

## **A brief guide to studying law at Pembroke**

Congratulations on getting and meeting your offer to study law at Pembroke! You have clearly already demonstrated to those involved in the admissions process that you are capable of achieving great things in law at Cambridge. Appreciating that you have been chosen for this reason will hopefully allay any fears you might have about studying at Pembroke before you arrive.

My name is Tom Fletcher and I'm the subject representative for law in the coming year. I'm writing to give you a short insight into life as a lawyer at Pembroke and to offer some advice on how to approach the subject. I imagine that Nick McBride has been or will be in touch, encouraging you to read parts of his book, *Letters to a Law Student*. I'd strongly advise you to do so, and to continue to come back to the book throughout the year to revisit the advice it gives.



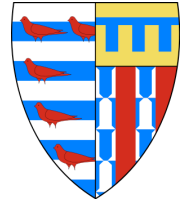
### **Life as a first-year lawyer**

This year you will study four papers: Civil Law I (Roman Law), Criminal Law, Constitutional Law and the Law of Tort. Together they pose a difficult intellectual challenge but one that is greatly interesting. You will be taught through a mixture of supervisions and lectures and can expect to be given two essays to complete for each paper, per term. This works out as one piece of written work each week which is perfectly manageable if you use your time effectively and stay on top of things.

Having said that; don't get stuck in the library for too long, particularly in the first term. As you will soon realise, there is so much to do outside of law, and so many new people to meet. The sports and societies in Cambridge are fantastic, both at college and university level and I encourage you to take up anything which interests you. The workload only increases in the second and third year, so make sure you take plenty of well-earned breaks to go out and enjoy yourself as much as possible.

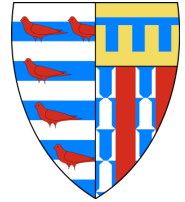
### **Advice on studying law**

- Work hard, but more importantly, work effectively and efficiently. You will naturally become quicker in the way you work as the year progresses, but it's important to realise that



you should only use a resource as much as you have to for your needs **and then stop**.

- Don't be intimidated by a long reading list. There are times when you simply will not have time to get through everything making decent notes. Some supervisors will give you 'optional reading' as part of their lists, and if you are feeling pushed for time, be selective in what you read.
- Go to lectures. I and others found our lecture notes to be a very useful revision tool in the third term. You can read faster than a lecturer speaks, but given that your lecturers are probably very well read/written in their subjects (and may be setting your exam papers), their insights will be useful. Lectures are all at the Faculty building and are roughly an hour long. Last year I had eleven lectures per week in Michaelmas term and eight per week in Lent term. There are lectures in Easter term, but these vary in number between the different subjects.
- Use supervisions as best you can. You will have supervisions every fortnight in each subject, meaning you're likely to have two per week. The supervision is your opportunity to clear up any issues that you have and to get stuck into a topic. You and two other students will be sitting across the table/room from someone who is probably a leading academic in the field for an hour or so and you should make the most of your time with them.
- Be sceptical and critical: question everything. Ask yourself 'why should I buy into this argument?' and, if you can, come to your own view on a given question or topic. Don't be too hesitant to bring in any ideas you have about politics, philosophy or economics into your own arguments.
- Work with the other lawyers from time to time. Ask questions and give advice if you are asked a question by someone else. Talking about cases and journal articles (which you are allowed to do in the law library) will make you more familiar with them and helps you to store them in your long-term memory. If you're helpful and friendly towards others, they are far more likely to be the same towards you which may be of great benefit at some stage in the year.
- Don't be afraid or too proud to ask for help. Nobody is expecting you to be a legal genius from the word go- you're likely to be starting a new subject and using a completely new set of resources. Talk to your fellow students, including those in the second and third year, about any problems that you have. The current bunch of lawyers are all really friendly and will be happy to help you just as people helped them. We're



very lucky to have Nick McBride as our Director of Studies as he will go to great lengths to help any of his students. You will get all the support you need from Nick, but you have to be prepared to ask for it. Similarly in supervisions; if there is something in the reading which you haven't understood, bring it up in the supervision! Most supervisors will expect you to come to their sessions armed with at least a few questions.

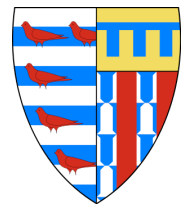
- Appreciate that people work at different speeds and in different ways and don't be intimidated by that. Everyone has a different way of working and so long as you feel comfortable, are meeting deadlines and Nick and your supervisors are happy with your progress, don't worry too much about how far ahead/behind the other first-year lawyers are.
- Carry on using a pen. It's tempting to do everything on your laptop once you get to university, but as exams are still done using paper and ink, you'd be well advised not to get out of the habit of writing at length by hand.
- Try not to get worried about law exams in Michaelmas term- they are a long way away! I would, however, recommend that you print off the past exam papers for each of your topics for the last four or five years, along with the examiner's reports (you'll be able to find all of this online when you get to Cambridge). Reading over them for the first time may seem daunting but will alert you to questions and topics that seem to come up repeatedly, allowing you to be more effective in your studies.
- Don't be put off if things don't make sense or are proving to be difficult to begin with. I promise that, if you stick at it, everything will start to make sense and you will find yourself flying through your reading lists. Staying on top of things and reminding yourself that you have been chosen for a reason will help if you find the first couple of weeks a bit tricky.



Pembroke College Law Society Dinner (2011), held at the London office of Slaughter and May

### **Buying books**

You will be able to buy second-hand books from the Pembroke lawyers at the start of term book sale. I'd strongly advise you to do so as you will save yourself a good amount of money. There should be an equal number of first-years and second-years, meaning that you will be able to get a lot of the books that you will need at



heavily discounted prices. Law is a fast-moving subject so you may have to buy some newer editions from the bookshop. But if you don't mind a bit of 'wear and tear' (as well as some potentially useful highlighting/annotations) then buying second-hand is the way to go. In addition, the law library at Pembroke is outstanding and a huge amount of material is also available online.

### **Summer preparation**

As I said above, read the relevant chapters from Nick's book, perhaps a couple times. Nobody will expect you to follow his advice to the letter, but using some of the ideas- especially those about taking a 'question-driven' approach to law- will set you in very good stead. I personally found the sections on writing essays and problem questions to be very useful, so I'd encourage you to really focus on those. If Nick gives you a piece of work to do over the summer, don't get too stressed about it. I appreciate that you'll want to make a good first impression, but really I think he just wants you to show that you have taken on board the advice he gives you in the book about writing essays. I had to do a preparation essay last year which was a bit of a rambling disaster, but this did not impact on my success for the rest of the year.

Other than that, don't worry too much about doing any law over the rest of the summer. You can't really make a proper start until you're in Cambridge with the right resources and the guidance of your supervisors. Take the time you have to sort out everything else (stuff for your room, stationery, a bike and so on) so that you're in a great position to get started quickly after you arrive. You can expect to meet your supervisors and be given reading lists within the first few days and need to be ready to begin working.

Law can be a difficult subject at times, but if you are prepared to knuckle down and get to the bottom of the issues and concepts at hand, it is a subject which you will find rewarding and interesting. If you have any questions or concerns about anything I've said thus far, law, life at Pembroke or anything else, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at [tgf23@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tgf23@cam.ac.uk). I hope you have a great end to your summer and look forward to meeting you in October.

All the best,

Thomas Fletcher

2<sup>nd</sup> Year Lawyer (from October 2011)