Statute law databases available online

Purpose:	To provide information to the Bar about the statute law databases available online
Scope of application:	All practising barristers
Issued by:	The Information Technology Panel
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Status and effect:	**Please see the notice at end of this document. This is not "guidance" for the purposes of the BSB Handbook I6.4.**

UK legislation

1. The Statute Law Database was first released to the public on 20 December 2006. In 2010, a new website was created, termed "legislation.gov.uk." It is the official repository of all new UK laws and is maintained by the National Archives.

Revisions

2. Legislation.gov.uk contains both primary legislation, usually in its revised form (as amended by subsequent legislation), and secondary legislation, usually in its unrevised form. Information on the revision and editorial policy of legislation.gov.uk is available on the website. Legislation that has been amended will be presented as both "Original (as enacted)" and then "Latest available" and will be accompanied by the following text:

> *"There are outstanding changes not yet made by the legislation.gov.uk editorial team to [Act]. Those changes will be listed when you open the content using the Table of Contents below. Any changes that have already been made by the team appear in the content and are referenced with annotations."*

3. The inclusion of a "textual amendments" section, a scrollable "changes over time" bar and drop-down boxes identifying "Changes and effects yet to be applied"

have all improved understanding of revisions. However, commercially available legal databases will likely always be more quickly updated than legislation.gov.uk.

Date

4. It is stated that legislation.gov.uk contains all primary legislation from 1988 onwards. In relation to pre-1988 acts it only claims to have most of these. The pre-1988 primary legislation may be in the original unamended form or absent if it was wholly repealed prior to 1991 or solely in the revised form if the original was not available in a web compatible format.

Geographical scope

5. Geographically speaking, all UK legislation is included with coverage of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Legislation originating from the EU, accessible from the homepage.

6. There is information on the coverage of European Union Law. The summary section, "Finding the right version of legislation originating from the EU" explains as follows:

> *Legislation.gov.uk is where you can find legislation originating from the EU as it now applies in the UK. This legislation will be kept up to date with any amendments made by the UK Parliaments, Governments and Assemblies. For our editorial approach and timelines see Revising legislation originating from the EU.*
>
> *EUR-Lex is where you can find EU legislation as it applies to EU Member States, and as it may continue to apply to the UK under sections 7A or 7B of the Withdrawal Act. A link to the EU versions of legislation is available from every item of legislation originating from the EU published on legislation.gov.uk. However, legislation.gov.uk will not publish any new EU legislation published on EUR-Lex after 11.00 p.m. on 31 December 2020, or reference amendments made by the EU after that date.* [see further below].
>
> *EU Exit Web Archive is where you can find versions of EU legislation from EUR-Lex as they stood at 11.00 p.m. on 31 December 2020.*

Other Legislation

7. Legislation.gov.uk also has partial datasets of many historical laws and some Church measures.

Summary

8. The updates to legislation.gov.uk in recent years have rendered it considerably more comprehensive and accessible. Given its longer editorial and revision process,

it does not seek to replace commercially available legal databases. However, it retains considerable utility for a range of research tasks and is the primary source for members of the public without access to such databases.

9. If you have any problems using the database there are FAQs on the site and also a helpdesk.

UK case law

10. Bailii (the British and Irish Legal Information Institute) provides access free of charge to judgments across all UK jurisdictions (and additional international jurisdictions). New judgments are uploaded to Bailii rapidly following hand-down. At the present time, it remains a comprehensive source of official transcript versions of judgments across multiple areas of court and tribunal work. Bailii is a registered charity dependent upon donations and sponsorship and for many years there has been discussion of its supplement/ replacement by a government / publicly-funded database.

11. In April 2022, the National Archives launched the Find Case Law website. At the present time, this is in its "Beta phase", self-described as "meaning it is being actively developed and may change in order to test and introduce new features". At present, there is no timetable for subsequent phases. The coverage of judgments since 2022 is comprehensive, but careful regard should be had to the publishing policy. Whilst the main page has a general search bar, results are more effective under the advanced search section.

European legislation and case law

12. EUR-Lex is the portal for all European Union legislation (as well as case-law and information on national transposition). The homepage provides access to treaties, legal acts and consolidated texts and the Official Journal.

13. N-Lex is the portal by which you can get access to the national laws of EU Countries. N-Lex was built to complement EUR-Lex by linking to national law. It was developed jointly by the EU's Publications Office and national governments. This site has been available, in experimental form since April 2006. According to N-Lex – it offers the following:

a) An interface between you and databases on national legislation

b) A common search form enabling you to make searches in your own language

c) Search results coming directly from national databases

d) Descriptions of database contents and search options for each country (search fields and different types of national law)

e) EuroVoc - the EU's multilingual thesaurus – which helps you to find the corresponding term in a language you do not know, when looking for words in the title or in the text

f) Context-sensitive help - to give you more information on specific search fields or show you examples

g) A multijurisdictional search option

14. It purports to give access to the legislation of 28 European countries. A number of countries' links are no longer operational. From the Homepage, one can select "EN" for access to English language results. The search form – accessible once you click on the relevant country - permits searches in your own language.

15. The search results are provided in the original language but there is a machine translation of the text (which is not claimed to be accurate), but which provides an approximation of the text in other languages. How good an approximation it is, is indicated. It is certainly not a replacement for having an official translation but may assist with less formal requirements.

16. It remains, in common with many of the EUR-LEX sites, not as intuitive as it could be. However, it is a good starting point for preliminary research. With the increasing interest in e-justice within the Commission, it seems likely that this resource will continue to be supported and may one day be more intuitive and more useful.

Important Notice

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