

Are the public ready for changes to legal technology?

Discussion event in Leeds - 7 June 2022

The Legal Services Board hosted an in-person breakfast event at DLA Piper's Leeds office on 7 June 2022 to discuss our [new research on the social acceptability of legal tech](#). We were joined by people from different areas of the legal profession, including in-house practitioners, small and medium firms, those at the beginning of legal careers, and legal academics, to share their perspectives with our Board. The purpose of the session was to explore how lawtech can lead to greater access to justice and legal services, a key aim of the [Reshaping Legal Services](#) strategy.

We highlighted the progress the sector has made in addressing the challenges of the strategy, one year on, and introduced the findings of our new research on the social acceptability of technology, and how this can help shape innovation solution and planning in the future.

Whitecap Consulting, who lead the [Legal Tech in Leeds Initiative](#), provided some context regarding the eco-system of legal tech in Leeds, and how organisations in the region are demonstrating collaboration in action to increase access to justice through tech and innovation. DLA Piper also spoke about how we need to get the basics of lawtech right across the sector to best benefit all consumers.

Thank you to those who attended and shared their thoughts and experiences. Below we set out some of the perspectives that were provided during the discussion, that will feed in to our ongoing work as we continue to work together to respond to the challenges in the legal sector and improve the consumer journey.

The potential of lawtech

Points raised by participants included:

- Tech is a great enabler - the 'value-add' from lawtech needs to be emphasised. Technology can provide great support and make client interactions with law firms and legal practitioners more seamless.
- Law students of today and the future may present fresh ideas and perspectives on tackling digital exclusion, and it's important they are included in the conversation to develop ideas.
- New opportunities could be presented by reshaping current course programmes to include modules on lawtech/IT for both current and the next generation of students.
- The world is changing because of data. The legal services sector has a huge amount of data (some protected), and some of the data could perhaps be used to benefit wider society.
- A review of the regulatory landscape may assist innovation.
- The training pathway should reflect flexibility and multi-disciplinarity skills needed to provide modern legal services – should lawyers be trained after gaining knowledge in a different area? Embracing wide knowledge and skills and facilitating opportunities for students with technical knowledge to demonstrate expertise when working at law firms and across the sector.

- It is necessary to consider what knowledge and skills students need in advance of joining the workforce.
- There is opportunity for law firms to offer sandboxing environments to develop tech skills from new entrants so that students can then build on the skills gained at law school/law clinics.

The challenges

Points raised by participants included:

- The definition of what constitutes 'lawtech' is unclear - distinctions and classifications are needed – lawtech has different connotations for different audiences.
- Innovation requires investment - the law firm model is not really geared to innovation, and this can be particularly challenging for small and medium firms with less resources.
- Security, risk and compliance concerns remain a potential barrier to implementation of lawtech solutions and developing new technologies within the sector.
- At one end of the scale, lawtech can mean access to the right equipment at the right time – the pace of change needs to have some consistency across the sector to stop some falling behind.
- Cost issue - ensuring that the sector as a whole is included in the pace of change and with the changing technological landscape. Time, lawtech expertise and financial support are key issues for smaller law firms.
- Some firms may be unsure when they will see the benefits of technology or innovative solutions, so can be less likely to invest if solutions are untested.
- Lawtech offers a lot to be excited about, but providers need to consider the layering of acceptability. There is a distinction between advanced lawtech and getting the basics right, such as data security, is an issue.
- How smaller firms can utilise the benefits of lawtech needs to be considered – this remains to be a key challenge.
- There can't be a one size fits all approach, as some consumers will continue to need exclusive face to face meetings. Not all consumers have access to computers or knowledge of how to use laptops and other devices, and digital exclusion will be a challenge to increasing access to justice for all.
- Lawtech developments in the sector - need to consider how they can be accessed and supported in the community to improve access to justice for a wide base.
- There are some limitations with lawtech at present – for example access to equipment and with regards to providing support to elderly clients and clients with disabilities.

Progress and next steps

- The discussion created interesting thought points for the LSB to consider in our ongoing work, particularly around how we can better engage law students and those at the beginning of their careers into the lawtech discussion.
- We are also keen to collaborate with attendees to promote examples of good practice in this area on the [Reshaping legal services microsite](#).
- The LSB is continuing the conversation around access to justice and the role lawtech can play in this at the *Reshaping legal services conference: a diverse public deserves a strong, ethical and diverse profession* in October 2022. If you would like to attend our conference online please [register your interest](#).