

# DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE LAW

Road-to-Damascus conversions: so often the stuff of evangelical enthusiasm. Cobbetts librarian **Caroline Mosley**'s new-found faith is no exception. Having finally signed up to the JustCite citator after years of resistance, she and her trainee colleagues discuss their delight at the revitalized service with **Alistair King**, who goes on to outline so-called precedent maps – the new way to view the law.



Caroline Mosley

"The new JustCite is just so much better. I can see the benefits. I am a convert and, like converts, I am evangelical about it!"

With offices in Birmingham, Leeds, London and Manchester, Cobbetts LLP is a medium-sized, full coverage law firm. With eight years under her belt at the company, Caroline Mosley – whose effusive (and largely unprompted!) words grace the opening to this article – is the Library and Information Manager for the Top 60 practice.

Had I contacted her before January to discuss the provider-neutral, multi-jurisdictional JustCite, this would have been a very different story. Before the citator's re-launch in December, Mosley was a JustCite sceptic. But, like so many librarians and practitioners before her, she's come round, saying that she "was staggeringly surprised about how good it was."

Her conversion could be attributed to the slew of recent improvements, which include: better search technology; clearer documents, marked up with meaningful case relationships; and easy-to-use hyperlinks straight into full-text records on third-party sites.

So why the buzz and what's next for the innovative citator?

I start by asking Mosley about her solicitor colleagues.

"Trainees know how to use databases but they had to start at one and move to another to make sure their search was complete; there was no one exhaustive place," explains Mosley of the age-old problem of knowing where to look for supporting authorities and legislation.

"Whereas with JustCite," she continues, now a vocal user of the device, "you can hit two or three [databases] in one fell swoop."

But do practitioners "get" this concept?

"Fee earners can understand how JustCite works, yes," she says, adding: "With them it's all about time, time, time," and JustCite certainly saves a lot of that increasingly rare commodity.

"The ones who've used JustCite are evangelical," adds Mosley. This is no exaggeration. A selection of views from trainee solicitors at the firm can be seen in the box over the page.

But to regular readers of these articles, a lot of this – positive and reassuring though it is – will seem quite familiar. True, JustCite's had a massive overhaul since the bulk of these past features were published. But to a large extent, an existing service has just been refined, right?

Well, yes and no. It looks much smarter and is easier to use – all its subscribers will tell you that – but the biggest single improvement is to its unique search ranking technology, and therefore its accuracy.

Like no other legal search engine, its algorithms consider the relationship cases have with each other. So when you search for a phrase, case name, citation or any other query, your results are ranked as if selected by legal experts for true relevance, not by a machine arranging them by keyword frequency.

As a happy byproduct of this development work, it became clear that all the data behind these weighted relationships and shared cases could be used to generate something completely new and visually useful in complementing one's search process.

And so, two months after the main re-launch of JustCite, its precedent map was born.

It's a very "different concept," says Mosley, who, like many JustCite users, is still getting to grips with it.

So what is it?

The JustCite precedent map provides a way of visualising relationships between cases and finding other cases that might relate to your line of enquiry.

When a precedent map is available for a case – and if any cases it cited or cases that cited it are listed, it will be – you can access it by clicking the link on the left-hand side of the JustCite information screen (Fig. 1).

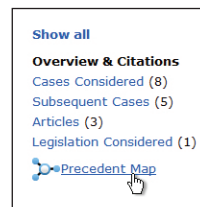


Figure 1:  
Precedent map icon

## Initial view

When you first view the map, the instant case is displayed in the centre of the screen, and around it are cases it has relationships with (Fig. 2).

Cases cited by your case appear on the left-hand side of the screen and cases that cite it appear on the right.

Cases are ordered chronologically, in a clockwise direction. The oldest case cited appears in the lower left, and the most recent citing case appears in the lower right.

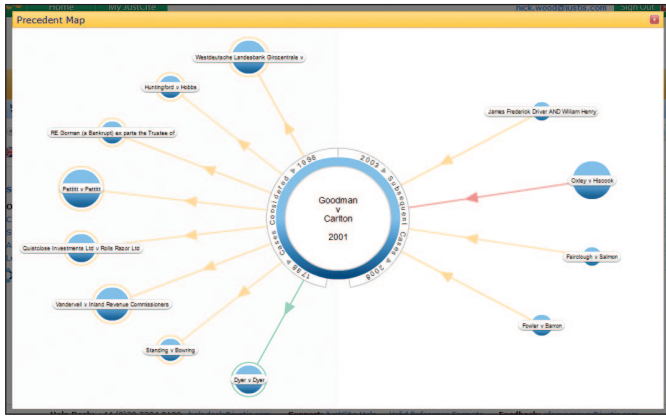


Figure 2: Initial view

**Relationship types**

- ← A green connector indicates a "positive" relationship, e.g. "applied", "approved" or "followed".
- Yellow indicates a "neutral" relationship, such as "referred to" or "considered".
- And red indicates a "negative" relationship, such as "distinguished" or "overruled".

If you hover over a connector with the mouse, you will see a tooltip offering an explicit description of the relationship type (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Explicit relationship type displayed when arrow hovered over

**Relative sizes and common relationships**

The size at which "orbiting" cases are displayed is proportional to the number of relationships shared with the case in the centre. In the example in Figure 4, Oxley v Hiscock has more cases in common with Goodman v Carlton than, say, Fowler v Barron, and therefore appears larger.

By hovering over a case, JustCite will fade out unconnected cases and show the relationships shared with the central case.

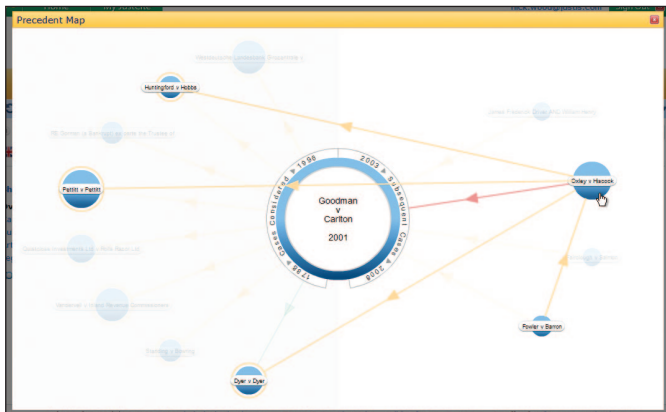


Figure 4: Fading out

In the aforementioned example, you can see that Oxley v Hiscock distinguished Goodman v Carlton, but cited three cases in common: Dyer v Dyer, Pettitt v Pettitt, and Huntingford v Hobbs. Further, you can also see that Oxley was subsequently cited by Fowler v Barron, which also cited Goodman.

As an aside, Mosley acknowledges that this visualisation could help one "better track down, say, Pettitt v Pettitt," which might not have been as quickly apparent from other search methods.

**Additional information**

Hovering over the central case will produce an overlay providing further details about the case, including keywords, legislation cited and related articles (Fig. 5).

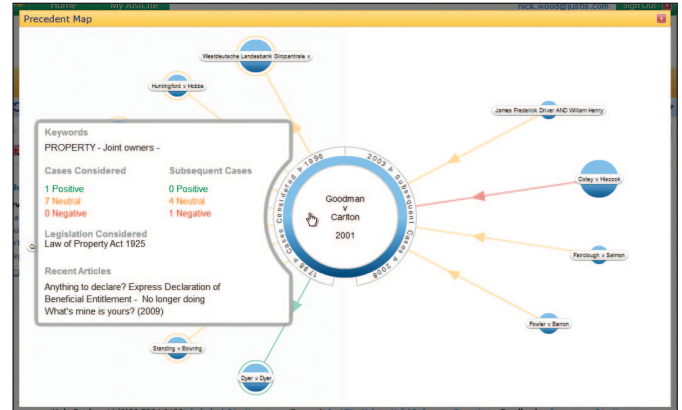


Figure 5: Additional information

**Changing focus**

By clicking on any of the orbiting cases you can change the focus to that case (Fig. 6 and 7), and clicking on the central case exits the precedent map and takes you to that case's JustCite Information Screen.

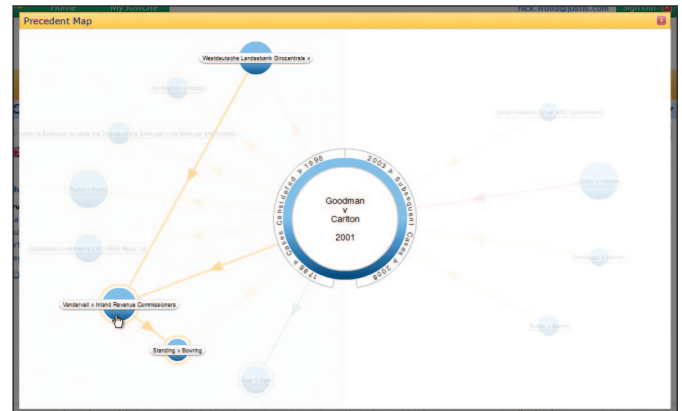


Figure 6: Changing focus from the above to Fig. 7

**General views on JustCite from trainee solicitors at Cobbetts**

"I'm still raving about JustCite! It's so easy to use. I wish I'd had it at uni! I was searching for recent cases on a topic and it made my research ten times faster."  
- Laura Jarvis

"It saves loads of time to just go straight to JustCite instead of through the search engines individually."  
- Zoe Brown

"It's very easy to use and follow. The small synopsis under each case makes it very easy to scan through and find something relevant and ignore those cases that aren't."  
- Sarah Childs

"It's a port in the storm that wasn't there previously! It's certainly helpful to be able to see the databases that actually have a particular case before trawling through them all."  
- Sophie Bonner

"I am finding it very useful and I recommended it to other fee earners in my team!"  
- Rachel Macfarlane

"I just thought I would pass on how wonderful I think JustCite is! It's so much easier to find things!"  
- Emma Deighan

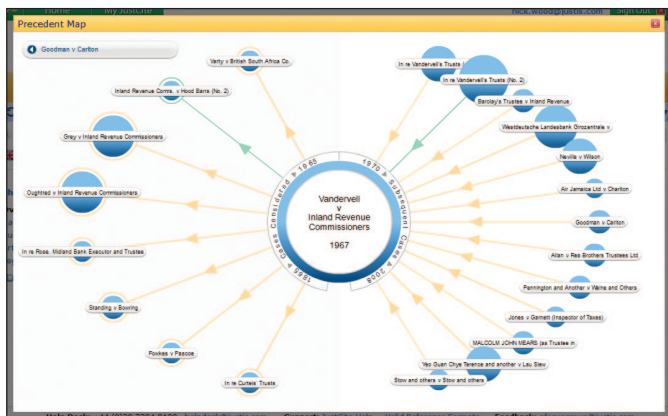


Figure 7: Focus changed to the above from Fig. 6

**Drawing conclusions**

For cases with a large number of relationships, it may not be possible for all of them to be displayed on the screen. So JustCite prioritises cases of particular interest or importance within the network at a given time and displays as many as possible.

The precedent map should therefore be considered a visual aid to help find leading cases relevant to your line of enquiry, not an exhaustive list of cases.

A more comprehensive list of preceding and subsequent cases can of course be found by using the "Show All", "Cases considered" or "Subsequent Cases" links from the JustCite information page – and this is what the brains behind JustCite would always want users to do, regardless of the precedent map development, something that exists purely to speed up a process that, to an extent, happens in one's mind when navigating through JustCite and spotting recurring cases that cite each other.

Within the first three weeks of the function going live, 1000 maps had been viewed by 200 unique users; very low numbers compared to the citator's overall usage but, day by day, an upwards trend.

If practitioners, academics, students and librarians can alter their mindset to this new way of thinking, the precedent map should catch on, speeding up their search and unearthing precedents they might otherwise have neglected.

Mosley agrees that it "would be useful" and is "intuitive" but only when you cotton on to what it's trying to achieve – a message that will trickle through to the profession but how quickly, we can't say.

**JustCite could help you too**

To test the service for free, get your instant sign-in details at [www.justcite.com/SLR2011](http://www.justcite.com/SLR2011).  
And if your university has yet to sign up, ask your librarian to visit [www.justcite.com](http://www.justcite.com) or call **020 7284 8080**.



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