



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2018-0119, 11 May 2018

# Public legal education

## Westminster Hall, Tuesday 15 May 2018, 2.30pm

A Westminster Hall debate on Public legal education is scheduled for Tuesday 15 May 2018 at 2.30pm. The Member leading the debate is Ranil Jayawardena MP.

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# 1. Background

Public Legal Education (PLE) seeks to provide people with awareness, knowledge and understanding of rights and legal issues, together with the skills and confidence necessary to deal with disputes and gain access to justice. It also helps people recognise when they may need support, what sort of advice is available, and how to go about getting it.<sup>1</sup>

The term PLE is used to refer to a wide range of activities aimed at enhancing people's 'legal capability'. This work can be broadly categorised into education and training initiatives and research activities.

A leading organisation providing education and training is [Law for Life](#). Projects include producing training materials for organisations providing advice to individuals, and developing a support strategy to improve access to justice for Litigants in Person.

Academic research in this area focuses on measuring people's legal capacity. Leading studies include *Paths to Justice: What People Do and Think About Going to Law* (1999), by Dame Hazel Genn, and [How people understand and interact with the law](#), 2015 by Professor Pascoe Pleasence, Dr Nigel Balmer and Dr Catrina Denvir.

PLE work has generally focussed on adults and young adults. However, recently Dr Dawn Watkins at the University of Leicester completed a [study of children's understanding of the law](#) in their everyday lives using digital gaming as a research tool. Dr Watkins argues that children are capable of possessing legal capability to varying degrees.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017 the Solicitor General, Robert Buckland, announced the launch of a new panel to drive forward legal education initiatives. According to the [press release](#), the panel will promote the importance of teaching people about the law and their basic civil and criminal rights. The Solicitor General said:

Teaching people about their legal rights and responsibilities, together with helping them gain the confidence and skills to get access to justice can really make a difference to people's lives – as well as our legal system.

The new Panel will help drive forward Public Legal Education so more people can reap the benefits.<sup>3</sup>

The panel, which is chaired by the Solicitor General, includes representatives from the following organisations: Citizenship

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<sup>1</sup> [Report of the Public Legal Education and Support Task Force, 2007](#)

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the research, please see [Law in Children's Lives](#), Briefing for APPG on Public Legal Education, February 2018

<sup>3</sup> [New panel launched to drive legal education](#), 19 July 2017

Foundation, Legal Education Foundation, the Law Society, Bar Council, CILEx, Magistrates' Association, Ministry of Justice, Judicial Office, Solicitors Regulation Authority, Citizens Advice, Law for life, Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, Youth Access and Law Centres Federation.

## 2. News and blogs

Law Society Gazette

[Solicitor general to map public legal education efforts](#)

7 November 2017

Independent

[Education drive could teach prisoners and school children how to protect their legal rights](#)

8 August 2017

Attorney General's Office

[New panel launched to drive legal education](#)

19 July 2017

Politics Home

[Tom Tugendhat MP: Empowering the public with legal education](#)

6 May 2016

Legal Futures

[Politicians put emphasis on public legal education as lawyers urged to see benefits](#)

Dan Bindman 8 March 2016

Low Commission

[Low Commission calls for fresh approach to social welfare law provision after 12-month inquiry](#)

9 January 2014

Guardian

[Making the law accessible for all](#)

Neil Rose 25 May 2010

## 3. Parliamentary Business

### 3.1 Debates

[Bach Commission: The Right to Justice](#)

HC Deb 14 December 2017 c1725-62

### 3.2 Parliamentary Questions

[Public Legal Education](#)

Oral questions

HC Deb 21 December 2017 c1278-80

Including:

**Asked by: Nigel Huddleston**

What steps he has taken to promote public legal education in the last 12 months.

**Answered by: Robert Buckland | Solicitor General**

In July I launched a public legal education panel to support and drive forward legal education initiatives. Bringing together key organisations will mean a more joined-up approach to PLE, and will ensure that more people can reap the benefits of the good work that is being done. The panel is currently combining its resources to map the provision of, and need for, PLE around the country.

[Law: Education](#)

**Asked by: Alistair Carmichael**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will ensure better provision of public legal education to ensure people understand and can effectively claim their rights, and to provide parallel education to practitioners.

**Answered by: Sir Oliver Heald | Ministry of Justice**

As one of their regulatory objectives the legal services regulators have a duty to promote public understanding of citizens' legal rights and duties. The regulators have established the Legal Choices website, which provides information to help with decisions on whether and how to seek legal advice and the available services the public might choose. There is also easy to understand information to help the public to be aware of their rights and the law on the 'crime, justice and the law' section of the GOV.UK website. Finally, independent advice is also

provided at the Advicenow website, established by Law for Life, which provides information on rights and the law.

25 October 2016 | Written question | 48969

[Pro Bono Legal Services](#)

Oral questions

HC Deb 26 May 2016 c664-7

Including:

**Asked by: Dr James Davies**

I thank the Solicitor General for his replies on this topic. How can the Government further help the efforts of charities such as LawWorks, a pro bono legal advice service supported by the Law Society that targets the most needy and has offices across the UK?

**Answered by: Robert Buckland | Solicitor General**

My hon. Friend is right to mention LawWorks, which has been an active member of the pro bono co-ordinating committee for several years. Since October 2014, the Ministry of Justice has provided funding for the litigant in person support strategy, which is designed to help third sector organisations deliver increased support to litigants in person. I am sure that he will put that on his website.

[Public Understanding of the Law](#)

**Asked by: Tom Tugendhat**

What steps his Department is taking to increase public understanding of the law.

**Answered by: Dominic Raab | Ministry of Justice**

The Ministry of Justice is working to increase public awareness of the law and of important initiatives in the criminal justice and civil law system. We do that by disseminating information to the media, by using our website and digital channels, and through bespoke campaigns of particular importance, such as on access to victim services.

HC Deb 8 March 2016 c131

[Public Understanding of the Law](#)

**Asked by: Tom Tugendhat**

I welcome the efforts made by the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor. May I encourage my hon. Friend to do more to broaden public legal education? Having just set up a new all-party parliamentary group on the subject, I urge him to work with us to provide such education not just in schools and through adult services,

but perhaps in prisons. Although it may not reduce the inmate population, it may reduce the future conviction rate.

**Answered by: Dominic Raab | Ministry of Justice**

My hon. Friend is right. I commend him for his efforts and his initiative. One illustration of the things we are doing is the victims information service, which provides information on the criminal justice system, on what a victim can expect and on restorative justice. He is right—we need to strive to bring the law and its operation closer to the citizens it serves.

HC Deb 8 March 2016 c131

### [Law](#)

**Asked by: Mark Menzies**

To ask the Attorney General, what steps the Government is taking to increase public understanding of the law.

**Answered by: Robert Buckland | Attorney General**

Public Legal Education is a statutory feature of the justice system and part of the Rule of Law. I have been actively involved with the Citizenship Foundation who are the UK's largest provider of public legal education for young people, I was also happy to support the recent establishment of the APPG to promote the importance of public legal education. It is my role as Solicitor General and as the Government's pro bono champion, to help individuals become confident, effective members of society, helping them to develop an understanding of, how our society works as a democracy, our legal system, and their rights and responsibilities within it.

25 February 2016 | Written question | 903724

## 4. Organisations and further reading

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Public Legal Education and Pro Bono \(Register\)](#)

LawWorks [website](#)

Acts as the Group's secretariat

APPG on Public Legal Education [website](#)

APPG on Pro Bono [website](#)

[PLEAS \(Public Legal Education and Support\) Taskforce](#)

Bar Council, [Public Legal Education](#)

Law Society, [Public Legal Education](#)

[Civil Justice Council](#)

"The CJC is an Advisory Public Body which was established under the Civil Procedure Act 1997 with responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating the modernisation of the civil justice system"

[lawforlife](#)

"A charity dedicated to ensuring that people have the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to secure access to justice"

[Legal Education Foundation](#)

[Litigant in Person Support Strategy](#)

Citizenship Foundation, [Young Citizens](#)

"Young Citizens is an education charity working in primary and secondary schools to help educate, inspire and motivate the active citizens of tomorrow"



## Reports and articles

Bach Commission, [The right to justice](#), 22 September 2017

[Low Commission](#) on the Future of Advice and Legal Support

- Low Commission, [Getting it right in social welfare law: second report](#), March 2015
- Low Commission, [Tackling the advice deficit: a strategy for access to advice and legal support on social welfare law in England and Wales](#), Legal Action Group, January 2014

[International Journal of Public Legal Education](#), 1 (1), 2017

Hogan Lovells for All-Party Parliamentary Group on Pro Bono, [Mind the gap: an assessment of unmet legal need in London: a survey of MPs' surgeries Oct-Nov 2016](#), 2017

Dawn Watkins and others, [Exploring children's understanding of law in their everyday lives](#), *Legal Studies*, 38 (1), March 2018, p59-78

Dawn Watkins, [Where do I stand? Assessing children's capabilities under English law](#), *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 28 (1), 2016 p25-44

Catrina Denvir, Nigel J Balmer and Pascoe Pleasence, [When legal rights are not a reality: do individuals know their rights and how can we tell?](#), *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 35 (1), March 2013, p139-60



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