotations around the law - you may like to ask why this is the case.
- **Crime:** many people associate the law with prisons and punishment - you may like to ask whether the law is just concerned with punishment. Does it have any other function?
- **Power:** law-related problems often occur when there is an imbalance of power. This is a key factor in how people cope with situations, and how they behave.
- **Not for us:** some people may believe the law is not 'for' them or in some way prevents them from doing what they want.

- **Complex:** people may believe that the law is too complicated and difficult to understand; you may like to ask them in what way this applies, and what evidence they can give to back this up.
- **Costly or unaffordable:** that using the law is very expensive, and beyond the means of most people.

You may need to be careful if you are working with vulnerable groups, such as people who have experienced homelessness or trauma in their lives, and handle people's contributions with care and sensitivity and/or explain the importance of confidentiality.

This exercise is a great opening activity for almost any teaching session. It could also be adapted to suit various legal contexts. For example, in our session about section 21 evictions, we ask participants to "Draw their experience of eviction". You can find this exercise on page 9 in our teaching guide **Section 21 eviction notices: learning about the process and developing strategies for dealing with private renting housing problems.**

3.3.2. Identifying legal dimensions: introducing useful legal concepts

Exploring basic legal concepts can be a good way of helping people begin to navigate some of the legal problems they may be facing and to start making sense of the law.

Understanding some key concepts gives participants more confidence in the law and a greater feeling of engagement. An example of a key legal concept that we often cover in our teaching sessions is contract.

Contracts are an element of many aspects of law - employment, housing, buying, and selling goods and services, etc. Although often used in a detailed legal context, the idea of a contract is not complicated. Understanding the nature of a legal contract is an important part of legal capability.

The following is a suggested 30-minute teaching exercise for contract law, included in our existing guide *Finding out about the law: where to get information and help*, pp 7-9.

What is a contract?

3.3.3. Finding out about the law

One of the skills that all participants will need is the ability to undertake simple online legal research. The sources for research will need to be based on UK law, up-to-date, and accurate.

Below is a 50-minute exercise for evaluating online sources of information included in our existing guide *Finding out about the law: where to get information and help*, pp 24-27. You can use this exercise as an opening for research about specific legal scenarios too.

Evaluating online sources of information

3.3.4. Building awareness of rights and obligations

Many of our course participants do not have legal qualifications, and so it is important for them, and those who they may be supporting, to be able to build awareness of rights and obligations.

Case study in this section is used to help people understand the basic rights in private renting. It is included in our existing guide *Section 21 eviction notices: learning about the process and developing strategies for dealing with private rented housing problems*.

Relationship breakdown

3.3.5. Developing confidence to deal with legal problems

Developing confidence to deal with legal problems is another important aspect of legal capability. To achieve this, we often use a *Stop and go* activity because it allows participants to practice soft skills (such as negotiation, getting organised, taking records of what happened, etc.) that are needed to handle some legal situations in their life. This role play exercise is included in our existing guide *Housing disrepair: assessing courses of action and developing communication skills*, pp. 11.

Stop and go role play



3.4. Preparing your own materials

We hope that some of the information and teaching materials that we have shared here can be used or adapted to teach different legal topics. Here are some additional ideas to help you prepare your own materials.

Teaching notes

We find it helpful to write teaching notes. This helps in understanding the course structure, timings and materials that you need to prepare in advance. Once you have them, it is easy to make any relevant changes in the future. You may find, like we do, that each time you deliver a course you understand better what works and what does not work and can make any changes for the next session. Please do not expect everything to work straight away! You may also like to ask your participants to give you feedback at the end of the course or in evaluation forms.

Use of PowerPoint

We often use PowerPoint in our courses. This is a good visual tool, especially important for visual learners and it provides a useful focal point for participants.

As such, the PowerPoint should be clear, simple, and not too crowded with text. Each slide should have main points of what you are trying to cover and serve as a reminder rather than an information tool.

Try to keep letters on your slides in large fonts in order to make sure that everyone can read from them, even people sitting at the back.

Try to include a photograph on some of the slides that is in some way linked to the text. It is a good way of breaking up the text and drawing people's attention to what you are saying.

In our experience, people often ask for PowerPoint presentations. It is a good idea to either print and distribute them at the end of the course or email them afterwards.

Timing	Notes	What we are trying to achieve	Materials
Welcome and introduction	Welcome everyone to the session.	To give an outline of today's teaching session.	PowerPoint
15 mins	Facilitators introduce themselves and then give some venue information, etc.	To understand participants' aims and expectations.	
Introductory exercise, Draw the law	Ask participants to sit in groups of three or four; give each small group a large sheet of display paper and a marker pen.	Icebreaker Understanding that people often see the law in very different ways.	Flipchart Display paper Marker pens
20mins	Explain...	Drawing out some of the benefits and drawbacks of the legal process ...	BluTack

Using technology

We often use the internet to show useful information, show how some websites work, encourage participants to do online research or show films and other educational materials in our sessions. This is a useful way of making teaching dynamic.

For this reason, it is useful to check if everything works in advance. For instance, check with the venue provider that they have all relevant facilities available, including PowerPoint facilities (if you use it), appropriate cables, AV equipment, internet access and WIFI passwords. If you are asking participants to do internet research, as part of your teaching exercise, you will also need to check that you have enough laptops or mobile phones in advance. We also find it useful to arrive about 45 mins in advance and check that all of the equipment works, set up laptops for internet research, make sure they are fully charged and ready to use.

Adapting courses for digital delivery

We prefer to deliver our courses in-person as this allows us to spend more time doing exercises which are designed to strengthen soft skills (such as finding reliable information online, getting organised, preparing documents for court, form filling or negotiating). However, during the COVID-19 lockdown, we had to find creative ways of delivering our courses online.

We used the technology in ways that would allow active participation and a safe learning space. We also consulted our participants through a survey to ensure they would be able to access the course in the format we proposed.

We then selected the key legal content of each workshop, which normally takes five to six hours to deliver, and turned it into a short video which was about thirty mins long. The videos were in a Q&A interview format and we sent them to participants to view before our interactive two-hour live webinar.

In the webinars, we allocated time for a small group exercise as well as time for participants to ask questions. We used the technology to break people out in smaller rooms to hold small group discussions or take part in role play exercises. Due to the limited time, we could only focus on one skill/exercise per webinar.

From a teaching perspective, this format did not allow us to apply the principle of ‘backward design’ as people learned the legal content upfront instead of ‘deriving it’ through practical exercises.

However, as the **videos** were uploaded on YouTube before the webinars took place, participants could watch them at their own convenience. This also meant that they joined webinars with some basic knowledge of the topic and approached the group exercises with confidence. During webinars, participants could engage and ask questions orally or through the chat function. They were not required to have their videos on and were allowed to sign in through a different name. We found that these factors helped create a safe space which ensured participation even from those participants who tend to be less outspoken in in-person teaching sessions.

Attendance and participation in online courses were much better than we expected. This could be due to the fact that people did not have to travel long distances and that our films and webinars required less time than in-person teaching workshops. In terms of PLE outcomes, participants reached similar increases in knowledge and confidence that they normally reach after in-person workshops, although the range of skills we could focus on was more limited.

Overall, we still feel that participants would have benefitted from more interactive in-person teaching. However, digital delivery enabled us to connect with groups and individuals who perhaps would not engage in in-person teaching in the same way, and to do so at a difficult and important time. In addition, the videos we created for this programme became “stand alone” learning resources and achieved far wider reach than our in-person teaching would.

How to evaluate a public legal education course

PLE Evaluation Framework⁴ and Guidance for Evaluating PLE⁵ are good starting points when thinking about evaluating public legal education courses. The evaluation framework begins by examining the main domains of legal capability. You can find a detailed table of what is meant by each domain of legal capability on **page 24**. This will help you decide on a set of measurable outcomes that your course might reasonably be expected to achieve, for example changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes or confidence.

In order to accurately measure the impact of a PLE course, we find that it is best to develop a baseline set of questions which you can ask your participants to complete at the start of the course and a follow-up set of questions, which they will complete at the end of the course. You can reassure your participants that this is not about testing their knowledge as such but about assessing effectiveness of the course. Before and after surveys should allow you to see any journey in your participant's knowledge, skills or confidence as a result of attending the course.

We also find it useful to collect participants' feedback on course delivery, learning materials and venue so that we can make improvements in the future. In addition, it is good to collect the socio-demographic information to help explain evaluation findings including age, gender, ethnicity, household composition, level of education, employment status or health status.

To understand whether the knowledge, skills and confidence developed during PLE courses are actually used by participants to prevent or deal with legal problems in the

future requires longitudinal research. In order to do this, you will need to send your participants a follow-up questionnaire around three to six months after the course was completed.

As the PLE Framework notes, there are a wide range of methods that can be used to evaluate a project or programme. For example:

- self-assessment questionnaires,
- interviews,
- live recordings of activities and participants' views,
- participant observation, or
- tests, quizzes and case studies designed to assess levels of knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving skills or confidence.

It is common for evaluations to include more than one type of data collection in order to meet its objectives, for example quantitative surveys combined with in-depth interviews. This will depend on your capacity and resources available. Law for Life conducted different kinds of evaluation, including self-evaluation and independent evaluation. You can find examples of this work at our website.

If your participants have limited literacy or levels of English or if they lack confidence to complete tests, you may need to adapt evaluation methods. We found that a focus group discussion before and after delivering a PLE programme is a good way of understanding impact when other methods do not seem appropriate.

⁴ Collard Sharon, Deeming Chris, Wintersteiger Lisa, Jones Martin, *Public Legal Education Evaluation Framework*, Law for Life in partnership with Bristol University, 2011.

⁵ Hayes David and Deeming Chris, *Guidance for Evaluating Public Legal Education*, Personal Finance Research Centre and Bristol University, 2011.

Legal capability learning needs assessment

The primary purpose of this needs assessment is to establish the learning needs of the audience for whom the PLE is intended. The secondary purpose is to identify any additional resources or capacity gaps on the part of the education provider.

About the group

1. Is English the first language of the learners?

2. What are the literacy levels of the learners?

3. Are there any special requirements amongst the learners?

4. How many learners are expected to attend?

About learning

5. How do you prefer to learn? For example, interactive/group work/seminar style?

6. How long should the session be?

Legal needs

7. What are the issues that the group is experiencing difficulties with? What are the most talked about stories?

8. Are there organisations or institutions that learners may have particular difficulties with?

9. Are there any specific skills that you would like to develop?

Technical issues

10. Are there any technical issues for the educational provider?

Legal Capability Table

Recognising the legal dimensions of issues and situations	Is aware of the concept of rights and obligations and can recognise where the law applies to a situation.	Is able to frame a situation in terms of the law and distinguish between civil and criminal legal issues.	Is aware of the basic legal principles that underpin the legal system and can apply them to issues	Has the communication skills and confidence to explain a law-related issue and ask and answer questions about it.		
Finding out more about the legal dimensions of issues and situations	Able to find out what rights and obligations apply in a particular situation	Able to find out about basic legal processes and procedures that apply to particular situations	Able to find out about the steps involved in dealing with a lawrelated issue	Able to assess the different sources of information about a law-related issue	Able to assess risks and opportunities, and decide when they can deal with a law-related issue themselves and when they might need expert advice	Able to find out about different sources of advice and to choose one which will meet their needs
Dealing with lawrelated issues	Able to apply relevant information or advice that has been obtained.	Able to decide what a satisfactory outcome to a law-related issue looks like for them.	Able to anticipate and plan ahead, to identify opportunities and obstacles.	Able to identify and assess different courses of action for dealing with a law-related issue (which may include doing nothing), then plan and follow through an appropriate course of action	Has communication and interpersonal skills to manage relationships and deal with the other parties involved.	Has personal skills and attributes such as confidence, self-esteem, motivation and calmness to persevere throughout the process
Engaging and influencing	Aware of the impact of the law and legal institutions on their lives and on the lives of others	Is aware of relevant processes, structures and institutions that can be used to influence and participate in decisionmaking in order to achieve change.	Is able to critically assess situations in order to weigh up opportunities	Has communication and interpersonal skills necessary to engage and influence	Has personal skills and attributes such as confidence, self-belief and strength to effect change either individually or collectively.	Able to keep a good record of events, information and correspondence, and keep track of evidence.

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Law for Life is a charity dedicated to ensuring that people have the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to deal with law-related issues.

It incorporates Advicenow – an independent, not for profit website providing helpful information on rights and legal issues (www.advicenow.org.uk).