

Introduction

This short book is intended to be a compilation of some of the best advice I have tried to give to students in my years of being a legal academic. Over years that I have realised that I am asked the same questions again and again, by my own students, by other people's students, and by numerous students from other universities who seem (some of them) to be trying to reach out to communicate with someone. I decided to write a lot of it down in the hope that it might help some more people.

So, this book is intended to be a 'guide, philosopher and friend' in the way that Charles Dickens envisaged in *David Copperfield*. The same expression was borrowed by Professor Williams in his peerless book *Learning the Law* which aimed to be a classical skills guide as much as anything. This book does have a large amount of skills training bound up in it: most of it in the form of on-line exercises, podcasts and vidcasts on my companion web-site www.alastairhudson.com. That is something which Prof Williams could not do. Furthermore, this book aims to give students an insight into the running of modern law schools and universities so as to make more sense of their experiences at university. Importantly, this book is also a compilation of some of the most important pastoral advice (as a personal tutor and senior tutor) and academic advice (as a course leader) which I have given over the years which it seems to me might help a more general audience.

The study of law is an emotional as well as an intellectual activity. The most significant intellectual activity which you will undertake (it seems to me) is *a journey within* as you come to learn at least as much about yourself and about the person you will become once you leave university, as you will learn about the law. University is that great existential airport lounge in the journey of your life in which you decide on your destination and on the person you will become once you have left your childhood and your school career behind forever. You will find out about your own mind by testing it against the rigour of legal study and by testing it against other people from different backgrounds and in discussion with your tutors. Some of this will be the most enjoyable period of your life (and may well seem to have been such later in life), and some of this may be the most difficult and confusing of your life (perhaps involving the end of your first adult love affair, the rejection letters from law firms, or a sense that the dreams you have had since childhood are simply not the right dreams for you anymore). It is unlikely that your time at university will leave you unchanged in some way.

My aim in writing this book, in part I suppose, is to try to help you make your university life into a positive and joyous experience, even if parts of it are challenging or confusing. It is possible that if you were educated in the UK, then your education may have left you surprisingly ill-equipped for university life because modern secondary education focuses so much on tests, on preparing you only for tests, and on school league tables. The idea of having a rounded education has slipped from the syllabus. So a big part of this book is to think about what a university is supposed to be, and how understanding what a university is supposed to be can help you to get the most out of the experience of being at one. If you can understand why your law degree is organised in the way that it is then you are more likely to be able to succeed because you will see why the academics do things in the way that they do, and

consequently what it is that they want from you so that you get what you want from the experience. For example, their occasional reluctance simply to tell you the answer to every question you ask is probably bound up in a determination and shared belief among academics that they should not simply 'spoon-feed' you but instead that they should encourage you to find out the answers for yourself, and so become an active learner, better lawyer and independent thinker. In effect to help you to be better educated.

The general term which I use for any department in a university in this book is a 'law school'. I will also use the term 'students', somewhat against the grain, to refer only to people studying at university; whereas I shall usually use the term 'pupil' to refer to people at school or sixth form college, because pupils are what are produced by a system of secondary education which is so focused on 'teaching to the test' rather than trying to educate people. Simply rebranding sixth formers as 'students' does not mean that they have thus become genuinely independent learners, it just means that we have tried to hide the change in how we teach them at school by calling them something we would like them to be. Furthermore, being a university student brings with it entirely different pressures from those at school or sixth form college. You are an adult making adult decisions; you have to manage your own money; you are probably living away from home and so responsible for your own food, laundry, bedtime and everything else. You are free to have love affairs with pretty much anyone you like and to live exactly however you want. You are free to make mistakes; you are free to soar. The academics around you do not see their role to be the same as schoolteachers: which may be a relief or it may be a odd change which makes you feel a little lonely. You have the opportunity completely to reinvent yourself at university; or alternatively the opportunity to slip completely from view, to make one friend, and to cling to one another through it all.

I genuinely hope that this little book will help you to prepare yourself to become the person you want to be. I loved studying law. I had to educate myself into how I was supposed to love it. To do that I needed to understand what the degree was supposed to be about, to understand why things were the way that they were. I was lucky because Prof Ian Kennedy had just taken over King's College law school where I was an undergraduate, and as a result a lot changed and the academics were prepared to discuss why they were making changes and what we were supposed to get out of it. I was very lucky to meet the late Jeffrey Price and to have him as my personal tutor: he had an extraordinary generosity of spirit and would talk about the academic life as well as about the study of law in a way that opened up the subject for me. He was a natural teacher. I have always tried to emulate his energy and generosity in my own teaching. I was also lucky to be taught by people like Jon Hayes, Rob Blackburn, and David Hayton who had a similar warmth and good humour, each in their own particular ways. By understanding the place where I studied (by seeing the real people behind the Wizard of Oz's curtain) I came to understand a lot more about the study of law, and to develop my own mind much more satisfyingly than would otherwise have been the case.

So, we are going to have fun together, you and I. Hopefully, across these few pages, I will be able to show you just one thing which will make a difference to your university life. Hopefully, I will be able to help you in some small way to become the person you want to be. That is all that any teacher really wants from life. A remark of

Mother Teresa's is an important part of my teaching philosophy: 'in this life we cannot do great things; only small things with great love'. Teaching and learning are slow, delicate processes in which small things are achieved one after the other. For the teacher there is no greater validation of one's vocation than seeing small things genuinely affecting or helping individual students. In its own little way, I do think that that is a great thing.

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