

# Shaping the Future Lawyer: Training, Pupillage, and Practice in an AI Age

by

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The legal profession is undergoing a period of significant transformation as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated in professional practice. These developments have prompted renewed scrutiny of how lawyers are trained, how legal tasks are executed, and which professional skills must be preserved in an evolving technological landscape. While AI presents new opportunities to enhance efficiency, access, and learning, it simultaneously raises critical questions about the continuing relevance of foundational legal competencies and professional values.

As Singapore Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon observed, contemporary pressures may have altered the conditions of legal practice, but not its essential character as a discipline grounded in judgment, responsibility, and service.<sup>2</sup> Against this backdrop, it is imperative to examine how the profession can respond to these challenges by reaffirming core legal skills, reimagining training and pupillage, and integrating AI in ways that complement rather than compromise human judgment and professional integrity.

## *Foundational Competencies of Legal Practice*

The core skills that have long underpinned the legal profession are not contingent on technologies or modes of work. Rather, they reflect the foundational competencies and values that define competent and ethical legal professionals.

Legal practice centres on legal reasoning and analysis: lawyers must synthesise rules and principles, and apply them logically to resolve problems and provide sound advice. This frequently requires a high level of evaluative judgment to discern relevant similarities or differences between prior decisions and the case at hand<sup>3</sup> — abilities closely linked to legal research skills. Beyond locating legal authorities, lawyers must assess relevance and integrate the sources into coherent arguments or advice.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, strong critical thinking and sound decision-making are hallmarks of quality legal representation, especially in contexts marked by factual ambiguity and competing legal and

ethical considerations. In child custody and family disputes, for instance, careful analysis of a child's welfare, financial circumstances, and emotional well-being is central to judicial determinations<sup>5</sup> and can influence outcomes.

Advocacy in litigation, negotiation, or advisory contexts requires thorough preparation, strategic judgment, and clear communication. As Bokhary observed, advocacy is akin to an iceberg: much of the preparation remains unseen.<sup>6</sup> It involves rigorous analysis, careful identification of key points, and anticipation of potential weaknesses. The same competencies apply to client communication, where distilling issues, explaining risks, managing expectations, and tailoring guidance are crucial.

### *Professional Integrity and Ethical Responsibility*

Beyond technical and cognitive skills, the legal profession rests on enduring safeguards, including integrity and ethical responsibility. Lawyers are accountable to courts, clients, and the administration of justice, upholding public trust and sustaining the legitimacy of legal institutions and the rule of law.<sup>7</sup>

Together, these core skills and values provide the foundation of legal practice and the framework for training and developing lawyers in a rapidly evolving professional landscape.

### *Reimagining Legal Training in an AI-Enabled Profession*

The transmission of legal skills and professional values has traditionally taken place through a combination of formal education, pupillage, and apprenticeship-style learning. Pupils and young lawyers do not merely study doctrine but observe senior practitioners, perform foundational legal tasks, and gradually assume responsibility under supervision.

However, AI tools are now capable of performing many basic legal tasks efficiently.<sup>8</sup> For example, AI has been utilised to transform two complex judgments on lifting of the corporate veil into a podcast presented in an accessible format. The AI system structured a summary for listeners, reducing preparation time while presenting legal concepts in a more engaging form,<sup>9</sup> facilitating learning by rapidly distilling core doctrinal insights.<sup>10</sup> Legal training should therefore place greater emphasis on higher-order professional skills such as legal reasoning, advocacy, judgment, and strategic thinking.

This transition does not render pupillage obsolete. Rather, it underscores the need to rethink training models so that pupils develop foundational competencies while adapting to an AI-enabled professional environment. Continuing Professional Development during pupillage should therefore include training on the responsible use of AI. This would democratise access to technical knowledge, foster awareness of how technology can enhance legal services, and equip pupils to engage effectively with digitally managed legal information. Training and pupillage must be re-imagined so the profession keeps pace with technological change without sacrificing depth, judgment, and ethical standards.<sup>11</sup>

### *From Routine Tasks to Higher-Order Skills: Rethinking Legal Education with AI*

The advent of AI is reshaping courtrooms and law firm operations, while fundamentally recalibrating expectations for the next generation of lawyers.<sup>12</sup> This development aligns with the broader shift from theory-based legal education towards more skills-based approaches.<sup>13</sup>

AI-driven technologies can serve as supportive training tools. AI-powered platforms such as ROSS Intelligence, LexisNexis, and other natural language processing tools have transformed legal research and case analysis.<sup>14</sup> Initiatives such as the course on the use of AI in law introduced by Lucknow University in India are particularly welcome,<sup>15</sup> so that law students already gain familiarity with AI.

Additionally, virtual and augmented reality applications enable immersive moot court simulations and experiential training, thereby further expanding interactive modes of learning.<sup>16</sup> The AgentCourt framework proposes a simulated courtroom environment in which adversarial large language model (LLM)-based lawyer agents engage in structured legal debates and evolve through iterative self-reflection.<sup>17</sup> By simulating civil proceedings and constructing evolving knowledge bases, the system enables the development and refinement of core advocacy skills.<sup>18</sup> Such platforms leverage generative AI to create real-life simulations, enabling law students to hone their skills without having to step inside a courtroom.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, AI tools can recreate transactional environments to offer practical exposure, as illustrated by Stanford Law School's initiative in partnership with the Flatiron Group.<sup>20</sup>

AI tools can also support the development of legal drafting skills by providing guidance on grammar, style, and organisation, allowing more focus to be placed on higher-order concerns such as argumentation and analysis.<sup>21</sup>

However, merely integrating AI into legal training will have limited impact if assessment styles remain static, such as memorisation-based examinations. A more “human-centric”, skills-based approach is necessary, with AI functioning as a supplementary evaluation tool. Moot court simulations and oral submissions, for example, may provide more effective methods of assessing understanding of complex hypothetical scenarios.<sup>22</sup>

### *AI in Practice: Enhancing Legal Workflows*

The case for integrating AI into legal training is reinforced by the fact that these technologies are already being deployed in professional practice. AI is reshaping legal practice not by displacing lawyers, but by functioning as a support tool that enhances efficiency, consistency, and capacity.<sup>23</sup> In practical terms, AI is most effectively applied to automate routine, information-intensive tasks such as legal research, document review, and the drafting of preliminary materials.<sup>24</sup>

Traditional methods of legal research involve time-consuming manual searches, and are susceptible to oversight. AI-enabled tools now automate much of this process, allowing lawyers to identify and retrieve relevant cases, pinpoint governing principles, and discern judicial trends with greater efficiency.<sup>25</sup> Unlike conventional keyword-based searches, AI platforms employ natural language processing to interpret queries,<sup>26</sup> recognising relevant cases even when terminology differs. For example, the Cambridge Law Corpus (CLC) in the UK leverages expert-curated legal datasets<sup>27</sup> to deliver more tailored and reliable outputs than traditional research tools or general-purpose AI tools such as ChatGPT.<sup>28</sup>

AI has also transformed practical functions within legal practice. In England and Wales, a notable regulatory milestone was reached in May 2025 when the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) authorised Garfield Law Ltd as the first law firm to provide regulated legal services primarily through AI.<sup>29</sup> Its AI-powered litigation assistant guides users through the English small claims process to recover debts of up to £10,000, with human oversight.<sup>30</sup> The SRA characterised this as a “landmark moment”, acknowledging the consumer benefits of faster, more affordable access to legal remedies as well as the need for regulatory oversight.<sup>31</sup>

### *Preserving Human Values and Skills in an AI-Enabled Profession*

While AI can assist lawyers, it cannot meaningfully replicate the distinctive human values essential to legal practice.

Chief among these is critical thinking, which remains uniquely human. AI systems can identify trends or generate analyses, but cannot fully grasp nuanced contexts where ethical judgment and discretionary decision-making are central.<sup>32</sup> It can stimulate broader thinking, but cannot make decisions or replace human evaluative judgment, and its use should therefore support — not supplant — the development of human reasoning skills.<sup>33</sup> This human element is especially vital where decisions carry significant personal or commercial implications.<sup>34</sup>

Closely related to critical thinking is the skill of persuasion, which, together with effective client handling, highlights the limits of AI in legal practice. AI cannot adapt in real time to exercise the caution required in complex negotiations.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, building rapport, understanding client concerns, and exercising discretion in communication remain beyond AI's capabilities.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, integrity and ethical responsibility continue to rest exclusively with the human lawyer. Duties to the court and clients demand honesty, independence, and accountability, but AI systems lack moral agency and cannot be held accountable for errors or misconduct.<sup>37</sup> Empirical research has shown that, despite claims of “hallucination-free” performance, even leading AI legal research tools can generate inaccurate or fabricated information at significant rates, underscoring the risks of unquestioning reliance.<sup>38</sup>

Verification, risk assessment, and compliance with professional standards rest squarely on the shoulders of human lawyers.<sup>39</sup> As AI's role expands, these human skills grow ever more central to the identity and legitimacy of legal practice.<sup>40</sup>

### *Beyond the Algorithm: Augmented Lawyering, Not Automated Justice*

The integration of AI into legal education and practice presents both a significant opportunity and a pressing challenge for the legal profession. Rather than discarding traditional models of training and pupillage, the profession must critically re-examine and adapt them to harness AI's potential. Experiential learning, mentorship, and guided practice remain indispensable, even as young lawyers are equipped to navigate technology that is embedded in professional workflows.

Technological advancement does not diminish the core skills and values that define a competent and effective lawyer. On the contrary, it reinforces the enduring centrality of legal reasoning, judgment, advocacy, and ethical responsibility — skills and values that can only be

cultivated through human mentorship and lived professional experience. Ultimately, AI should be regarded as an augmentative tool, enhancing efficiency and insight without supplanting human discretion. By integrating AI purposefully, the legal profession can adapt to technological change while preserving its integrity, sustaining public trust, and upholding the highest professional standards.

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<sup>6</sup> Kemal Bokhary, 'The Essence of Advocacy' (2022) 52 HKLJ 811, 813.

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