

# Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer

The Official Journal of Leeds Law Society

 Leeds  
Law Society

March 2025  
Issue 193

# The evolving legal landscape

## AI, ethics & the future of law



### Leeds JLD

Ellie Whitehead on  
how junior lawyers can  
utilise AI

### Business development

Williamsons Solicitors  
transitions to employee  
ownership

### Regulatory

Compli's Andrea  
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update on ethics  
and compliance

### Comment

Adapt or be automated,  
says Schofield Sweeney's  
Karen Crutchley

### Last word

Leeds barrister  
Steven Turner on  
'Google-spoofing'





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# President's column



## Nigel Brook is legal director of Tyr and current president of Leeds Law Society.

This edition of Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer – focusing on the evolving legal landscape – is timely, following hot on the heels of LegalTech in Leeds releasing its annual report for 2024-25. Leeds Law Society is pleased to have been a key supporter of this initiative, which has successfully brought together Leeds' thriving legal sector and our significant and growing digital industry.

Some headline statistics: Leeds' legal sector employs over 15,000 people and contributes £923m annually in gross value added. The legal tech sector is projected to create over 1,800 jobs during the course of this year. Both sectors – and where they intersect – appear to be booming.

This is also a good time to highlight the upcoming LegalTech in Leeds conference, which is taking place on 24 April 2025, between 8.30am and 5.30pm at Cloth Hall Court. It promises to (again) be the largest LegalTech event outside of London.

### Observations on AI

Given the breadth of this topic, and the short space of this column, I'll focus on a few observations, particularly around large language models (LLMs) – currently the most relevant AI tools in legal work.

Today's AI is not conscious (as far as we know); the Terminator's Skynet remains fiction. Like any new technology, AI can feel both overhyped and terrifying. Oversimplifying, LLMs like ChatGPT and Microsoft's Copilot are complex pattern-recognition tools trained on vast amounts of data to generate sophisticated responses.

Stepping back from the existential potential threats, what, then, are the near-term risks – especially in legal practice?

- Unguarded (and uncritical) use. We know this has resulted in lawyers citing non-existent cases which have been "hallucinated" by AI. It can also manifest in ineffective due diligence being

undertaken before feeding a new system confidential information.

- We can't know how a system has reached a given output. So, if AI is used to sift through applicants for a job posting, how can we be sure that the AI hasn't inherited prejudices from the material it has been trained upon?
- Using AI for malign ends. In a legal context, it has become easier for sham documents to be produced – particularly in bulk. Perhaps in future, legal professionals will face new challenges verifying authenticity.
- AI taking the place of humans. This force has already been felt in creative industries. Our laws will need to adapt quickly to grapple with the questions that this will throw up; it is easy to conceive of knotty intellectual property questions arising where part of a work has been undertaken by AI.

That, though, is likely too negative a reaction to these new technologies. Using any tool improperly is something which can be remedied through better know-how, training, and the development of new roles for AI specialists in a legal context. And techniques like "reinforcement learning from human feedback" are improving how AI systems learn from their mistakes and become more transparent.

Whilst AI might be used maliciously, there are clearly potential (and actual) beneficial uses. I would frame the challenge as being how to police AI's (mis)use, which might require the use of AI in response.

As for taking the place of humans, and how the law can keep up, these risks are almost inherent to any new technology. Detractors might suggest this is a luddite reaction, but I posit that there is one significant difference between the introduction of the steam-powered loom and the wide adoption of LLMs: the immense pace of change. Many readers will remember a time before the wide availability of the internet, and the ubiquity of the smartphone. OpenAI, the entity which developed ChatGPT, was founded in December 2015, less than ten years ago. ChatGPT was first launched in November 2022, less than three years ago.

### Ouroboros

I will sign off with a paragraph from Microsoft Copilot, on the potential limitations of large language models, prompted\* by my own reflection on the potential direction of public discourse (particularly on the internet) today:

*"Large language models consuming themselves conjure an image as mystifying as the ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail in an eternal loop. In this scenario, imagine a model trained on content increasingly derived from outputs of other models—an echo chamber of generated text feeding upon itself. Over time, the original diversity and richness of human input risk being diluted, replaced by a recursive cycle of repetition and homogenization. While this could lead to fascinating emergent behaviours, it also raises questions about the nature of originality and authenticity in artificial intelligence. Like the ouroboros, it's both a symbol of infinite potential and a cautionary tale of self-referential collapse. Will this cyclical feast sharpen the AI's insights, or devour its creative edge? That's a riddle worth pondering."*

Worth pondering – fascinating? – or has AI already eaten itself?

\* The prompt for this paragraph was: "please write me a paragraph about large language models eating themselves, ouroboros style."

# COFA meeting

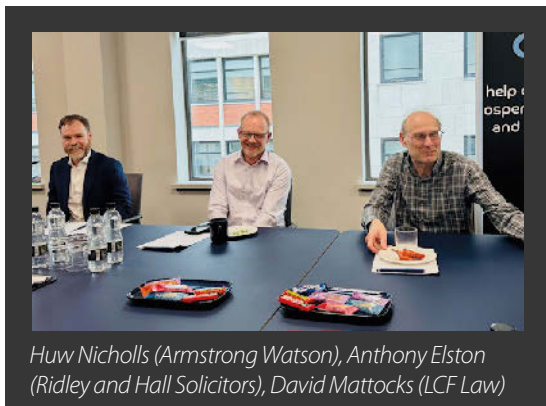
The Leeds COFA Roundtable has returned, offering a much-needed space for Compliance Officers for Finance and Administration (COFAs) to share experiences, tackle common challenges, and strengthen best practice across the city's legal sector.

February marked the successful relaunch of the Leeds COFA Roundtable, an initiative designed to bring together compliance officers for finance and administration from across the city.

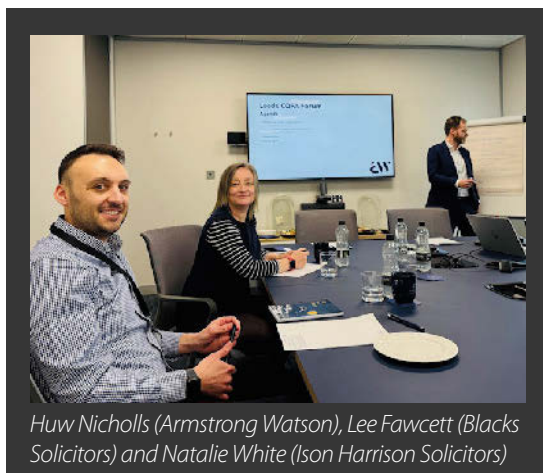
As the role of COFA becomes increasingly pivotal in the legal sector, the roundtable provides a vital forum for those working in this often under-recognised but critical position.

The COFA is responsible for ensuring that a firm's financial and administrative functions remain compliant with the SRA's regulatory framework. Despite its importance, the position can often feel isolated - especially in firms where the COFA is not a solicitor or legal practitioner by background.

Recognising this, Leeds Law Society has teamed up with Armstrong Watson Accountants, Business and Financial Advisors, to provide a collaborative space for COFAs to connect, learn, and share insight. The event, held under Chatham House rules to ensure open dialogue, was met with enthusiasm from attendees.



Huw Nicholls (Armstrong Watson), Anthony Elston (Ridley and Hall Solicitors), David Mattocks (LCF Law)



Huw Nicholls (Armstrong Watson), Lee Fawcett (Blacks Solicitors) and Natalie White (Ison Harrison Solicitors)

Emma Pearmaine, director of Leeds Law Society and managing director at Ridley and Hall Solicitors, spoke about the need for targeted support:

"The COFA in many law firms is not a solicitor, and the role can be isolating and challenging to navigate. Leeds Law Society looks to support legal services in Leeds – not just the solicitors. That's why we are supporting our individual and corporate members with events and opportunities to help them to succeed in legal services in Leeds."

The roundtable drew participants from a wide range of practices, from boutique firms to larger regional players, creating a diverse and inclusive environment. Attendees discussed a variety of topics, including financial controls, compliance audits, the SRA's expectations, and the evolving regulatory landscape.

Huw Nicholls, audit and assurance director at Armstrong Watson, said: "We had an interesting and engaging chat. The discussion was an opportunity for COFAs from Leeds firms to share experiences, knowledge, and best practice in an environment where Chatham House rules apply. Everyone got lots out of the session and all asked if we could make it a regular fixture."

Given the positive feedback, plans are already underway to make the COFA Roundtable a recurring event in the city's legal calendar. Leeds Law Society and Armstrong Watson will be announcing the next date soon, with invitations extended to both individual and corporate members.



# Leeds Legal Walk 2025

**17 June 2025 | 5.30pm - 8.30pm**

Leeds Combined Courts Centre to Leeds Law School



**Join Leeds Law Society on the 2025 Leeds Legal Walk in aid of the Access to Justice Foundation.**

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## Book as a team



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The Access to Justice Foundation is the only national charity solely focused on delivering access to justice for those in need. They use their expertise to tackle the barriers to justice that advice organisations continually face. They aim to make the case for advice and help charities build stable foundations to provide legal services to the most marginalised individuals.

The walk is 10K (6.2 miles) and starts at 5.30pm at the Leeds Combined Courts Centre, Oxford Row, Leeds.

The walk finishes at Leeds Law School, Broadcasting House, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds for end of walk drinks kindly provided by Leeds Law School.

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## Karen Eckstein Ltd celebrates five years in business

Karen Eckstein Ltd is celebrating its fifth anniversary. Founded in 2020 by Karen Eckstein, a qualified solicitor and chartered tax adviser, the firm was created to address common professional negligence issues.

From experience, Karen saw that most claims stem from administrative errors rather than complex technical mistakes. She left professional negligence defence behind to launch Karen Eckstein Ltd, dedicated to preventing claims before they arise.

In 2023, the firm welcomed Polly Coram, an experienced solicitor. Polly has since achieved her IRMCert qualification.

Karen commented, "We are so lucky to have a supportive and growing network of clients and contacts who have helped us grow the business.

"We're excited for the future and look forward to expanding our services, particularly with our new 'Professional Friend' service, which helps firms manage complaints and regulatory challenges."



As part of its anniversary celebrations, Karen Eckstein Ltd is hosting a special event on Friday 11 April 2025, in Leeds city centre. For those wishing to join, contact Polly Coram.

## Schofield Sweeney backs Bradford 2025

Bradford-based commercial law firm Schofield Sweeney has been named as the latest official partner of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture.

Schofield Sweeney has provided legal expertise and guidance to the Bradford 2025 team since 2020, and this support will continue throughout the City of Culture year as Bradford welcomes millions of visitors with over 1,000 events. The firm now joins a prestigious list of corporate sponsors, including Morrisons, Yorkshire Building Society, and PwC.

Beyond legal counsel, Schofield Sweeney has also provided a dedicated floor of office space in its Church Bank House premises to use as a secondary hub.

Graham Sweeney, managing partner at Schofield Sweeney, said, "Bradford 2025 is a pivotal moment for Bradford. Culture adds vibrancy to the economy as a whole, and it's important for us to play our part in building confidence in Bradford from

inside and outside of the district."

Schofield Sweeney employees will have the opportunity to contribute their time through the firm's dedicated volunteering days.

Daniel Bates, executive director of Bradford 2025, said, "Schofield Sweeney has been fantastic in their support, not only through expert legal advice but welcoming our team into their building – a true reflection of the district's community spirit which also shines through its corporate sector."

Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture is backed by public funding from HM Government, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, and the National Lottery, alongside private investment and corporate sponsorships.

## Leeds law firm Walker Morris loses age discrimination tribunal



A senior partner who was "forced out" of top Leeds law firm Walker Morris LLP has won a landmark age discrimination employment tribunal.

Martin Scott, represented by Milners Solicitors and Matrix Chambers' counsel Darryl Hutcheon and Hugh Tomlinson KC, successfully challenged the mandatory retirement policy at the firm, where he was head of Walker Morris's construction and engineering department. His team argued that the firm's refusal to allow him to continue working beyond 63 was unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

Despite granting Scott an initial extension in 2020 due to his "exceptional contribution," the firm refused a subsequent request in 2023, requiring him to leave based on his age. The tribunal unanimously found that Walker Morris unlawfully

discriminated against Scott by applying mandatory retirement rules without adequate justification.

The tribunal determined that Walker Morris's approach relied on "discriminatory assumptions about and attitudes towards older partners," specifically noting that assumptions about declining energy and performance among senior staff were unsupported by any objective evidence.

A Walker Morris spokesperson said, "We are disappointed by the findings of the Employment Tribunal and will be considering our response.

"In common with other professional services firms, our partnership has agreed rules covering the retirement of partners which we follow in a full and fair manner. These rules were intended to open up partnership opportunities for future generations. Mr Scott voted in favour of changes to our retirement rules and indeed benefitted from them when his retirement date was extended in 2020."

A remedy hearing to determine compensation for Scott will be held in Leeds this May.

## Ison Harrison targets record-breaking growth in 2025



Ison Harrison has announced that it is set to make 2025 its most successful year yet. The firm reported its highest-ever turnover last year, reaching over £27 million – a 23% increase from 2023.

Over the past five years, Ison Harrison has more than doubled its revenue. Key drivers of this growth include the acquisition of Cohen Cramer Solicitors and significant

increases in turnover across its property, family, and commercial departments.

Ison Harrison became 100% employee-owned in January 2022. The firm, now celebrating its third year of employee ownership, rewarded its 350 staff for their contributions with profit distributions. Employees with over one year's service received a tax-free payment of £4,000, matching the amount distributed in 2023.

Managing director Jonathan Wearing commented, "The move to employee ownership was a defining moment for us. Our record-breaking year has positioned us to achieve even greater success in 2025."

## McCormicks Solicitors trainee earns spot on Rugby Football Union disciplinary panel

Harrogate-based McCormicks Solicitors has cemented its reputation in sports law with the appointment of team member Lana Wilks to the Rugby Football Union (RFU) disciplinary panel.

Lana, a former professional women's rugby player, qualified referee, and published legal writer, joined McCormicks as a trainee solicitor.

The RFU disciplinary panel investigates and decides on sanctions for players who violate the rules of rugby union, to ensure that the game is fair and safe for all players.

After receiving an invitation from the RFU to apply for panel membership, Lana's successful application was supported by McCormicks as part of her professional development.

Partner David Birks commented, "This appointment reinforces McCormicks position... as one of the top law firms providing specialist advice to sports associations and prominent sporting individuals. Lana's interest in, and knowledge of, Rugby Union will undoubtedly prove an asset."

Lana is currently completing a master's in law at The University of Law, which she will finish in 2025, ahead of qualifying as a solicitor in 2026.



## Williamsons Solicitors transitions to employee ownership in major restructure



East Yorkshire firm Williamsons Solicitors has officially transitioned to an employee ownership model.

The firm, which has offices in Hull, Driffield, and Bridlington, completed its conversion from a limited company to an employee ownership trust on 1 February. The restructure sees 100% of shares transferred from former owners Sarah Clubley and Jane Cousins to the new trust, ensuring the long-term stability of the firm while maintaining its independence.

With a heritage dating back to 1890 and a team of 120 professionals, the decision forms part of a strategic succession

plan. Clubley and Cousins will remain actively involved, serving on the board of six directors responsible for guiding the firm's strategic direction and day-to-day management. Four trustees have been appointed to safeguard the business on behalf of all staff.

Sarah Clubley, who has been with Williamsons for 25 years, commented, "This move safeguards us from external acquisition or a management buyout that would place control in the hands of a select few. While employees will have a greater voice in decision-making, the day-to-day operations will remain unchanged."

The legal and financial aspects of the transition were overseen by Nigel Beckwith of Gosschalks Solicitors and Mike Beckett of Forrester Boyd.

## Wilkin Chapman and Rollits announce merger to create 500-strong regional firm

Two regional law firms, Wilkin Chapman LLP and Rollits LLP, have announced they will merge on 1 April 2025 to create a new powerhouse in the legal sector, Wilkin Chapman Rollits.

With more than 500 people, including 70 partners, the merged firm will become the largest regional law firm operating across Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. It will be based across six offices in Grimsby, Lincoln, Louth, Hull, York and Beverley, and is expected to achieve a combined turnover of £40 million. There are no redundancies planned as part of the deal.

Ralph Gilbert, managing partner of Rollits, said, "Both of our firms have deep local connections and histories within

our respective regions and are very proud of these links. Such links help us understand the needs of our clients and bring insights to them."

Wilkin Chapman Rollits will offer expertise across a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, commercial property, food, energy and renewables, tourism and leisure, education, local government, the military, social housing and the third sector.





# Ethics, AI, and enforcement

**Andrea Cohen**, legal director in the Compli team at Weightmans, is back with our regular update on regulatory matters, risk and compliance, and recent disciplinary decisions.

Where has the first quarter of 2025 gone? Wasn't the Christmas break only a few weeks ago? They say things change quickly in the world of regulation, and these last few weeks have been no different.

## Have professionals lost their ethical compass?

Yes, according to the LSB, which recently declared that there is a decline in professional ethical standards, with gaps in understanding and support. The latest LSB consultation, Upholding Professional Ethical Duties, states, "The evidence of poor ethical conduct indicates that regulators' core rules and regulations dealing with professional ethical duties are . . . not always properly understood or applied in practice, or – at worst – they are disregarded altogether."

The recent Axiom Ince and SSB debacles, the Post Office scandal and reported disciplinary decisions may appear to support this. In reality, they involve just a handful of individuals in a profession of over 200,000 SRA-regulated solicitors. That does not mean that professional ethics should not be at the forefront, but as a profession, should we all be tarred with the same brush?

The outcome of the consultation may result in changes to existing regulation, or even wholesale change, and, perhaps, a return to the rules and principles of professional conduct. Is it time to dust off the Guide to the Professional Conduct of Solicitors (1999)? Watch this space!

## SRA update on investigation on the Post Office scandal

The SRA updated its statement on 20 February 2025, stating, "Now that the inquiry has finished hearing evidence, we are liaising closely with it to collect all relevant evidence, and with the police to understand what, if any, action they might take. We will, of course, take action as soon as we can, and while we can't confirm the exact timeline, we are hopeful that we can launch prosecution action in some cases in the summer of this year."

Apparently, there are more than 20 live investigations, and the SRA is looking at a range of issues including solicitors' management and supervision of cases; the strategy and conduct of prosecutions and of litigation; duties relating to expert witnesses; disclosure obligations; and improper application of privilege.

## Rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic

Within days of closing its consultation on safeguarding consumers (from which many responses suggested that rather than introducing swinging changes, the SRA should focus on improving its own internal processes, with reference to the conclusions and criticisms in the Axiom Ince report) the news broke of the 'loss' of senior people in both the SRA and LSB.

There have been suggestions that the Axiom Ince and SSB report (when it lands), together with the loss of these key people, may pause any potential changes to regulations to allow stability within both the regulatory bodies and the profession, but, as noted above, that is unlikely.

## AI or improved client knowledge?

While there is talk of governance and regulation of AI - with firms introducing AI use policies, and high-profile examples of American lawyers citing AI-"hallucinated" cases in court - we are seeing a rise in clients using AI to generate complaint letters and claims. These often quote Acts, regulations and time limits for responses which are not always correct. Responding to such correspondence takes more time, yet replies - also AI-generated - arrive faster and, of course, none of this time is chargeable!

## Disciplinary and regulatory decisions

### Fines for AML breaches

The raft of fines imposed on firms and fee earners continues, with fines ranging from £3,000 to £25,000 for breaches including failing to adequately conduct client risk assessments, not maintaining records of risk assessments, and using a client account as a banking facility.

### Trainee barred for touching colleague at social event

A trainee solicitor received a section 43 banning order and cannot be involved in legal practice without the SRA's prior approval, following inappropriate behaviour towards a female colleague at a firm social event.

### Partner struck off for misleading clients about state of claim

A partner who misled clients for two years regarding the progress of the claim was struck off. The client had been led to believe that the claim had been issued when this was not the case.

## How Compli can help...

The Compli Solicitor Regulatory and Professional Discipline Team can provide expertise and advice on risk and compliance, AML, disciplinary assistance etc. If we can help in any way, please get in touch at [compli@weightmans.com](mailto:compli@weightmans.com)





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# Adapt or be automated

With a background in commercial and technology-focused contracts, Schofield Sweeney partner **Karen Crutchley** reflects on the growing impact of AI on the legal profession - and why lawyers must adapt to thrive.

In Yorkshire, where legal services play a crucial role in supporting businesses, individuals, and public institutions, AI presents both opportunities and challenges. From document review to case prediction, AI-powered tools have the potential to re-shape how lawyers work.

Much has been written about the risks that AI poses, particularly around fairness, transparency and accountability. For the legal profession in particular, concerns around privacy and data security are also paramount.

However, AI-powered advancements have the potential to free practitioners from mundane, repetitive and time-consuming tasks, allowing them to focus on providing bespoke advice to clients in the way that each of those clients wants to receive it. For those of us who cut our teeth spending hours reviewing documents line by line as part of due diligence or disclosure exercises, it is tempting to feel that this is a rite of passage that all junior solicitors should go through to make a good practitioner of them.

*“48% of [people] believed that AI would be able to do up to 50% of their current job within the next 5 years”*

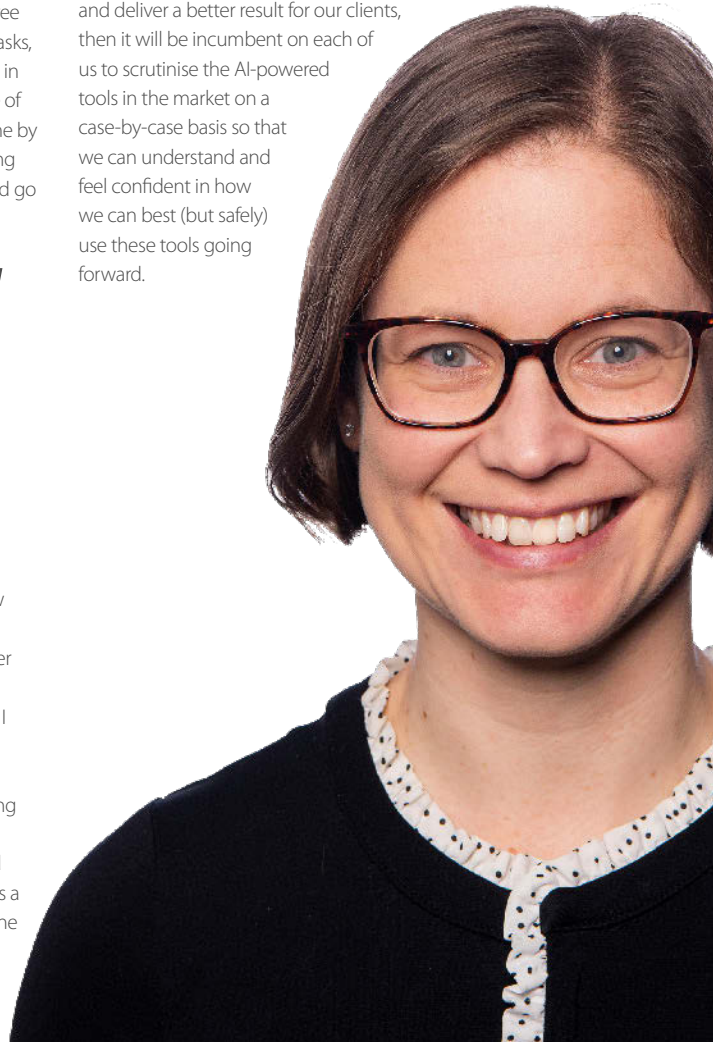
But technology has consistently developed over the past few decades, leaving each successive generation to feel that the next does not realise how easy they have it. Am I less of a lawyer because electronic data rooms have always existed during my career and I've not had to sit in a room filled with dusty boxes? I would venture to say not.

The true value that a solicitor brings to their client is in advising on the practical implications of what the documents say, and what to do next – not the process of getting to that point. And this is where AI (at least currently) cannot replace us. It still takes a human to build a personal interaction with a client and combine

emotional intelligence with the critical and strategic thinking required to best advise them.

However, AI will inevitably change our roles. In a webinar we held as part of the Leeds Digital Festival last year, 48% of attendees believed that AI would be able to do up to 50% of their current job within the next 5 years. Whilst anything that can help us to be more productive would be welcome, it does leave the question: what skills do we as lawyers need to gain to best harness the capabilities of AI? Many colleagues and clients are wary of using AI because they have heard so much about the risks and what can go wrong and feel they don't understand enough about how it works to use it confidently.

So, whose job is it to educate us? The providers of legal specific AI-powered tools have invested significant amounts in developing extraordinarily powerful tools, but as providers their words are perhaps still treated with some scepticism. For the next generation, our law schools will inevitably have a role to play. But ultimately, if we want to harness the power of AI to become more efficient and deliver a better result for our clients, then it will be incumbent on each of us to scrutinise the AI-powered tools in the market on a case-by-case basis so that we can understand and feel confident in how we can best (but safely) use these tools going forward.



## Gordons LLP expands construction team with two key hires



Gordons LLP has expanded its construction practice with the appointments of Mark Smith and Haiqa Baig.

Mark joins as a senior lawyer from Addleshaw Goddard, bringing over 25 years' experience in construction and engineering disputes. Haiqa, previously at Shoosmiths, is a solicitor with notable experience in high-value residential

and commercial developments. Her expertise includes adjudication, litigation, and mediation in the Technology and Construction Court.

Both will work under construction partner Richard Piper, supporting a client base that includes GMI Construction, United Living Group, and Evri.

Piper commented, "Mark and Haiqa are excellent additions to our expert construction team. They both also have the ability to initiate, develop and nurture strong client relationships, which is a skill that is key to the ongoing success of the firm."

## Six promotions at Schofield Sweeney

Schofield Sweeney has kicked off the year with six internal promotions across its Yorkshire offices.

Pardeep Khela becomes partner in the real estate teams. In commercial services, Tina Morris has been promoted to director. Seema Gabbi steps up to director in residential conveyancing, while James Farrell becomes director and Alex Aitken associate in the corporate team. Rajveer Basra has also been promoted to associate in the employment

team, advising on HR and business immigration matters.

Managing partner Graham Sweeney praised the group's "hard work and dedication to excellent client service."



## Catteralls Solicitors strengthens family law team



Catteralls Solicitors has strengthened its family law department with the addition of solicitor Richard Bannister and legal assistant Jessica Bullock.

Richard, an accredited specialist with Resolution, brings over a decade of experience across all areas of family

law, with particular expertise in private children's proceedings and domestic abuse cases. Jessica re-joins the Wakefield-based firm to support Richard and the wider team.

Director Kumer Ali commented, "We are very pleased to have recruited someone of the calibre of Richard, who has already made a telling contribution to the department and we are receiving excellent feedback from clients. Jess is a very able professional in her own right and will provide excellent support."

## Winston Solicitors launches new healthcare claims department with expert appointment

Winston Solicitors has appointed James Urquhart-Burton to lead its newly launched Continuing Healthcare claims department in Leeds.

Joining from Ridley & Hall Solicitors, James brings extensive expertise in NHS Continuing Healthcare funding, supporting adults with complex health needs in securing fully-funded care packages.

The new department forms part of Winston's strategic expansion of its private law services, complementing its existing offering in family law, residential property, and wills and probate.

Jonathan Winston, managing partner, commented, "We've entered 2025 from a position of strength. Last year saw the firm take on several new hires, and with James joining the firm, we continue in our business growth and to provide legal solutions to our clients."

"James brings specialist legal knowledge along with genuine care to support people, provide effective advocacy and secure lifechanging results for his clients."



## Jones Myers celebrates team promotion in Harrogate office



Harrogate-based family law firm Jones Myers has promoted Brittany Dyer to a qualified family lawyer within its children's team.

Brittany joined the

firm as a paralegal in 2023 and now strengthens the team's expertise in both private and public children law. She praised the firm's "gold star service" for all clients and looks forward to building her advocacy skills.

Jones Myers partner and head of the children's team, Kate Banerjee, said, "Brittany is a valued member of our children's team. Her promotion is well deserved, and we wish her continued success in her career with us."



## Andy Gilchrist joins Schofield Sweeney as employment partner

Schofield Sweeney has welcomed multi-award-winning lawyer Andy Gilchrist as a partner in its employment team.

Andy joins from Lupton Fawcett, where he was head of employment, bringing over 20 years' experience advising on complex workplace issues for UK and international clients. He has recently supported a US Fortune 500 company on a senior executive exit, advised on a UK office closure, and guided several major brands through workforce restructuring.

"I am delighted to join the employment team at Schofield Sweeney, as it is one of the strongest and best regarded in the region," said Andy. "I knew it would be a great firm at which to continue my career."



## Mills & Reeve makes senior hire to Leeds insurance disputes team



Mills & Reeve has reappointed Laura Johnson as a principal associate in its Leeds insurance disputes team.

Laura returns to the firm after a period at DAC Beachcroft and brings extensive expertise in defending complex, high-

value professional negligence claims, particularly in the construction sector.

Neil Howes, partner and head of Mills & Reeve's insurance disputes team in Leeds, commented, "We are thrilled to welcome Laura back to the team. She is an excellent lawyer with an outstanding reputation for advising on high-value and complex disputes, and she will be a superb addition to our growing team."

## Fletchers Group expands leadership with four new managing directors

Fletchers Group has strengthened its leadership team with four new managing director appointments, each joining the executive committee.

Caroline Morris becomes managing director of Serious Injury Law, having led the team's growth to over 150 people and overseen the 2024 acquisition of Serious Injury Law.

Peter Rigby is appointed managing director of clinical negligence, progressing from serious injury lawyer to leading the shift towards complex multi-track cases.

Georgia Briscoe takes the role of managing director of

medical law services, following her success in launching MLS, now the sector's largest pagination operator.

Charlene Mann becomes managing director of new acquisitions and Scott Rees & Co, following her work leading six acquisitions and major operational transformation since joining in 2022.

Fletchers Group CEO Peter Haden commented, "I'm incredibly proud to recognise and celebrate the promotion of these exceptional leaders. All four have contributed significantly to the success of our firm."

## Blacks Solicitors promotes 10% of its workforce

Blacks Solicitors has announced 28 promotions across 10 specialist teams, recognising more than 10% of its workforce in a major start to 2025.

Key partner promotions include Andrew Foulds (family), Emma Garfitt (residential property), Annie Beaumont (private wealth), and James Ricketts (risk and compliance).

New legal directors include Perdip Bhachu, Dean Goodwin, and Sarah Brown (residential property), Paula Moses (disputes), and Alex Hall (corporate).

Hayley Blackburn, who joined the firm as a paralegal, has

been promoted to senior associate in corporate, alongside several others across residential property and other departments.

Managing partner Chris Allen praised the team's achievements: "As a leading independent law firm, we are committed to investing in our team and acknowledging their hard work and dedication. Their enthusiasm, teamwork, and collaboration have been vital for the continued success of the firm."

## Berwins strengthens private client team with estate planning specialist

Berwins Solicitors has appointed estate planning specialist Paul Colman as associate director, strengthening its private client offering across its Leeds, York, and Harrogate offices.

Paul brings extensive experience advising business owners, agricultural clients, and high-net-worth individuals on complex estate planning matters.

He joins the firm's growing life team and will work alongside department head Derek Hellawell to lead a new centre of excellence focused on estate planning, complementing

Berwins' existing estate administration expertise.

Managing director Danielle Day said, "As a firm, we know the impact that deep expertise can have on the lives of those we support. Paul has that in abundance."





## Gateley Legal expands Leeds office with two new appointments



Gateley Legal has strengthened its Leeds office with the appointments of Libby Clarkson as senior associate

in residential development and Kate Develly as solicitor in regulatory and business defence.

Libby brings over a decade of experience advising developers and housebuilders on land acquisitions and disposals. Kate, a criminal law specialist, joins following her 2024 qualification and focuses on regulatory investigations and business defence.

The hires are part of Gateley's continued investment in its growing Leeds office, which has expanded by 22% since 2022. Partner Roger McCourt said the additions reflect "increasing demand for our legal services and our commitment to providing exceptional expertise to our clients."

## Hethertons Solicitors appoints Khal Shahjahan to property team appointment

York-based Hethertons Solicitors has strengthened its property team with the appointment of Khal Shahjahan as associate director.

Khal brings over 25 years of experience in residential, commercial, and agricultural property, as well as property finance, business leases, and investment portfolios. He joins from Berwins Solicitors and will be based across the firm's York and Boroughbridge offices.

"I am delighted to be joining Hethertons at such an exciting time of growth," said Khal, "Their client-first approach, commitment to excellence, and outstanding reputation made this an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

David Hallam, director of commercial property at Hethertons Solicitors, said, "We are really pleased to welcome Khal to the property law team. His extensive expertise will be a tremendous asset."

## Switalskis welcomes five newly qualified solicitors

Switalskis has welcomed five newly qualified solicitors into permanent roles following the successful completion of its qualifying solicitors programme.

Rebecca Wardle and Georgja McKelvey join the court of protection (health and welfare) team, Ellie Goodison and Emily Chan bolster the clinical negligence department, and Maariyah Sidat begins her role in the family law team.

Amy Clowrey, director and training principal at Switalskis, said, "Watching our newly qualified solicitors grow in skill and confidence has been a privilege. They've worked incredibly

hard to reach this point, and I know they'll make a real impact."

The firm's training programme offers both traditional and apprenticeship routes, aimed at developing talent and increasing access to the profession.



## DAC Beachcroft strengthens Leeds construction team with partner hire



DAC Beachcroft has appointed Thomas Hurst as a partner in its Leeds office.

Thomas joins from Addleshaw Goddard, bringing over a decade of experience in high-value construction and engineering disputes, particularly in health,

education, and public sector infrastructure. He also advises on PFI/PPP contracts, project risk, and the Building Safety Act.

Suzanne Wharton, head of professional and commercial risk, said, "Thomas has a wealth of experience of resolving complex, high value construction disputes, and an excellent track record for securing new work and building long-lasting client relationships. We're delighted to welcome him to the team."

## Lupton Fawcett welcomes trio of new hires: Allen, Hirst, and Rudd

Lupton Fawcett has welcomed Edward Allen, Sally Hirst, and Thomas Rudd to its growing team.

Edward Allen joins as a partner in the York-based private client team, bringing expertise in inheritance tax planning, trusts, succession, and Court of Protection matters.

Sally Hirst joins the family team as a solicitor, with experience spanning child arrangements, financial proceedings, and abuse compensation claims.

Thomas Rudd arrives as a debt recovery executive, with a background in litigation and commercial debt cases.

"We are thrilled to welcome Edward, Sally, and Thomas

to Lupton Fawcett," commented managing partner James Richardson, "Their expertise and dedication strengthen our offering as we move into what we

anticipate will be a highly successful 2025. We are in an excellent position to deliver the best results for our clients across all our practice areas."



# Artificial intelligence: friend or foe?



**Ellie Whitehead** is a solicitor for DAC Beachcroft and Sports Representative of Leeds JLD for 2025.

The impact of generative artificial intelligence (AI) on the legal industry should not be understated. Whilst still in its relative infancy, the pace of change and development is staggering, with potentially far-reaching impacts, especially on junior lawyers just starting out.

An ominous forecast might suggest AI will eventually replace lawyers altogether, with junior roles disappearing first. But is it really all doom and gloom?

## Role of AI

Traditionally junior lawyers will be assigned smaller, less complex tasks - mostly for cost efficiency, but also for their learning and development. AI could potentially perform these tasks at a much faster rate and remove the need for junior lawyers. Examples include:

- Research. AI could look through vast amounts of legislation and case law in a fraction of the time any human could, keeping costs down and avoiding delays.
- Form filling. Many areas of law have standard forms that are used frequently. AI could locate and fill out these forms with the relevant details with such standardisation, improving overall efficiency.
- Reviews. Large contracts, long leases or detailed title documents could all be reviewed and summarised succinctly for clients at an unprecedented scale and speed.

## Could AI lead to a lack of skills?

The professional development of lawyers in their early years is critical. Junior lawyers use this time to take their theoretical knowledge of the law and transition this into practical application - becoming familiar with precedents in specific areas, evaluating

the relevancy of information, identifying trends in data, etc.

As we become more reliant on technology, we may see some of these foundational skills and practices slowly erode. It's something junior lawyers should remain aware of.

## Will AI ever truly replace lawyers?

Whilst it can do some of the more mundane tasks, AI currently lacks the nuanced understanding, ethical reasoning, and contextual awareness of experienced lawyers. Clients might be able to read what AI can tell them but to really understand the content, especially of more complex information, they need lawyers who can explain the practical implications in a logical way that is easy to comprehend.

Many different areas of law - family, criminal and even corporate - require significant interpersonal interactions and high level complex tasks that AI simply cannot assist with and so will not be a part of these lawyers daily routine. Whilst AI might be changing the legal landscape, the need for experienced lawyers - all of whom began as juniors - isn't going anywhere.

## Should junior lawyers embrace AI?

Whilst AI will usurp junior lawyers for many tasks, these are the most time-consuming and for the most part, the least interesting aspects of their responsibilities. By doing away with these tasks, it will free up junior lawyers' time to engage with more meaningful and substantive work, enabling them to focus on more analytical, evaluative roles, digging into case strategy and fostering client interactions.

Junior lawyers can also work with AI to broaden their knowledge and use it as a way level up their capabilities rather than sit back and watch AI take over. As with all change, those unwilling to adapt risk being left behind. Junior lawyers are living in a technologically advanced age that older generations could not comprehend at the start of their legal careers. Tech fluency is becoming more and more desirable to employers who are placing higher value on technical skills. Junior lawyers should embrace the law as a dynamic career path: there is always something new to learn. In this instance, it happens to be AI. The key is to understand it and use it to your advantage.

## What does the future hold?

Whilst no one has a crystal ball to predict what the future looks like for junior lawyers, what is certain is that the way junior lawyers become experienced legal experts will change. As AI technology becomes more widely deployed, we can expect a shift in what junior lawyers do, how they are utilised, and the qualities needed to succeed in those roles.

From a strategic perspective, it makes little sense for the legal industry to stop investing in junior lawyers and increase investment in technology. Rather, there needs to be a combination of the two alongside each other.

Managed correctly, AI can accelerate learning - but care must be taken not to lose crucial interpersonal and business skills along the way.

## Raworths selects Harrogate Hospital & Community Charity as charity partner



Harrogate law firm Raworths has chosen Harrogate Hospital & Community Charity (HHCC) as its charity partner for

the next two years.

The legal firm's team has chosen to support HHCC, which funds specialist equipment, training, and services to enhance treatment and facilities across all departments at Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust.

It's a big year for the charity, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2025 with events such as a National Three Peaks Challenge in May, a Stepathon in June, and a 30th Birthday Ball in Harrogate in October.

Simon Morris, managing partner at Raworths, commented, "The Harrogate Hospital & Community Charity is an incredible organisation that provides much-needed services, support, and funding to our local NHS Trust. This enables them to go above and beyond in patient care."

Gemma Cook, associate business development, charity and volunteer manager at Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, said, "We are very grateful to have been chosen as Raworths' charity partner for 2025 and 2026."

The Raworths team selects a nominated charity partner every two years. In 2023 and 2024, the firm raised more than £4,300 for the Harrogate District Food Bank.

## Minster Law partners with MTSP to support children and families

Minster Law has teamed up with the Major Trauma Signposting Partnership (MTSP) to support children and families affected by traumatic injuries at Sheffield Children's Hospital.

A specialist advisor from MTSP and a Citizens Advice representative will work closely with families, offering guidance on legal matters and rehabilitation. Minster Law, one of only two firms on MTSP's legal panel, will focus on early intervention and tailored support to help children recover.

Minster Law's team, led by Stacy Clements, includes experienced lawyers Matthew Nash and Daniel Bates, who specialise in complex paediatric trauma cases such as brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and amputations.

Stacy Clements, partner, said, "We are honoured to be working as part of the MTSP legal panel. Our goal is to address the unique challenges these families face and provide compassionate, tailored support."

## Best Solicitors offers free wills to support assistance dog charity

Sheffield-based Best Solicitors has teamed up with assistance dog charity Support Dogs to offer free will writing services.

The firm, which has a long-standing relationship with Support Dogs, is part of the National Free Wills Network, a nationwide initiative aimed at increasing charitable donations through wills.

Support Dogs trains and provides assistance dogs to support autistic children and adults with epilepsy or physical disabilities, enabling them to lead safer and more independent lives.

Danny Anderson, head of fundraising at Support Dogs, said, "We are so grateful to Best Solicitors for being part of this scheme. Charities like Support Dogs rely heavily on donations left to us in wills. They truly make a life-changing difference to the people we help, leaving a real lasting legacy."

Ellie Whitehead, a legal advisor at Best Solicitors, assured that clients participating in the scheme receive the same level of service as those paying full fees: "Our wills & probate team is very proud of our ongoing support and dedication towards Support Dogs and our free will writing scheme through the National Free Wills Network."

The firm tailors each will to an individual's personal circumstances, covering family, assets, and specific wishes.



Clients can visit Best Solicitors' offices in Sheffield, Barnsley, and Chesterfield, or opt for telephone, video, and at-home consultations.

Those interested should contact Emily Allison on 0114 6981 184 or email [emilyallison@bestsolicitorsonline.co.uk](mailto:emilyallison@bestsolicitorsonline.co.uk), specifying any amount they wish to leave to Support Dogs. The legal team then handles the rest.



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# 29th October 2025

**Leeds Marriott Hotel / 11am–3:30pm**





# Last Word

Landmark case, *Stocalfe v Mapston*, exposed a rise in Google-spoofing fraud, where fake ads lured motorists into unknowingly signing up for tens of thousands of pounds worth of debt. Barrister **Steven Turner** led the case and reflects on digital deception and legal reform in our Last Word.

**Let's talk about *Stocalfe v Mapston*. 'Google-spoofing' is a relatively new issue in consumer law. How did it first come onto your radar in the credit hire sector?**

Google-spoofing is a practice where fraudulent businesses pay to appear at the top of search results by mimicking legitimate companies, tricking consumers into contacting them instead.

Insurers I work with noticed a pattern - policyholders calling to ask about vehicles they'd been given, only to find out their insurer knew nothing about them. The insurers in turn raised the issue with panel solicitors who came to me to advise on case-specific and broader strategic approaches to the problem.

**The case is being called a landmark decision. What's its most important legal takeaway?**

While it's not technically a precedent, it's a strong reminder that the Unfair Relationships provisions of the Consumer Credit Act apply to both regulated and unregulated credit agreements. That allows consumers to use FCA Principles as a benchmark - even if those principles don't directly apply. In Google-spoofing credit hire cases, that tends to favour the consumer.

**The court found *Stocalfe* in serious breach of FCA Principles. Do current regulations go far enough to protect consumers?**

No, reform is definitely needed. Credit hire companies often structure agreements to fall outside the Consumer Credit Act by limiting the credit term to a notional 12 months. That exemption means the FCA Principles don't apply.

These businesses aren't required to check if the credit service is necessary (such as when someone already has a no-cost vehicle through their policy) or even if the person can afford it. I've encountered claimants on modest incomes sign up for £100,000+ in potential debt. It's extraordinary that companies operating at that scale can avoid regulatory supervision.

Further, major issues remain unresolved: Should courts consider a claimant's own fully comp policy when assessing mitigation? Is it reasonable to hire a brand-new car if the claimant's vehicle was old and low-value? Should someone with a fraudulently fronted policy be entitled to credit hire damages? I could go on, but you get the picture.

**The case centred on the concept of an 'Unfair Relationship'. Do you think we'll see more claims challenged on that basis?**

Possibly, but *Stocalfe* wasn't a standard credit hire case. The hire company sued Mr Mapston after he refused to cooperate, having realised he'd been duped. That made it a classic consumer dispute. In standard hire cases - where the claimant hasn't challenged the agreement - courts might treat *Stocalfe*-style arguments as outside scope. But I wouldn't rule out creative attempts to apply similar reasoning as the case law develops.

**How can legitimate businesses respond to the threat of Google-spoofing?**

Engaging with search engines is key. Google will remove ads where a company can demonstrate impersonation. It's also good customer service (and good publicity) for insurers to fund representation for their customers who've been duped.

**You recently spoke on BBC Radio 4 about the case. What kind of response have you had?**

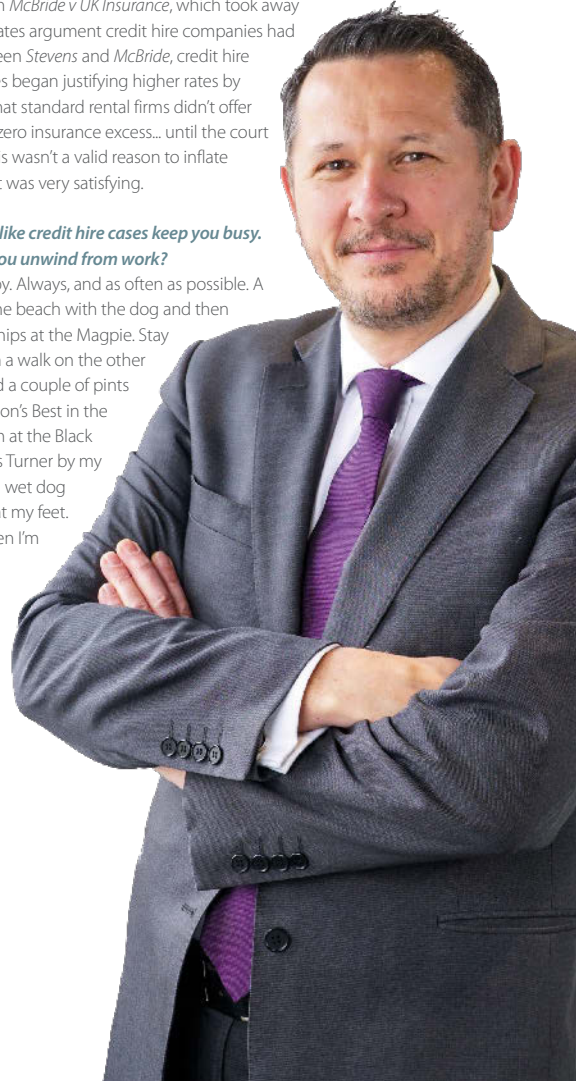
Very positive. The more the public understands, the better - the BBC told me they received several "that happened to me" calls after the segment aired, which is astonishing. I'm still amazed by the number of claimants who think their credit hire vehicle is just a courtesy car. They often don't realise they've signed up for tens of thousands of pounds in personal debt!

**Your legal career spans more than 25 years. What's been the most rewarding moment?**

Reshaping the law on credit hire rates. Before *Stevens v Equity*, hire companies could recover the highest rate in a range. After *Stevens*, they had to settle for the lowest. That was followed up with the very satisfying decision in *McBride v UK Insurance*, which took away the best rates argument credit hire companies had left. Between *Stevens* and *McBride*, credit hire companies began justifying higher rates by arguing that standard rental firms didn't offer cars with zero insurance excess... until the court agreed this wasn't a valid reason to inflate costs. That was very satisfying.

**It sounds like credit hire cases keep you busy. How do you unwind from work?**

Whitby. Always, and as often as possible. A walk on the beach with the dog and then fish and chips at the Magpie. Stay over. Then a walk on the other beach and a couple of pints of Theakston's Best in the back room at the Black Horse, Mrs Turner by my side and a wet dog sleeping at my feet. That's when I'm happiest.







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