'IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT': GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF LEGAL PRACTICE AND EDUCATION

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Artificial intelligence ('AI') and generative artificial intelligence ('GenAI') are both rapidly reshaping legal practice. As both AI and GenAI tools become embedded in legal workflows, there is growing concern that law graduates are entering the profession without the skills needed to engage with these technologies. This article presents findings from an empirical research study which examines how GenAI is being used across the legal profession in Australia, and what this means for the future of legal education. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 51 participants from 27 organisations. Participants described significant shifts in legal roles, processes, and expectations. There is some concern about an emerging '5-year problem', where it is uncertain where future skilled lawyers will come from. We argue that universities must prepare graduates for the realities of contemporary legal practice and equip them to critically evaluate GenAI output.

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The title of this article draws inspiration from the R.E.M. song, 'It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)', first released in 1987, which reflects themes of rapid, chaotic change – an apt metaphor for the disruption generative artificial intelligence ('GenAI') is bringing to legal practice and education. See R.E.M., 'It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)' (I.R.S. Records, 1987). These words are also echoed in recent commentary on the transformative potential of legal artificial intelligence ('AI'): Richard Tromans, 'If We Achieve Legal AI Perfection: Everything Changes', *Artificial Lawyer* (Web Page, 28 April 2025) <https://www.artificiallawyer.com/2025/04/28/if-we-achieve-legal-ai-perfection-everything-changes/>.

I INTRODUCTION

Technological innovation has long been reshaping the practice of law, with a growing suite of tools transforming how legal professionals work.[1] Emerging technologies that have already had an impact on lawyering and legal services include cloud computing, electronic document management systems, artificial intelligence ('AI'), virtual law firms, online dispute resolution, electronic courts and court filings, social media, and blockchain.[2] None of these technologies have been as disruptive as generative artificial intelligence ('GenAI') is prophesied to be. GenAI has drawn significant attention for its capacity to undertake tasks traditionally carried out by lawyers, many of which are now being completed, at least in part, by machines.[3] These developments have prompted important questions not only for the profession, but also for the universities and law schools responsible for preparing our future lawyers.

The release of ChatGPT in November 2022 marked the emergence of GenAI, particularly its subset, Large Language Models ('LLMs').[4] This has generated speculative literature addressing its potential impact on law and the legal profession. The volume of literature is perhaps unsurprising given that the skills that GenAI displays, such as complex analysis, understanding detailed documents, and high-level written communication, are also those that are highly prized in legal professionals.[5]

This article examines how GenAI is currently being used in legal practice and makes recommendations as to how these practice changes should impact legal education in Australia. Drawing on empirical research, we present findings from interviews with 51 participants across 27 organisations in which we aim to evaluate what it means to practise law alongside GenAI.[6] In the analysis of the interview data, we consider the impact of GenAI upon the profession and whether these impacts will challenge long-held traditions associated with the ethical practice of law. Interview questions were framed to gather an understanding of the profession's perception of the future of lawyers, and whether this perception would

1 See, eg, the list compiled by the CodeX project of tech law providers – now at 3,076 providers in a range of categories: 'CodeX TechIndex', *Stanford Law School* (Web Page, 2025) <https://techindex.law.stanford.edu/>.

2 Sally Kift and Kana Nakano, Council of Australian Law Deans, *Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education* (Report, 1 December 2021) 244.

3 Andrew Perlman, 'The Implications of ChatGPT for Legal Services and Society' (2023) 30(1) *Michigan Technology Law Review* 1 <https://doi.org/10.36645/mtlr.30.1.implications>; Harry Surden, 'ChatGPT, AI Large Language Models, and Law' (2024) 92(5) *Fordham Law Review* 1941; Laura A Lorek, 'AI Legal Innovations: The Benefits and Drawbacks of Chat-GPT and Generative AI in the Legal Industry' (2024) 50(3) *Ohio Northern University Law Review* 513.

4 A search of Google Scholar (26 February 2025) using the terms 'chat gpt' and 'law' or 'lawyers' or 'legal profession' limited to publications from 2022–2025 returned over 9,800 references. A search of 'generative AI' and 'law' or 'lawyers' or 'legal profession' returned 18,300 references.

5 Joe Regalia, 'From Briefs to Bytes: How Generative AI Is Transforming Legal Writing and Practice' (2024) 59(2) *Tulsa Law Review* 193.

6 Organisations include small, medium, large, national, and international law firms, legal tech companies, community legal centres, government bodies, and the judiciary.

change hiring practices in the short to medium term; to gather an understanding of what is considered acceptable use of GenAI in legal work; and, of course, to determine whether new skills are needed in the profession. Participants in the study commented on a '5-year problem', where it is unclear how junior lawyers will obtain necessary fundamental skills, particularly if GenAI reduces the demand for law graduates and alters traditional training pathways by assuming responsibility for mundane, yet essential tasks. Ultimately, our research aims to respond to the critical question as to whether legal education is keeping pace with changes to the profession caused by GenAI technology. Importantly, in this article we aim to make a key contribution to the literature on how the role of universities is changing in preparing graduates for a profession already being reshaped by intelligent systems.

II DISRUPTION, TECHNOLOGY AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

There is substantial literature on the potential disruption that technology like GenAI may cause in the legal profession. This Part outlines some of the key contributions in the literature to this debate, highlighting the potential risks and benefits for the legal profession, as well as the challenges it raises for legal education. We start with a description of GenAI. We then describe some of the arguments in the literature as to the potential impacts of this technology within the legal profession. Finally, we explain some of the current methods for teaching undergraduate law students with a view to informing how these methods may need to adapt.

A What Is GenAI?

GenAI is the name given to machine learning processes that can draw on an LLM to generate a response to a series of inputs.[7] LLMs are trained on vast online content. This data is cleaned, turned into tokens,[8] and mapped (or embedded) into a multi-dimensional vector that seeks to capture the meaning and structure of the content. Through adjusting these embeddings and billions of parameters, the LLM begins to resemble a statistical model of language. When a user enters a prompt, the model predicts the most likely next token based on its training, repeating this process to generate a full response. The more varied and extensive the training data, the better the model 'understands' context and reflects the complexity of language.[9] There are many definitions of GenAI, and many forms of nuance that emerge depending on whether a technical or social lens is being adopted, but broadly speaking, it 'is a class of machine learning technology that learns to

7 These responses can generate text, but also audio (including music and voice), code, images, and video. For the purposes of law firm usage, the primary use is text generation and responses, but there are some instances where broader uses are helpful, such as the generation of presentation slides or similar images.

8 Tokens are numerical units that may correspond to whole words, parts of words, or other characters.

9 Michael Guihot and Lyria Bennett Moses, *Artificial Intelligence, Robots and the Law* (LexisNexis, 2nd ed, 2025).

generate new data from training data'.[10] The potential of this technology means that GenAI operates within 'realms once thought to be reserved for humans'.[11] This form of GenAI has been in the cultural imaginary since the release of ChatGPT as a free-to-use interface that allowed the world to experiment with GenAI to create, write, and answer.[12]

Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI (the developers behind ChatGPT) declared his manifesto for the 'Intelligence Age' on 23 September 2024. This made clear his ideology, and the dream for a future where AI could create an unimaginable 'shared prosperity' that humanity faces in the new age that AI heralds.[13] Altman's manifesto concludes:

> [N]obody is looking back at the past, wishing they were a lamplighter. If a lamplighter could see the world today, he would think the prosperity all around him was unimaginable. And if we could fast-forward a hundred years from today, the prosperity all around us would feel just as unimaginable.[14]

If one is to agree with Altman's view, then GenAI promises that humans will march forward and create new forms of labour in the GenAI revolution that we cannot possibly fathom. This begs the question of what this may mean for the industries that rely on human intelligence as a form of labour, particularly in a profession where ethical conduct is paramount.

In response to this, one may argue that GenAI has the potential to alter the legal profession rapidly if it is left unchecked to do so. For more than 50 years, data scientists and engineers have been seeking to develop general AI tools to perform the work of lawyers.[15] The major problem was not only interpreting language itself, but also the particular use of language in law, or technical legal language or legalese. Ironically, a further problem with legal language was its need to support discretion and remain open to interpretation. The difficulty in applying computational methods to legal reasoning has been observed by scholars over the last 30 years.[16] Up until 2022, when ChatGPT was launched, general AI

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10 Stephanie Houde et al, 'Business (Mis)use Cases of Generative AI' (Conference Paper, IBM, 17 March 2020) 1.

11 Michael Chui, Roger Roberts and Lareina Yee, 'Generative AI Is Here: How Tools like ChatGPT Could Change Your Business', *McKinsey* (Web Page, 20 December 2022) <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/generative-ai-is-here-how-tools-like-chatgpt-could-change-your-business>; Tom Taulli, *Generative AI: How ChatGPT and Other AI Tools Will Revolutionize Business* (Apress, 2023).

12 See, eg, Barton Beebe, 'Law's Empire and the Final Frontier: Legalizing the Future in the Early Corpus Juris Spatialis' (1999) 108(7) *Yale Law Journal* 1737 <https://doi.org/10.2307/797449>; Lachlan Robb, Felicity Deane and Kieran Tranter, 'The Blockchain Conundrum: Humans, Community Regulation and Chains' (2021) 13(2) *Law, Innovation and Technology* 355 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17579961.2021.1977215>; Kieran Tranter, *Living in Technical Legality: Science Fiction and Law as Technology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

13 Sam Altman, 'The Intelligence Age' (Web Page, 2024) <https://ia.samaltman.com>.

14 Ibid.

15 Bruce G Buchanan and Thomas E Headrick, 'Some Speculation about Artificial Intelligence and Legal Reasoning' (1970) 23(1) *Stanford Law Review* 40 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1227753>; Walter G Popp and Bernhard Schlink, 'Judith, a Computer Program to Advise Lawyers in Reasoning a Case' (1975) 15(4) *Jurimetrics Journal* 303.

16 Jaromír Šavelka and Kevin D Ashley, 'Legal Information Retrieval for Understanding Statutory Terms' (2022) 30(2) *Artificial Intelligence and Law* 245 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10506-021-09293-5>; L Karl

tools had been developed to perform specific tasks. One was designed to analyse cases, another system would review documents, another AI system would do legal research, yet another AI system would perform e-discovery. Each was specifically designed for a single task and would take a long time to develop and adapt to each client's individual needs. There was not a singular tool that could perform a range of tasks.[17] GenAI represents such a transformative shift in legal analysis and work. It can effectively approximate an understanding of the structure of language, including legal language. Also, its potential to provide a range of solutions for very limited cost and its versatility make it ideally suited to legal practice. This is why the paradigm of legal practice and legal education may change.

B What Does This Mean for the Legal Profession?

Whether Altman's utopian vision will become a reality is yet to be seen; however, GenAI is already reshaping the legal profession. Below, we explore how the profession is evolving in response to this new technology. Within this section, we explore predictions about the 'death of lawyers', the potential for faster and fairer legal processes, and concerns that legal education is falling behind.

1 An Evolving Profession

Legal technology refers to 'all devices, capable of being used as a means for interacting with the substance of law or assisting its user to interact with the law, and the skills and techniques by which we use them'.[18] The literature addressing technology in the law raises important questions around 'change' to the profession and whether the change is ethical.[19] A consistent theme within legal tech literature is that the social entity of the law firm is perceived as inherently stationary; something that 'endures' rather than develops.[20] This static approach fails to adequately account for how law firms can develop into the future and how, as a social entity, a firm may need to innovate and react to the changing nature of legal practice and legal problems emerging from new technologies.[21]

Within a minority of papers, the counterfactual to a stationary profession emerges. That is to say that, although the legal profession is one of tradition, it is also

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Branting, 'A Computational Model of Ratio Decidendi' (1993) 2(1) *Artificial Intelligence and Law* 1 <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00871744>; Howard Turtle, 'Text Retrieval in the Legal World' (1995) 3(1) *Artificial Intelligence and Law* 5 <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00877694>.

17 Michael Guihot, 'New Technology, the Death of the BigLaw Monopoly and the Evolution of the Computer Professional' (2019) 20(3) *North Carolina Journal of Law and Technology* 405, 466.

18 Ryan Whalen, 'Defining Legal Technology and Its Implications' (2022) 30(1) *International Journal of Law and Information Technology* 47, 52 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijlit/eaac005>.

19 See, eg, Guihot (n 17) 457–68.

20 Marc Galanter and William Henderson, 'The Elastic Tournament: A Second Transformation of the Big Law Firm' (2008) 60(6) *Stanford Law Review* 1867, 1870; John Flood, 'Lawyers as Sanctifiers: The Role of Elite Law Firms in International Business Transactions' (2007) 14(1) *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 35, 44.

21 John Flood and Lachlan Robb, 'Professions and Expertise: How Machine Learning and Blockchain Are Redesigning the Landscape of Professional Knowledge and Organization' (2019) 73(2) *University of Miami Law Review* 443 <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3228950>; Guihot (n 17).

one that has changed and adapted over time. For instance, the tradition of learning through apprenticeship (such as Articles of Clerkship) predated the emergence of law schools as institutions of learning for young lawyers.[22] Despite these changes, the importance of maintaining high ethical standards has been a common theme in the law and in legal education over the past century. A high ethical standard is now seen as being one of the key requirements for universities bestowing a law degree.[23] Theories of reflexive empathy underscore the importance of human interaction in legal education, suggesting that in a GenAI-dominated world, human engagement in training may become even more critical.[24] This prediction is borne of reports from analysts showing '[m]ore than two in five private practice professionals (45%) anticipate their law firm's investment on legal-related tech will rise by 20% or more.'[25] In-house work is not immune. The *GenAI in Legal Benchmarking Report 2025* by Factor studied 120 in-house legal teams and noted that '61.2% of legal departments provide AI access to most or all team members'[26] and that '[25.3%] have already spent between $100,000 to $500,000 on "domain-specific" legal AI tools and close to half (43.4%) have upgraded existing legal tech licenses to access particular AI features'.[27] If this prediction is accurate, educators may feel some relief that they may not be out of a job entirely. However, it is important to recognise that this does not necessarily mean that the legal education will remain as it currently exists. Just as the firm must adapt over time, so too must the legal education sector.

2 The 'Death of Lawyers'

Literature in legal technology and technology's impact upon the legal profession reveals pessimistic trends and an emergent normative narrative: the 'end of lawyers' will be heralded by the rise of legal tech within the profession.[28] While GPT-4 passing the bar exam[29] was seen as a means of demonstrating that the end of the legal profession was only a matter of time, others suggest that this was instead indicative of the end to online multiple-choice exams for legal assessment.[30] This

22 Roscoe Pound, 'The Law School and the Professional Tradition' (1925) 24(2) *Michigan Law Review* 156, 160–1 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1280039>.

23 Sara Migliorini and João Ilhão Moreira, 'The Case for Nurturing AI Literacy in Law Schools' (2025) 12(1) *Asian Journal of Legal Education* 7 <https://doi.org/10.1177/23220058241265613>.

24 Lauren Alexandra Weber, Mary Ryan and Maryam Khosronejad, 'Reflexive Empathy as Social Relation: The Case for Contextualised Professional Learning' (2024) 45(1) *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 159 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2023.2283700>.

25 Thomson Reuters, *Tech, AI and the Law 2024: Australian Edition* (Report, 24 October 2024) 4 ('*Tech, AI and the Law Report 2024*').

26 Factor, *GenAI in Legal Benchmarking Report 2025* (Report, 2025) 6.

27 Ibid 4.

28 Richard Susskind, *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* (Oxford University Press, 2008) ('*The End of Lawyers?*').

29 Daniel Martin Katz et al, 'GPT-4 Passes the Bar Exam' (2024) 382(2270) *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 20230254:1–17 <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2023.0254>.

30 Philip Newton and Maira Xiromeriti, 'ChatGPT Performance on Multiple Choice Question Examinations in Higher Education: A Pragmatic Scoping Review' (2024) 49(6) *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 781 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2023.2299059>; Teo Susnjak and Timothy R McIntosh,

indicates that although fear is apparent in the literature, there are many competing views about the impact that this technology *should* and will have on the legal profession.

Indeed, the narrative of fear is evolving (and expanding) over time as investment in legal technology continues at unprecedented levels due to its increasing importance in the practices of law firms around the world.[31] A leading voice in this scholarship is Richard Susskind through his works *The Future of Law: Facing the Challenges of Information Technology* ('*The Future of Law*'),[32] *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* ('*The End of Lawyers*'),[33] *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future* ('*Tomorrow's Lawyers*'),[34] and *The Future of the Professions: How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts*.[35] While the evocative nature of *The End of Lawyers* instantly draws attention, Susskind's earlier exploration of the legal profession and technology in *The Future of Law* provides an important starting point,[36] because here he engages with burgeoning technology from the 1980s and 1990s. This early exploration of technology included predictions of linked 'document management systems',[37] discussions of the early days of Lexis,[38] and the pioneering technologies that allow judgments to be downloaded by solicitors.[39] He draws upon the role of information technology ('IT') as an innovative phenomenon and indicates that 'IT can indeed help overcome current difficulties facing the law and lawyers',[40] but warns that this can often cause additional problems and is not a panacea.[41]

The narrative from Susskind has developed over time to be less benign than his original predictions. In some of his more recent work, Susskind paints a picture where legal services are made redundant by IT and where technology increases the commoditisation of legal services.[42] In his most recent work, *Tomorrow's Lawyers*, Susskind tends to be less dystopian but still argues that the legal profession will

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'ChatGPT: The End of Online Exam Integrity?' (2024) 14(6) *Education Sciences* 656 <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14060656>.

31 See, eg, 'CodeX TechIndex', *Stanford Law School* (Web Page 2025) <https://techindex.law.stanford. edu/>; *Tech, AI and the Law Report 2024* (n 25); Thomson Reuters, *Tech and the Law 2018* (Report, 23 February 2019); Tanel Kerikmäe, Thomas Hoffmann and Archil Chochia, 'Legal Technology for Law Firms: Determining Roadmaps for Innovation' (2018) 24(81) *Croatian International Relations Review* 91 <https://doi.org/10.2478/cirr-2018-0005>.

32 Richard Susskind, *The Future of Law: Facing the Challenges of Information Technology* (Oxford University Press, 1996) ('*The Future of Law*').

33 Susskind, *The End of Lawyers?* (n 28).

34 Richard Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future* (Oxford University Press, 2013) ('*Tomorrow's Lawyers*').

35 Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind, *The Future of the Professions: How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

36 Susskind, *The Future of Law* (n 32).

37 Ibid 204.

38 Ibid 57.

39 Ibid 202.

40 Ibid 48.

41 Ibid.

42 See, eg, Susskind, *The End of Lawyers?* (n 28) 28; Richard Susskind, *Online Courts and the Future of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

face significant disruption that will ultimately shift the nature of the profession and the way that lawyers undertake legal work.[43] This literature feeds the fears that existing structures which are central to the profession may prove redundant. His commentary also generates widespread concerns that competition for work will increase as new actors and technologies modify the profession.[44]

The fear-driven discourse brought about by work from scholars such as Susskind often paints a bleak tale of the effect of technology upon the legal profession. At its heart, the narrative goes as follows: technology is leading to more work being outsourced based on the relative low cost of labour. This means that standardised, repetitive, and linear tasks are being conducted by technology rather than paralegals. The narrative would have us then believe that, because of this rise of technology, junior lawyers are no longer needed,[45] experienced lawyers are no longer needed in the same volume, jobs will become scarce, career prospects become bleak, and society must then rethink what a lawyer is even supposed to 'be' in the aftermath.[46] This analysis evokes action and panic from the community, especially due to the rapid pace at which these changes are anticipated.[47] However, this narrative paints a picture of a profession without any control over its own destiny. This of course is not entirely accurate.

43 Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers* (n 34).

44 Jordan Furlong, 'The Multifaceted Impact of Generative AI on Lawyers and Legal Services' (2024) 14(2) *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 8; John O McGinnis and Russell G Pearce, 'The Great Disruption: How Machine Intelligence Will Transform the Role of Lawyers in the Delivery of Legal Services' (2014) 82(6) *Fordham Law Review* 3041.

45 Megan E Boyd and Brian L Frye, 'The Duty of Efficiency & Generative AI Pedagogy' (2025) 77(1) *Washington University Journal of Law and Policy* 96, 125 <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5128234>.

46 For a discussion of this type of narrative being voiced by the profession, see, eg, Flood and Robb (n 21); William D Henderson, 'Letting Go of Old Ideas' (2014) 112(6) *Michigan Law Review* 1111; John Flood, 'Global Challenges to Legal Education' in Christopher Gane and Robin Hui Huang (eds), *Legal Education in the Global Context: Opportunities and Challenges* (Routledge, 2016); Kieran Tranter, 'The Speculative Jurisdiction' (2011) 20(4) *Griffith Law Review* 817 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10383441.2011.10854722>; Tim Buckley Owen, 'Failure Means Opportunities' (2009) 9(3) *Legal Information Management* 160 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669609990259>; Kieran Tranter, 'The Laws of Technology and the Technology of Law' (2011) 20(4) *Griffith Law Review* 753 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10383441.2011.10854719>; Christina Inglis, 'A Brave New Technological World: Opportunities for Gain and Pain...' (2018) 43(2) *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations* 5; Samuel V Schoonmaker IV, 'Withstanding Disruptive Innovation: How Attorneys Will Adapt and Survive Impending Challenges from Automation and Nontraditional Legal Services Providers' (2017) 51(2/3) *Family Law Quarterly* 133; Brian Sheppard, 'Warming up to Inscrutability: How Technology Could Challenge Our Concept of Law' (2018) 68 *University of Toronto Law Journal* 36 <https://doi.org/10.3138/utlj.2017-0053>; Paul Gowder, 'Transformative Legal Technology and the Rule of Law' (2018) 68 *University of Toronto Law Journal* 82 <https://doi.org/10.3138/utlj.2017-0047>; James GH Griffin, 'The Future of Technological Law: The Machine State' (2014) 28(3) *International Review of Law, Computers and Technology* 299 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600869.2014.932520>; Terry Hutchinson, 'Legal Research in the Fourth Industrial Revolution' (2017) 43(2) *Monash University Law Review* 567.

47 Susskind, *Tomorrow's Lawyers* (n 34) xiii.

3 Faster and Fairer Legal Processes or Just Quick and Cheap?

Susskind's reasoning has since been applied by scholars to other areas of justice, including the emergence of online courts.[48] Attilio Costabel notes that although online courts do present many challenges, they may in fact resolve some of the problems associated with access to justice for many. The contribution that Costabel takes from Susskind's conclusions is that it will be possible for these long-established legal traditions to change, and at the same time improve the shortcomings of the existing system. Despite these potentially positive developments, they argue that any change will need to happen incrementally rather than drastically.[49]

In contrast to this incremental change argument, it is possible that GenAI's rapid and significant impact on the legal profession may come about through its analysis of case law, which has been made possible by the development of databases for judgments, which have existed since the 1990s.[50] The existence of these databases has supported the argument that GenAI may be used to *predict* case outcomes and ultimately remove the court process.[51] If GenAI is used to replace traditional legal adjudication there may be some positive outcomes. For instance, there may be less delay in seeking justice, costs could be reduced, and legal decisions could potentially be finalised in fractions of the time currently required. Of course, such a proposal may also strike fear (or at the very least concern) in the hearts of many who may recognise that speed and low costs are not necessarily the goals of a justice system that adheres to the rule of law. However, some scholars have argued that the efficiency gains offered using AI will mean it will need to be deployed in some form, especially where there are potential benefits of increased transparency and legitimacy.[52] In contrast, the use of AI in the courts also gives rise to fears of second-class justice for the people who are unable to afford traditional dispute resolution and are being forced into this alternative.[53]

Despite the fear of a two-class justice system, potential efficiency leads to an alternate opinion that there are many benefits of new technology such as AI. For instance, there are claims that it allows for greater leveraging of human capital within a law firm.[54] Social science explanations of law firms and lawyers often

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48 Attilio M Costabel, 'The Future of Online Justice According to Susskind: From COVID-19 Emergencies to Global Platforms' (2023) 15(1) *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 79.

49 Ibid.

50 Masha Medvedeva, Michel Vols and Martijn Wieling, 'Using Machine Learning to Predict Decisions of the European Court of Human Rights' (2020) 28(2) *Artificial Intelligence and Law* 237 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10506-019-09255-y>.

51 Ibid.

52 Paul Burgess, *AI and the Rule of Law: The Necessary Evolution of a Concept* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024) 9–10.

53 Margaret Hagan, 'Good AI Legal Help, Bad AI Legal Help: Establishing Quality Standards for Responses to People's Legal Problem Stories' (Conference Paper No 4696936, International Conference on Legal Knowledge and Information Systems, AI and Access to Justice Workshop, 18 December 2023).

54 Mahmoud Khalifa and Mahmoud Sabry, 'The Challenges of the Artificial Intelligence of Law in the Context of Technological Development' (Conference Paper, 2024 ASU International Conference in Emerging Technologies for Sustainability and Intelligent Systems, 28–9 January 2024) 107 <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICETSIS61505.2024.10459547>.

draw upon the concept of human capital as a characteristic of the profession.[55] This concept considers the primary driving force of a law firm to be an investment in humans and their abilities, rather than in items and stock. In this way a law firm is distinct from a retailer or mechanic. Importantly, a profession that depends on human capital can be made more productive through new technology such as GenAI. For example, it will optimise the human capital output of existing lawyers through efficient research, processing more information faster, aiding in statutory interpretation, assisting in discovery, and through other automated outcomes. This is not without its disadvantages however, and there is concern that by increasing the efficiency of experienced lawyers who have already built upon their skills, the opportunities for others to grow their own human capital will evaporate. Marc Galanter and Thomas Palay state that the four key human assets of a lawyer are: pre-law school endowment of skills; learnt skills from university and practical experience; professional reputation; and client relationships.[56] The fear is that with an increase in the adoption of technology, there will be less need for junior lawyers and therefore fewer people willing to provide junior lawyers with the experience-dependent skills that they require to grow their own personal human capital.[57]

On another note, there is an important counterargument to be made about the passive response of the profession that scholars refer to in the literature reviewed above. Indeed, predicting, fearing, and even embracing the impact of GenAI on the legal profession takes an inactive view of the approach the legal industry could take to these technological developments.[58] Sam Bates Norum posits that there is a responsibility on all members of the legal profession to determine what role should be played by AI and GenAI in shaping the law, determining disputes, and even in allowing its use in routine matters. As an alternative to embracing this technology within the profession, Norum calls for an ethical requirement that ensures that 'human connection [remains] at the moral and ethical center of our field'.[59] This

55 See, eg, Ronald J Gilson and Robert H Mnookin, 'Sharing among the Human Capitalists: An Economic Inquiry into the Corporate Law Firm and How Partners Split Profits' (1985) 37(2) *Stanford Law Review* 313 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1228619>; Marc Galanter and Thomas M Palay, 'Why the Big Get Bigger: The Promotion-to-Partner Tournament and the Growth of Large Law Firms' (1990) 76(4) *Virginia Law Review* 747 https://doi.org/10.2307/1073211> ('Why the Big Get Bigger'); David B Wilkins and G Mitu Gulati, 'Why Are There So Few Black Lawyers in Corporate Law Firms? An Institutional Analysis' (1996) 84(3) *California Law Review* 493 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3480962>; Marc Galanter and Thomas Palay, 'A Little Jousting About the Big Law Firm Tournament' (1998) 84(8) *Virginia Law Review* 1683 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1073793>; Galanter and Henderson (n 20); Fiona Kay and Elizabeth Gorman, 'Women in the Legal Profession' (2008) 4 *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 299 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.lawsocsci.4.110707.172309>; Larry E Ribstein, 'The Death of Big Law' [2010] (3) *Wisconsin Law Review* 749; Bernard A Burk and David McGowan, 'Big but Brittle: Economic Perspectives on the Future of the Law Firm in the New Economy' [2011] (1) *Columbia Business Law Review* 1.

56 See Galanter and Palay, 'Why the Big Get Bigger' (n 55) 768.

57 See ibid: 'She does not acquire practical knowledge of this nature in a classroom. Acquiring experience-dependent skills requires significant hands-on experience – as well as somebody willing to invest in the time and resources needed to provide such experience.'

58 Sam Bates Norum, 'Changing All the Time: AI's Impact on Humanity's Role in Common Law Development and Interpretation' (2023) 103(7) *Boston University Law Review* 2215.

59 Ibid.

argument places the onus back on the profession to determine how and if new technology like GenAI is given the power to 'upend legal practice'.[60] It is this position which may resonate with lawyers who are both unwilling and unable to embrace such a technology. Further, there are some indications that the widespread adoption of the technology will not just be supported by the profession without regulation. At the same time, it is perhaps a position that will be unrealistic given the potential efficiency gains offered by GenAI and a fear of being left behind by more progressive firms.

4 How Do We Teach Lawyers?

The view that AI and GenAI will largely be a tool for new and existing lawyers has led to arguments in the literature for a more adaptive legal higher education sector. While higher education undoubtedly needs to evolve, the rapid pace of technological innovation has potentially resulted in unrealistic demands on the sector. For instance, Renée Crawford and Louise Jenkins suggest that tertiary educators 'evolve at a pace consistent with the growing expectations and requirements of an innovative society'.[61] This expectation places a significant burden on educators to keep up with the billions invested in GenAI and other technological advancements. While one could argue that such adaptation is essential for the sector's continued relevance, university educators, operating in a resource-constrained environment with increasing demands and pressures,[62] may struggle to meaningfully meet aspirations for a revolution in higher education if that is indeed required.

For much of its history, legal education in Australia has focused on doctrinal learning and the transmission of content knowledge by teaching students the rules of law through statutes and case law analysis.[63] Traditionally, law schools used a black-letter approach, including didactic lectures, where students memorise legal principles and apply them in hypothetical scenarios.[64] The Socratic method – an approach centred on questioning and dialogue to develop critical thinking – was more prominent in the United States, whereas in Australia, legal education traditionally relied on lectures, textbooks, and assessments focused on students' ability to apply legal rules logically and systematically.[65] Over time, however, Australian legal education has evolved to include problem-based learning, experiential learning, and clinical legal education to better prepare students for

60 Ibid 2218.

61 Renée Crawford and Louise Jenkins, 'Blended Learning and Team Teaching: Adapting Pedagogy in Response to Changing Digital Tertiary Environment' (2017) 33(2) *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 51, 68 <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.2924>.

62 Ann Martin-Sardesai, James Guthrie and Lee Parker, 'The Neoliberal Reality of Higher Education in Australia: How Accountingisation Is Corporatising Knowledge' (2021) 29(6) *Meditari Accountancy Research* 1261 <https://doi.org/10.1108/MEDAR-10-2019-0598>.

63 Mary Keyes and Richard Johnstone, 'Changing Legal Education: Rhetoric, Reality, and Prospects for the Future' (2004) 26(4) *Sydney Law Review* 537, 540.

64 Ibid 541.

65 Lowell Bautista, 'The Socratic Method as a Pedagogical Method in Legal Education' (Research Paper, University of Wollongong, 1 January 2014).

legal practice.[66] More recently, Australian law schools have also adopted other innovative teaching methods, including work integrated learning, authentic assessment, design thinking, interdisciplinary approaches, and education focused on personal wellbeing and professional identity.[67] These changes reflect a broader recognition that legal education must adapt to prepare students for the real world.

The influence of GenAI is undeniable, making GenAI literacy essential in modern legal education.[68] Although a shift is needed, it is complicated by GenAI's simultaneous transformation of education itself, with new technologies increasingly involved in teaching students, supporting students, and assisting teachers.[69] These advancements are rapidly shaping how law curricula are designed and how learning experiences are delivered. Law schools must prepare students for this shift, ensuring they can navigate the ethical, practical, and technical challenges of a GenAI-driven legal landscape.[70]

In summary, AI and GenAI are reshaping legal practice, sparking both concern and optimism about its role in the profession.[71] While some fear GenAI could replace lawyers, others see it as a tool that enhances efficiency and improves legal services.[72] To better understand how law schools should integrate GenAI into legal education, we spoke to law firms, community legal centres, in-house legal teams, government legal departments, professional regulatory bodies, legal educators,

66 Jonny Hall and Jeff Giddings, 'Experiential Education across Disciplines' in Jeff Giddings (ed), *Global Clinical Legal Education* (Routledge, 2025); Adrian Evans et al, *Australian Clinical Legal Education: Designing and Operating a Best Practice Clinical Program in an Australian Law School* (ANU Press, 2017); Caroline Strevens, Richard Grimes and Edward Phillips (eds), *Legal Education: Simulation in Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2016).

67 See, eg, Alperhan Babacan and Hurriyet Babacan, 'A Transformative Approach to Work Integrated Learning in Legal Education' (2015) 57(2) *Education and Training* 170–1 <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-07-2013-0098>; Narelle Bedford, Wendy Bonython and Alice Taylor, 'Law as It Is, and How It Could Be: Law Reform Participation as Authentic Assessment and a Pedagogical Tool' (2024) 58(1) *Law Teacher* 58 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069400.2023.2288415>; Rachel Hews, Gnanaharsha Beligatamulla and Judith McNamara, 'Creative Confidence and Thinking Skills for Lawyers: Making Sense of Design Thinking Pedagogy in Legal Education' (2023) 49 *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 101352: 1–14 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2023.101352>; Rachel Hews, Judith McNamara and Zoe Nay, 'Law and Design Thinking: Preparing Graduates for the Future of Legal Work' (2022) 47(2) *Alternative Law Journal* 118 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X211065189>; Liz Curran, 'Multidisciplinary Practice' in Liz Curran (ed), *Better Law for a Better World: New Approaches to Law Practice and Education* (Routledge, 2021) 79; Rachael Field, James Duffy and Colin James (eds), *Promoting Law Student and Lawyer Well-Being in Australia and Beyond* (Routledge, 2016); Rachael Field, James Duffy and Anna Huggins, *Lawyering and Positive Professional Identities* (LexisNexis Butterworths, 2nd ed, 2020).

68 Shu Zhang, Jie Luo and Peng Guo, 'A New Era of the Australian Legal Education: In the Context of a Global Trend of New Technology' in Shu Zhang, Jie Luo and Peng Guo (eds), *Technology, Legal Education and Legal Profession in China and Australia: Opportunities and Challenges* (Springer Nature, 2024) 71.

69 Wayne Holmes et al, Council of Europe, *Artificial Intelligence and Education: A Critical View through the Lens of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law* (Report, November 2022) 63.

70 Seifedine Kadry (ed), *Artificial Intelligence and Education: Shaping the Future of Learning* (IntechOpen, 2024).

71 Zhang, Luo and Guo (n 68).

72 Ni Xu and Kung-Jeng Wang, 'Adopting Robot Lawyer? The Extending Artificial Intelligence Robot Lawyer Technology Acceptance Model for Legal Industry by an Exploratory Study' (2021) 27(5) *Journal of Management and Organization* 867, 867, 871 <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2018.81>.

and technology providers working in the legal sector. Our research examines how GenAI is shaping hiring practices, job roles, and the future of legal work, as well as its impact on billing models and service delivery. On the basis of the findings in these interviews, we explore the evolving skill set required for lawyers, including GenAI literacy, critical thinking, and adaptability, and evaluate how legal education must evolve to support continuous learning. These insights from the interviews inform our recommendations on GenAI integration in law curricula, ensuring graduates are better prepared for the profession's changing demands.

III METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to investigate how AI, but particularly GenAI, is being used in legal practice, and determine what this means for the future of legal education. To do so, we conducted a qualitative inquiry using semi-structured interviews[73] with a diverse range of legal professionals and stakeholders across Australia. We used empirical research to understand how the legal profession was responding to GenAI. This approach allowed us to explore how legal technologies, such as GenAI, are used and understood within the social and institutional contexts of legal practice.[74] This methodology supports a nuanced understanding of how broader technological shifts intersect with professional identity and can potentially change the role of lawyers in ensuring access to justice. It may also change what it means to be an ethical legal professional. Through our analysis we aimed to understand how changes to the legal profession may warrant the evolution of legal education.

Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling.[75] We began by approaching individuals within our professional networks (seeds) and invited them to suggest others who were likely to have relevant insights. This approach enabled us to access a broad cross-section of the legal profession and related sectors.

Between August and November 2024, we conducted interviews with 51 participants from 27 unique organisations.[76] While our study had national reach, most participants were based in Brisbane, Melbourne, or Sydney. The organisations represented a wide range of legal practice contexts, including six international law firms, five national firms, two medium-sized firms, one small firm, one in-house legal team, three community legal centres, two professional services firms,

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73 Kathryn Roulston and Myungweon Choi, 'Qualitative Interviews' in Uwe Flick (ed), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection* (SAGE Publications, 2018) 233 <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070.n15>; Eileen M Ahlin, 'Semi-structured Interviews with Expert Practitioners: Their Validity and Significant Contribution to Translational Research' (Research Methods Case, SAGE, 3 January 2019) <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526466037>.

74 Darren O'Donovan, 'Socio-Legal Methodology: Conceptual Underpinnings, Justifications and Practical Pitfalls' in Laura Cahillane and Jennifer Schweppe (eds), *Legal Research Methods: Principles and Practicalities* (Clarus Press, 2016) 107–30.

75 Charlie Parker, Sam Scott and Alistair Geddes, 'Snowball Sampling' (Research Paper, SAGE, 17 September 2019) <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036831710>.

76 Of 51 participants, 34 participants have quotes featured in this article, as listed in Table 1.

one government agency, one member of the judiciary, one state law society, and three legal technology companies. Participants held a variety of roles across seniority levels and specialisations. These included 20 partners, eight lawyers, five junior lawyers, seven technology specialists, one commissioner, and 10 senior organisational representatives such as executives, directors, and managers. All participants and organisations were anonymised to protect confidentiality, as listed in Table 1.[77]

Table 1: Research Participants and Associations by Pseudonym

Name	Association	Name	Association
Asher	Lawyer, Community Legal	Julia	Junior, International Firm
Beau	Representative, Tech Provider	Katherine	Commissioner, Judiciary
Benjamin	Tech Specialist, Government	Kieran	Partner, Medium Firm
Brynn	Lawyer, Community Legal	Laura	Partner, National Firm
Caleb	Partner, National Firm	Liam	Partner, National Firm
Callum	Partner, International Firm	Nelson	Tech Specialist, National Firm
Daphne	Lawyer, In-House	Nicole	Tech Specialist, National Firm
Declan	Partner, International Firm	Olivia	Representative, National Firm
Dominic	Lawyer, Small Firm	Owen	Junior, National Firm
Felix	Lawyer, Small Firm	Pierce	Junior, National Firm
Finn	Partner, International Firm	Rowan	Partner, National Firm
Gideon	Partner, Medium Firm	Tobias	Tech Specialist, National Firm
Grace	Partner, International Firm	Uma	Partner, National Firm
Hugo	Tech Specialist, Medium Firm	Vera	Representative, Tech Provider
Iris	Lawyer, International Firm	Victor	Tech Specialist, Professional Services
Isaac	Junior, Medium Firm	Wyatt	Representative, Tech Provider
Jasper	Partner, Medium Firm	Zane	Lawyer, State Law Society

We conducted interviews either in person or via video conferencing, depending on participant preference and availability. Interview participants were asked open-ended questions to ensure participants' views were expressed in their own words. One investigator was consistently present at all interviews to ensure consistency

77 All names attributed to quotes are given in the format of generated first name, role, institution category, and date of interview.

in conduct and the way questions were asked across participants. With consent,[78] interviews were recorded and later transcribed using Otter.ai.[79] Each transcript was manually reviewed and corrected to ensure accuracy. Finally, the data bricolage was analysed using NVivo through an inductive thematic analysis to identify key patterns, tensions, and insights that emerged throughout the dataset.[80]

IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews enabled the research team to develop insights into how AI is reshaping legal work. This Part reports on and analyses the themes that emerged through those interviews, including changes to legal roles, junior pathways and the '5-year problem', the future work of lawyers, and the need to rethink billing when AI does the work. These results are structured around the themes identified by the interview participants. They show how the narrative of the 'death of lawyers' is reflected by how the role of lawyers is viewed by the current profession. The broad message from the interviewees was that this is not the end of the profession, but there are critical changes that are happening as a result of the introduction of this technology.

Within this Part we map the changes to legal work and the six types of work that AI was observed to contribute to in the Australian legal profession. These observations logically raised questions of how to charge and bill within this new AI-enhanced profession. Ultimately the discussion reflects on what all these pieces – job loss, emerging work, and billing – mean for the types of skills that are still prioritised by the profession, and therefore what skills are required for future lawyers.

A Changes to Legal Roles

Susskind's narrative starts by predicting the 'death of lawyers'. However, his arguments evolve over time to suggest the profession will potentially change to the point of being unrecognisable.[81] These views have the potential to evoke action, panic, and scepticism from the legal community. However, it should not be merely seen as a pessimistic view, but one that is couched in arguments of realism, and taking current patterns and predictions seriously. Susskind's work was raised directly in interviews, with some professionals refuting his arguments:[82]

78 This research was approved by the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No LR 2024-8059-19983). All participants provided informed consent, and all identifying information has been removed from the data and reporting to maintain participant confidentiality.

79 Roulston and Choi (n 73) 238; Melissa Corrente and Ivy Bourgeault, 'Innovation in Transcribing Data: Meet Otter.ai' (Research Methods Case, SAGE, 1 March 2022) <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529799033>.

80 Alyahmady Hamed Hilal and Saleh Said Alabri, 'Using NVivo for Data Analysis in Qualitative Research' (2013) 2(2) *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education* 181 <https://doi.org/10.12816/0002914>.

81 Susskind and Susskind (n 35) 3.

82 Interview with Isaac, Junior, Medium Firm (9 August 2024): '[E]veryone's always like "oh lawyers will be wiped out by AI", I mean, I don't see it. Susskind – I've read about him in my last year at [university] … I wholeheartedly agree it's likely, but I am just not seeing it'.

'I certainly don't believe that this is the end of the world for lawyers … Susskind wrote the end of lawyers back in 2007 … it was just wrong … I think the future is bright. Just got to jump on the train.'[83]

The profession as a whole presented an attitude of positivity in response to the changes posed by GenAI. Interviewees recognised that there was indeed a narrative that GenAI may spell the 'death of lawyers' but chose instead to view the metaphorical death as a force of change rather than annihilation and despair. Ultimately, this change is nothing new for the legal profession.[84]

Responses were not all positive, and responses revealed that there is a level of scepticism and fear experienced by the profession, as is to be expected when faced with the unknown. Often this fear was either a fear for someone else or the hypothetical future grad, rather than for those we spoke to.[85] This is because at the time of this research, the potential for change was recognised but had not caused a direct upheaval of the profession. The resounding opinion was that these changes were 'of course' coming, but they would impact those entering the profession, not those already established. Conclusions differed between participants and notably there was a pattern depending on whether that participant was more senior within their firm. Many partners saw the disruption as a benefit for graduates. For instance, one interviewee indicated that graduates hired in the future will do the more engaging and less menial work,[86] suggesting that they will have a greater balance.[87] This theme could be broadly summarised as 'the future's bright, just got to jump on the train'.[88] In contrast, junior lawyers saw that they were lucky they entered the profession when they did, arguing that entry to the profession is going to become far more competitive, and some expressed the fear that they may not actually have been hired if they were to apply for the job today.[89]

Ultimately the majority of those interviewed expressed uncertainty, suggesting that the future is unknowable. Others added that negative academic speculation (like that of Susskind) is unhelpful for planning and decision-making. Instead, it is important that firms make clear decisions based on what is known:

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83 Interview with Finn, Partner, International Firm (9 September 2024).

84 Interview with Vera, Representative, Tech Provider (19 September 2024):

> [W]hilst I do appreciate the philosophical question that Richard Susskind poses about what it would mean if we didn't have lawyers … I think that we have already seen such an incredible transformation of legal practice…

85 Interview with Daphne, Lawyer, In-House (22 August 2024):

> I have [a daughter] who is considering studying law. So, hearing that the legal profession was going to be very impacted [by AI] … made me think, gee, maybe I should go home and say to my daughter, maybe you shouldn't study law…

86 Interview with Jasper, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024): 'A concrete thing would be to take out the grunt work without affecting profitability, you should improve the profit to unpleasurable work ratio'.

87 Interview with Callum, Partner, International Firm (29 August 2024): '[Y]ounger lawyers … [have] the time to work out how to make their life or their job easier by exploring the capabilities of the tech'.

88 Interview with Finn, Partner, International Firm (9 September 2024).

89 Interview with Isaac, Junior, Medium Firm (9 August 2024) in response to the question '[i]f you had to compete in that sort of environment, would you have gotten a job?': 'I don't know … probably not. I have the legal but not technology skillset'.

> There are all these predictions about the massive change in the business of law, where AI takes over and we don't need as many lawyers and so on … And look, you can't rule out that happening, but you also can't say that it will happen … and I just think it's an interesting conversation to have over a beer, but … We certainly can't set a strategy around it yet.[90]

Of course, there was not always consistency in this view across participants. Participants from larger national firms generally held the view that there were going to be very few changes to hiring practices in the immediate future. However, smaller firms saw the technology as a clear force multiplier and that it may in fact reduce the need to hire any new lawyers at all – something which may also translate to the judiciary.[91] This feeds directly into how different elements of the profession hire (for example, graduate programs versus as-needed recruiting), but it also demonstrates how challenges of the kind Susskind identifies for the profession are potentially becoming reality.

B What's Next for Junior Lawyers? The '5-Year Problem'

Susskind's 'death of lawyers' narrative commonly evokes the fear of job loss or that GenAI will change how the legal profession hires new graduates. This is because GenAI can potentially do the work normally given to a graduate lawyer. This may be heralded as a relief for firms that can better allocate resources, however the profession then faces what this research dubs the '5-year problem' relating to the loss of experience within the first five years of a lawyer's work.

Many within the profession believe that GenAI systems (ChatGPT, Copilot, Harvey, Lexis, Thomson Reuters, or any other GenAI system) can do the work of a law clerk, paralegal, or junior graduate lawyer.[92] The impression is that a graduate lawyer is 'aware' of legal problems but lacks the understanding to fully articulate and critically analyse those problems. The work completed by the average graduate lawyer or paralegal is something that is typically seen as a 'first draft' that needs to be corrected and improved by a more senior lawyer that understands the nuance of the problem. As such, a 'first draft' completed by GenAI is often seen as no different:

> It's like having a first rotation grad. So, you wouldn't say to a first rotation grad, do me a memo that I can send to the client and then just send it on. It's a starting point. It's a helpful step up. It can save you a bit of time, but you still need to be reviewing it and using your critical skills to think about whether it's accurate or not and then testing.[93]

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90 Interview with Liam, Partner, National Firm (29 August 2024).

91 Interview with Katherine, Commissioner, Judiciary (4 September 2024):

> You know, the cost of the AI within that, just the monetary cost, you have to think, has got to be a cheaper way, and it can't replace the person. But I think there's an argument there that says that maybe instead of appointing your next Commissioner, what you do is you invest in helping the commissioners who are there to be more effective …

92 Interview with Caleb, Lawyer, Small Firm (27 August 2024): 'The general consensus seems to be it comes out with the quality of a sort of average law clerk'; Interview with Felix, Lawyer, Small Firm (27 August 2024): '[T]he next generation of lawyers … won't go through some of the grunt work that you go through from years of just looking at the same documents and reviewing things and having a process for that, because AI effectively does it all'.

93 Interview with Laura, Partner, National Firm (23 August 2024).

As such, there is some acceptance that this standard of law work can be done quickly and cheaply by a GenAI tool and verified by a senior lawyer, which naturally leads to an assumption that fewer graduate lawyers need to be hired in the future:[94]

> I don't think [post AI hiring] affects graduates, and it can't, right? Because if we let it affect graduates, we end up in the exact same situation that every short-sighted firm has ever had, which is, 'oh, fuck the global financial crisis we're not going to hire any graduates', four years later, 'why don't we have any associates?'[95]

At the time of the research, this change was speculative and very few hiring practices were being changed.[96] The core change was seen in graduate programs that were making slight changes to hiring criteria, but not to numbers.[97] It demonstrated a shift towards changing what the role of graduate lawyers might be in the future.[98] This demonstrates a widely held belief that this is a positive trend, and that technology will allow graduate lawyers to be hired to do better and more engaging work:[99]

> I think the tendency at the moment is to dump a grad in the forms and the tick and flick work and never give them any exposure to clients and people. And I think that having AI focusing on some of that tick and flick work means the profession is going to have the time to focus on people. I think it's a benefit to the profession myself, and it's a good thing for early career professionals.[100]

What this represents is a change to what the role of graduate and junior lawyers may be, and that this is something more closely aligned to practical and interesting work. This is seen as positive by the profession, as it can do away with the mundane and be more engaging;[101] however, it does raise further problems of how lawyers

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94 Interview with Jasper, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024):

> It would mean where grunt work has resulted in us hiring more grads, that won't happen anymore. And it may mean that we end up needing slightly fewer, or needing only the best, and wanting to pay them more, and we'll prefer to get 10 superstars rather than … people we're taking a chance on kind of things, I think it'll shrink the number a bit, but not a lot, in terms of focus.

95 Interview with Kieran, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024).

96 However, while confirming quotes for this article as part of ethics, in April 2025 one participant informed us that their hiring was directly impacted by AI. 'Now that I've integrated AI tools into my daily practice, I'm glad my quotes still hold up. I've avoided hiring at least one new person in my new firm as we have unlocked so much efficiency on basic tasks': Email from Caleb to Lachlan Robb, April 2025.

97 Interview with Grace, Partner, International Firm (16 August 2024):

> We've changed the questions in our graduate recruitment forms to make them as human focused as possible and experience-based recognising that applicants may well use generative AI. And we've started to see the first lot of applications where people have clearly used generative AI, and haven't even bothered to delete the first sentence that says, 'As a machine learning model I don't have human experience'.

98 Interview with Kieran, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024): '[I]n terms of grads … I don't see it changing the existence of that job. I see it changing what that job is'.

99 Interview with Owen, Junior, National Firm (19 September 2024): 'Yeah which is better for [grads], because a lot of the criticism, or the commentary you get for grads coming out is this is not what I expected, and maybe [with AI] it will be more what they expected.'

100 Interview with Brynn, Lawyer, Community Legal (6 November 2024).

101 Interview with Olivia, Representative, National Firm (8 August 2024):

> [I]t's both opportunity and disruption … junior lawyers coming into legal practice [can] come in at a very different level … like, what grad wouldn't love to kind of come in and actually be really getting into, a third-year level of legal work, as opposed to coming in literally just doing incremental parts of the legal workflow?

actually learn when the tradition (by happenstance) has been to learn through repetitive tasks to get the proficiency and expertise that makes a junior lawyer into a partner. This is discussed further below as the 'mundane work paradox'.

C What Is the Future Work of Lawyers?

The interview participants indicated that the future work of lawyers (or law work) will be augmented by GenAI. This has been described as a 'superpower' for lawyers.[102] The augmented lawyer will be one who is more effective, efficient, and focused,[103] and one where GenAI serves as a force-multiplier that can bring greater reach and skills to smaller industry players.[104] As stated, the consensus is that GenAI will not be the 'death of lawyers', nor will it inherently remove the need for graduates. Instead, it will change the nature of this role. This is a profession that will be enhanced by AI and GenAI, and the resounding belief is that job losses and failures will come from those who fail to adapt.[105] The participants identified six main areas of law work that could be enhanced by GenAI. These were: personal productivity, condensing, checking, learning, drafting, and predicting. Personal productivity was the least controversial use case, and the use of AI and GenAI to improve productivity in this area is a common first step taken by many firms in their adoption of AI. This was typically rolled out using systems such as Copilot that were able to sit across the Microsoft Office suite and assist with email and file management tasks.[106] This adoption was seen as the 'low hanging fruit',[107] and as a

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102 Interview with Hugo, Tech Specialist, Medium Firm (13 August 2024):

> I just see [AI] as giving – especially law grads, paralegals, all the way up to partner level, I would classify [AI] as giving them superpowers. That's, that's my sort of view of the world, to take the mundane, the boring, the not interesting stuff that they have to do as being a lawyer and offloading that to tools.

103 Interview with Liam, Partner, National Firm (29 August 2024):

> I think our focus is going to be more on using AI to augment the types of work that we do, which tends to be the more complex, more difficult matters and the larger matters and so on, where we can use AI to do those projects more effectively and efficiently.

See also Interview with Benjamin, Tech Specialist, Government (12 September 2024): '[W]hat they recognise is that the future of their job will be an AI enhanced'; Interview with Kieran, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024):

> So I think it's been very much overhyped, particularly in the legal industry, perhaps in Creative Writing arts and all the rest of it. My heart bleeds for those guys, right? Because that's where there's going to be real problems. But in our industry, I think my view, at least, is that it will be used as a tool to make practice more effective.

104 Interview with Julia, Junior, International Firm (6 November 2024): 'I think provide a more level playing field in terms of supplementing skill sets'.

105 Interview with Laura, Partner, National Firm (23 August 2024): 'The lawyers who don't embrace it, I think, unfortunately, will be left behind'; Interview with Zane, Lawyer, State Law Society (30 August 2024):

> [I]f you get too too negative about it and … disengage entirely … when they are forced into the market, they won't have time for a proper warm up and risk analysis, and they'll just jump in, start using whatever product is closest to hand. That will probably not work out well for anybody.

106 Interview with Grace, Partner, International Firm (16 August 2024): '[W]e're seeing time savings of between one and two hours a week from lawyers using [Office 365] for a wide range of personal productivity tasks'.

107 Interview with Finn, Partner, International Firm (9 September 2024): 'I think at one level, you know, the ability to solve personal productivity issues is pretty good and so that's an area which I think can be explored more. And probably the low hanging fruit would be my suspicion'.

way to use the technology without the risks posed by GenAI use in more sensitive legal work.[108]

Condensing activities involved the use of GenAI to make information easier to understand. This captures a range of actions and can involve the use of GenAI to upload specific documents that need to be analysed, or otherwise to break a complex concept into smaller pieces:[109] 'So if you wanted to test a high volume of documents against a policy, for example … We might use GenAI to summarize and condense the clause, to extract the essence of the clause'.[110]

Checking involves verifying and assessing information for legal uses. This can involve checking the quality of work produced by lawyers or checking contracts and other documents against other files or legislation. This uses GenAI to quickly see patterns in documents that may otherwise take time for the lawyers to identify. It is also a task prone to human error and oversights.[111] This can involve the use of legal knowledge from a GenAI tool, detecting inconsistencies between versions and rules, or otherwise just correcting general grammar and expression problems.[112] Common challenges to this involved the risk posed by offshore data storage and what this meant as a privacy concern.[113]

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108 Interview with Kieran, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024): 'Please just do a quick cut letter for that, and then, you know, Secretary can go ahead and make it better, but so it has a real purpose in things that don't matter'; Interview with Callum, Partner, International Firm (29 August 2024): 'So we're using it in a fairly limited way more as an administrative assistant, rather than for specific legal tasks at the moment'.

109 Interview with Laura, Partner, National Firm (23 August 2024): '[I]f you want a plain English description of quite a technical activity, you know, it can be used for things like that'; Interview with Owen, Junior, National Firm (19 September 2024): 'I use it as well to simplify concepts. A prompt I like is "explain, CPI, as if I'm a five-year-old" and it's just fantastic. It dumbs it down…'; Interview with Julia, Junior, International Firm (6 November 2024): 'So we have created our own AI tool at [our firm], and the purpose of that is so we can upload client documents in a secure space and create chronologies review for key information'.

110 Interview with Grace, Partner, International Firm (16 August 2024).

111 Interview with Victor, Tech Specialist, Professional Services (14 August 2024): '[I]t will then also identify conflicts, so where you've got conflicts between document A and document B, or A, B and C, for example'; Interview with Dominic, Lawyer, Small Firm (27 August 2024):

> I think the one of the main like, one of the main tasks where you get a lot of value is document review. Like, if you get a 50 page contract in, or 50 page lease and you need to review it, it's cutting that. Like the time taken to finish that job by, you know, at least 30% I would say…

See also Interview with Felix, Lawyer, Small Firm (27 August 2024):

> [Y]ou might upload a document, and then it'll give you a couple of prompts that are already set that you can select from. And it could be something like, can you recommend, like, recommend clauses to insert into this type of contract?

112 Interview with Owen, Junior, National Firm (19 September 2024):

> [Y]es, I'll say I use it to sort of proofread work, which is pretty good at both proofreading for spelling, grammar and then also for changing, tone softening, particularly in family law, a lot of how your message is conveyed is somewhat important.

113 Interview with Tobias, Tech Specialist, National Firm (23 August 2024):

> There's a few limitations with the use of GenAI for us. One is obviously security, very broadly. The other is jurisdiction. So, when we are looking at the use of large language models … we look at it from the perspective of, okay, well, where does the data sit? Where's it stored? But also where's it processed? And where's the large language model sit?

See also interview with Nicole, Junior, National Firm (30 August 2024):

> [E]ven if you look at it from our perspective, you can build it on shore. But even if you do that, the processing still has to go back out, and then you don't know what gets taken. So then it's the point at which

'Learning' activities are research activities where GenAI finds new information and cases and highlights important features that are needed for the lawyer to then analyse. This can be used to help speed up research tasks, but also to quickly onboard lawyers into new (or forgotten) areas of legal practice that they can now quickly get across by virtue of GenAI. This can be particularly useful for small practices that are able to expand their general services, or to juniors who can potentially now learn from well-trained GenAI systems.[114] Participants were consistent in identifying this as a riskier use for GenAI because of the risk of hallucinations and the need to verify any information returned by the system.[115] While research was raised as a riskier use than personal productivity, it was regarded as being safe when used appropriately. Appropriate use generally involved its review prior to use by a lawyer, rather than being directly client-facing text.[116]

Drafting relies on the more generative abilities of GenAI and enables creation of words and drafts of documents based on prompts or templates. This was identified as a riskier practice by the profession, and one that requires clearer boundaries to prevent generated drafts being presented to clients or assumed to be correct. Firms were reluctant to openly discuss the extent to which drafting and generation was being used to entirely create first drafts. They were willing to highlight how important confirming information was, and that nothing generated was ever not checked. Instead, most direct use cases described low-risk activities, or using it to create law-adjacent documents. The research showed that most firms began to experiment in this use through administrative activities – such as the generation of emails, presentations, or speeches – rather than using it to create entire contracts or legal documents:[117] 'It gives me something to start with, because I find that it kicks your brain into gear that you don't have to put in all the filler words. So that's what I think it does.'[118]

For community legal services, GenAI has been adopted slowly, but even free-use tools can be useful to allow clients to help themselves. Often community legal services are limited by time and resources, and so the drafting of letters or simple writing tasks that are normally done by clients, can now be assisted through GenAI:

> I don't use it for submissions. I don't use it for anything to do with court work or advices, because at a [Community Legal Centre], we also don't really give much written advice at all. I find it quite useful for clients that maybe aren't too literate and have sort of difficulties with reading and writing and input and articulating …

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processing occurs, the point like separate to data storage. And is that an issue, that it loops back that were out and back in. I think that's, yeah, the thing that we're trying to work through at the moment as well.

114 Interview with Victor, Tech Specialist, Professional Services (14 August 2024):

> From some of the stats that we have, it's used quite frequently just to support, like 'give me an overview of something' – getting almost like a junior training guide … rather than having to trawl through a lot of information.

115 Interview with Laura, Partner, National Firm (23 August 2024): 'And whilst you could use it, I guess, as a starter for research, it's obviously not the only point that you should be stopping at that point'.

116 Interview with Declan, Partner, International Firm (29 August 2024): 'The tools that we're using at the moment are more in that research space. Rather than generative'.

117 Interview with Hugo, Tech Specialist, Medium Firm (13 August 2024): '[O]ur lawyers will use it to help maybe refine an email or put something in so that if we've got a, you know, it needs to be a professional tone'.

118 Interview with Kieran, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024).

> say they have to write an apology letter to someone that they literally would not have any idea how to start anything like that. So I've showed them before … on my PC, said, 'look, you can ask GPT to help you with this'. You can say, 'look, write an apology I committed this crime. I'd like to write an apology to the owner of the thing that I damaged', and they could use that in court. And then that's been quite useful for clients.[119]

This is particularly helpful for those clients with limited writing skills. At the same time, the use of GenAI has raised concerns about the increased instances of self-representation. An increase in self-representation will have a corresponding impact on the need for lawyers, particularly if GenAI representation is considered competent. Additionally, this will lead to the creation of paperwork and documents by people outside the legal profession.[120] This is being borne out in real-life examples of non-represented litigants using GenAI in court cases and citing cases that do not exist.[121] The Queensland Courts have issued 'The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidelines for Responsible Use by Non-lawyers' on the use of GenAI in court which outline their capabilities and their limitations, including that they hallucinate.[122]

Prediction uses are law-adjacent and do not specifically use GenAI. Prediction AI tools are trained on data related to judges or legal concepts to try and wargame decisions and information and therefore predict the outcome of a certain legal dispute. This is not something that was discussed by the legal profession more broadly in the interviews, however it was raised in an interview with a member of the judiciary:

> Wouldn't it be amazing if you could use ChatGPT to say 'what decisions has Commissioner [Katherine] made on independent medical examinations', or 'what is [Katherine's] view on this matter'. And it was able to just gather up the last 20 decisions that I wrote on this matter and give you a bit of a summary of that … So, I think that it would be useful for people, because I also think some people might read that and then realise … maybe I'm wasting everyone's time here with this appeal. Maybe I just need to, you know, pull out. But then I'd hate for people to be discouraged from running their matter because they think that they know what the answer is going to be.[123]

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119 Interview with Asher, Lawyer, Community Legal (22 August 2024).

120 Interview with Katherine, Commissioner, Judiciary (4 September 2024):

> I can tell you now, there's people who have appeared, who are self-represented … and it's clear to me from the terminology being used … that its coming from generative AI … Now what's amazing about that to me is unfair dismissal decisions from this commission in the '80s were one and a half pages long, and now my average unfair dismissal decision in this jurisdiction is probably around 50 pages long, and I think part of it is because the advocates who ran those matters just knew the key five most recent cases. It was hard to find cases. It was hard to go and get them down … Now, I'm not just hearing the case, but I'm being referred to up to 60 different cases that are people think are on point … So if generative AI gives people even more and easier capacity to do that, I think it's got the potential to actually make decision making slower from the jurisdiction, rather than what the promise might be, which is to streamline it, and, you know, help us to turn things over more quickly.

121 Sally Crosswell, 'Fake Case Prompts Chatbot Warning', *Proctor* (Web Page, 13 April 2025) <https://www.qlsproctor.com.au/2025/04/fake-case-prompts-chatbot-warning/>.

122 Queensland Courts, 'The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidelines for Responsible Use by Non-lawyers' (Guideline, 15 September 2025).

123 Interview with Katherine, Commissioner, Judiciary (4 September 2024).

This is not as futuristic as it might seem. For example, TheoAi, a United States company, uses prediction analytics for case prediction.[124] An Israeli company, Canotera, with a 'rigorous focus on accuracy', claims that its AI system 'reviews millions of past cases to analyze your case in the context of historical precedents' to provide 'clear predictions about your case's likely outcomes, potential damages, and timelines'.[125] In an interesting act of resistance to this trend, under article 33 of the *Justice Reform Act*, the French government has prohibited the specific use of case prediction GenAI that uses the identity of magistrates and court registry members for 'evaluating, analysing, comparing, or predicting'.[126]

Although the interviews identified some clear efficiency gains for the profession through the use of GenAI, there were ethical concerns that underpinned a lot of these uses. Further, these ethical concerns are exacerbated where the text generated by GenAI tools is not closely reviewed and corrected by a legal professional. Consistent through the interviews is that the profession will need to adapt, regardless of whether a person is already a member of the judiciary or a partner, or if they are a graduate lawyer. There was one question that begs attention that has been raised by the integration of GenAI into legal tasks. That is, how can the work of lawyers be ethically charged and billed when GenAI has been deployed?

D Rethinking Billing When AI Does the Work

The question of billing was frequently raised by the interviewees when asked to predict the impact of AI on the profession. This was not unexpected as billing is an issue that has been raised in the literature as one of the challenges for a legal profession coexisting with GenAI.[127] Ethical billing is inherently part of a good legal profession and for some this practice is closely connected to their professional identity. It forms part of ethical and commercial considerations of lawyers, but the advent of GenAI puts this pillar of the profession in a state of flux. As noted by Nicole Black, 'AI has the potential to disrupt the almighty billable hour.'[128]

The legal requirements for billing by the legal profession are regulated through state-based legislation.[129] This regulation requires that legal costs are fair and reasonable and that clients have the right to dispute those costs where this is not the case.[130] As a result, billing disputes are frequent in the legal profession due to the ambiguity of what is fair and reasonable. At a basic level, billing for legal work is a factor of time and complexity, where the number of hours committed to

124 'Predicting Legal Outcomes with Theo AI', *Ripple Ventures* (Web Page, 2024) <https://archive.is/kV9HC>.

125 *Canotera* (Web Page, 15 Feb 2025) <https://canotera.com/>.

126 *Loi n° 2019-222 du 23 mars 2019 de programmation 2018-2022 et de réforme pour la justice* [Law No 2019-222 of 23 March 2019 on Programming 2018-2022 and Reform for Justice] (France) JO, 24 March 2019, art 33(IV)(1°) al 3 [tr author].

127 Nicole Black, 'AI in Legal Tech: Efficiency, Innovation, and Justice for All' (2025) 39(1) *Commercial Law World* 42.

128 Ibid 43.

129 There are different Acts in different states. For instance, in New South Wales billing is regulated through the *Legal Profession Uniform Law 2014* (NSW): at pt 4.3 div 5. In Queensland, costs agreements and billing are regulated by the *Legal Profession Act 2007* (Qld): at pt 3.4 divs 5–6.

130 See, eg, *Legal Profession Uniform Law 2014* (NSW) s 172; *Legal Profession Act 2007* (Qld) ss 319, 341.

a task is multiplied by the skill level of those who completed it.[131] Logically, the hourly rate from a junior lawyer is much less than that of an experienced partner.[132] The reality of law work is that matters may be initiated by a partner and based on partner-client relationships, but much of the work is completed by a junior and merely signed off by the partner. This keeps costs lower but may not always be readily obvious to a client. An alternative to hourly billing (and the 'billable hour') is fixed-fee billing. This is common for tasks that have a regular and knowable duration (eg, a conveyance) but is rarely used for more complex legal work.[133] This billing dynamic is challenged by the introduction of AI. This is because a legal practice cannot charge for time not actually undertaken by a lawyer. The inability to bill for work may be one barrier to the adoption of GenAI in the legal profession. Whether it remains a barrier could depend on resolution by state law societies, legislation, and the courts. A few possible responses to this challenge emerged through the interviews.

Some interview participants suggested that the use of AI should make no difference to billing and would not impede its uptake. Other interview participants saw the reduced costs as being positive rather than negative, which may lead to faster uptake of GenAI as opposed to it being a barrier. This is because the use of GenAI may mean that there is less effort being undertaken by lawyers and staff and therefore less internal costs. This could make bills lower and therefore the firms embracing AI could have a competitive edge based on being able to offer lower costs.[134] This would allow a firm to take on more matters – and it would be less tedious and therefore less of a burden on the workers:

> We want to bill our clients less for these matters, because we become more competitive. It's not all about trying to charge the most time for matters – if we can shave three hours off, there's plenty of work, we just do another matter, and we'll get through more work for the client … Often, if we charge them less, they're going to give us more. So, there's not a lot of worry about that here at all.[135]

Where GenAI leads to increased costs, firms may need to recoup some expenses, for example, by '[upping] all the hourly rates a little bit'.[136] There are

131 See also Herbert M Kritzer, 'Lawyer Fees and Lawyer Behavior in Litigation: What Does the Empirical Literature Really Say?' (2002) 80(7) *Texas Law Review* 1943.

132 See, eg, Christine Parker and David Ruschena, 'The Pressures of Billable Hours: Lessons From a Survey of Billing Practices Inside Law Firms' (2011) 9(2) *University of St Thomas Law Journal* 619 <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1790082>; Alice Woolley, 'Evaluating Value: A Historical Case Study of the Capacity of Alternative Billing Methods to Reform Unethical Hourly Billing' (2005) 12(3) *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 339 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695950500420218>.

133 See generally Richard C Reed, *Beyond the Billable Hour: An Anthology of Alternative Billing Methods* (American Bar Association, 1989); Lonny Balbi, 'Death to the Billable Hour: Alternative Billing Methods in Family Law Practice' (2010) 24(2) *American Journal of Family Law* 99; Mitchell Kowalski, *Avoiding Extinction: Reimagining Legal Services For the 21st Century* (iUniverse, rev ed, 2016).

134 Interview with Jasper, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024): 'If the AI makes us more efficient … we don't need to pass on any extra cost'; Interview with Beau, Representative, Tech Provider (13 August 2024): '[I]f you're using AI, [law work] should not cost you the same rate as it did before, unless it's great quality, far above exceeding whatever it is that needs to be done – otherwise it has to be discounted'.

135 Interview with Gideon, Partner, Medium Firm (13 August 2024).

136 Interview with Jasper, Partner, Medium Firm (9 August 2024).

alternative approaches including charging specific amounts for the use of AI as a reflection of the time it had saved:

> [F]irms effectively use it like they have a staff member … that has a set rate so that if they are doing any work and they've used AI to help sort of offset that, then they apply a rate, at an hourly rate [that] sort of keeps the client happy, and the output is still [the] same.[137]

An interesting alternative has been the proposal of a tiered system where clients are able to opt into different models of charging depending on how much GenAI is used. In this model, the AI use ratio is decided by a client with an 'entirely human' solution being charged at a higher rate than one being managed mostly through AI.[138] Depending on the quality of outcomes associated with GenAI, this may increase or decrease its use in legal practice. In some ways this makes the future of GenAI in the profession somewhat difficult to predict. What is certain is that the profession will need to avoid an inevitable race to the bottom in terms of quality of service.[139]

In summary, the inability to bill clients for the work done by GenAI may in fact be a barrier to the adoption of this technology in the profession. This is relevant here because charging for services directly impacts the legal profession, which in turn can change the role and value of graduates entering the profession. As stated in the above results, the '5-year problem' reveals the tension that the legal profession needs to continue to hire graduates despite GenAI's ability to undertake tasks traditionally performed by graduates. However, at least for now, the work performed by GenAI cannot be billed in the same way. Whether this constraint changes the impact of GenAI on the profession is yet to be seen.

Overall, the interview results illustrate that AI is (already) actively reshaping legal work, roles, and required skills, but it does not appear to be replacing lawyers entirely. Further, replacing lawyers directly is not an outcome anticipated by the profession. This means that in the immediate future, hiring of graduates may change slightly but the profession is not anticipating a complete revolution. However, the results do indicate that there may be a shifting role for universities in an AI-driven legal profession. This is particularly the case if an undergraduate law degree is expected to support the development of skills needed in an AI-competent lawyer. For the remainder of this article, we use the results from the interviews to provide a foundation for the discussion of the broader implications for shifts in legal education, professional identity, and the evolving nature of legal expertise.

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137 Interview with Hugo, Tech Specialist, Medium Firm (13 August 2024).

138 Interview with Liam, Partner, National Firm (29 August 2024):

> I've also seen a firm doing risk based billing, where you can choose a model where you do an AI only due diligence and that has a certain price, or you have one that has a light touch human lawyer review, or a one that has this kind of full complement of human review, and they have different price points and sort of risk and so on associated with them. So all of this is on the table.

139 Interview with Tobias, Tech Specialist, National Firm (23 August 2024):

> So of course, the conclusion [clients] jumped to was also, 'it's going to be cheaper for us to get legal advices from you, right? Because you're not spending all that time to draft it up using a technology'. So, everybody wants to race to the bottom, which we don't want to do, and we're not necessarily saying we want to charge you more for it, but at the same time, and this is the thing, it's because this industry is so time based. It's the reason why those kind of discussions happen …

V THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN AN AI-DRIVEN LEGAL PROFESSION: CREATING THE AI-COMPETENT LAWYER

The findings from this research highlight a fundamental challenge: while GenAI is already transforming legal practice, any changes to education need to be intentional and well-planned.[140] We aim to add to the literature that can help support this planning. Our study revealed a legal landscape where GenAI is automating routine tasks, altering hiring expectations, and redefining legal work.[141] Despite these shifts, as educators we know that many law graduates enter the workforce without formal training in GenAI, or the critical skills required to engage effectively with GenAI-assisted legal processes.[142] Preparing law graduates for an AI-enhanced profession is not merely about teaching them how GenAI functions but ensuring they are equipped to engage with these AI tools as part of their legal practice. This means understanding GenAI's applications, risks, and limitations, as well as being prepared for a profession where GenAI is increasingly embedded in legal research, document drafting, analytical skills, and legal advisory tasks.[143] As a result, universities need to rethink how they educate the next generation of lawyers to ensure graduates are equipped with GenAI literacy, technological adaptability, ethical reasoning, and the ability to critically evaluate GenAI-generated outputs.[144]

This Part starts by considering the pressures reshaping legal education that have arisen outside the practices of the profession.[145] Next we explain the legal, ethical, and technical skills needed by graduates (and lawyers more broadly) in a GenAI-reliant profession. Finally, we focus on the role of universities and the importance of understanding how these graduate skills could be taught as part of a law degree. In this Part we provide a framework that balances how and when GenAI can be integrated into law curricula. Within this Part we take the observations and themes that emerged from the interviews and use them to inform how GenAI will change the necessary skills for graduates. We carefully consider the balance between the role of universities versus the role of the firm in educating graduate lawyers.

A Reforming Legal Education

Our interview results indicate that GenAI is being adopted within the profession and that this may have an impact on hiring practices, particularly for graduate lawyers. However, the pressures on universities to adapt arise not only from within the legal profession but also from broader policy frameworks that are shaping the

140 See also Parineeta Goswami, 'Revolutionising Legal Education: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Shaping the Future of Law Teaching and Learning' (Scholarly Paper No 5123719, Social Science Research Network, 4 February 2025) 5 <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5123719>.

141 See also Samantha A Moppett, 'Preparing Students for the Artificial Intelligence Era: The Crucial Role of Critical Thinking Skills' (2025) 52 *Mitchell Hamline Law Review* (forthcoming).

142 Ibid 3.

143 Migliorini and Moreira (n 23) 12–15.

144 Zhang, Luo and Guo (n 68) 80; Interview with Finn, Partner, International Firm (9 September 2024): 'How can the universities create lawyers that can go in and use the technology to be productive earlier? And obviously the firms are going to have to think about that as well … sort of like an apprenticeship'.

145 This Part relies on research conducted in parallel to the interviews with the profession.

future of higher education. In 2021, the Council of Australian Law Deans' ('CALD') report, *Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education*, emphasised the need for curricula to evolve so that graduates not only understand legal principles but can also critically engage with AI-assisted legal work, manage ethical risks, and collaborate within multidisciplinary teams.[146] To achieve this, the report proposed a more integrated, practice-based approach to learning that better reflects the evolving nature of legal work.[147] The report also outlined a progression of technological competence among lawyers, beginning with foundational digital skills such as using automated legal tools (Automated Lawyer), recognising cybersecurity risks and protecting client data (Alert Lawyer), and navigating professional responsibilities in digital legal environments (Avatar Lawyer).[148] However, the report emphasises that legal education must go beyond these foundational competencies to prepare graduates for higher levels of GenAI engagement.

In 2023, the *Australian Universities Accord* report, a major policy initiative aimed at reforming Australia's tertiary education system to ensure it meets the future needs of the nation, similarly highlighted the increasing influence of GenAI on higher education and the need for universities to adapt to emerging technologies.[149] In particular, it highlights the importance of aligning graduate capabilities with workforce expectations.[150] To achieve this, the report proposed a well-resourced and dynamic tertiary education system, broad and equitable access to high-quality education, the development of graduates with future-focused skills, strong collaboration between education providers and industry to align skills with workforce demands, and the generation and application of new knowledge to benefit society.[151] Within this framework, GenAI is identified as both a challenge and an opportunity, driving the need for a shift in curriculum design to equip students with digital literacy and critical thinking skills that align with the evolving demands of the workforce.[152]

At a state level, in 2022 the Queensland Law Society ('QLS') commissioned *The Job Readiness of Law Graduates and Entry-Level Solicitors in Private Practice* ('*Job Readiness Report*'), which examines the extent to which new law graduates and entry-level solicitors possess the legal knowledge, practical competencies, and professional attributes required to transition effectively into private legal practice.[153] It raises concerns about how graduates will gain the foundational experience they need to become experienced lawyers who can interpret AI-assisted legal research, identify errors, and ensure compliance with legal standards.[154]

146 Kift and Nakano (n 2) 106.
147 Ibid 18–19.
148 Ibid 248.
149 Mary O'Kane et al, *Australian Universities Accord* (Final Report, 28 December 2023) 61.
150 Ibid 86, 98.
151 Ibid 16, 233.
152 Ibid 84.
153 Queensland Law Society, *The Job Readiness of Law Graduates and Entry-Level Solicitors in Private Practice* (Final Report, 1 December 2022) 2, 32, 53 ('*Job Readiness Report*').
154 Ibid 8–9.

In 2023, the QLS launched the *Future Ready Report: Queensland Sole, Micro, Small and Medium Law Firm Capability to Meet Disruption* to explore how smaller legal practices are responding to major challenges, including technological advancements such as AI.[155] The report identifies that while larger firms have led legal technology innovation, smaller firms have been slower to adopt new technologies.[156] This means that even though some graduates will be exposed to GenAI immediately, and will need corresponding skills, others may be more reliant on traditional legal skills when entering practice. Understanding the concerns set out in these reports is fundamental to identifying how law schools can better align their curricula with the evolving demands of GenAI-driven legal practice and respond to the changes taking place within the profession. On the one hand, it is important for graduates to be prepared for expectations created by GenAI in the profession, but on the other, the fundamental skills of legal professionals may not drastically change, particularly not for more senior lawyers. The following sections explore key areas for reform.

B Rethinking Legal Skills

Our interviewees emphasised that lawyers, including those new to the profession, continue to need strong human skills as legal work becomes increasingly shaped by technology. The views of interview participants were supported by the QLS *Job Readiness Report*, which highlights the importance of sound human judgement and interpersonal capacities as technology evolves, particularly emotional intelligence, teamwork, and collaboration, as these 'are human characteristics that (for the moment) cannot be replicated by technology'.[157] The rise of GenAI made it clearer to firms that lawyers need to be better skilled at the tasks that are (at the time of the research) beyond the capabilities of the technology. This can be broadly attributed to 'soft skills', that is, the ability to empathise and communicate with clients and generate a 'human connection'.[158]

The interview results also reinforced the importance of technical skills where lawyers are aware of how to use the technology, but not at a skill level where lawyers need to create the AI themselves. The clear need was for graduates to know how to evaluate GenAI legal research, identify errors, and apply legal reasoning to

155 Queensland Law Society, *Future Ready Report: Queensland Sole, Micro, Small and Medium Law Firm Capability to Meet Disruption* (Final Report, March 2023).

156 Ibid 131.

157 *Job Readiness Report* (n 153) 7. See also Michael Legg, 'New Skills for New Lawyers: Responding to Technology and Practice Developments' (Research Paper No 51, University of New South Wales Law Research Series, 2018).

158 Interview with Grace, Partner, International Firm (16 August 2024):

> [A]ctually a lot of what lawyers do is the human connection. It's building trust, and it's articulating complex concepts into simple terms, simplifying complexity. So I do firmly believe that the interpersonal skills will be really important…

See also Interview with Declan, Partner, International Firm (29 August 2024):

> [T]he tech can do so much, but you know, it's that emotional intelligence piece and the empathy where AI just doesn't have it … You know, it's not going from point A to point B to get the output. Sometimes, there's a lot of other factors that have to be taken into consideration.

GenAI-assisted outputs. At its core, GenAI technical literacy is predominately one of symbiosis and augmentation, insofar that legal practitioners will need to have the skills to know what the tools of GenAI can do, and how it can enhance their role: 'If I was a law student now, I would want to be so adept at using these tools and really understand what data they're pulling on, so when I'm doing my legal research, I can understand'.[159]

This means that graduates will need to know how to prompt the GenAI tools and the best way to engage with the technology,[160] but not necessarily how to code the tools.[161] Prompting skills were a key area that interview participants discussed,[162] however, although interview participants were not experts in GenAI systems, some observed that the art of prompting appears to be constantly changing as the way they have interacted with GenAI systems changes.[163] Further, some participants suggested that, depending on the user interface, there does not always appear to be a need for prompting expertise to generate useful results.[164] This observation aligns with technological advancements where advanced prompting skills are not needed when a firm uses an assist in prompt improvement that can be plugged into these interfaces.[165] Hence, although prompting was identified as an important skill at the time of writing, its inclusion in an undergraduate degree may be premature due to the expected evolution of the technology.[166] As lawyers without technical expertise, participants identified the importance of knowledge in using any GenAI tools. From the perspective of a legal professional, this may include knowing what the GenAI tool is capable of,[167] knowing the risks in using it, knowing what the legal task requires, and knowing the ethical boundaries of its use to achieve those aims: 'How do you

159 Interview with Laura, Partner, National Firm (23 August 2024).

160 Interview with Rowan, Partner, National Firm (19 September 2024): 'I mean, I would expect our grads to come through and be experts at prompting'.

161 See, eg, James Grimmelmann, 'Programming Languages and Law: A Research Agenda' (Conference Paper, 2022 Symposium on Computer Science and Law, 1 November 2022) 155 <https://doi.org/10.1145/3511265.3550447>; Mark Fenwick, Wulf A Kaal and Erik PM Vermeulen, 'Legal Education in a Digital Age: Why "Coding for Lawyers" Matters' (Working Paper No 2018-4, Lex Research Topics in Corporate Law and Economics, 7 August 2018) <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3227967>; Interview with Nicole, Junior, National Firm (30 August 2024): 'I think it's helpful to understand the architecture and how everything plugs in … but I don't think you need to actually know how to code. I hope not'.

162 Interview with Grace, Partner, National Firm (16 August 2024): 'When you write a prompt, it's not like a Google search. You're not just fishing … It's a methodology'.

163 Interview with Nelson, Tech Specialist, National Firm (19 September 2024): 'It's also just about having that exposure and familiarity about AI, because as these products, they evolve, prompting might even take on a different shape'.

164 Interview with Grace, Partner, International Firm (16 August 2024): 'I think the most important thing is to teach [AI] in almost a tech neutral approach, because the technology will change so quickly'.

165 See, eg, 'Use Our Prompt Improver to Optimize Your Prompts', *Claude Docs* (Web Page) <https://docs.claude.com/en/docs/build-with-claude/prompt-engineering/prompt-improver>.

166 Henry Chandonnet, '"AI Is Already Eating Its Own": Prompt Engineering Is Quickly Going Extinct', *Fast Company* (Web Page, 6 May 2025) <https://www.fastcompany.com/91327911/prompt-engineering-going-extinct>.

167 Interview with Wyatt, Representative, Tech Provider (4 September 2024): 'There's more aspects to prompt engineering than just creating and knowing what you want. It's also knowing what's available and what's not available'.

leverage the multiplying components of technology to achieve your goals? … that skill is absolutely essential for new lawyers right now'.[168]

To this extent, it is not a simple matter of 'prompting skills', but instead there is a need for wider competence that draws on GenAI knowledge, a clear understanding of professional ethical principles, and a strong foundation of legal knowledge to be able to understand and interrogate the technology.

Hence this demonstrates that the fundamental skills of lawyers – a need for critical thinking, soft skills, and the seemingly obvious ability to actually understand the law – remain critical to the profession and the ethical practice of law. These tasks can be attempted by GenAI, but the human-in-the-loop fundamentally needs to have a strong foundation of this knowledge to properly use the GenAI and to interrogate its outputs: '[Y]ou need to explicitly understand the law, because if some GenAI spits something out, you need to understand what it's saying'.[169] The core required skill becomes one of verifying and interrogating the outputs of the technology:

> We're not going to be recruiting people based on their ability to use GenAI. That's not the point … we see that as a skill that we would need to teach once they come to the firm … I think the ability to critique and evaluate the output is going to be even more important.[170]

These skills are not new; however, with the ability to use GenAI, law students may find them increasingly difficult to prioritise. That is because when faced with the prospect of technology that can simply provide answers, there is a perception that users do not need to inherently know the answers themselves. This becomes a delegation of knowledge, but ultimately the concern is that lawyers will lack the skills to know what question needs to be asked: 'The LLM is not going to come up with a question. We need to come up with a question … I think that's all that's been the history of time that's been the issue of lawyers is trying to ask the *right* question'.[171]

Asking the wrong question and missing the deeper issue beneath the surface is a common problem in law. Empathy-based approaches, central to legal design, emphasise the importance of understanding the *real* problem to be solved, which is frequently quite different from how it initially presents.[172] This way of thinking is essential not just in the context of GenAI, but more broadly as the depth and complexity of the skills required in legal practice continue to grow. The interview participants constantly agreed that the need for legal skills is not made redundant by technology, and that in fact it may be even more important because of the risk posed by hallucinations in the GenAI and complacency that assumes it is correct.

> You know what you're putting in, so you're using the tools simply as a vehicle. We're going to have to supervise the technology. So, we'll become intelligent machine operators in a different way than we are today. So, you will have to know

168 Interview with Vera, Representative, Tech Provider (19 September 2024).
169 Interview with Isaac, Junior, Medium Firm (9 August 2024).
170 Interview with Grace, Partner, International (16 August 2024).
171 Interview with Gideon, Partner, Medium Firm (13 August 2024) (emphasis added).
172 Chalen Westaby and Emma Jones, 'Empathy: An Essential Element of Legal Practice or "Never the Twain Shall Meet"?' (2018) 25(1) *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 107 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695958.2017.1359615>.

> more than the output of the machine. So how do we keep our lawyers ahead of the tasks that we're asking them to verify? To me, that becomes the real question.[173]

This creates a clear challenge for graduate lawyers to learn the required skills because the clear use case for GenAI is to replace the mundane work,[174] and yet there is a continued perception that this mundane work is how graduate lawyers learn the skills that are foundational to their specific practice area.

C How Is the AI-Competent Lawyer Created?

The interview participants identified that the automation of routine legal tasks has the potential to fundamentally alter the role of junior lawyers.[175] The QLS *Job Readiness Report* highlights that many law graduates lack the necessary practical experience that the profession requires and need to undergo extensive training before becoming practice-ready.[176] Our interviews with legal professionals and firms revealed concerns that GenAI is reducing the need for entry-level lawyers to perform tasks such as research, document review, and contract drafting.[177] These tasks traditionally provided essential training, but if GenAI takes over these tasks, firms may hire fewer junior lawyers or shift their expectations towards graduates with more developed practical skills. Some interview participants claimed that practical legal training ('PLT') was one solution,[178] some declared it was a challenge for universities to resolve,[179] and others proposed that the profession needed to embrace this during graduate programs,[180] or to return to stronger forms of mentoring or apprenticeship models of education.[181] These proposed pathways

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173 Interview with Grace, Partner, International Firm (16 August 2024).

174 Interview with Pierce, Junior, National Firm (19 September 2024):

> Use it for these mundane tasks, or these other types, whatever types of tasks we think it's suitable for, so that you've got more time to do the value add, but you can't value add until you've got skills and building blocks.

175 See, eg, Ian Nelson and Chris Wedgeworth, 'Reinventing Associate Training for the Age of AI', *The Artificial Lawyer* (Web Page, 2 April 2025) <https://www.artificiallawyer.com/2025/04/02/reinventing-associate-training-for-the-age-of-ai/>.

176 *Job Readiness Report* (n 153) 29, 30, 33, 34, 42, 44, 47.

177 See also Michael Legg and Felicity Bell, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Legal Profession: Becoming the AI-Enhanced Lawyer' (2019) 38(2) *University of Tasmania Law Review* 34, 59.

178 Interview with Julia, Junior, International Firm (6 November 2024):

> Well, at the moment, there's a big disconnect between the law degree, the practical legal training and then what you actually get on the job. Think that this might be a great catalyst for a review of that system, and it becoming a more practical training course, perhaps?

179 Interview with Pierce, Junior, National Firm (19 September 2024):

> [T]he work that they're going to do at university, using [AI] is going to be based around assessment and assignments. It's not around solving legal problems with clients. So I think we probably have to split that one in half. That the university gives them the base, as in any research tool, and then [law firms] have got to just refine it as part of the practical piece, so that it's actually useful.

180 Interview with Iris, Lawyer, International Firm (19 September 2024): '[S]o there are bits of grad programs which are now looking at AI'; Interview with Isaac, Junior, Medium Firm (9 August 2024): 'The same as like a doctor or an engineer, you go to uni and you learn how to draft the drawings and how all the contraindications work, but it's not until you actually see it, touch it, do it, that everything kind of comes to life'.

181 Interview with Callum, Partner, International Firm (29 August 2024): '[A]nd then there will be a level of, you know, training by osmosis, with a lawyer sitting with me'.

require a clear rethinking and expansion of clinical legal education. If PLT is a place for training, then integrating GenAI training into professional legal training courses will be needed. Other alternatives may include strengthening collaboration between universities and law firms, and modernising assessment methods to reflect GenAI-assisted legal work. Similarly, interviewees for the *Job Readiness Report* study suggested that reinstating clerkships and legal apprenticeships or extending clinical placements to ensure graduates develop core competencies before entering the workforce may be necessary in the future.[182]

One problem that was identified by the use of GenAI in firms is the 'mundane work paradox'. The 'mundane work paradox' is derived from a belief from participants, especially the partners interviewed, that they were highly skilled and accomplished today in part because of the experience they gained through early monotonous practice.[183] This experience included the crucible of graduate work that was predominantly mundane and monotonous but instilled in them a clear work ethic as well as a deep understanding of their practice area and expertise: 'How do lawyers train, learn by osmosis, if they're being excluded from that sort of task?'[184]

Although participants argued that the monotonous tasks are ones that can be improved through GenAI, at the same time any efficiency gains may be offset by the lost learning potential that monotonous tasks have always offered. However, whereas in the past doing the same task 1,000 times was needed, 20 may be enough to provide the learning opportunity.[185] Ultimately, if doing these tasks changes from being a necessity to being a learning opportunity, then the tasks may be viewed more favourably by graduate lawyers.[186] This perception may make the first years of a graduate lawyer's career more enjoyable and potentially improve graduate retention rates for firms.[187] It is possible that this could mean the 5-year problem identified earlier may be less catastrophic if graduates can progress through stages of learning more quickly and firms recognise the value in this. However, the 5-year problem will remain if firms try to (and the profession allows them to) replace the graduate stage entirely with GenAI: 'A lawyer has to do the thing, and that is how

182 *Job Readiness Report* (n 153) 57, 84, 86.

183 Interview with Daphne, Lawyer, In-House (22 August 2024): 'That is how we all learn to build up lawyers by doing all of that, you know, terrible probably and not fun work and spending way longer on it than you actually can charge a client for. But that is how you learn'.

184 Interview with Callum, Partner, International Firm (29 August 2024).

185 Interview with Finn, Partner, International Firm (9 September 2024):

> [I]s the best way to train a smart young person to stick them in a room with 1000 documents? … I suspect you know there's diminishing returns on that … I suspect, you learn a lot in the early stages of that. And then you know, at document, whatever it is, document 20? Document 100? Document 300? It's probably well before document 1000 you probably cease learning.

186 Interview with Pierce, Junior, National Firm (19 September 2024): 'So there's an existential problem if you don't find something else for the juniors to do … You've got to train them somehow'.

187 Barry Yau and Glenda Bloomfield, 'The Road Taken: An Australian Longitudinal Study of Law Graduates and Lawyers Who Pursued Careers Outside of Law' (2024) 30 *James Cook University Law Review* 87, 96. In this article, the authors argue that it is mundane tasks that can reduce job satisfaction for some graduate lawyers.

they learn – by doing the do. And if you take that away from them, how does the paralegal become the partner of tomorrow if they don't do the job?'[188]

Hence, it is possible that graduate recruitment could decrease. This could create a problem of knowledge gaps and skills shortages. Ultimately, there was no clear solution to this problem presented by the interview participants, other than to suggest it was a problem that would be shared with universities.

This begs the question: what is the role for universities in addressing these future problems? The CALD report argues that legal education places too much emphasis on doctrinal knowledge, offering students content that is 'frozen' at the point of teaching and potentially outdated by the time they graduate and enter the profession.[189] Instead, it suggests legal education should move away from closed-book and time-pressured exams and promote practice-based assessments like clinical experiences and written performance tests that mirror real-world legal tasks.[190] Another study raises similar concerns, noting that graduates often rely on memorisation of case law without developing the critical analytical skills that will be necessary for 'mature and contextualised human judgment … as machine-operated processes increase'.[191]

Hence when we weigh up concerns of the profession coupled with the above research, it is apparent that a balance between not over-committing to technological lessons at university, and the need to introduce awareness of the skills, ethics, and knowledge of GenAI is needed by graduates.[192]

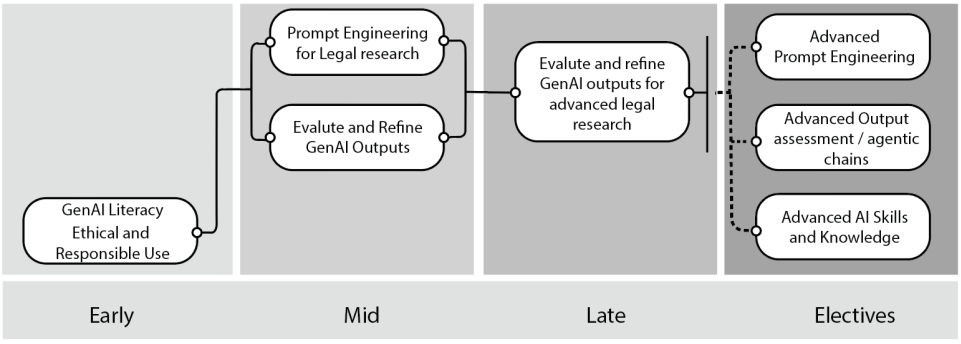

Figure 1: Proposed focus of GenAI use in law degrees

188 Interview with Hugo, Tech Specialist, Medium Firm (13 August 2024).

189 Kift and Nakano (n 2) 20–1. See also David Barker, *A History of Australian Legal Education* (Federation Press, 1st ed, 2017).

190 Kift and Nakano (n 2) 232.

191 Gabrielle Appleby, Sean Brennan and Andrew Lynch, 'Keep Calm and Carry On: Why the Increasing Automation of Legal Services Should Deepen and Not Diminish Legal Education' (Research Paper No 18-50, University of New South Wales Law Research Series, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3233424>.

192 The work elaborated on here builds on the GenAI approach developed through the Queensland University of Technology ('QUT') School of Law's GenAI in Learning and Assessment Working Party in 2024. Adoption of this approach within the curriculum is already underway at the QUT School of Law.

As awareness of the technology and the ethics of its use is necessary from the outset of the degree, introductory law subjects must create a baseline understanding of the technology. This could include an acknowledgment of how students used and understood the technology from high school or general personal use. What will be essential, however, will be to set clear boundaries and expectations for the use of GenAI tools within the university setting and ethical use post-graduation. This can highlight the risk it poses for students as a form of academic misconduct, how this misconduct may be a barrier to entry to the profession and, importantly, if misused could mean students miss out on critical knowledge development.

It could be considered an important role for university educators to host early discussions of GenAI use in assessment with an emphasis on how it is used in the profession. As one participant noted, '[i]t's like having a first rotation grad … It can save you a bit of time, but you still need to be reviewing it and using your critical skills to think about whether it's accurate or not and then testing.'[193] It will be important to emphasise that the very fact that students are learning a course implies that they do not have the skills to determine its accuracy, so any use of GenAI is a risk and potentially unethical as a result. This should further reinforce the need for lawyers in the profession to have the baseline understanding of law to interrogate and improve the technology. In other words, to be a GenAI-enhanced lawyer, a lawyer still needs exceptional legal knowledge and skills currently required in the profession.

The ethical use of GenAI should be emphasised throughout any law degree. Mid-degree subjects can deepen foundational knowledge and may include an option to allow the use of GenAI in controlled circumstances.[194] These mid-degree uses will allow students to reflect on their GenAI usage which in turn will teach students about the hallucination risks, biases, and limitations. The educational experience of GenAI may include responsible use of AI as a research and enhancement tool for final year students. Advanced courses may be offered as electives to students to learn specific skills, such as advanced prompting and coding for those with aptitude and interest in learning not just how to engage with the technology, but how to improve and develop it in a way that is informed by legal minds, not merely delivered to them by technology companies.[195]

D Industry Collaboration and Partnerships

This research project has emphasised that universities cannot adapt to GenAI-driven legal practice in isolation; collaboration with law firms, professional bodies, and regulators is essential to rethinking how graduates are trained, assessed,

193 Interview with Laura, Partner, National Firm (23 August 2024).

194 We refer to 'mid-degree' as being typically a 2nd or 3rd year subject depending on the university and if it is studied as part of a single or dual degree.

195 Interview with Hugo, Tech Specialist, Medium Firm (13 August 2024):

> I think it's a great synergy to have if you can do both. [Partner at firm] just been doing it for so long. The tech piece and the lawyer piece – he's brought both together. You can see that when you talk to him, because he'll be at home on an evening coding and figuring out how to solve the problem. But then in the next meeting, he's the lawyer … But he in very unique position to bring the two together and then bring other people around him as well … with the client at the heart of that so not the tech or even the law to a certain degree, but it's the client.

and admitted to practise. The *Australian Universities Accord* report highlights the need for universities to work with industry to co-design curriculum, deliver work-integrated learning, extend clinical placements, develop shared training opportunities, and align graduate skills with national workforce needs.[196] Similarly, the CALD report advocates for a more integrated, system-wide approach to legal education – a 'shared space' spanning pre-admission and post-admission stages – where responsibility for developing and maintaining professional competence is collectively shared across academia and the profession.[197]

As this research has indicated, law firms are already changing their internal training models, but there is little structured collaboration with universities to prepare graduates for these shifts. A pathway could be built towards this. Collaborative arrangements could involve co-designing curriculum content that reflects the realities of modern legal practice (particularly the use of GenAI tools), or developing shared training modules, guest lectures, and assessment tasks that simulate GenAI-assisted legal work. Although many law schools may already aspire to such partnerships, creating formal arrangements to support extended placements or clerkships will provide students with more practical exposure to emerging technologies. This collaboration should extend to professional bodies and regulators to ensure legal education and graduate training align with admission requirements, involve all stakeholders in any proposed changes to those requirements, and support the development of clear, effective practical legal training pathways. This is an area that warrants further research and attention within both academic and policy contexts.

VI CONCLUSION

The integration of AI and GenAI into legal practice is no longer speculative; it is already happening across a range of legal settings. From large commercial firms to community legal centres and tech startups, legal work is now being shaped by machines capable of automating routine tasks, assisting with complex analysis, and generating written content. Our interviews reveal that while GenAI may not be replacing lawyers, it is altering the nature of law work, reshaping workflows, and redefining what skills, competence, and value look like in legal practice.

As GenAI is rapidly integrated into legal practice, legal education is struggling to keep pace. The disconnect between the skills being taught and those now demanded in practice is becoming more pronounced. While doctrinal training remains essential, graduates must also be equipped to critically evaluate GenAI-generated outputs, understand the limitations and risks of automated systems, and navigate new ethical, financial, and professional challenges. Junior legal work is changing, and with it, traditional assumptions about how legal capability is developed through practice.

196 O'Kane et al (n 149) 98–102. See also Kift and Nakano (n 2) 111, 270–1.
197 Kift and Nakano (n 2) 4–5.

Universities have a central role to play in this transition. Responding to GenAI in the legal profession requires more than adding a technology subject to the curriculum. An important way to support this shift is through sustained, structured collaboration between law schools and key stakeholders across the legal ecosystem, including law firms, community legal centres, in-house legal teams, government legal departments, regulatory bodies, and legal technology providers. These partnerships might involve jointly developing curriculum materials that reflect the realities of GenAI-enabled legal work, alongside shared teaching initiatives such as co-delivered training sessions, guest lectures, and assessments designed to simulate practice with GenAI tools.

This research demonstrated that it is important to interrogate technology outputs. GenAI cannot and should not replace important legal skills. The legal profession needs to take clear steps to avoid the '5-year-problem' and ensure they are not being short-sighted and truly understand what the role of a graduate can be. The role of the GenAI-enhanced lawyer is one of symbiosis with the technology; if a lawyer lacks skills, they cannot use the technology to fill these gaps. In practice some legal skills may prove increasingly difficult to acquire if GenAI is exclusively used for the mundane work. Therefore, firms who look to the future will identify that while GenAI can help in the mundane work, it should not be used exclusively. Finally, students and firms will both need to be aware of the law and ethics of billing for GenAI-completed tasks. As noted in this article, changes to billing rules may indeed be a barrier to its uptake.

Ultimately, preparing law graduates for a profession reliant on GenAI is not simply about future-proofing legal education. It is about ensuring that the lawyers of tomorrow are not only technically capable, but also critically informed, ethically grounded, and able to lead and adapt in a rapidly transforming legal landscape. It is these lawyers who will have to decide the extent to which AI is integrated into the profession, if there is in fact a choice to be made.