Online Legal Resources and their potential for Visual Learning Inclusivity

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Abstract

The motivation behind this piece was to discuss the factors which relate to forms of legal education. In particular, this poster hopes to examine the concept of the online legal resource. For the purposes of this discussion, the legal research tool under consideration is JustisOne.

The argument of this poster is that legal research tools which are available online mark an important milestone in the advancement of legal education. This benefit emanates from the benefits the online resource format imparts on students, and how it affects issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality.

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LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

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UCL

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The argument of this poster is that legal research tools which are available online mark an important milestone in the advancement of legal education. This benefit emanates from the benefits the online resource format imparts on students, and how it affects issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality.

By diversity, inclusivity and equality, this poster argues that online resources contain the ability to implement and prioritise visual learning elements. This visual learning approach supplants the traditional, and limited, approach to the teaching of law which many universities follow. Studies have highlighted the importance of visual learning in inclusive education, noting that the use of visuals can help to improve learning opportunities in those suffering from conditions such as Dyslexia.[1] Given the international nature of many courses, and the attempts by many colleges to include non-English speaking students, a visual depiction of information can also help to combat issues surrounding language proficiency.

It is important to note that all of these benefits are afforded on a widespread nature to all students enrolled on a course that subscribes to legal research tools, such as JustisOne. This further helps to challenge the issue of socio-economic imbalance. It accomplishes this through two channels; firstly, the large amount of archived material is provided free of charge to the students, through a college subscription, which is preferable to costly textbooks or pay-to-read online articles. Secondly, online legal tools are also more accessible as a source of law, compared to the traditional concept of a library, which creates issues around travel and opening hours, both of which can hinder the opportunities of students who have other commitments, such as childcare or part-time employment. However, this poster will focus on the visual learning advantages of online learning and research platforms.

Background to JustisOne

The UCL library database describes JustisOne as, "A legal search engine, analysis and citation tool covering cases and legislation. Includes International Law Reports and State Trials and JustCite".[2] Its own website describes JustisOne in the following terms:

Justis gives you access to the most comprehensive collection of common law cases from 1163, and an extensive collection of legislation from 1235. Using our intelligent legal research platform, JustisOne, you can search for cases from across over 25 jurisdictions, all in one location.

It provides access the largest collection of UK superior court judgments, the largest collection of Irish case law, the largest collection of Caribbean case law, extensive Australian, Canadian and international cases, and exclusive New Zealand cases.

JustisOne is updated daily, with hundreds of new cases added each week. Our collection of case law dates back to 1163, and legislation back to 1235. Our content includes major and specialist reported series such as the International Law Reports, English Reports, The Times Law Reports, Bermuda Law Reports and more.[3]
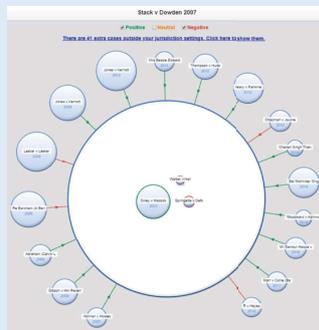
Visual Learning

One of the most inclusive aspects of the legal research platform JustisOne is that it affords students the opportunity to benefit from visual learning mechanics. This is interesting to note, given that it is technically a secondary aspect to the platform. JustisOne has not been designed around visual learning, as it is modelled on the conventional model of case digests and full-text reports. However, it is this visual element that is important for a discussion of legal teaching, because it stands as an example for other platforms, and for legal teaching more generally, to follow.

It has been widely documented that visual learning offers a more nuanced approach to the intake of information. By presenting legal cases in a visual learning form, students are better able to intake in the large, and often quite dense, amount of legal information. This approach is a strong example of an electronic resource accomplishing something to aid students, which conventional hard-copy resources would be unable to achieve. The idea of precedent maps and colour-coded case judgements, which update effectively in real time, can change as new laws and judgements are introduced, allowing for dynamic and up to date visual learning opportunities. For the purposes of this discussion, this poster will examine four facets of JustisOne's visual learning approaches. The first, and the most in depth visual feature, is the precedent map, which incorporates several distinct visual identifiers:

1- Precedent Map

The Precedent Map Structure- The precedent map is a visual display method by which the outcomes and the inter-references of cases can be displayed in a succinct visual manner. The case being studied is placed in the center of a circular frame, with the cases that have gone on to discuss this case arranged in chronological order in a clockwise circle around the case. Within the case is a similar system, however, these cases are the cases which are discussed within the main case. All of this information would be tedious and almost impossible to compile in an offline format. There is no easy way to determine every subsequent case which has referenced a case you are studying, but this map provides a comprehensive list of these cases is a single click. At the top of the precedent map is a simple traffic-light system, which allows for cases to be added or removed from the map on the basis of how they were treated by later courts. This is broken down into three key areas; positive treatment, neutral treatment, and negative treatment.

2- Highlighted Passages

Colour-Coding- This feature of the JustisOne platform offers users an opportunity to blend visual learning with technological advancement. Using this system, users have the option to enable a highlighting system operated by JustisOne. Using this device, the platform will highlight in purple all of the passages in the text of a case which have been quoted in external sources. This allows users to quickly identify the relevant passages and the pieces of text which are beneficial for an initial reading of any text. This approach also compliments the research which shows that students can more readily recall information which was written on different colour pages to white.[4] It is also another example of technology which improves upon traditional approaches to the study of law, where tracking every other quotation after a case would be almost impossible.
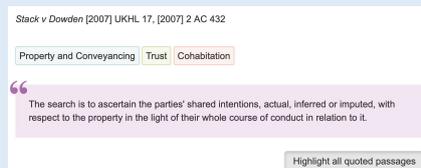
3- Traffic Light System

The Caselaw Colour-codification System: This visual element, again, is used to quickly outline a crucial aspect to any case; its treatment by a court. Even though one need not read an entire case to determine its outcome, in this example the colour system turns the determination of 184 cases into something which can be interpreted by a user in mere seconds. These three categories can also be further broken down with each case:

Green: Positive Treatment (Affirmed, Applied etc.)
Orange: Neutral Treatment (Considered, Referred to, etc.)
Red: Negative Treatment (Distinguished, Disapproved, etc.)

4- Jurisdiction Icons

The simple Jurisdiction map icons are also an example of visual elements to assist in learning and accessibility. Here, the maps again aid users who have language barriers, and further, they help to cut down the legal jargon which might pose an issue for non-law educated or early stage law students. In the example below, the jargon of "Court of Appeal (Civil Division)" is made much easier to understand through the simple addition of the map.

Conclusion

To conclude, there are many elements which should be considered when looking to the concept of advancing legal education. Although there are many advancements being made through online legal resources, it is crucial to study these advancements, to ensure that they are being tailored to suit a diverse and inclusive audience. Mark Rasch makes a powerful argument when he discusses cybercrime, and many of the sentiments translate well to the idea of technology focused legal education. He argues, "Computer crimes have analogues in traditional crimes like trespass, larceny, destruction of property, but these common law concepts are inadequate to proscribe the new, high technology crimes".[5] Following this logic, although online legal research tools have analogues in traditional legal education, we must ensure that these are not simply transcribed onto technology. For the legal educational institutions of the future to be diverse, inclusive and equal, their platforms for learning must reflect these qualities, and it is my argument that through its focus on visual based learning JustisOne represents a positive step in achieving this goal.

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JustisOne
Easy legal research