

Using law reports

This guide will help you understand English case law references and confidently find and use cases in law reports

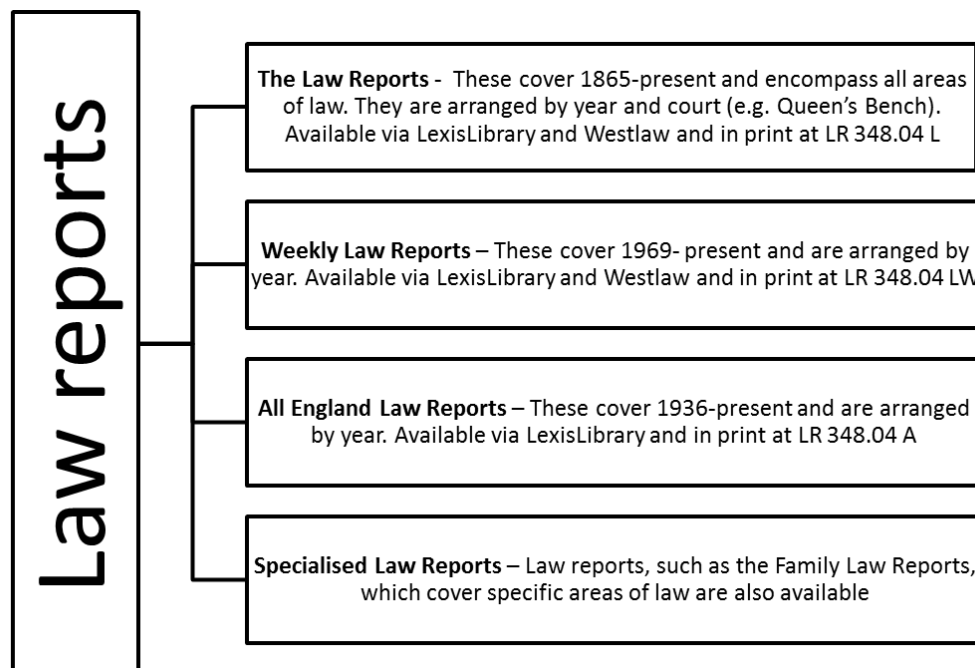
Introduction to law reports

“A law report re-prints the full text of a judgement, i.e. the statement of facts and judicial reasoning made by judges in a case and adds additional material. This consists of a summary of the legal issues, lists of other cases cited, legislation referred to, and other key features of the case”¹

They are, therefore, a valuable source of information about a case and provide a stepping stone to other related cases or journal articles. There are a number of series of law reports and they are available in print in Headington library or online via LexisLibrary and Westlaw.

The hierarchy of law reports

There is a recognised hierarchy of law reports, with those at the top of the diagram below considered more authoritative than those lower down. Not every case is reported in the every series of law reports. However, you should always refer to the most authoritative source available when citing a case in your work. This is particularly important to remember if you are mooting.



¹ John Knowles and Philip A. Thomas, *Effective Legal Research* (3rd edn, Sweet & Maxwell 2012) 25

The set of law reports called simply The Law Reports has been published since 1865 by the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting (ICLR). If you look in the A-Z list on LexisLibrary the names of the series start with ICLR e.g. ICLR Chancery Division.

There are 4 series in The Law Reports, reflecting the structure of the High Court:

- Appeal Cases (usually shortened to AC)**
- Chancery Division (usually shortened to Ch)**
- Queen’s Bench Division (usually shortened to QB)**
- Family Division (usually shortened to Fam)**

It is usual for just the name of the series (e.g. QB) to be given in a reference so you need to remember that these four form part of The Law Reports and therefore sit at the top of the hierarchy.

Understanding references to law reports

References to law reports can look like a foreign language but, as you become more familiar with them they will start to make sense. The information within each reference (also known as a citation) appears in a standard order.

The title of the law report series is often abbreviated. If you are not sure what the abbreviation is short for, consult the Cardiff Index to Legal Abbreviations (<http://www.legalabbrevs.cardiff.ac.uk/>).

Ciccione v Ritchie [2016] 4 WLR 60



Ciccione v Ritchie	The names of the two parties in the case
[2016]	The year that the case was reported.
4	The volume number i.e. this was the 4 th volume published in 2016
WLR	The abbreviated title of series of law reports. WLR is Weekly Law Reports
60	The page the case starts on

Neutral citations

All cases heard in the High Court, Court of Appeal or House of Lords/Supreme Court since 2001 have been given a neutral citation. This citation reflects where and when the case was heard, not where it was reported. It means that even if a case is not reported in the law reports it can be identified and referenced. You can spot a neutral citation as it will have EW [for England and Wales] or UK in it. This is the neutral citation for the same case as above:

Ciccione v Ritchie [2016] EWHC 608 (Fam)



Ciccione v Ritchie	The names of the two parties in the case
[2016]	The year that the case was heard.
EWHC	The court: in this case, England & Wales High Court
608	Each case is given a unique identification number. This was the 608 th heard in this court in 2016
(Fam)	The division of the High Court – in this case the Family Division

The most common abbreviations you will see in neutral citations are:

UKSC	Supreme Court
UKHL	House of Lords
EWCA Crim	Court of Appeal (Criminal Division)
EWCA Civ	Court of Appeal (Civil Division)
EWHC (Admin)	High Court (Administrative Court)
EWHC (Ch)	High Court (Chancery Division)
EWHC (QB)	High Court (Queen's Bench Division)
EWHC (Fam)	High Court (Family Division)

Finding law reports online

The two recommended resources for finding law reports online are LexisLibrary and Westlaw. The library has subscriptions to both of these databases. It is important you access them via the library website rather than a Google search so that you are recognised as being from Oxford Brookes. Go to <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/subject-help/law/databases-in-law/> to access these databases and to find out more about how to use them.

Both databases have a cases option near the top of the screen. Once in the cases screen you can either search by parties e.g. Cicccone v Ritchie or by citation e.g. [2016] 4 WLR 60. You can use either a neutral citation or a law report citation in the citation field. If you get no results, try removing brackets from your citation.

You may find it easier to search by citation as there may have been more than one case involving the parties, especially if there was an appeal. Also in family law, the parties can be given one letter names, which can make cases hard to distinguish by party name alone.

Other resources

This video provides a good introduction to using law reports:
http://learnmore.lawbore.net/index.php/Get_To_Grips_With_Law_Reports

There are a number of legal skills books shelved at 340.07 in the Headington library which contain good advice about finding, using and understanding law reports.

Getting help and finding out more

More online information can be found on the Law help pages, at www.brookes.ac.uk/library/subject-help/law

If you need any help with finding or using library resources for law please contact **Charlie Brampton** (Academic Liaison Librarian for Law) using the contact details below.

Email: c.brampton@brookes.ac.uk
Tel: 01865 483077

Headington Library, JHB 310 (Level 3, Zone C)
Oxford Brookes University.