

Book Review

Ian McLeod, *Key Concepts in Law*, Palgrave Macmillan (2006). Paperback; 260 pp (including appendices). ISBN 0-230-00014-2; £11.99.

The market is not short of well-established dictionaries of English law, all of which may claim, at least to some extent, that they not only define but also explain the target words. In reality, however, explanation tends to take very much second place to definition. Consequently, the common experience of readers of these dictionaries who are coming afresh to the study of law is that their lack of any prior knowledge of the subject means that they have no context within which to place what they are reading, and the texts in question do little to remedy this difficulty. In short, therefore, the typical reader is left none the wiser, and perhaps not – in any real sense – even better informed.

Although at first glance Ian McLeod's *Key Concepts in Law* may look like a dictionary, it is in fact a glossary. In other words, it is a collection of explanations (or glosses) which are intended to convey real understanding, and thus it breaks the mould of the traditional law dictionary.

The major problem facing the author of any book such as this is deciding what to include. This author has approached this problem by restricting himself almost entirely to those areas of law which the professional bodies have prescribed as the foundations of legal knowledge, namely public law (including the basic elements of European Community law), the law of obligations, criminal law, and land law and trusts, together with an introduction to the vocabulary of the English legal system.

In the nature of things, the entries vary considerably in length and complexity but the author has succeeded in keeping them as short as possible, consistent with maintaining clarity of explanation.

The three appendices include a list of the most commonly encountered references to journals and law reports; key extracts from the Interpretation Act 1978; and the text of those articles of the European Convention on Human Rights which give rise to Convention rights under the Human Rights Act 1998.

While this book is clearly aimed at first year undergraduate students, it can also be recommended as a useful companion for lawyers qualified in other jurisdictions who are coming to English law for the first time.

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