

3.1 Key players in law enforcement

If a law is broken, who has the responsibility for ensuring that the individual or company who has broken the law is 'brought to justice'?

Activity 1: Who enforces the law in the UK?

0 hours 10 minutes

Take a moment to think about what you may know about how law is enforced. When you last listened to the radio, watched a television programme or read a newspaper, did you come across any situations where a law had been broken? If so, can you recall who was responsible for dealing with the lawbreaker?

Discussion

There are a number of possible answers to this question. A number of individuals and bodies have responsibility for dealing with lawbreakers, depending on what law has been broken. Therefore, laws may be enforced by any one of the following organisations:

- the trading standards department of a local council
- HM Revenue and Customs
- the UK Border Agency (formerly known as Immigration)
- the Child Support Agency (CSA)
- the social services department of a local council
- an industry ombudsman or watchdog
- the police.

This list is not exhaustive and there are a number of factors that determine who deals with the situation. The main factor is the type of law broken: is it a criminal law or a civil law? If it is a criminal law then it is likely to be a publicly funded body that is responsible for making sure that the breach of law is dealt with. A police officer will question and may arrest someone suspected of a crime such as theft. The trading standards department of your local council would investigate cases of goods not matching their description, fake goods or goods that don't meet safety requirements.

End of discussion

In civil law matters, it is often up to an individual to take action via the proper channels; often a **tribunal** or court of law. This is a fact which is often overlooked. If your employer has broken a law and you are affected by this, for example they haven't paid you for the work you have done over the past six months, then it would be up to you to pursue this. You have a legal right (to your pay) that you are entitled to enforce. You may seek advice from someone with specialist knowledge about the best way of getting your money, but *you* are responsible for bringing any legal action against your employer for the recovery of your wages.

There are a number of people who provide advice on the law or who are responsible for hearing legal cases. Many, but not all, of these are trained specialists with legal qualifications.

The following list is not exhaustive but illustrates the range of people involved in our legal system:

- solicitors
- barristers
- legal executives
- a jury
- magistrates
- judges
- charitable organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau or local Law Centre.

We will now look at some of the people who are responsible for working on or hearing legal cases in court.

