

**UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
FACULTY OF LAW**

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Law at Cambridge

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Good morning everyone. My name is Claire Fenton-Glynn. I am a lecturer of law in this faculty but I am also one of the faculty's access officers, which means that I am responsible for things like faculty admissions, talking to students and basically, as Richard said, getting the best students we can here to Cambridge. So what I am going to do with you today is talk a bit through the course in Cambridge. What we study, what it's like and a bit about the student experience, our teaching methods and what makes Cambridge so different from other universities. After that you will have a session with Professor Graham Virgo and Janet O'Sullivan who will talk you through some legal problems – I am sure you have all seen the sheet there in your packs – followed by an admissions talk by my colleague, Henry Mares. Finally, you will have a chance to have a question and answer session. The parents will come with Henry and myself so they can ask us any questions they want, whereas the potential applicants will stay in here with some of our current law students. So you will have a chance without the professors, without your parents, to ask any questions you want about what it's really like here and they have been told to give you as honest an answer as possible.

So there are three main things that I am going to talk about in this session today. Why study law at university, why study the law course at Cambridge, and finally, as I said, the style of teaching here and what makes us unique. So first of all, why study law at all, what is the point of studying law at university? So some of you may already have decided that law is the perfect course for you; others might still be tossing up between a couple of different subjects. If you have already decided that you definitely want to be a lawyer then obviously studying a law degree is going to be an excellent thing to do. As you may know, it's not necessary to study law at university in order to qualify as a lawyer in this country. You can study another subject first, history, English, natural sciences, whatever you want, and then do a one-year conversion course after your other degree. However, if you are interested in understanding the way rules work, of exploring the subject deeper, you really should think seriously about doing law as a degree.

Studying law at university over the three years will allow you to acquire a greater and much more in-depth understanding of not only the law but the way it rules work, the way to think about law and this knowledge can have a real benefit for you in your future career as a lawyer. Law is also a brilliant academic subject to study in its own right. Even if you don't want to be lawyer it can provide a fantastic foundation for a lot of different future careers. Why? Because it involves not only studying and applying the rules in an analytical way, but it goes a lot further than that. Law involves a lot of different subjects. We think about why a particular rule exists, we think about whether this rule can be justified philosophically. We think about how the law has applied historically. We think about what kind of social goods we are promoting by implementing this particular law and then think, "Okay, so how can we take all this, put it together and talk about

how the law should evolve in the future?” So, as Professor Fentiman just said, this isn't just about learning what the legislation says, what the case says, and then regurgitating it. What we are teaching you is to read that, think about it and then come up with your own opinions about where we should go with this law.

So let me give you an example of this from one of the subjects I teach, which is family law, and this is actually a question that I have used in admissions interviews over the last couple of years, and won't be able to do again, but it will give you an idea of the kind of things we are talking about. So the scenario is that we have an infertile couple who cannot have a child. So they pay a woman to act as a surrogate to bear that child on their behalf. The surrogate is implanted with a donated egg, donated sperm from strangers and then nine months later the surrogate gives birth to a baby girl. Who are the child's parents? So does anyone have any ideas? Yes.

A: It depends how you would define “parents”.

Absolutely. So there are a lot of different ways that we can think about parenthood. I can tell you the easy legal answer to this in one sentence, but what the easy legal answer is relies on the way that we have viewed parenthood over the last however many centuries, but we are now faced with a new and evolving technology that we need to think about, “Okay, can we use these historical rules to apply in new situations?” Anyone else have any ideas, any opinions on who they think the parents should be? Well, how about we have a vote. Who thinks that it should be the couple who organised this who should be the parents of the child? That's a fair number. Who thinks it should be the surrogate? A couple. Anyone think it's the genetic parents, the people who donated the egg and sperm? A couple still.

So you can see in this room of a couple of hundred people we have vastly different ideas about what makes someone a parent. Is it pure genetics? Is it the fact that someone has carried this child in their womb for nine months? Or is it the fact that they have worked so hard and have organised this to bring the child about? Now, the simple legal answer is the law in this country at the moment treats the woman who gives birth will always be the legal mother of the child, which is contrary to what a lot of you have suggested, and this is a reason why we are now pushing at the moment to change this law, to have the government think again about what we mean to be a parent. So this is just one of the kind of issues that we look at; the law itself as it currently stands is a very small part of it. We then use that as a springboard to think about the reasons behind it, where we want to go in the future and what kind of world we are trying to create.

So what does our course consist of? So the law degree is typically a three-year degree and this is what's known as a “qualifying law degree”. A qualifying law degree is one in which you study seven key foundation subjects and these are the ones that will come up in red on the screen. If you have a qualifying law degree and you want to be a solicitor, typically you go on to do one more year of study after your degree. That is a legal practice course followed by a training contract with a firm to give you some practical experience. If you don't have a qualifying law degree, for example, if you study another subject at university, then you have to do a year-long conversion course before going through the legal practice and the training contract. Some of you might have heard that this system is currently under review by the Solicitors Regulation Authority who are discussing whether or not students will need a qualifying law degree in the future. What I can say about this is that this won't affect the intake for 2018 and 2019 and they

are still in consultation phases exactly how this is going to work, but it's not something that you need to worry about for these purposes.

So being a solicitor is one route that you can go down. The other one is being a barrister if you want to be a practising lawyer. So if you want to be a barrister, similarly, you would be looking to have a qualifying law degree followed by a bar training course and what's called a "pupillage" where you go into a chambers and work as a barrister. Although the Solicitors Regulation Authority is talking about changing, the barristers' regulation actually isn't, so you would still need a qualifying law degree no matter what happens with the solicitors if you do want to become a barrister. So, having said this, how do we structure our course? Our first year, which we call "Part 1A", you study four main subjects and these are tort, constitutional, criminal and civil law. So civil law is actually Roman law. That is the law in place in around 200AD. Now, you might be thinking why on earth are we making you study this as a compulsory subject? As you can see, it's not required for a qualifying law degree but it is something we make all students take. Why is this? Because the Romans were actually really, really brilliant lawyers and studying civil law gives you a chance to look at an entire legal system and it helps enormously when you come to think about modern legal subjects that you study the rest of the course. Constitutional law, on the other hand, you might all be a bit more familiar with. It looks at the way that the laws of the United Kingdom allocate powers between different institutions: parliament, the judiciary and the government. In addition to this the course studies topics, for example, parliamentary sovereignty, separation of powers, the effects of EU law on domestic legislation, but also things like the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act.

The third subject, tort, discusses civil wrongdoing; "tort" meaning a wrong in French. So this is concerned with the law if someone wants to sue someone else, for example, in negligence, in cases where one individual's rights may infringe on someone else's. The final substantive subject you take in the first year is criminal law. This is quite self-explanatory. The law relating to murder, manslaughter, offences against the person, sexual assault, but also defences to crime. So things like what do we do if someone was intoxicated when they committed an offence. Is there such a thing as self-defence? When does that apply? Necessity, etc. In addition to these four papers, you also take something called our "Legal Skills and Methodology" paper. This gives you a really essential grounding in basic legal skills. So not only understanding the policy and the philosophical debates, but thinking about, okay, how do I read a case, how do I find a statute? These kind of skills that will help with you all other courses.

The Legal Skills and Methodology course is examined by an essay at the end of the year. All other courses are examined by an exam at the end of first year. So you will sit four exams at the end of the first year and you need to pass these in order to move on. When we get to second year you actually pick up an additional subject and you will be studying five. You do the compulsory subjects of contract law and land law but then we give you a chance to individualise your degree. So you have a chance to decide three optional subjects of what you want to study, of what interests you. So these subjects range from things like family law, which I teach, international law, human rights, jurisprudence, criminal evidence. Even, if you enjoyed it so much in the first year, advanced civil law. So there is a whole range of subjects that you can choose to tailor the course to what kind of lawyer you want to be, what interests you. Then once again we have exams at the end of the year on those subjects before moving to third year. In third year there are two more compulsory subjects: equity, which is the law of trusts, and EU law. We do get some questions about whether EU law is still going to be taught. At the moment this is one of the foundation subjects that you need to have a qualifying law degree and

until it's not then we definitely keep teaching it. The other thing is that, well, we still teach you Roman law, 2,000 years after the fall of the Roman civilisation. So we are going to be teaching EU law for a while yet, I would be saying.

In the final year we do teach another three optional subjects and these are some of the subjects that you can take in the final year. So in addition to the ones that you can take in the second year you can also take things like company law, commercial, intellectual property, labour law. You can also take a combination of half papers. There is one other option that you can have in the final year and this is the dissertation option. So we give students the chance to write a 12,000 dissertation in place of one of the papers. This is on a topic of entirely your choosing, related to a subject that you found interesting throughout your course. So you see that there are a variety of different areas that you can write this in: public law, crime and criminal justice, human rights, tax, women and the law, so it gives you the scope to once again tailor the degree to what interests you.

So this is our typical three-year degree. There are a couple of different kind of permutations that you can have. The first is that we do offer the opportunity for students to go on an Erasmus year. The universities, we have an agreement with Regensburg in Germany, Poitiers in France, Madrid in Spain and Utrecht in the Netherlands. So for three of these, Germany, France, Spain, there is a language requirement, however, in the Netherlands the course is taught in English so there is no requirement that you learn Dutch. Students wishing to participate in this apply once they are here in Cambridge so you don't have to put that application in on your UCAS form. This is something that once you are here you can decide whether or not this is something that interests you. The other permutation is to do with the fact that if you already have a degree from another university you can do an advanced course which condenses our law course into two years. If anyone is in that situation and wants to talk about this, come and see me later in the day and we can have a discussion.

So, what about our teaching methods, how do we teach law at Cambridge? So teaching takes a combination of lectures and supervisions. Lectures take place here in the law faculty. This is our largest lecture theatre and, as Professor Fentiman was saying, we have some wonderful facilities here. All law students, no matter what college you attend, come to the faculty for lectures. You will have two or three lectures per week for each subject which means that you will have approximately ten to 14 hours of lectures every week. The second part of teaching is what's known as "the supervision" and this is what makes Cambridge so special. Supervisions take place in small groups, so usually two or three students. They are arranged by the colleges. Each college has what's known as a Director of Studies, who will be responsible for guiding you through the three-year law course and they are also responsible for organising your supervisions and your supervisors. In fact, that's what I have been doing earlier this morning for my students next year. So sometimes you will be supervised within your own college if your college has an expert in this area; otherwise, they can get academics from other colleges. For example, I teach across seven or eight colleges at the moment in my subjects that I am a specialist in.

So what do we actually do in supervisions? They last an hour and they take place once every fortnight so that means you have about two or three supervisions per week. To set the scene, they normally take place in an academic's office; for example, this is one of my colleagues. Before each supervision you are set a reading list, cases, statute, the textbook, but also academic articles to get you thinking about the subjects that you have been lectured on over the past couple of weeks. So in the supervision, it is a chance for your supervisor to go over topics

that you don't understand, to help you look at this area in more depth and really get you to think. So in a room with only two or three students, one of the wonderful things and also the terrifying things is there is nowhere to hide. So you are having a discussion with your supervisor and this is very different from other universities where you might have a tutorial group of, say, ten or 15 or even a few more, so this is a chance for you to have a relationship with your supervisor, that they can help lead you through this subject area. So students are expected to be very prepared for these supervisions, obviously, because we will be asking you a lot of questions and expecting you to have your own ideas. The idea is that lectures will provide you with kind of the base level and then supervisions take it one step further.

One of the things that I really like about this university is this supervision system, because it does give me an opportunity as well to learn things from students. There has been a couple of times when students have really surprised me in supervisions and given me ideas for my own research of things where I want to move forward. So it is not just a teaching environment, it is a two-way relationship where you can learn together. This is the basic structure of a Cambridge law degree. If you are wanting to find out more, we have our ba.law.cam.ac.uk website, we have a video on the day in the life of a law student, but also a lot of different resources about what this course is about. There is also going to be a chance at lunch. There will be a lot of academics who are coming to eat lunch with you who you can ask any questions you have and I will be around all day if you want to speak to me. So that's all I wanted to tell you now. We will have a five minute break before we have Professor Virgo and O'Sullivan to take you through your legal problems session. Thank you.