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From the Field

AI based Legal Tech; in the firm and in the law school

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Abstract

Conscious of the investment in, and use of, AI by law firms, a project was established for final year law students to better equip them for careers in practice. This was the first legal-tech project in an Irish law school. LegalTech was omnipresent and was changing the practise of law by means of process efficiency and automation. To introduce the students to legal tech, they were given access to some brilliant technology developed by Neota Logic. Critically, without a knowledge of coding, they were able to build Apps which automated certain tasks and legal advice, created efficiencies and addressed a notional client's needs. Deep learning of certain areas of law was coupled with experiential learning of company and other areas of law. Additionally the students had their first experiences of dealing with a client's requirements. The practical aspects of law and compliance were also revealed to the students and, showing an appreciation of these tasks, one App built in a link to the Companies Registration Office website. Assessment was designed to capture their legal expertise but also measured their transferable skills of time and task management, as well as team working skills. Graduates reported positive effects on the recruitment processes they faced too.

Keywords: LegalTech, Creating Apps, Teamwork, Technology based clinical legal education

Introduction

The prevalence of AI during the last decade was such that it was highly likely to have an impact on the delivery of legal services. McCann Fitzgerald LLP, a leading Irish corporate firm, announced a significant investment in a software platform in 2018. In this decade, technological developments have advanced greatly and lawyers and law students are learning of the potentials and pitfalls of Generative AI. However, that investment by McCann Fitzgerald LLP in 2018 caught the author's attention as there was much discussion of 'legal tech' at the time. Awareness of those developments resulted in a very interesting learning experience for some final year law students. Legal Tech is the term used to describe systems of case management, document automation and advanced applications with AI.¹

¹ K. Nilupu-Moreno, Y. Riega-Virú, E. M. Puga-Ayala, J. L. Salas-Riega and Y. Lázaro-Ortiz, *Legaltech in Legal Education: A Systematic Review of the Training of Technological Competencies*, 2024 IEEE 4th International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies on Education & Research (ICALTER), Tarma, Peru, 2024, page 1.

The Opportunity

The School of Law at University of Limerick approached McCann Fitzgerald LLP and the outcome was the joint sponsorship by Neota Logic and McCann Fitzgerald of a project for final year law students. The project was the first 'legal tech' module in an Irish University. In University of Limerick the final year law students take a capstone project module which can take the form of completing a research article, working with Citizens Advice Bureau, studying the ISDA Master agreement and Netting of Financial Contracts Act 1995², or other options which vary from year to year. In light of developments in legal- tech, the author wished to offer something in that sphere, to prepare students for the firms in which they would work.³

During the legal-tech project, twelve final year law students developed a selection of tech-based applications (called 'Apps') for a non-profit organisation. The organisation was the Limerick Chamber of Commerce and they helped identify areas of law or compliance pertinent to many of their members. Any Apps that could help with the recurring need for information on these areas of law or compliance would be very helpful they told us. The Apps were to reflect a method of calculation of legal liability, analyse applicability and interpretation of a legal instrument or audit compliance with some area of company law.

The technology

The technology was provided by Neota Logic and it soon became clear that a knowledge of coding was not necessary in order to build an App. Any person could learn to build an App through a series of exercises and tips offered sequentially through the Neota academy. The steps resembled the creation of a quiz on Brightspace, Sulis or any other learning management system. The system was easy to use and very intuitive. It helped that the entire process would be even more intuitive for the young students, who were 'digital natives'. In 2019 Slaughter and May had chosen 6 start-ups to take part in their legal technology programme and one of those was also a platform, called Logiak, which allowed non-coders to create Apps. However as further developments occur, it may be preferable for a law school to teach generic Legal Tech skills, such as document automation and basic concepts like inputs, outputs and decision trees.⁴

Identifying App needs

Cornell, Monash and other law schools had run legal tech modules with their students and Apps had been built on identifying the risk of elder abuse and eligibility for disability pensions. This is consistent with the history of clinical legal education which often focusses on social issues, access to justice and community.⁵ As a Company / Competition lawyer, the author wanted to focus on industry and business. Neota, McCanns and the students asked the Limerick Chamber of Commerce what Apps would assist their members and they suggested one on Fire Safety Compliance, and another on Business Insurance.

² S.Eaton, *Using a real contract to teach law holistically*. IJCLE, vol 24, no 3, 2017, page 122.

³ A. Contreras & J. McGrath, *Law, Technology and Pedagogy; Teaching coding to build a future-proof lawyer* Minnesota Journal of Law, Science & Technology, Vol 21, no 2, page 297, at page 307.

⁴ C. Ireland, R. Hockley, *A call for introducing LegalTech in the classroom*, Computer Law & Security Review, Vol 36, 2020, article number 105399.

⁵ M. Castles, *Marriage of convenience or a match made in heaven, Collaboration between a law school clinic and a commercial law firm*, IJCLE, vol 23, no 2, 2016, page7, at page 23.

Liaising with the Limerick Chamber of Commerce and focussing on their member's needs enabled the project to provide legal education to their members – a parallel to the contribution to Citizens Advice made by the Law in the Community module elsewhere.⁶ The author added a request for one on the Company Secretarial role and one on Directors' duties, which also appealed to the Limerick Chamber of Commerce. Those were the four Apps to be built by the four teams.

Working through the semester – the technology

Twelve students were chosen for the project and registered on Neota Academy to complete their training during the first six weeks of the semester. These sessions ran smoothly and the students learned to use the technology with ease. The students later commented that, at the outset, they felt daunted and were concerned that they would not master the technology. They had no issues at all when the time came.

Working through the semester – the law

The idea with the App was to harvest the legal knowledge once and allow the App to apply it over and over again without the need for the lawyer's repeated input. To develop and build each of the four Apps, each team needed to gather and manage some legal expertise. The legal expertise was set out in a Content document for that App. As there were 3 students in each of the 4 groups, they typically divided the legal research tasks between them. The 2 Company law Apps, on Company Secretarial and Directors' Duties, were easily researched and a plethora of sources was available, ranging from the Companies Act 2014 to case law.

The App on Fire safety compliance proved more difficult to research but that was what the 'notional client', the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, needed. The Fire Safety Regulations in Ireland are in Part B of the Building Regulations and are labyrinthine but the students harnessed the unwieldy matter with the help of a Fire Safety Officer who worked for the County Council. This was a good learning experience for that team as they had to apply the legal provisions in consultation with a Fire Safety practitioner.

The Business Insurance market is vast and a very wide set of possible insurance products are available, ranging from Keyman insurance to product liability insurance. First the team made assumptions as to whether the users of the App were start-up or already in business. The team then cleverly decided to tailor the App for the Food and Beverages sector in order to make the number of options realistic.

The Company Secretarial App relied heavily on a precise knowledge of the provisions of the Companies Act, while the App on Directors' duties relied on provisions of the Companies Acts which codified those duties and on decisions of the Superior Courts which interpreted the duties.

None of the Apps developed, or legal resources used, involved identification of a person or disclosure of any private information. This had the advantage of not raising those ethical issues encountered more nowadays with GenAI. Ethical considerations that come with AI include privacy, algorithmic transparency, and bias mitigation.⁷ These and other basic human rights were not raised by the Apps.

⁶ L Bengtsson and B. A'Court, *The Law in the Community Model of Clinical Legal Education; Assessing the impact on Key Stakeholders*, IJCLE, vol 30, no 2, 2023, page 54, at page 55.

⁷B. Munir, *Integrating Generative AI in Legal Pedagogy: A Case Study*, International Journal of Legal Information, 2025;53(3), page 272.

It was also notable that each team included disclaimer of liability terms on their Apps and the Apps on Directors' duties and Company secretarial stipulated that they were not providing legal advice and were for information and training purposes only.

Moulding good lawyers

It was interesting to hear the students comment on other possible uses for the app technology. The students identified where efficiencies could be achieved, repetition avoided, better knowledge of a client's business be gained and costs curtailed. They could immediately see the relevance of what they were learning and were hungry for the knowledge.⁸

Given that legal work and the administration of justice increasingly involves technology, students who can collaborate with technology professionals have a competitive advantage.⁹

Choosing judges

It was important to get a client perspective, so a consumer of extensive legal services was needed. Dr. Hugh O'Donnell of Ingenium TC, formerly CEO of Kentz Corporation kindly agreed to act as a judge. The lawyers were represented by Mr. Josh Hogan, Partner, McCann Fitzgerald LLP and the technology sector by Ms. Aisling Curtis, Commercial Director of Microsoft Ireland. The feedback from the judges was superb with Dr. Hugh O'Donnell saying he was 'overwhelmed' that law students could produce these Apps. Ms. Aisling Curtis asked the students to reflect too on the broader team-working skills they had acquired, which would be so important in their professional lives. Mr. Josh Hogan admired their ability to see other uses for the technology.

It is important to replicate practice and the liaison with the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, as well as the profiles of the judges, really helped to bring a sense of there having been a client.¹⁰

Launching the Apps

On launch day each team of 3 students presented their App and ran through its capabilities. For the Food and Beverages insurance needs, cover choices were explained and legal niceties on the ownership of insurance policies. The fire safety compliance app allowed for an audit of risk and an analysis of steps to be taken to minimise risk to employees in the business and maximise compliance. The App on Directors and their duties included an eligibility for directorship test and exercises that illustrated how Directors' duties are interpreted by the courts. It did so by presenting scenarios and asking the user to answer hypothetical questions. The user had multiple-choice type options to choose from. The App then told the user whether they were correct or not and cited case law to support the analysis. Finally the Company secretarial App did an eligibility test and then guided a company Secretary through their duties, while including links to necessary materials on the Companies Registration Office website.

Different teams were found to display different strengths and while there was an overall winner, it seemed like all were winners. The students had had the opportunity to try legal technology and to see an emerging aspect of the delivery of legal services. A few University of Limerick Law alumni joined us

⁸ P. Ramsden, *Learning to teach in higher education*, 2nd ed., Routledge Falmer, at page 93.

⁹ T. Dolidze, *The evolving role of AI in Legal Education and research*, Law and World, vol 11, no 1, page 94.

¹⁰ N. Tarr, *Current Issues in Clinical Legal Education*, 37 Howard Law Journal, page 31, at page 35.

and one, by this time a trainee from Allen & Overy's specialised legal tech trainee programme, shared her experiences with the final year law students, which was very helpful.

Academic assessment

The assessment was based on four aspects of the project. A maximum of 25% of the marks were gained by a timely completion of the Neota Academy and so this was an individual mark. The Neota Academy was a series of online learning sessions which taught the user to create Apps. No student missed the six week deadline for completing the online training. This was reassuring for the students who were the first to undertake such a Legal Tech module.

A further 25% of the marks were allocated for the App's Content document which set out the legal expertise informing the App. It also explained the functioning of the App and that was a team mark. The judges could see what legal research had been done and ensure that correct statements of the law were included. This exercise also allowed the students to present the technical information in a clear manner and to organise their information logically in order to achieve that result.

To ensure individual reflection on the teamwork in which they were engaged, as well as on their learning of the law and technology, a maximum of 25% of the marks was awarded to each individual for a self-assessment exercise. The self-assessment asked them to reflect, inter alia, on whether communication had been clear between them and whether each person had met their individual deadlines. While the form provided for self-assessment, it had to be co-signed by a team member and the judges found the reflections were balanced and appeared very honest. These types of projects help students learn additional, but important skills, including problem-solving, planning, strategic communication, collaboration, and project management.¹¹ Developing, and knowing that they had developed, this wide range of skills and attributes is very important to students.¹²

The final 25% was awarded for the App itself and so was a team mark.

Clinical legal education costs money and the project would not have been possible without the support of Neota Logic and McCann Fitzgerald. Both parties gave generously without seeking in any way to interfere with academic assessment decisions or exclude faculty, which can be a risk.¹³

How the project developed students' professional skills and competencies, and their observations on it.

The students were encouraged to reflect on tasks within the work of lawyers which could be executed more efficiently and cost effectively using AI technology. The student's enthusiastic response to the project was infectious and their comments at the end included the observation that "I learned a whole new set of skills through taking part in this project".

The project was probably the first situation in which the student had to imagine a client's needs and be able to address those. The Content document required a sequential and logical setting out of the technical legal or compliance information. The ability to set out and explain the underlying legal position on any given issue is an important professional skill.

¹¹ A. Carpenter, *The Project Model of Clinical Education: Eight Principles to Maximise Student Learning and Social Justice Impact*, *Clinical Law Review* vol 20;39 Fall 2013, page 42.

¹² L Bengtsson and B. A'Court, *The Law in the Community Model of Clinical Legal Education; Assessing the impact on Key Stakeholders*, *IJCLE* vol 30, no 2, 2023, page 54, at page 74.

¹³ N. Tarr, *Current Issues in Clinical Legal Education*, 37 *Howard Law Journal*, page 31, at page 37.

The exercises completed through the project were of a clinical and practical nature. For each team the learning outcomes included a particular knowledge of an area of law or compliance but in a broader sense the learning outcomes were experiencing ‘a brief’, a set of requirements, from a fictional client. They each had an experiential learning experience.

The law firm participants were very helpful in explaining to the students what would, or would not, be understood by, and be useful to, a potential client. The practising lawyers were also able to assure the students that the Apps would be very useful to clients and would do away with a lot of repetition.

The students themselves identified how apps could be used to streamline and automate legal and company secretarial tasks. They identified that contracts could be generated by use of legal tech if software allowed certain factual information to be supplied at the outset. The whole area of Probate and resultant tax returns was also mentioned as an area which could be more automated.

Lessons learned and a graduate’s reflection

On reflection, there were distinct advantages to being on one of the two Company law projects and the students themselves knew this. If I were organising an experiential learning module like this again, I would seek to ground all of the teams in doctrinal law areas. This would allow all of the students to deepen their knowledge of a core area of law, rather than a new quasi-legal issue. They would still have the experience of legal tech based on AI but with a more symbiotic relationship with their modules.

One of the participants, Rachel, is now a qualified Solicitor with a different top- 5 large corporate firm and we reflected on the project recently. Rachel could see clearly how firms would use these technologies to advise clients of new regulations on a given area.

Rachel went on to say “*I would say the project was very beneficial in terms of getting an appreciation for AI and it definitely had a big impact on securing a training contract as the firm was very interested in the project and the fact I had some knowledge of how to build the app.*”

The graduate also confirmed the author’s suspicion that it was easier to work on one of the Company law projects, where the students already had some knowledge of the material.

The project offered clinical legal education in a non-traditional, commercial law field. That was also more important than I realised at the time, as so many of our graduates move on to private practice in large commercial firms.¹⁴

Conclusion

The Legal Tech project was a very satisfying exercise from the perspective of offering clinical legal education and for the students in deep learning of Company law and more broadly in preparing for the new world of providing professional legal services.

Since the project, generative AI has presented even greater opportunities for efficiency through its ability to research, generate and draft legal documents. GenAI is now integrated into the curriculum in some law schools and students are alerted to the weaknesses as well as being taught how to prompt it.¹⁵ This is reasonable as lawyers are now encouraged to see GenAI as a thought-partner and legal

¹⁴ M. Castles, *Marriage of convenience or a match made in heaven, Collaboration between a law school clinic and a commercial law firm*, IJCLE, vol 23, no 2, 2016, page7, at page 25.

researcher. The next clinical legal project will have to involve scrutiny of, and experiment with, the broader capabilities of Gen AI.

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