

MODULE

1

Teaching guidance and handouts

Finding out about the law: where to get information and help

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Handouts

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Introduction

This training resource has been developed by Law for Life: the Foundation for Public Legal Education, together with our award-winning information service Advicenow (www.advicenow.org.uk).

Law for Life is a charity dedicated to ensuring that people have the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to deal with law-related problems. The resource, intended for use with intermediaries in community organisations, focuses on the development of legal capability. However, please feel free to adapt the modules to suit the needs of any groups you work with.

Who are intermediaries?

Intermediaries are people who work in organisations whose service users are seeking help to deal with problems which may have legal dimensions. The intermediaries may be paid staff, students, volunteers or trustees and are unlikely to have any legal or advice training. This training aims to help them to spot a legal issue, know when the law can help, know how to find out what rights apply, and know where to get help. They can then help service users to organise and plan how to deal with their case, help with the practical steps of dealing with a law-related issue, build their confidence, support them to communicate effectively, and be organised. This training can also be used to support those who currently provide legal advice, but would like to build skills to teach public legal education.

What is legal capability?

At Law for Life we think about legal capability as the personal attributes that someone needs in order to deal effectively with law-related problems. These capabilities include or encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes. The concept of legal capability is explicitly about empowerment. It aims to transform, through education,

people's knowledge and understanding of their legal rights and their capacity and willingness to enforce them. This is distinct from and goes beyond having specific knowledge of legal systems and processes. If you have legal capability it means you can identify potential law-related problems as they arise, find information to help you understand the problem, and take steps to deal with it.

Training overview

This training resource contains handouts and guidance notes to be used in conjunction with the handouts. Three different legal topics have been paired with particular skills to form each module. They are:

- 1 Finding out about the law:** where to get information and help (consumer contracts)
- 2 Housing disrepair:** assessing courses of action and developing communication skills
- 3 Employment and discrimination:** developing confidence and getting organised.

The modules are designed to be taught consecutively but you can easily adapt them in order to teach them independently. Each module has specific learning aims, which you should use to guide the delivery of the module, as well as detailed guidance notes for each activity.

We hope we have anticipated many of the issues and questions which may arise as you prepare to deliver these modules, but please contact us if you need additional support. Any questions about the modules can be directed to info@lawforlife.org.uk.

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Finding out about the law:

where to get information and help



Background

In this session, you will introduce group members to a number of legal ideas that are helpful in understanding how the law works, particularly in relation to consumer contracts. In the second part of the session you will help group members find and use reliable online sources of legal information.

Key learning points and outcomes

The session is designed to help group members:

- understand two basic legal concepts, contract and statute;
- apply the law in particular legal situations;
- identify accessible and reliable sources of online legal information;
- use these resources to find information about specific legal scenarios.

Running time

2 hours – 2¼ hours



Equipment and preparation

Equipment

Try to have the following items available:

- name tags or labels on which people can write their name;
- a flip chart or white board, with markers;
- sheets of flip chart paper and markers for small group use;
- a supply of adhesive tack to display group chart and posters.

Internet access

Group members will need access to a laptop, tablet or PC, to enable them to work in small groups of two or three. Check the availability of internet access in the teaching room. You will also need a computer, projector and screen for your own use at the front of the class.

Towards the end of the final activity, you will ask group members to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of a number of real websites. It would be helpful and save time to set up the internet on each computer, with the five sites already open in separate tabs.

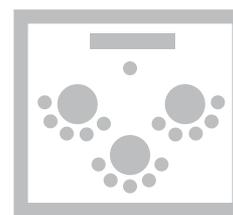
Photocopying

Duplicate the following pages, in advance:

- **What if...?** (see **pages 14–16**)
1 copy per group member
- **What if...? (Answers)** (see **pages 17–18**)
1 copy per group member
- **Deciding what's wrong** (see **page 21**)
1 copy per group member
- **Deciding what's wrong (Answers)** (see **page 22**)
- **The Sale of Goods Act 1979** (see **page 23**)
1 copy per group member
- **Evaluating online sources of information – sample sites** (see **page 24**)
1 copy per group member
- **Top tips for using online resources** (see **pages 25–26**)
1 copy per group member
- **Sources of legal information – useful websites and tools for the public** (see **page 27**)
1 copy per group member

You should also cut apart and place the key words (see **pages 19–20**) on the board for reference as the module progresses.

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 between Activity 1 and 2. Groups may vary in the amount of time they need to complete these tasks. There is enough material for at least two hours, but potentially more. You might consider running the activities over more than one session, based on the needs of your group.

Opening: Introductions and practical matters

15 minutes



- 1** 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 module or put it up on the wall and refer to it.

- 2** Briefly run through the module 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 misfit between what the group is hoping to get from the course and what you are able to provide.
- 3** Stress that the sessions do not amount to a legal training course, but focus instead on developing legal capability. You are not expecting group members to have or to develop specialised legal knowledge.

- 4** 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 experiences and for the learning experience to be informal.

In some circumstances you may be working with a group who will use the sessions as a basis for training a further cohort of volunteers. In this situation, you may like to explain that you will be looking at questions of training strategy in addition to the learning points and outcomes of the module listed above.

- 5** 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.

Activity 1:

What is a contract?

30 minutes



1 In this activity, you introduce your group to the general nature and elements of a consumer contract – although, to start off with, we suggest that you don't approach the topic in an overly legalistic way.

As indicated in the notes on **Equipment and preparation** above, we suggest that for this activity you place all the key words (see **pages 19–20**) on the board for reference as the activity progresses.

2 Explain that you would like to explore some basic aspects of a contract, as it is a common building block in many areas of law, even though in this session you will focus on consumer contracts.

With group members sitting in twos or threes, give each group member **What if...?** (see **pages 14–16**). Explain that these are a series of pictures showing everyday situations in which people are buying and selling goods and services.

Open the discussion by asking someone to describe what's going on in the first picture. Ask the group if they can explain the image in legal terms. What exactly is happening in law as the coffee is being poured?

Try to lead the group towards the idea of a legal agreement being made between the assistant and the customer.

You could develop questions along the following lines:

- what is happening in the picture?
- now, what's happening in a legal sense?
- let's break this down...
- what is the man asking for?
- what has the assistant agreed to supply?
- what does the customer have to do in return?
- what kind of arrangement has been made?

Members of the group will almost certainly suggest the words 'agreement' or 'contract'. You can write these words, and other important terms that arise, on the board or on flipchart paper as they are mentioned.

3 Now ask the group to imagine that the coffee is served cold, or that the cup is chipped or dirty. What is the customer likely to do? What is the customer's position? Why?

Here we begin to introduce group members to some of the characteristics of a contract. For example, that a contract may contain implied terms – that the coffee should be hot and properly served in a clean, hygienic cup.

(continued)

You might also ask what happens when someone goes into a shop and buys a newspaper, and simply picks up a newspaper and hands over the correct money – without saying a word. Is this a contract? Explain that in this situation although nothing has been said or written down, a contract has still been made; contracts can be written, spoken, or silent.

- 4** Move on by explaining that you would now like to look in more detail at the main components of a contract to help understand how contracts work in a number of different situations.

Go back to the picture in the café and ask the group members, in twos or threes, to discuss briefly how they might break down the process of buying a coffee into four separate stages. Give them a few minutes to think about this, and then go through their answers. These are likely to be as follows:

- the customer asks for a coffee,
- the assistant agrees to provide the drink,
- the customer pays for the coffee, and
- the assistant prepares and hands over the drink.

Write out these four stages on the flipchart/board, and alongside (in the wrong order) place the printed keywords: **offer / acceptance / consideration / consideration**. Ask the group to suggest which word best describes each of the four stages, and place the correct word alongside the relevant stage, as below:

Stage 1: The customer asks for a coffee.	Offer
Stage 2: The assistant agrees to provide the drink.	Acceptance
Stage 3: The customer pays for the coffee.	Consideration
Stage 4: The assistant prepares and hands over the drink.	Consideration

Go over these terms again within the example, and then ask the group to suggest at what point, in each case, is the legal agreement/contract is made. This is at the end of stage two, after the acceptance of an offer.

Ask what stages three and four represent. These are where the contract is carried out or executed: the trader provides the coffee (**consideration**) and the customer hands over the agreed payment for the item/service (also a **consideration**).

- 5** Now move onto the ‘What if...?’ scenarios beneath the remaining images. Go through each one, trying to draw out, where possible, two responses – group members’ answer to the question, and an explanation in law.

Try to use these questions as a way of extending and reinforcing group members’ understanding of everyday consumer contracts. Answers to these questions are on **pages 17–18, What if...? (Answers)**.

In the course of this discussion, you may find it helpful to mention a number of other legal terms and phrases with reference to contracts. Some of these are included in the list of key words on **pages 19–20**.

Intention to create legal relations

Not all agreements or contracts are legal. If you promise to be at the airport to meet a friend, as a favour,

but then you forget to do so, you won't face a request for compensation. Neither of you saw the agreement as being legally binding. However, if you made this arrangement with a taxi or car hire firm, the law would see this differently. It would have been a legal relationship, ultimately enforceable through the courts. A legal contract does not exist if there is not an intention to create a legal relationship.

Invitation to treat

An invitation to treat is a preliminary action before an offer is made as part of a contract. Window displays, sales catalogues, sales advertisements, and items on a supermarket shelf, are all examples of an invitation to treat.

Were it not for this rule, a wrongly priced item on a supermarket shelf would be regarded as an offer and would have to be sold at that price once the customer had taken it to the checkout. An auction is another example of an invitation to treat, where the auctioneer invites bidders to put forward an offer.

However, it may be possible for a customer to make an offer based on the price displayed and have it accepted, as if bargaining.

Necessaries

Usually, children cannot enter into contracts. However, they can if the goods they are purchasing are considered to be 'necessaries'. In contract law, these are goods that are suitable for and needed, in this case by a child, at the time the contract is made. There is no set list of goods that count as necessaries, but they can be more than essentials, and can be necessary for the way a young person usually lives.

A court would decide what counts as 'necessaries' on the specific facts and context of a particular case. For example, a child may buy some sweets or a low-priced toy, which would be termed necessaries. But you would not expect a child to buy an expensive coat, or jewellery. If the purchase of any such items by a child was called into question, the law would almost certainly treat the contract as void. None of the items are suitable (or necessary) for a child.

Activity 2:

Sale of Goods Act

20 minutes



- 1** This section is designed to introduce group members to an important piece of consumer law, the Sale of Goods Act 1979.

Give everyone a copy of the handout **Deciding what's wrong** (see **page 21**) and explain that you would like them to spend a few minutes looking at the three examples and to decide, in twos or threes, the legal position in each one. Encourage the group to apply any knowledge and understanding they have already gained on the course.

- 2** Allow for a few minutes discussion, and then go through each question. There are two levels of answer that you might encourage or look for.

The first is that, in each case, the seller has failed to honour the terms of the contract. The second explains the reason for this; for example, the bookcase is not made of wood, as described in the advertisement; it's not satisfactory/acceptable for the case of a new washing machine to be badly scratched; nor is it acceptable if goods do not do something that the seller or manufacturer claim.

Draw out these points from the group and make a note of them on the flip chart as you do so. Explain to the group that in analysing these three cases they have outlined the basis of an important and very useful piece of consumer law: the Sale of Goods Act 1979.

Point out that although the law can be complicated, for everyday purpose the Sale of Goods Act can be summarised in this way –

Goods sold by a trader must:

- be of satisfactory quality
- fit for all their intended purposes
- match the description.

If goods fail any one of these tests, the buyer is entitled to a refund.

- 3** If it seems appropriate, and time is available, you may find it helpful to give some background detail to this legislation.

Ideas of contract and duty of care go back a long way in legal history, as part of common law, developed by judges over hundreds of years in order to establish common standards and a common way of dealing with legal issues, throughout England and Wales.

In the nineteenth century, a time of great change in Britain, it became clear that the existing law did not deal effectively with the kinds of new problems that people were encountering. As much of the population left the countryside for new towns and cities, there were no neat rules setting out people's rights and responsibilities, particularly with respect to trade and commerce.

In order to deal with this, from the 1890s onwards, Parliament began to pass new laws covering the buying and selling of goods and services. Laws of this kind, passed by Parliament are known as Acts or statutes.

The law in this area continued to evolve during the twentieth century, and today a key part of current consumer legislation is the Sale of Goods Act 1979. It builds on ideas of contract, and is designed to give consumers greater protection than previously.

Activity 3:

Evaluating online sources of information

50 minutes



- 1 Explain to the group that the Sale of Goods Act 1979 is one of hundreds of laws that have been written down and can now be looked up and checked online.

It may also be useful to mention here that manufacturers and retailers often use the phrase “does not affect your statutory rights” on packaging and guarantees. Point out that this is a reference to the statutory rights that are included in laws like the Sale of Goods Act and underlines the fact that those rights cannot be overridden by any other terms and conditions.

- 2 Now move on to the subject of looking up legal information online. Although many in the group may be familiar with general online research, they will not necessarily know of good, reliable sources of *legal* information – and it is this that we primarily try to develop in the remainder of this session.

We suggest that you distribute the list of sample websites, **Evaluating online sources of information – sample sites** (on **page 24**) with little or no preamble. Ask group members in pairs to visit each website and to decide on its value as a resource.

After about 10–15 minutes, bring the group back together to discuss their findings. Go through each website asking whether they thought it was a good or less good source of information and why. If possible, use the projector to bring each website up on screen.

During this feedback, make a note of the various criteria that group members use; for example: clarity,

accessibility, detail, accuracy, applicability, etc. You might also like to add further prompts such as ‘what makes a good/poor website?’

When the discussion has run its course reflect on the notes you have made, and bring the list together, summing up the key points that the group feels characterise useful and reliable sources of legal information.

Almost certainly the group will have put together a list similar to **Top tips for using online resources** (see **pages 25–26**). Give a copy of this to each member of the group. Briefly go through the list, mentioning in particular any points that have not yet been covered.

- 3 Explain to the group that two reliable starting points for research into everyday law are the Adviceguide and Advicenow websites.

Adviceguide provides online information and advice from Citizens Advice. Advicenow is an independent online information service linking members of the public to handpicked pieces of quality legal information, sourced from the best providers (often including Adviceguide).

Bring the Advicenow website up on the projector and demonstrate a basic search, explaining how the website works. Explain that the website functions, in part, as a reputable search engine, giving them only legal information that has been hand selected and quality checked.

(continued)

- 4** Continue the discussion with the following scenario, which we suggest you read out and tackle as a whole-group exercise.

Donna has recently purchased a mobile phone with a three-year contract. After using it for several weeks, she decides she no longer wants to use the service and would like to return the phone and end the contract. However, the company says she cannot do this unless she pays £700. Is there anything she can do?

An important starting point for online research is the identification of appropriate search terms; knowing what to look for can be the most difficult part.

Ask the group to suggest possible terms or phrases. Someone, for example, may suggest contract; try this. The group will soon recognise that this is too wide. How can the search be narrowed down or refined? “Phone contracts,” would be a possibility; “unfair contract” could be more fruitful.

Now ask the group, in pairs, to conduct a search using the terms that they have agreed as a group. Explain that they may need to consult a few websites before they find an answer. Remind them that they can use the Advicenow and Adviceguide websites and any other resources they find.

Give the group 10–15 minutes to find answers before reconvening to discuss what they have found. Ask them to explain what kind of information they found and what sites were particularly helpful.

Hopefully, they will identify that unfair contract terms may not be enforceable. Contract terms can be unfair for a variety of reasons, as set out in the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999. However in a consumer context, if the term was individually negotiated, it cannot be unfair. One reason why a term might be unfair is if it allowed the trader to get back more than the cancellation of a contract had actually cost them.

Ask if there were any practical things that they did as they were going along, such as writing notes, keeping tabs open, using bookmarks or writing down or pasting URLs. What tips and hints would group members pass on to people who are not as familiar as they are with searching for information online?

Closing:

Reflection questions

10 minutes



Now that the group have completed all of the exercises in this module, invite them to discuss the following questions:

- How do you think the skills and legal information we talked about today could be useful to your clients or the people you work with?
- How would you support them to develop these skills and prevent future problems with law-related issues?

What if...?

Buying a coffee



- ... the customer decides she'd rather have tea?
- ... the coffee is cold?

At the hairdresser's



- ... the customer thinks the hairdresser has cut off too much hair?
- ... the cost of the haircut is more than the customer expected?

Buying sweets



- ... the little girl asks for 150g of sherbet lemons?
- ... the little girl goes into another shop and buys a £200 computer printer or a mobile phone?

At the supermarket



- ... the customer says that she picked up the oranges by mistake, when she really wanted lemons, and asks for the cost of the oranges to be taken off her bill?

Buying clothes



- ... the customer buys a top, but later decides that it is too small?
- ... the customer buys a pair of boots that split the first time they are worn?

Buying furniture



- ... the bed takes six weeks to be delivered, rather than two weeks, as promised?
- ... by mistake, the bed has been priced at £49.00, instead of £499.00?

What if...? (Answers)



Buying a coffee

- ... the customer decides he'd rather have tea?

Once the assistant accepts the order for coffee and begins to make it or pour it out, a contract has been made. If the customer then asks for tea, the customer may have to pay for both the tea and the coffee.

- ... the coffee is cold?

If the coffee is served cold (or not as hot as it should be) the café owner has almost certainly broken the contract made with the customer. An implied term of a contract of this kind is that the coffee supplied should be hot. If it is not, the contract has been broken. The customer is entitled to her money back. She does not have to accept a replacement.

At the hairdresser's

- ... the customer thinks the hairdresser has cut off too much hair?

This depends on the instructions given by the customer to the hairdresser. If the customer said that he would leave it up to her, the hairdresser probably cannot be blamed.

- ... the cost of the haircut is more than the customer expected?

The hairdresser should clearly display a price list. If this is not done, or a special cut is being given, a price should be agreed with the customer before the work begins. Otherwise the charge must be reasonable.

Buying sweets

- ... the little girl asks for 150g of sherbet lemons?

Sweets are likely to be seen in law as a 'necessary', that is, something that it would be quite reasonable for a child to buy, entirely fitting with their situation in life. In law, children have the capacity to make contracts of this kind, for necessities, and the shopkeeper would be quite entitled to make the sale.

- ... the little girl goes into another shop and buys a £200 computer printer or a mobile phone?

The law would judge the child as not having the capacity to make a contract to buy a mobile phone, despite their use by many children today. Mobile phones are not generally bought by eight-year-olds, and in these circumstances, the little girl's parents would be entitled to return to the shop and to ask for their daughter's money back.

At the supermarket

- ... the customer says that she picked up the oranges by mistake, when she really wanted lemons, and asks for the cost of the oranges to be taken off her bill?

Strictly speaking, the contract to buy the oranges was made the moment the cashier signalled acceptance of the customer's offer to buy the oranges by passing the bag of fruit across the scanner. Although most shops today would allow the customer to change her mind and buy the lemons instead oranges (or to deduct the price of the oranges from the final bill), they are not required by law to do so.

(continued)

Buying clothes

- ... the customer buys a top, but later decides that it is too small?

The error is almost certainly the customer's, and once a contract has been made, the shop is under no obligation to refund the price or even to change the top for a larger size. Many stores, however, will do this as part of their business practice (although they are not legally required to do so) as long as the item is in mint condition and the customer has a receipt as proof of purchase.

- ... the customer buys a pair of boots that split the first time they are worn?

By selling a pair of sub-standard boots, the shop has failed to keep its side of the contract – to provide the customer with a pair of boots that last a “reasonable” length of time under normal use. (However, the interpretation of these terms can be problematic.) The customer is entitled to her money back. If the shop instead offers a replacement pair of boots, it is up to the customer to decide whether to accept them or to insist on a full refund.

Buying furniture

- ... the bed takes six weeks to be delivered, rather than two weeks, as promised?

If the customer specified a time limit when placing the order, to which the shop agreed, the contract has been broken. The delay in delivery means that a specific term of the contract has not been met. The customer is entitled to compensation for any loss suffered as a result.

If delivery time is not specified at the time of purchase, the shop should deliver the goods in a ‘reasonable’ time. Exactly what this is depends on the circumstances of the case. However, if the delivery time became unreasonably long, the customer would be entitled to terminate the contract and withdraw from the sale, and ask for the return of any money she had paid.

- ... by mistake, the bed has been priced at £49.00, instead of £499.00?

An item placed for sale in a shop is technically known as ‘an invitation to treat’. It is not an offer by the shop to sell the bed for £49.00. However, when the customer tells the sales assistant that she would like to buy the bed (for £49.00), she is making an offer. Realising the mistake, the shop assistant will reject that offer, and make a counter-offer... “you can’t have the bed for £49.00, but you can buy it for £499.00.” It is then up to the customer whether to accept this new offer, and buy the bed at the full price.

Key words

Implied terms

Contracts can be written, spoken, or silent

Intention to create legal relations

Offer



Acceptance



Consideration



Invitation to treat



Necessaries



Deciding what's wrong



What do we know about each person's legal position?

1 Jess

Last week, Jess bought a new MP3 player which, the manufacturer claimed, was suitable for people who go jogging.

She used it for the first time yesterday when she was on the running machine at the gym, but as soon as she started to get up to any kind of speed, it skipped onto the next track.

2 Keira

Keira buys a new washing machine. Two days later, it is delivered to her flat and plumbed in.

Keira immediately puts in a load of clothes to be washed, but just as she presses the button to start the wash cycle she notices a deep scratch on the top of the unit.

The machine washes and spins the clothes extremely well.

3 Salima

Salima spots an advert for a bookcase in solid oak. She places an order, and the book case arrives. As she undoes the packaging, she realises that the bookcase is made from oak veneer, rather than solid oak.

The bookcase is satisfactory in every other way.

Deciding what's wrong

(Answers)



What do we know about each person's legal position?

1 Jess

As the MP3 player was advertised as being suitable for people who go jogging, Jess should be entitled to a refund. According to the Sale of Goods Act 1979, products must be fit for their intended purposes and match the description and advertising.

2 Keira

Kiera has the right to goods of a satisfactory quality, which means they should work properly and be free from damage. As the scratch most likely occurred during manufacture or delivery, Kiera will be entitled to have the product replaced, repaired or have her money back.

3 Salima

Salima has a right for the goods she purchased to match their description. If the bookcase was advertised as solid oak but the product delivered was oak veneer, she will have a right to a refund.

Goods sold by a trader must...

✓ **be of satisfactory quality**

They must be free from faults and not scratched or damaged in some way.

✓ **be fit for all their intended purposes**

The goods must do what they are designed to and, in particular, what the sales assistant or packaging claims.

✓ **match the description**

They must be the same as they are described in the advertisement, on the packaging, or by the sales assistant.

... and if they are not, the buyer is generally entitled to his or her money back.

Evaluating online sources of information – sample sites

All the websites listed below offer information about the Sale of Goods Act 1979, but they are all very different.

How would you rate the information on these websites?

Which of these websites provide the most reliable information?

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sale_of_Goods_Act_1979
- www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1979/54
- www.theguardian.com/money/2006/mar/25/consumernews.howtocomplain
- www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/regulation/sale-of-goods-act
- www.moneysupermarket.com/community/forums/t/sale-of-goodsact-54691.aspx

Top tips for using online resources



When searching for legal information online, it is important to be choosy about the information you find. Some online resources are accurate and reliable, while others may be inaccurate and misleading.

Here are some questions and tips to consider when searching for legal information online.

1 Who is providing the information?

- Check the source. Who is the information from?
- Check if the website publishes 'About us' information and their contact details. If so, what do they tell you about the people running the website?
- If you cannot identify the person or organisation that is providing the information, it is best to look for a more transparent source.
- Other sources, such as newspapers, Wikipedia and online discussion forums may be less reliable and more likely to contain personal opinion, biased or misleading information.

2 Why are they providing the information?

- Check the source. Why are they providing the information?
- Consider whether they are independent and impartial; they may have a particular motivation which is worth considering. Some websites may have a particular agenda or political bias.

- Reputable charities and non-governmental organisations for example, Shelter or Age UK, are good at making sure the legal information they produce is designed with their particular audience in mind.

3 Does the internet address (URL) tell you anything useful?

If the internet address ends in **.gov.uk** it will probably be a central or local government website.

If it ends in **.ac.uk** it is probably a University.

If it ends in **.org.uk** it is probably a not for profit organisation.

Sometimes the internet address tells you which country the site comes from. For example, if the address includes 'au' the site is Australian, 'ca' is Canadian. Many, but not all, sites that end in **.com** will be American.

4 Do they want to sell you something?

Is the site attempting to sell you something or promote their services? Might it have another agenda? This does not necessarily mean the information is wrong but, for example, it might make something simple sound complex so you think you can't do something for yourself without their help.

(continued)

5 Does the information apply where you live?

Always check that the legal information you use is true for where you live. It is no use to you if it is not. General searches can bring up results from all over the world. If you are looking for information for a particular country, it is best to include the name of the place in your initial search. It is important to remember that the law varies even within the UK, with differences in the law between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

6 Comparing information

If you are unsure about the reliability of the legal information you have found, search again to see if you can find the same information somewhere else. Does one confirm the other? Finding the same information in multiple places can be a good indication that it is accurate. In addition, if a website indicates where the information has come from, you can check the source to reassure yourself it is accurate.

7 Is the information updated regularly?

Reliable websites will usually, but not always, show the date when the information was last updated. If a website does not tell you this, double check the information using another website.

One way to tell that a website is updated regularly is if the links work. If there are a lot of broken links, it suggests that the website is not updated regularly.

8 Is the information well-written?

Presentation can tell you a lot about the reliability of a website. If you notice a lot of grammatical and spelling errors, it is a good indication that the information is not reliable.

9 Does the information cater for your audience?

As well as being user-friendly and written in plain English, good legal information should help someone to manage the practical and emotional aspects of a problem by:

- Including an overview
- Explaining key legal points, procedures and processes
- Dealing with recognising when and how to get help
- Building the confidence and resilience needed to deal with a problem
- Offering step-by-step guides, route maps and standard letters
- Incorporating guidance on the skills needed to manage a problem.

Sources of legal information – useful websites and tools for the public



Websites

- **Advicenow** – guides and links to best sources of information www.advicenow.org.uk
- **Adviceguide** – www.adviceguide.org.uk
- **Shelter England** – <http://england.shelter.org.uk>
- **Shelter Cymru (Wales)** – www.sheltercymru.org.uk
- **Wikivorce** – helping you through a break-up www.wikivorce.com/divorce
- **Child Maintenance Options** – <http://cmoptions.org/index.asp>
- **Money Advice Service** – www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en
- **National Debtline** – www.nationaldebtline.co.uk
- **Business Debtline** – www.businessdebtline.org
- **StepChange** – www.stepchange.org/Home.aspx
- **Turn2us** – www.turn2us.org.uk/information__resources/benefits.aspx
- **Going to court** – www.advicenow.org.uk/going-to-court
- **Civil law** – www.rcjadvise.org.uk/civil-law

Tools

- **Form finder** – <http://hmctscourtfinder.justice.gov.uk/HMCTS/FormFinder.do>
- **Court finder** – <http://hmctscourtfinder.justice.gov.uk/HMCTS/>
- **Check your benefit entitlement** – www.turn2us.org.uk/benefits_search.aspx
- **Money health check and Budget planner** – www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/categories/tools--resources

We would like to thank the London Legal Support Trust for funding this teaching module.

Published by Law for Life – March 2015.



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).