

## LLM DISSERTATIONS Information for Direct Entrant Students

### 1. **What is an LLM Dissertation?**

It is a requirement of all LLM programmes that a 15,000 – 18,000 word dissertation is submitted. This is known as stage 2 of the LLM and takes about 9 months to complete part time.

### 2. **Direct Entry to Stage 2**

Students who have completed an LPC or Bar Vocational Course **qualify for complete exemption from stage 1**. Solicitors and barristers can also obtain exemption from Stage 1. This means that you can obtain an LLM by completion of a dissertation only. For those who enrol, detailed guidance is available in the form of a 'Dissertation Guidelines' booklet. You will also be provided with a comprehensive research study module which is an integrated part of the course and must be completed.

### 3. **What standard is expected?**

It is in effect, a significant research project in your chosen subject area demanding a high standard of achievement reflecting Masters level work. The approach may be either essentially empirical or theoretically reflective, or may combine both theoretical and empirical insights. It is not a 'long essay'; surveying the arguments of material contained in a limited number of references on a broadly defined topic. At masters level students are expected to display a sound familiarity with source literature in his/her chosen area, a high level of theoretical competence, a clear ability to sift and evaluate evidence relevant to the area of legal studies being examined, design investigations in a sure and competent way, and to produce a dissertation of potentially publishable quality. You will be expected to synthesise conceptual, analytical and research skills. Define a legal problem within an appropriate theoretical or conceptual framework appropriate methods and techniques of analysis; it should show evidence of an appropriate research methodology. To assist with this you will be provided with a research methods course which includes a reader. It is not necessarily expected that original research results may emerge, but the dissertation should demonstrate the potential of the student to progress to this given further time and resources.

### 4. **What topic can I select?**

Appendix A (below) contains a short outline of legal research sufficient to get you started in selecting a topic. If you come to stage 2 direct and are one of our own students you may already have a topic selected. By all means approach an appropriate member of staff and discuss.

### 5. **How do I get started?**

By providing us with a 1000 word outline of your research proposal. Then, if you know members of staff you can approach them informally and discuss the suitability of a topic with them or the course leader. Appendix B contains a preliminary LLM proposal form. You should complete and submit this form to us and it will assist us in determining whether we can offer supervision. It will also help focus your thoughts.

**6. How will I be supervised?**

You will be allocated a supervisor and you will receive a dissertation guidelines booklet to which you can refer (supplied on enrolment).

**7. How is progress monitored?**

There are specific rules which require the submission of written material. There is an interim report on progress. The LLM dissertation guidelines booklet contains further details.

**8. I have already undertaken an undergraduate 10,000 word dissertation. What is the difference?**

That rather depends on the topic and standard of your LLB dissertation. There are no clear dividing lines. A very good LLB dissertation may have certain qualities which we associate with an LLM. Question 3 does give further details as to what is expected.

**9. I have already done a 5,000 word project at post graduate level. What is the difference?**

If you have undertaken Post Graduate Diploma then you will have produced a short article. It may form the basis of LLM study. However your Post Graduate Diploma course was an intensive introduction to core legal topics. The project was designed to draw you into wider reflection on the law but by necessity it was time constrained.

**10. I have completed the Legal Practice Course/Bar Vocational Course and/or have been working in legal practice and have a particular area of expertise which I want to develop. Is an LLM a suitable way of doing this?**

Yes, provided you understand that the LLM is primarily an academic course. By all means develop and reflect on your practice experience. The LLM will provide you with the opportunity to do this. However you will still need to undertake the research module and introduce an academic perspective. Our experience to date is that this works very well, we have had some good results. The research module contains specific guidance on converting practical experience into academic study.

**11. Should I undertake the LLM Dissertation part time or full time?**

Most of our students are working and find it easier to undertake the LLM part time over 9 months. If you decide to undertake it full time then you would have 4 months.

**12. Is the LLM award the same as that awarded to students who have to complete the stage 1 taught courses?**

Yes.

**13. Contact Details**

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## **Appendix A: Legal Research - Thinking About A Topic**

- \* Legal research must contain an in depth study and critical evaluation of particular problem in law, which may include legal theories, law in practice, socio-legal studies, law in context, legal policy, other applied legal topics, with the formulation of alternative approaches where appropriate

### **A. Choosing a Dissertation Topic - Initial Thoughts**

The initial steps are extremely important, yet some students find this the most difficult part of the dissertation. In selecting a topic, you must be able to demonstrate its practical and/or theoretical interest in a subject area. It is particularly important to be aware of the way in which your topic relates to broader themes in the disciplines concerned, e.g. a problem of introducing change should be placed within a legal context. A sensible proposal should take into consideration manageability, in terms of time and resources, whilst showing an awareness of the existing state of knowledge on the subject so that research may be located in the wider debate. Fairly extensive reading around your chosen topic is important if only because you should include a literature survey near the start of the dissertation. The following specific points may help:-

1. There are virtually no topics where the last word has already been said: start to delve and researchable issues soon emerge.
2. By all means choose a topic which has interested you, but remember that the dissertation is an academic piece of work and the study must be approached in an objective and disinterested manner.
3. You are strongly advised to relate your topic of research interest to the expertise/knowledge of staff: try to capitalise on in-house experience.
4. Have you checked the recent academic literature (e.g. journals, books) to see where the research focus is at present? Can you update some research done a number of years ago? Sources of information of use to you in constructing a literature review include books, journal articles, and research theses. When carrying out a literature search, the most recent issues of abstracts/indexes should be consulted first.
5. For many students, topics may arise from their work situation. This is to be welcomed, though to be done with care, as there can be problems of ensuring a research project with an adequate academic framework conducted with sufficient objectivity and a disinterested focus. In the case of practitioner research, previously published research should not dictate the form of the stated research problem and research questions asked: but *aid* the development of the research design, once the problem(s) and questions are closely identified.
6. When confronted with the prospect of having to carry out research, researchers often concentrate most on the question of how they are going to collect the data (and later on how this data might be analysed) - the mechanics of the research process. The more conceptual element of the research process - identifying, developing and contextualising the problem and questions to be addressed in the first place is usually assumed to be of less importance. However, if research is to be fruitful, then the way in which research problems and research questions are identified and developed must receive adequate attention.

## Appendix B

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING AND SUBMIT

**LLM DISSERTATION PROPOSAL**

**WORKING TITLE**

**OUTLINE RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

**POSSIBLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF INTEREST**