4. The interpretation of statutes

This chapter explains the problems of statutory interpretation and how the courts approach the problems. The traditional rules of statutory interpretation, the literal rule, the golden rule, and the mischief rule are explained and the problems associated with their use explored. In modern times the courts now employ a more purposive approach to interpretation using a range of intrinsic and extrinsic aids to interpretation. These include the long title, preamble, cross-headings, marginal or side notes, punctuation, Explanatory Notes, Interpretation Act 1978, pre-parliamentary materials, parliamentary materials—Hansard, statutes on the same subject area— statutes in pari materia, and dictionaries. Rules of language may be employed, e.g. the ejusdem generis rule, the noscitur a sociis rule or the expressio unius est exclusio alterius rule.
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