



Public legal education

Improving lives, empowering communities



Public legal education (PLE) is the name used to sum up a range of activities and initiatives that aim to improve people's lives and empower communities.

What's it all about?

PLE aims to help with the problems of everyday life such as housing, benefits, divorce, employment, redundancy and discrimination etc.

These issues can have a massive impact on people's lives. Research shows that many people with a problem worry about it most of the time, not knowing what to do or where to go for help. Often, they do nothing and things get even worse.

And the people who are hit the hardest are those who already experience some disadvantage, for example, people with disabilities, literacy problems, the homeless and older people.

How does PLE work?

PLE works on a number of fronts to achieve its aims:

- It raises awareness of rights and legal issues and teaches people to anticipate and prevent problems.
- It gives people knowledge and understanding about common legal issues.
- It equips people with the confidence and skills they need to solve problems and get the best result they can.
- It helps people to recognise when they need support and know where to get it.
- It helps people to get organised for legal and social change. Better legal know-how means people can participate in the democratic process by forming and voicing opinions about the laws that affect them.

Learning, rights, empowerment and community are the key themes of public legal education.

What are the benefits of PLE?

Helping people to avoid problems or solve them earlier avoids expense, stress and disruption and creates knock-on savings for the justice system and society as a whole.

Problems are expensive

Economists estimated that over a three-four year period unresolved problems cost the nation £13 billion.

And **PLE** isn't just for the bad times: By building skills and confidence it can help people to access services, get better homes and jobs and believe in themselves and their future.

You learn, they learn

Carrying out effective PLE work means interacting more with your users, which will raise your profile, clarify your role and make your organisation more accessible and approachable.

PLE can help people to understand and analyse the rules and systems they live with, and so to be involved in the decisions that affect them. This can range from planning and problem solving in local communities to social change or law reform at a national level.

“If I'd had this when I was in practice I'd have saved masses of time writing letters by just giving it to my clients!”

It could be you!

All sorts of people do **PLE** as part of their job, perhaps without realising that is what it is called! Here are just a few examples:

- Teachers
- Advice workers
- Community leaders
- Social workers
- Information providers
- Policy officers
- [Insert your job title here!]
- Etc

And there are many ways it can be delivered. For example:

- On a website
- Through theatre performances
- In the classroom
- As part of a big media campaign
- In community meetings
- On a beer mat
- [Insert your idea here!]
- Etc

“Thank you. If I knew all that last year I would have made a claim for compensation. You’ve been a huge help, I feel much more confident dealing with harassment and discrimination. Knowledge is power!”

“Most inner city children see law as an area they can never gain access to and this scheme has started to change that perception.”

“If you don’t know your rights you don’t really know where you stand. You helped me prepare for my benefits interview and feel a little more confident.”

PLE Q&As

Q) Is PLE about teaching people the law?

A) No. Most people don't have much interest in the law: until they need it. But then **PLE** will provide a better understanding of legal rights in a specific situation. **PLE** is more about helping people to recognise a legal issue, know where to find out more, and have the skills and confidence to deal with it, including being able to get the right help.

Q) Is PLE just about rights?

A) No, it is about making sure that people know when the law can help, when it can't, and understand their own responsibilities. **PLE** is about giving people greater knowledge and confidence to use their own rights and understand other people's.

Q) Is PLE just about problems?

A) No, it's about people learning how the law fits into the rough and the smooth of everyday life. It's about understanding the law as a social good that equips us all to deal with conflicts and disputes. **PLE** provides the tools and skills to prepare for and manage the legal aspects of life events, to avoid problems as well as deal with them.

Q) Does PLE replace advice?

A) No, it complements advice, in the same way that public health campaigns and health information go hand in hand with the advice and treatment you get from your doctor. **PLE** helps prevent problems, gets people to act early to stop problems escalating and assists people to manage the issues that do come up, including knowing when to get advice.

Is PLE for you?

Do you help people who feel disempowered and confused? Do you wish people had a better understanding of how things work? Do you think they should have more of a say in the way the law and society works?

Give the people you work with the tools to manage the rules in their lives:

Join Plenet

Plenet is the Public Legal Education Network for organisations and individuals with an interest in public legal education.

Members include **statutory bodies, not-for-profit organisations, legal professionals, researchers, educators and campaigners.**

For more information and to get involved visit: **www.plenet.org.uk**

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