# AI Law and Legal Training

## Interim Report

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This project is funded by UKRI Responsible Ai

March 2025

The Open University
Law School

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# Introduction

This project is funded by UKRI Responsible AI as part of the skills programme that focuses on responsible AI skills. It comprises a multidisciplinary team from The Open University and the University of Lincoln, in collaboration with Citizens Advice and will:

- co-produce open educational resources to enhance knowledge, awareness, confidence of, and the use of GenAI in legal contexts
- educate and empower the public, free advice organisations, small and medium-sized law firms, students and academics on the application, implications, and ethical and responsible use of GenAI in a legal context
- empower learners through the provision of open access, accessible and engaging educational resources that encourage the ethical and responsible use of GenAI.

Artificial intelligence (**AI**) and machine learning (**ML**) are sub-sets of the broader field of data science. Generative AI **(GenAI**) is a form of AI that can generate, for example, text, images, video and other data in response to user queries, or 'prompts'. Large language models (**LLMs**) are a form of GenAI that have exploded in popularity and usage in both professional and personal contexts since the most well-known LLM-powered chatbot service, ChatGPT, was released by OpenAI in November 2022 (Mishcon de Reya and The Open University, 2024).

Wang and Ch'ang (2023) identify that knowledge of GenAI in law is below average, suggesting that lawyers need upskilling in AI fundamentals. Ryan and Hardie (2024) reported that relying on free GenAI tools for legal information poses significant risks. Free open-access resources are essential to enable the public and the free advice sector to understand the opportunities and challenges of using GenAI for legal advice. There is a significant risk of societal harm if we do not build capacity on how to use GenAI ethically and responsibly. Lack of access to legal advice often causes disadvantage, and trusted resources and education on GenAI within law are one way of mitigating existing structural inequalities.

As part of the project, we held three two-hour online learning design workshops, with approximately 100 people, between November 2024 and January 2025.

- Workshop 1: In partnership with, the Free Advice and Voluntary Sector, we brought together advisers and volunteers to gather information that provided an understanding of how the training materials can best address the public and free advice organisations' needs.
- Workshop 2: We met legal academics and law students to inform the training materials on the skills that law students require to transition into legal practice.
- Workshop 3: We invited legal practitioners – including law firms, the Bar, and the judiciary – to explore the training needs of legal practitioners.

# Research Context

Recent research explores the impact of GenAI on legal practice, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. Large Language Models (LLMs) are being used in legal practice to support legal research, document review, and case management (Ajevski et al., 2023; Ali Quteishant et al., 2024; Schneiders et al., 2024). The integration of AI into legal practice presents myriad ethical challenges relating to transparency, accountability and data privacy (Ali Quteishant et al., 2024). There are concerns about AI tools, which were not designed for legal advice, producing errors when being used in a legal context, raising doubts over their reliability (Ryan and Hardie, 2024). Research by Schneiders et al. (2024) explored the impact of LLMs on legal advice and the legal profession, and demonstrated that when lay people are presented with advice without knowing whether it was provided by a LLM or a lawyer, they are more likely to act on the advice provided by the LLM.

Cardoso et al. (2024) suggest there is a need for updated regulations and guidelines to ensure there is openness and accountability in the incorporation of AI tools into the legal domain. As LLMs can now be used to answer legal queries, there are increasing concerns about the consequences of relying on these models for legal advice (Cheong et al., 2024). Developments highlight the need for responsible LLM policies in legal contexts – similarly, there is a need for interdisciplinary collaboration and regulatory frameworks to address the challenges and leverage the potential of AI (Ali Quteishant et al., 2024).

Research highlights that many people who are not able to access legal support will use technology to access information about their legal rights (Sandefur, 2019). Technology is advocated as a way of increasing access to justice (Greacen, 2012), but many online tools and websites often fail to meet users' needs (Hagan, 2016). Measures to help and protect lay people from the dangers of using LLMs in place of traditional legal advice are required. LLMs are being used by unrepresented litigants in legal disputes (Hyde, 2023; Courts and Tribunal Judiciary, 2023).

In England and Wales, only reserved legal activities are regulated and delivered exclusively by lawyers. There is an unregulated legal services market, and LLMs could fundamentally change the nature of legal work (The Economist, 2023). Small law firms need to understand how to leverage and take advantage of GenAI technology; one of the top five challenges that small law firms face is keeping work practices and systems

up to date (LexisNexis, 2023). There is a need to continually innovate and, while GenAI offers the potential to do this, it is not without risk.

This project addresses these challenges and will provide free, trustworthy resources to understand and mitigate potential risks of GenAI, and understand its effects in legal contexts.

# Workshop Overview

Each of the three workshops mentioned above provided an overview of the project's background and objectives. Our keynote speakers were Dan Barrett from Citizens Advice, Henry Sturm, Harry Clark from Mishcon de Reya LLP, Richard Nicholas from Browne Jacobson LLP and Professor Kim Barker from the University of Lincoln, and every workshop included breakout activities designed to encourage active participation. These activities enabled attendees to share their knowledge, voice concerns about GenAI, and collaborate on shaping the development of the open-access resources. The primary aim was to foster meaningful discussions and gather insights from different stakeholder groups in order to ensure that their diverse perspectives informed the design of the courses, and addressed the opportunities and challenges presented by GenAI in the legal field.

# Stakeholder Engagement

## Workshop 1: Free advice organisations
## Opportunities of GenAI for free advice organisations

GenAI presents significant potential to enhance efficiency, client service and accessibility in the free advice sector.

Key opportunities include:

- Improving access and efficiency: GenAI tools could help to meet growing demand by streamlining case onboarding, triaging clients, and automating administrative tasks like form-filling and letter-writing.
- Enhancing client engagement: GenAI-driven tools could assist clients in understanding and resolving their own issues, potentially increasing self-sufficiency.
- Supporting inclusivity: Features such as transcription, voice-to-text form completion, and automated assistance could help to improve accessibility.
- Cost and resource savings: GenAI could reduce bureaucracy, free advisors for more face-to-face support, and lead to cost efficiencies in case management and recording.

*Key risks and challenges*

While GenAI offers many advantages, its adoption in the free advice sector presents several risks:

- Accuracy and reliability: GenAI-generated responses may be convincing but not necessarily correct, leading to potential misinformation.
- Ethical and legal concerns: Risks include AI interfering with court proceedings, and privacy issues.
- Skill degradation: Over-reliance on GenAI could weaken advisors' expertise if they lose hands-on experience in legal problem-solving.
- Digital exclusion: Some organisations may struggle to adopt GenAI due to funding, training gaps, and disparities in access to technology.
- Regulatory and insurance gaps: Many existing legal frameworks and advice quality standards do not yet cover GenAI-generated advice, raising liability concerns.

- Funders' perception: There is concern that funders may see GenAI as a staff replacement rather than a tool for support, leading to potential reductions in financial support.

*Broader sector considerations*

- Disparities in adoption: Smaller organisations risk falling behind owing to limited resources and training.
- Implementation challenges: GenAI adoption is often reliant on individuals rather than being embedded in organisational strategy.
- Balancing AI with human oversight: Ensuring that GenAI is used as an efficiency tool rather than a replacement for human judgement is critical to maintaining quality and ethical standards.
- Sustainability and equity: Considerations include the environmental impact of GenAI, training requirements, and the cost of maintaining GenAI tools in underfunded organisations.

*Conclusion*

GenAI has the potential to transform free legal advice services, but careful integration, strong regulatory frameworks, and sustained investment in training and oversight are essential to mitigate risks and ensure equitable access across the sector.

# Workshop 2: Legal education: legal academics and law students

## Key areas for GenAI training in legal education

To effectively integrate GenAI into legal education, training materials should cover:

- Fundamentals of AI in legal contexts:
  - understanding GenAI tools and their capabilities, including differences between open and closed GenAI models
  - baseline knowledge of GenAI's role in legal research, drafting, and education
  - ethical and responsible GenAI use.

- Practical applications:
  - how GenAI can support, but not replace, legal research and drafting
  - the importance of human oversight – students must critically evaluate GenAI outputs
  - the effective use of GenAI for summarising research, and legal document drafting
  - the role of GenAI in improving efficiency while still fostering legal reasoning skills.

- AI literacy and responsible use:
  - what students, researchers, and practitioners can and cannot use GenAI for
  - GenAI-generated content referencing, plagiarism policies, and fraud risks
  - intellectual property and data protection considerations
  - the implications of sharing content with GenAI systems and understanding the service terms and conditions.

- Developing essential AI skills
  - prompt engineering: crafting effective legal queries for GenAI tools
  - critical analysis: evaluating GenAI-generated legal responses
  - legal drafting: using GenAI for efficiency while maintaining accuracy
  - change management: identifying appropriate GenAI use cases in legal education and practice.

- Risks and limitations of GenAI
  - how to address hallucinations, biases, and incomplete or misleading legal information

- the need for human intervention to verify and contextualise GenAI-generated legal content
- environmental and societal impacts of GenAI usage
- GenAI's potential effect on student engagement, critical discussion, and collaboration in legal academia.

*Broader considerations for legal education*

- Discerning usage: We need to ensure that GenAI use complements rather than replacing or changing key aspects of legal education.
- Retaining 'the human touch': We should encourage discussion and peer interaction to maintain human-centred legal education.
- Ethical considerations: We must address concerns about AI's role in legal professionalism, ethics, and decision-making.

*Conclusion*

Legal education must equip students with the skills to use GenAI effectively while maintaining ethical integrity and critical thinking. GenAI should be viewed as a tool to enhance learning, not something that replaces key aspects of legal education such as teaching legal knowledge and reasoning, discussion and collaboration.

# Workshop 3: Legal practitioners

## Opportunities for GenAI in Legal Practice

GenAI has the potential to streamline and enhance various legal tasks, particularly in research, document management, and communication.

Key applications include:

- research and summarising automating information gathering, summarising legal cases, researching authorities, and compiling case/trial bundles
- document and evidence management: organising documents, compiling evidence, and structuring chronologies
- client and case handling: generating summaries of client meetings, assisting in mediation by analysing common interests, and taking transcripts
- content creation: drafting emails, presentations, articles, and planning documents
- workflow efficiency: supporting administrative work, drafting initial case outlines, and enhancing trial preparation with AI-assisted tools (e.g., WordSmith, Co-Pilot, Co-Counsel).

*Key risks and challenges in adopting GenAI*

Despite its benefits, integrating GenAI into legal practice presents several challenges:

- Accuracy and reliability: The risks of GenAI-generated hallucinations, errors, and superficial outputs may require significant human oversight.
- Ethical and regulatory concerns: We face a lack of clear guidance from regulators on AI use, potential reputational risks, and client preferences to avoid GenAI-assisted work.
- Skills development and professional growth: AI adoption may reduce opportunities for junior lawyers to develop critical legal analysis skills, leading to concerns about future expertise.
- Data privacy and security: There is uncertainty around data protection, confidentiality, and how GenAI tools store and process sensitive legal information.
- Strategic implementation challenges: Questions exist over firm-wide AI adoption, governance, training, and decision-making around AI tools.

- Financial and business considerations: We must assess the impact of AI on billing structures – such as billable hours versus AI-driven efficiencies – and determine how AI can add value without undermining traditional business models.
- Transparency and trust: We must ensure that legal professionals understand and can reverse-engineer GenAI outputs to validate and justify AI-assisted work.

*Conclusion*

GenAI presents opportunities for efficiency and enhanced workflows in legal practice, but requires careful integration, strong oversight, and clear regulatory guidance to ensure accuracy, ethical use, and professional development. Legal practitioners must address data security, client trust, and billing challenges while ensuring AI supports rather than replaces human expertise.

# Course Development

The findings from the workshops informed the course topics, ensuring that the content of the courses aligned with the needs and concerns of all the stakeholder groups. A key insight was that users may not need to study every course, but would benefit from tailored learning pathways designed to meet each group's specific needs. Therefore, structured learning will be offered for each of five groups: members of the public, front line advisers, and volunteers, managers and trustees of free advice organisations, law firm owners, and lawyers, and law students. The plan is to design these pathways by identifying the most relevant courses for each group. Outlined below are the topics that the eight courses will cover. The course names and final content will be refined during the writing process.

- Course 1: Essentials of AI
- Course 2: Skills and strategies for using GenAI
- Course 3: Incorporating GenAI into organisations
- Course 4: Case studies on integrating GenAI into workflows
- Course 5: Ethical and responsible use of GenAI
- Course 6: Navigating risk management
- Course 7: Understanding legal regulation and compliance
- Course 8: Preparing for tomorrow: horizon scanning and AI literacy.

The courses will total 20 hours of learning, designed to be interactive and engaging, incorporating a range of learning tools:

- quizzes to consolidate knowledge
- interactive elements
- video and audio content
- deep-dive sections for learners who wish to explore topics in more detail.

Upon successful completion of each course, participants will receive a digital badge and a certificate to confirm their engagement. The courses are designed not only to provide knowledge but also to equip learners with the critical thinking skills necessary to ask the right questions about GenAI in legal contexts, so as to support informed decision-making. The courses will launch in Summer 2025 on The Open University's OpenLearn platform.

# Next Steps

Alongside the launch of the courses in Summer 2025, we are collaborating with PolicyWISE to produce a 'Wise in 5' policy brief and best practice guidelines, which will provide concise, practical insights to support stakeholders in navigating the use of GenAI in legal contexts, ensuring informed decision-making and responsible implementation.

# Contact

For more information about the project, please visit our website or contact Dr Francine Ryan, Senior Lecturer in Law at The Open University: francine.ryan@open.ac.uk

For more information on the UKRI Responsible Skills Programme and the other skills projects, click here and to learn more about Responsible Ai UK visit their website.

For more information on the work of Citizens Advice visit their website.

To learn more about the Law School at the University of Lincoln and the research of Professor Kim Barker, click here.

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