



Public Legal Education

# Principles and Guidance

# Public Legal Education Principles

Public Legal Education (PLE) is the name used to sum up a range of activities and initiatives that aim to help people to make sense of the law and its processes. Better legal know-how 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. It also helps people to get organised for legal and social change and means people can participate in the democratic process by forming and voicing opinions about the laws that affect them.

## PLE aims to:

- Raise awareness of rights and legal issues and of the wider justice system
- Help people to identify the legal dimensions of every day situations
- Equip people with the skills and confidence to resolve issues and prevent problems
- Enable people to recognise when they need help and find the best help
- Help people to organise effectively for legal and social changes and get involved in shaping the decisions that affect them both at a local and national level.



These principles are universal and apply to all types of Public Legal Education. It is for you to decide how you meet them. The principles are under five headings, APPLE – Audience, Purpose, Provider, Learning and Evaluation.

PLE has no regulatory or audit body. Guidance notes accompany these Principles.

<h2>Audience</h2>	<p><b>Successful PLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ is tailored to a specific audience. It is clear about the issues people face and what they need to know;</li> <li>■ is based on an understanding of the audience’s legal capability: that is their knowledge, skills, and attitudes;</li> <li>■ doesn’t make assumptions based on poor information or stereotypes;</li> <li>■ is accessible to its audience.</li> </ul>
<h2>Purpose</h2>	<p><b>Successful PLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ has clearly defined objectives;</li> <li>■ empowers its audience and increases capability.</li> </ul>
<h2>Provider</h2>	<p><b>Successful PLE Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ recognise the need for appropriate expertise;</li> <li>■ often work with intermediaries trusted by the audience;</li> <li>■ ensure activities are supported by clear organisational policies and procedures;</li> <li>■ are open and clear with their audience;</li> <li>■ credit the sources of materials they have used.</li> </ul>
<h2>Learning Content</h2>	<p><b>Successful PLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ builds the content around the needs of the audience;</li> <li>■ ensures legal information is accurate;</li> <li>■ ensures it is clear to which countries legal information applies;</li> <li>■ dates all published information;</li> <li>■ provides appropriate signposting.</li> </ul>
<h2>Style</h2>	<p><b>Successful PLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ is delivered in an effective format;</li> <li>■ is engaging and promotes active learning;</li> <li>■ is presented in a way that is appropriate to its audience.</li> </ul>
<h2>Delivery</h2>	<p><b>Successful PLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ plans the method of delivery at the outset;</li> <li>■ is delivered in a way that ensures it reaches its intended audience;</li> <li>■ is effectively promoted to reach the maximum audience.</li> </ul>
<h2>Evaluation</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Evaluation is essential to effective PLE, enabling providers to learn from their experience and use that learning for ongoing improvement.</li> <li>■ Evaluation is planned at the outset and built into the life of the activity.</li> <li>■ PLE evaluation assesses the outcomes and impact of the activity and the role of PLE in achieving these.</li> <li>■ PLE providers are encouraged to share the results of their evaluations so that others can learn from their experience.</li> </ul>

# Public Legal Education Guidance

This guidance accompanies a set of principles for the delivery of Public Legal Education. Those principles cover five areas:

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**Audience** – who you are doing it for

**Purpose** – why you are doing it

**Provider** – what you should expect of yourself or your organisation

**Learning** – what the content will be like and how you will deliver it

**Evaluation** – how you know whether an activity works and how to improve it

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This guidance is for people who provide or are thinking about providing Public Legal Education (PLE). It aims to give a little more detail and some practical examples and suggestions to help you put the principles into practice. It is not designed to be a definitive list of do's and don'ts but to illustrate the ways the principles might work for different providers and their audiences. Not everything in the guidance will apply to every situation. Our idea is that the principles should apply to everything but different parts of the guidance will apply to different situations and different people.

Public Legal Education is provided in many ways by many people. Its range includes:

- sessions or workshops in schools, youth groups, prisons, and other venues
- information or resources about law-related issues
- theatre performances or shows
- awareness raising campaigns
- mock trials and role play exercises
- activities at community events.<sup>1</sup>

**Since 1997, a team of eight volunteer solicitors from the Somerset Young Lawyers Group have offered free legal information at the Glastonbury Festival, giving festival-goers a chance to find out about the law and how it affects them. They aim to increase knowledge and awareness of the law, improve skills, and increase confidence and the belief that it is worth taking action.**

PLE can be delivered by anyone or any combination of people who have the necessary knowledge and expertise. Examples include teachers, advice workers, lawyers, community leaders, information providers, social and community workers, and many others.

For more information about PLE, please look at [www.plenet.org.uk](http://www.plenet.org.uk) or contact us at the address at the end of the guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> In this guidance we have used the terms 'projects' and 'activities' to cover the wide range of PLE work.

# Audience

Effective PLE activities are designed with the audience in mind. You need to know your intended audience; the issues they face, their existing knowledge and level of legal capability, the barriers they face, and anything that might prevent them from getting the most out of your activity.

## ■ Successful PLE is tailored to a specific audience. It is clear about the issues people face and what they need to know

Effective PLE projects will be aimed at a defined audience and will be designed with them in mind. PLE can fail if it tries to cater for too broad an audience or no defined audience at all.

## ■ Successful PLE is based on an understanding of the audience's legal capability: that is their knowledge, skills, and attitudes

If your PLE project is to be effective, it needs to be designed with the intended audience in mind. You need to consider:

### Their knowledge

For example:

- How much do people know about their legal rights?
- How much do they understand about any relevant processes or procedures? (i.e. do they know what the town hall does, or that different benefits are dealt with by different departments etc?)
- How much do they know about how to access information, advice and advocacy?
- Have they any misunderstandings and misconceptions?
- How much do they know about how laws are made or changed?

## Their skills

- Do they have the skills needed to solve their problem?
- Do they need help to develop or hone their communication skills?
- Are they able to negotiate and manage relationships?
- Will they benefit from tips as to what to say, or how to write a letter or prepare for a meeting?
- Will they need guidance on recording and keeping records of their situation?

## Their attitudes

- How confident are they in their ability to solve their problem/change the situation?
- How determined are they?
- Will any emotions or stress they are experiencing affect their ability to deal with the issue?

## ■ Successful PLE doesn't make assumptions based on poor information or stereotypes

In trying to design a PLE activity that works for your audience, you will look at things like their age, gender, level of education, income, ethnic background, and socio-economic and cultural factors.

You should avoid making assumptions or basing your understanding on stereotypes.

You can ensure this by speaking to the audience and intermediaries or organisations that work closely with them at the design stage, or by designing activities jointly with them.

**Students from the College of Law presented a workshop at a youth centre aimed at helping participants to develop their communication and problem-solving skills. They asked staff and users at the centre to decide what problem the workshop participants should try and solve. It was decided to base the workshop around a problem about a mobile phone, because every participant would own a mobile phone and would have had a consumer problem – which would help the workshop appear relevant and useful.**

## ■ Successful PLE is accessible to its audience

You will need to consider:

### The barriers people face

These might be language barriers, literacy issues, disability issues, discrimination (or perceived discrimination), cultural issues, other commitments – anything that might prevent them from accessing and getting the most out of your activity.

For example, venues and times appropriate to men in a community may not be appropriate for women in the same community. Language skills may be different in different age groups or genders.

### Issues of physical access

- For events this might include wheelchair users, induction loops etc.
- For written resources this will include issues of format, text size, layout and design, and method of delivery etc. You may need to make printed material available in more than one format.

# Purpose

Effective PLE projects are clear on what they intend to achieve; they don't just inform, they aim to empower individuals and communities and encourage active citizenship.

## ■ Successful PLE projects have clearly defined objectives

You need to have clearly defined objectives for your activity. For example – what do you want your audience to be able to do as a result of your activities?

## ■ Successful PLE empowers its audience and increases capability

Good PLE does more than just inform the audience about the law. Information on its own isn't effective PLE. Good PLE activities will help the audience make sense of difficult situations, improve their capability, reduce their vulnerability, and increase their independence.

### PLE empowers people to:

- make good decisions and avoid problems;
- recognise law-related issues and respond quickly and appropriately to law-related problems;
- manage problems better, including knowing when to get help;
- become engaged and active citizens.

**The Environmental Law Foundation's Sustainable Communities Project addresses the social inequalities suffered by the poorest people in local communities as a result of environmental decision making and the quality of their local environment.**

**The project aims to raise awareness of how the law can be used by community groups to address local environmental issues such as local planning and environmental concerns. Under-represented groups are particularly encouraged to make strategic use of all the legal and democratic means available to them to address local environmental concerns.**  
<http://www.elflaw.org/site/index.php?id=13>

# Provider

Effective PLE providers recognise the need for the appropriate expertise, and will often work with intermediaries who are trusted by the audience. PLE activities need to be supported by appropriate organisational policies and procedures, and providers need to be clear and open with their audience at all times.

## ■ Successful PLE providers recognise the need for appropriate expertise

You need a range of expertise to design and deliver effective PLE activities. Communication skills, the ability to engage the audience and to foster learning are just as important as legal knowledge.

The range of expertise needed to deliver successful PLE includes:

- Planning skills;
- Presentation/teaching skills;
- Design skills;
- Writing skills;
- Legal knowledge;
- Project management skills.

## Gaps in expertise

There are various ways to acquire the expertise you need for a project. You can talk to other providers; get help from resources like the Plenet website. You may want to undertake staff training and provide opportunities to practice skills, or contract specific expertise. Often the best approach will be to enter into a partnership with other organisations which do have the necessary experience and expertise.

## ■ Successful PLE providers often work with intermediaries trusted by the audience

Experience suggests that some of the most effective providers of PLE work with organisations or individuals who already have a good relationship with the audience, and are well placed to engage with them.

The London Law Centres' Youth Homelessness Project delivers public legal education training to Connexions staff and other youth advisors on 'young people's rights around homelessness. The sessions provide youth advisors with a better understanding of the legal rights of young people and responsibilities of local authorities to enable them to better assist their young clients to obtain housing and support to meet their needs. They can refer more complex cases to Law Centre sessions in local youth venues.

## ■ Successful PLE projects are supported by clear organisational policies and procedures

You should ensure that your core policies and procedures cover your PLE activities, particularly where PLE is not your organisation's main activity.

### Equal Opportunities Policy

You should ensure that your Equal Opportunities Policy covers your PLE activities.

### Complaints

You should have a clear complaints procedure that enables you to investigate and address complaints related to PLE work. You should make that procedure available to your audience.

### Risk Assessment

You should assess and address any potential risks to your audience or yourselves posed by your PLE activities. This will include things like Child Protection (CRE checks) and any additional insurance cover you may need.

As part of the Lawyers in Schools programme, the Citizenship Foundation has produced a three-way Memorandum of Understanding, detailing the roles of the law firm, the school and the Citizenship Foundation, which includes a statement that the students' teacher will remain in the room throughout the session.

Child protection guidelines change regularly so this policy is checked and updated as required and schools are kept informed of changes. [www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk)

## ■ Successful PLE providers are open and clear with the audience

You should obviously be open, clear, and honest in all your dealings with users.

### Information about your organisation

You should provide your audience with written information that identifies who you are, including contact details. This could be a handout, a brochure, an 'About us' page on a website or something similar.

### Costs

You should make any costs associated with your PLE activity (or that arise from it) clear at the outset.

## ■ Successful PLE providers credit the source of any materials they have used

If you have made use of information or other resources created by another organisation, you should always credit the source.

# Learning: Content, Style and Delivery

Effective learning depends on appropriate content which is presented in an engaging style and efficiently delivered to its audience.

## Content

Content refers to the message you are delivering – the points you want to get across. This will include knowledge of the law or legal processes, skills needed to use rights effectively, or information about how and when to get further help.

### ■ **Successful PLE builds the content around the needs of the audience**

Your content should be based on what it is you are trying to do and the level of skills and knowledge your audience already has. Ensure you have the right content by speaking to people who work closely with your audience and know where skills gaps and misunderstandings occur. Even better, engage members of your target audience in discussion about what content is needed.

### ■ **Successful PLE ensures legal information is accurate**

Inaccurate or out-of-date information can be harmful to participants and risks undermining their confidence and your reputation.

### ■ **Successful PLE ensures it is clear to which countries legal information applies**

There are very significant legal differences between the countries that make up the UK. It is important to state which countries any information applies to as part of ensuring it is accurate.

### ■ **Successful PLE dates all published information**

Information in paper format or on the internet that contains details of the law or legal processes should be clearly dated. This increases the audience's ability to assess whether it is likely to still be up-to-date.

## ■ Successful PLE provides appropriate signposting

Good PLE will always direct the audience to appropriate advice. This requires knowledge of local and national advice providers in the appropriate area of law.

### Signposting and charging

Ideally, audience members should be signposted to a service that can provide advice without charge. If costs will be incurred this should be made clear.

### Signposting to more than one service

Ideally, audience members should be signposted to more than one advice provider.

#### Education or advice?

It is important to keep in mind the difference between PLE and advice. PLE is about increasing people's legal capability through learning. Legal advice is about solving individuals' problems, usually on a one-to-one basis.

PLE providers, particularly those whose work also includes advice, need to keep this boundary in mind and make sure that advice giving doesn't intrude into the learning setting.

## Style

Style refers to the way in which the content is presented. It includes the format you use, the learning methods and presentation techniques you employ, the tone and language style you adopt and the examples you use.

### ■ Successful PLE is delivered in an effective format

Effective PLE can be delivered in a range of formats – from theatre performances to self-help guides, from media campaigns to YouTube clips. Which format you choose should be based upon an assessment of what will be the most engaging for your audience and effective for your objectives.



### ■ Effective PLE is engaging and promotes active learning

Effective PLE activities will engage their audience and maintaining the audience's interest.

If you are providing written information, you should use a range of different presentation techniques in order to maintain interest and to appeal to people with different learning styles. For example, consider using a range of techniques like case studies, diagrams, illustrations, problem pages, etc.

PLE projects will often use active learning methods to involve the audience in an activity rather than just passively listening or reading. Research shows that active learning is much better recalled, understood and enjoyed. Active learning methods include things like role play, collaborative problem solving, and decision making exercises, quizzes, discussion forums, problem pages, and polls.

The Citizenship Foundation runs mock trials for schools giving young people an engaging insight to the workings of the legal system. Teams of students use witness statements to prepare their cases and take on roles of lawyers, witnesses, court staff and jurors to compete against other schools. The competition takes place in both Magistrates' and Crown Courts with students' performances marked by barristers, judges or magistrates. <http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/>

## ■ Effective PLE is presented in a way that is appropriate to its audience

You should use a tone and style of language that is most appropriate to your audience. This might be plain English or the type of language your audience use themselves. Legal jargon and technical language should be avoided except when the audience need to know it, when it should be carefully explained in appropriate language.

Content should be presented in a way that is appropriate to your audience. You need to consider if:

- case studies, examples or images will be familiar and relevant to your audience;
- any of your audience will feel excluded if they are not represented in the examples;
- any humour is accessible to your audience;
- your audience will understand any cultural references.

## Delivery

Delivery refers to the way in which your activity reaches your audience. Possible methods include the internet, mass media, or via trusted intermediaries. It includes making sure people can find your website or written resources and how you make sure your audience turns up for your theatre production or role play exercise.

### ■ Successful PLE projects plan the method of delivery at the outset

There's no point producing a fantastic PLE resource if no-one ever sees it. It is crucial to ensure that you have an effective delivery method planned at the outset.

### ■ Successful PLE is delivered in a way that ensures it reaches its intended audience

You need to know your audience well enough to know which of the wide range of available delivery methods will work for them. Intermediaries and those that work closely with your audience will be able to help in choosing the best method and in help with delivery.

**Lawyers from City law firm Clifford Chance write the 'Ask the Advisor' column in the east London local paper the 'Newham Recorder'. This work is done on a pro bono basis by 22 different volunteers, including senior lawyers, writing over 50 contributions over the course of a year. Issues covered include education, consumer, and issues affecting older people. The paper reaches 50,000 readers a week and the column is much appreciated by local people.**

### ■ Successful PLE is effectively promoted to reach the maximum audience

Successful PLE requires effective promotion and marketing in order to reach the maximum audience. It is particularly important that published material that aims to raise awareness is effectively promoted to reach its target audience. Similarly, if you are presenting a workshop or theatre production, you need to ensure that your target audience will turn up.

# Evaluation

Evaluation is an essential part of PLE and should be designed into projects from the outset. It is important to assess what works and to share the results of evaluations with other organisations.

## ■ Evaluation is essential to effective PLE, enabling providers to learn from their experience and use that learning for ongoing improvement

- Make sure you have understood the goals of the activity.
- Match the goals of the evaluation to the activity goals.
- Ensure that understanding of the audience is as complete as possible.
- Make sure the methods used to deliver changes can be evaluated.
- Select evaluation methods that fit with the goals and methods of the activity.
- Use the results of evaluation as a tool in the periodic reviews of the activity.

The evaluation process need not be complicated or formal and should be appropriate to the audience. For example, immediately after a College of Law Streetlaw workshop at an East London after-school club, the workers asked each boy, some as young as 8, simple questions like: 'What did you learn today, did you enjoy it?' No writing was necessary and the roundtable format enabled the boys to listen to what the others say and prompted them to join in.

## ■ Evaluation is planned at the outset and built into the life of the activity

- All too often evaluation is an afterthought and is only carried out at the end of the activity.
- Evaluators must be part of the team that designs the activity from the start.
- By contributing to activity design evaluators add value to the activity overall.
- If evaluation is part of the activity from the start, it allows you to evaluate all of the different elements of an activity in order to assess which components contributed what to the goals of the activity.
- Evaluation can start at any point in the life of an activity, including from the beginning.

## ■ PLE evaluation assesses the outcomes and impact of the activity and the role of PLE in achieving these

- Whatever methods you use, the broad evaluation questions are always the same: ‘What did we achieve?’, ‘Was it what we wanted to achieve?’, ‘Did PLE contribute to that?’, and ‘How?’
- There are many methods you can use to evaluate and your choices will be shaped by four factors: resources; the type of PLE activity; the target audiences; and the outcomes/impacts you want to measure.
- It’s useful to remember that evaluation methods fall into two broad groups: those that involve the routine collection of information or study of reports across the life of an activity; and those that focus on specific aspects of the activity and involve active and planned investigation. The first group tend to be known as ‘monitoring’ and the second as ‘evaluation’, but this distinction is unimportant.
- Monitoring methods are things like recording numbers of users, numbers of times something takes place, typically measured against targets.
- Evaluation methods are very varied and can mean things like observing activities as they take place; assessing users’ capabilities before and after the activity; interviewing participants of all sorts; surveys of participants’ views and reactions; discussions with participants; active assessment of target users.
- Just as intermediaries can be very important as deliverers of PLE, so they can be a very important focus for your evaluation.
- Where resources permit an independent evaluation is always a good idea. This need not be as sophisticated or expensive as it sounds – for example, asking a peer to review some of your work in exchange for doing the same for them can provide great mutual benefits.

Not everyone will have access to all the tools for evaluation or the resources to complete an elaborate evaluation. The message we want to give to providers is ‘Do the part you can do and do it well’.

## ■ PLE providers are encouraged to share the results of their evaluations so that others can learn from their experience

- In its current phase of development PLE providers must share their experiences if PLE is to grow to achieve its full potential in empowering individuals and communities.
- One of the simplest ways to achieve this is by adding your evaluation report and contact details to the Plenet website.

This guidance is published by Plenet, the Public Legal Education Network. Join the network at [www.plenet.org.uk](http://www.plenet.org.uk). Plenet is funded by a grant from the Ministry of Justice.

If you want any further guidance on delivering PLE, please contact Plenet. We will be very happy to discuss how the principles might apply to your situation. We can very probably put you in touch with someone working in a similar way to you who will be able to help.  
[info@plenet.org.uk](mailto:info@plenet.org.uk)



**Written by:** Ian Ford – *MBARC* [www.mbarc.co.uk](http://www.mbarc.co.uk)

**Edited by:** Martin Jones and Mary Webber – *ASA's Advicenow Project*

**With thanks to:**

Barbara Bowers	<i>Citizens Advice</i>
Chilli Reid	<i>AdviceUK</i>
Howard Gannoway	<i>NIACE</i>
John Seargeant	<i>Plenet</i>
Judith Gawn	<i>NIACE</i>
Lisa Wintersteiger	<i>Plenet</i>
Liz Long	<i>Legal Services Commission</i>
Liza Scicluna	<i>Advice Plus</i>
Martin Curtis	<i>LawWorks</i>
Myles Kunzli	<i>Law Centres Federation</i>
Pamela Robotham	<i>College of Law</i>
Rebecca Wilkie	<i>Bar Pro Bono Unit</i>
Ruth Cohen	<i>Citizenship Foundation</i>
Sara Chandler	<i>College of Law</i>
Tony Thorpe	<i>Citizenship Foundation</i>

Public Legal Education Network Advice Services Alliance, 6th Floor, 63 St Mary Axe, London EC3A 8AA  
[www.plenet.org.uk](http://www.plenet.org.uk)

The Advice Services Alliance is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England & Wales no. 3533317  
Registered office: 6th Floor, 63 St Mary Axe, London EC3A 8AA. Charity no. 1112627