

**UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
FACULTY OF LAW**

OPEN DAY 2016

Law at Cambridge

Speaker: Dr Claire Fenton-Glynn

So, good morning everyone and, once again, welcome to the Law Faculty. My name is Claire Fenton-Glynn and I'm one of the access officers here at the faculty as well as a lecturer in law. I'm really glad to see so many people here interested in studying law and what I want to do today is go through quickly with you, first of all, why it is a benefit to you to study law at university in general. Secondly, I want to talk about the law course at Cambridge and what it is that we do that is special and makes studying law at Cambridge so great. Finally, I want to go over quickly our course, our teaching methods, to talk again, as Richard mentioned, about our supervision system and what makes us so special.

So, first of all, why law? Why should you choose to study law as an academic subject at university? Some of you may already have decided that this is the subject for you. Others may be on the fence. If you've already decided that you want to be a lawyer then law is, quite obviously, an excellent degree to do. You don't have to study law at university in order to become a lawyer, a solicitor, or a barrister in this country; you can study another subject first and then do what is known as a conversion course after you've finished your other degree. However, if you are interested in understanding the way that laws work, getting a deeper understanding, exploring the subject in more depth you should think very seriously about taking a law degree. Studying law at university over three years gives you a really unique opportunity to acquire a much greater and much more mature level of understanding and knowledge of the law, which can be a real benefit to your career in the future. If you're not so sure if you want to study law, law can also be an incredibly helpful degree for a multitude of other careers, for example, politics, journalism, the charity sector, the United Nations. It can be a springboard to all these different types of careers. Why is this? Well, because of the way that we teach law. A law degree involves not only studying what the legal rules are but really taking an analytical approach to the world around us. It involves thinking about why certain laws exist; can they be justified philosophically? How have they developed historically? What social goals are they trying to serve? How should the law develop in the future? So here at Cambridge we're not just studying what the law is, we're talking about what the law could be; what the law should be.

So let me give you an example from one of the subjects that I teach which is family law. So, I want you to imagine that we have an infertile couple who desperately, desperately want to have a child. They hire a woman to act as a surrogate for them and they ask their friends to donate an egg and donate a sperm to impregnate that woman. After nine months she gives birth to a healthy baby girl. Who are the girl's parents? Is it the couple who organised the whole process; who wanted so badly to have a child? Is it the woman who carried this child in her womb for nine months and who gave birth? Is it the genetic parents; the people, these kind friends, who donated the egg and the sperm? What do you think? Hands up who thinks it's the couple who organised everything. Who thinks it's the woman who gave birth? What about the genetic

parents? So you can see that even in this room people are very split on this subject. Now, there's a very simple answer in English law. Contrary to what most of you think, it's actually the woman who gives birth. That is who is a legal parent, but that doesn't really cover what we're trying to do here in Cambridge. What we're asking is who do you think should be and why? What do we value here in parenthood? It also raises a lot of really interesting ethical and moral questions. So, for example, can I pay someone to carry a child on my behalf? Is that okay? We might think that, if I'm infertile and it's the only way I can have a child. What if I just don't like the idea of pregnancy? Childbirth sounds pretty horrific to me and I'd really prefer not to go through that. Can I pay someone else to do it on my behalf? What about if I go to another country and do that? So, one of the biggest centres for surrogacy at the moment is India. What if I pay a woman in India? At the moment the going rate is £3,000; that's more than she would earn in ten years. Can I pay someone in India to have a child for me? So, you can see that what we're looking at is not only what the law is, but all the ethical dilemmas, the way that law can develop in the future and how we should organise our society.

So, what does our course actually consist of? What would you be studying if you come to Cambridge? The law degree is typically a three year degree and it's what known as a qualifying law degree which means that you have to do seven foundational subjects. The point of a qualifying law degree is if you do want to be a solicitor then you typically only have to do one extra year of training afterwards, called the Legal Practice Course, and two years' training contract as a solicitor to be qualified. If you want to be a barrister you do an extra year of the BPTC before a pupillage. On the other hand, if you study another degree at university, for example history of English, etc, you would first have to do the conversion course before taking on the Legal Practice Course, the BPTC, and your practical experience. So, in our first year – I've coloured the foundational subjects that you have to do to get a qualifying law degree in red – we call the first year part 1A and you study four subjects. These are tort, constitutional, criminal, and civil law.

So, civil law is actually Roman law, the study of law used by the ancient Romans around 200AD. You may be thinking, "Why on earth are they going to make us study this?" Well, the reason is that the Romans were incredibly, incredibly clever lawyers and the laws that they put in place inform and have laid the groundwork for a lot of the legal systems and legal rules that we use today, so studying it in your first year helps provide that framework for the study of the modern law that you do throughout the degree. Constitutional law, on the other hand, is incredibly topical right now and considers how the laws of the United Kingdom allocate power to different institutions, parliament, the judiciary, and the government, the executive branch. In addition, this course covers topical issues such as parliamentary sovereignty, separation of powers, and the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. The third subject is tort law, so this discusses civil wrongdoing, so what happens if one individual wants to sue another? For example if, when you are walking out of the lecture theatre today, you trip and break your arm, who is responsible for your legal bills? Please don't do that. So tort looks at how individuals act and can their individual rights conflict against each other. The final subject you study is criminal law, which is really quite self-explanatory. It deals with things like murder, manslaughter, sexual offences, and also offences against the person. We also look at reasons why you might have a defence to breaking the law; self-defence, intoxication, insanity, and we think about reasons why we might choose or might be permitted to choose not to follow the laws as set down by our state. So, alongside these four subjects we also do a legal skills and methodology course which will give you the essential training in research skills and study skills, and also to help you understand the policy and philosophical debates that we'll be talking about in your other courses. At the end of the first year you sit exams on these four key subjects and

then you can leave them behind; you won't be examined on them again and you can enjoy the beautiful British summer.

In your second year, when you come back, we add an extra subject and you do five subjects in the second year. The compulsory foundational subjects are contract law and land law. They are fairly self-explanatory. But then the choice is up to you. One of the things we pride ourselves on at Cambridge is our wide range of optional courses. In the second year these range from international law, which is something that Cambridge is particularly renowned for; family law, which I teach; jurisprudence, that is legal philosophy; criminology; even advanced Roman law, civil law two, if you enjoyed it so much in the first year. You are then, once again, examined on those subjects at the end of the year. In the final year you'll be studying, once again, two compulsory subjects, equity, which is the law of trusts, and also EU law. Now, I have to admit, in the last couple of days I have got quite a few emails from my students who have been asking me whether or not they're going to have to study EU law next year, to which I point out we're still making you study Roman law 2,000 years later, come back to me in a while and we'll discuss it. So, for the time being, EU law is still one of the foundational courses that you must study to become a qualified lawyer in the United Kingdom. So, in your third year you have an even wider range of subjects. Some of the courses that you can take in your options you can see here: intellectual property; company law; commercial law. You also have the option instead of one of these full papers to take two half papers. These cover a wide range of ideas: environmental and sustainable development law; human rights law; landlord and tenant law. So this really allows you to tailor your degree to what you're interested in and what you would like to do. The other option in the third year is taking a dissertation option. This gives you the chance to write a 12,000 word dissertation under the supervision of one of the academics here at the faculty. This gives you the chance to really study in depth a particular legal issue that is of interest to you and it also means one less exam. At the end of third year you're once again examined and so one of the things that does differentiate our degree is that we do have these exams continually; at the end of first year, at the end of the second year, and at the end of the third year.

So, there are two slight twists to this three year degree that I'd like to mention. The first is that it is open to all law students, at the moment at least, to take part in an Erasmus exchange programme and spend a year abroad. I should mention from the start that Erasmus is an EU programme so we cannot guarantee its continuance. But in any case, for your information, we partner with four universities, in Madrid, Poitiers, Regensburg, and Utrecht. You apply for this Erasmus year once you arrive at Cambridge, so in your second year, and if you are successful you go away between the second and third years. There is a language requirement for Regensburg, Poitiers, and Madrid; German, French, Spanish respectively, but in Utrecht all the lectures are in English so there is no language requirement there. Having said that, there's no need to be completely fluent in any of these languages to go, though there are good chances that you would be by the time that you come back. On the panel later today with a question and answer with students we've got one student who is about to go to Utrecht, so if you have any questions about that please do feel free to ask her. The second twist I want to mention is the fact that if you already have a degree from another university it is possible to do a two year affiliated degree. If that is something you're looking at please feel free to come and talk to me some time throughout the day and we can talk about the different options that this presents.

So, the final thing I want to turn to is our teaching methods and what makes Cambridge so unique. So, teaching here takes the form of a combination of lectures and supervisions. Lectures take place here in the faculty and this is the biggest lecture theatre. Most of the

foundation courses will get taught in this lecture theatre but there are also a number following down the corridor. All law students come here for their lectures regardless of which college they attend. You get either two or three lectures a week for each subject lasting an hour each. So this amounts to approximately between ten and 14 hours of lecturing each week. The second half of our teaching is what makes us really unique and this is the supervision system. They take place in small groups, as Richard said before, in groups of about two, three, four students with one academic. Supervisions, unlike lectures, are arranged by colleges. Each college has someone called a Director of Studies who is responsible for your academic progress throughout the year and also in organising these supervisions for you. Sometimes you will be supervised by someone within your own college if there is a specialist there, but other times you will exchange with different colleges and go to academics in different places, for example, I teach family and criminal law across about eight different colleges. So what is a supervision? Well, they last for about an hour and you get one supervision per subject every fortnight, so that means about two or three supervisions a week. To set the scene, they normally take place in an academic's college office, this is actually the office of one of my colleagues, and in the supervision you are going to go through, and into more depth, the topics that you've been studying in the lectures that week. So, before each supervision the supervisor will give you a reading list and usually a list of questions, essay questions, problem questions, for you to go through and think about before you turn up. In the supervision you're going to go through those particular topics but also it gives you the chance to ask any questions of us, find out the areas that you didn't quite understand, and we'll also ask questions of you to really extend your knowledge and make sure that you are understanding what we've been teaching. So the great thing about the supervision is that it is a real intellectual exchange; you're asking me questions and I'm asking you questions and it's a unique opportunity to really engage with the people who are the experts in this area.

So, I've said a lot about teaching, about the course and what you have to... or the work that you're going to have to do, and there is a lot of work at Cambridge, but there's also a lot of other opportunities that you can take up. So, for example, we have mooted competitions; we have college sports, inter-collegiate sports for just about every sport you can imagine; we have music; there's a multitude of other societies and ways that you can really make the most of your time at Cambridge. To give you an idea about a typical day for a law student you can go on our website, which is ba.law.cam.ac.uk which has some videos and text that can tell you about different things that different students do.

If you have any questions please do come and find me during the day, I'm going to be around all day, and look at the website, look at our prospectuses and we very much look forward to seeing you here at Cambridge.