Tech education in law – a call to arms

Added on the 2nd Aug 2017 at 10:25 am

<http://www.hupso.com/share/>

Public pressure on UK law schools to incorporate technology into their teaching is growing as leading figures urge law schools to do more and a recently published list of English language legal technology courses shows the UK in a very poor light. However, leading University College London (UCL) vice dean (research), professor of law and professional ethics, Richard Moorhead has called for some balance in the dialogue and launched a legal tech education survey to show "what is actually happening" in UK schools, as he says the market is unaware of legal tech courses – including UCL's – that are already up and running.

Netherlands-headquartered business intelligence and analytics firm Clocktimizer earlier this month put the cat among the pigeons by publishing a list of legal tech courses by location, which shows the US leading by a country mile.

Across the US there are 21 educational establishments teaching legal tech courses according to Clocktimizer, including Georgetown Law and Chicago- Kent College of Law as well as Cornell Tech (singled out because we have already written about them.)

In Australia, Clocktimizer cites the University of Technology Sydney, where in June the Faculty of Law launched a brand new Bachelor of Laws degree in Legal Futures and Technology to "prepare graduates for careers that require a capacity to work with technology and its impact, innovation and new law as a result of unprecedented change and disruptive technologies."

Justin North, founder of legal management consultancy Janders Dean, which is itself a founder of the Australia and New Zealand annual Legal Innovation Index, said: "To us, the Australian market is a clear leader in combining technology and the law in their teachings.

Universities such as University of Technology Sydney, Melbourne University, Queensland University of Technology, and Griffith University are moving forward at pace in this space – and both law firms and their clients are ultimately going to benefit."

Across Europe, however, there are a total of just 11 schools or universities listed by Clocktimizer, including Ulster University, which in February teamed up with Allen & Overy and Baker McKenzie to launch a Legal Innovation Centre, having also received sponsorship from Invest Northern Ireland. Also listed is the University of Edinburgh, which runs a LLM in Innovation, Technology and Law and King's College London, which runs an MSc in computing, IT Law & Management.

The list will give added weight to the growing number of senior voices calling for UK law schools to adapt with the times. Roger Smith, a visiting professor at London South Bank University and an honorary one at the University of Kent who writes at Law, Technology and Access to Justice said in a recent blog post: "Proposals by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) to upend the traditional organisation of legal education in England and Wales offer the opportunity for discussion of the importance of covering the impact of technology on the training of lawyers.

"Domestic English law schools have been rather slower than their American cousins in absorbing technology into the syllabus. Richard Susskind reports 'with a heavy heart' that 'not a single law school in England can boast of a centre focusing on either the future of legal services or the role of technology' in the recently released second edition of his Tomorrow's Lawyers: an introduction to your future (OUP)."

Partly at fault is the heavy onus on research at UK educational facilities – frankly speaking, the time taken in creating a new technology-based course will not lead to promotion, research will.

However, in a recent blog post, Moorhead said: "Law schools should do more, but I think that Roger's post is limited in the sense that it does not demonstrate much awareness (if any) of what is actually happening in this country around teaching law students about law, innovation technology. That's disappointing, but rather than complain or tell you all what awesome things we already do at (say) UCL, I thought it might be an idea to do something a bit more constructive and less selfaggrandising.

"So, I am asking you, if you are in legal education, to help me collect some information on what is already happening in the nation's law schools (and I am defining nation as meaning the UK here but really would be delighted if others wanted to join in). If you are willing (and you can provide your information confidentially) I will publish a summary and if you are keen, I will try and organise a way of bringing all those interested together to discuss progress and problems in this area.

"So if you teach or oversee activity in legal education on innovation or technology in legal services please fill in this survey."

Moorhead himself has been teaching a Master's programme called The Future of Legal Practice which looks at innovation and machine learning as well as artificial intelligence and judicial prediction. He told Legal IT Insider: "We get practitioners involved in the course such as Alex Hamilton from Radiant Law and Chris Dale. Richard Susskind has been in a class or two, Neota Logic has done one and we tried to do one with Kira Systems over Skype that didn't quite work out but was a brave attempt."

He adds: "It's a mixture of getting students to think about broader ideas of theories and engaging with what's really going on at the cutting edge."

North says: "UCL is clearly leading the way in the UK, and setting an example for others to follow. Not only are they exploring ways to champion the role of technology and design in their legal education programmes, their involvement in global initiatives such as LawWithoutWalls.org further strengthens their position. Through Miami University's LawWithoutWalls.org programme, they are able to connect to dozens of law firms around the world and learn what others are doing in this space – bringing it back and translating it to the UK market."

Another UK course not yet on Clocktimizer's list is at Queen Mary University of London, which in October 2016 launched an eDisclosure course supported by Anexsys and kCura. The trailblazing course, which was conceived and put together by former litigator Maggi Healey, who now specialises in eDisclosure at The Review People, will combine guest lectures from a panel of leading lawyers and practitioners with in-depth access to kCura's e-disclosure software Relativity.

Practitioners involved at Queen Mary include leading consultant Chris Dale, Simon Manton of Epiq Systems, Marie-Claire O'Hara of Bevan Brittan, Andrew Haslam at Squire Patton Boggs, Sanjay Bhandari at EY, Alex Dunstan-Lee at Navigant, Clive Freedman at 3 Verulam Building Chambers, Andrew Herring at Pinsent Masons, and Matthew Davis at Consilio.

With the exception of Queen Mary, UK law schools that are offering legal tech education have been very slow to promote it. Despite that, North says the UK should avoid what he describes as a "rush to press release" approach. He singles out the efforts by Stanford, Harvard and the University of Chicago but says: "Other schools in the US unfortunately suffer from a "rush to press release" approach in an effort to create noise around faculty members themselves – rather than focus on the students or their future. So few of these have the desirable calibre of law or technology schools inside them that are aspirational brands to students, and so they will often be noise over substance."

Back to the UK and the final word goes to Moorhead, who tells us: "I'm getting fed up with people saying law schools aren't doing anything, some are. I'm going to find out what's going on and see if there is a way of bringing it together."

Fill out the survey people, it closes in August.

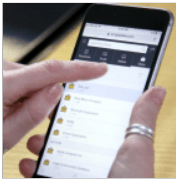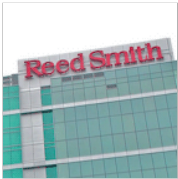*This article first appeared in the July Legal IT Insider <https://www.legaltechnology.com/latest-newsletter/>*

Related Recommended Reading