

What is a Legal Technologist?

An Interview with Chloe Kennedy



Chloe Kennedy is a Senior Legal Technologist at Ashurst Advance Digital, part of the NewLaw division of the global law firm Ashurst. She attained her LL.B. Honours and her Diploma in Professional Legal Practice, both at the University of Edinburgh. She is also an Advisory Panel Member of the Law Society of Scotland, which has a unique accreditation programme for Legal Technologists.

First of all, what is a Legal Technologist?

It's difficult to say in one word what a Legal Technologist is. It's a role that is still relatively in its infancy, and it continues to expand and develop and has continued to do so over the past few years. At its core, Legal Technologists leverage their unique legal knowledge and technical expertise to craft an impressive suite of digital solutions. This essentially transforms the way law firms deliver services to their clients and changes the way law firms themselves work.

What inspired you to become a Legal Technologist, and when did you first hear about this profession?

As I was going through my legal studies, technology was always at the forefront of my mind as it was an interest of mine. Unfortunately, there wasn't really much discussion around it. It wasn't until I started researching law firms that I started to understand what Legal Tech¹ was.

When I was doing my diploma - which is what is required if you want to qualify as a solicitor in Scotland - I had the opportunity to get hands-on with a knowledge management platform. It was my first practical experience with Legal Tech, which was really cool. The more I studied

¹ For an explanation of what Legal Tech is: *Frink*, CTRL 01/2021, S. 62 ff.

and researched what Legal Tech was, the more I developed a passion for this field and the less I wanted to serve the traditional lawyer route. That got me on the path I'm on today.

It's evident that you focussed your studies on law. Did you ever aim to become a traditional lawyer?

Originally yes. During law studies, you're only really presented with two options: the traditional solicitor or barrister.² Very similar to most people when they embark on their legal education, that's the end goal. So, absolutely! I was really interested in intellectual property law. That was something I wanted to focus on, but this is kind of a niche, and it was never a certainty I would be able to get into the area of law I was actually passionate about. When I realized that and played more with Legal Tech, I realized how viable that career path really was. So instead of igniting my passion for law, my interest in Legal Tech embarked me on the journey I'm on today.

Seeing as your studies gave you the legal knowledge for your role as a Legal Technologist, how did you learn the required technical skills?

I feel very lucky in that sense. When I joined *Ashurst* in 2018, I didn't have any technical expertise on the tools that we have as part of our tech stack. Of course, I was already familiar with the basics of Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, all that kind of stuff. Apart from that, I learned my technical skills here in the role. *Ashurst* as an entity as well as our vendors - the people who we work for to develop various solutions - provide training, so I learned everything I need on the job. This seems to be a popular way to go when you're in the sector, as not many opportunities are available prior to the role.

We are seeing increases with some vendors, who do product courses for students, but other than that - particularly when I was entering the profession - we didn't have these opportunities. Many skills evolved through work experience. It's exciting, and it's one of the things I really, really love about the role. I find it particularly interesting to understand how the tools work and what else I can do to push the boundaries of how one can apply them to different situations. An important part of my work is to experiment with different tools, which is fun.

² The main difference between a solicitor and barrister is that a barrister represents clients in court, whereas a solicitor performs legal work outside court.

How would you describe the work of a Legal Technologist and what does a workday look like?

The work that we do is very, very varied. At its core, we are building solutions using the tech stack that we have. Our work involves a lot of interaction between ourselves and our legal team. We come together, examine what sort of challenge we're trying to solve, and then get hands-on with whatever tech stack we have at the moment. If the existing solution isn't sufficient, we do some research to find out if there's perhaps another solution that we should be building or onboarding.

However, we're also responsible for training individuals in the firm on using our technology. Legal Tech now is becoming integral to the way that legal services are delivered. So, as well as being able to build these solutions, it's equally important that the people within the firm also understand what we can offer as services to our clients and what the benefits are. It's not just about being adept at tech, but instead it's also about horizon scanning. Legal Tech is constantly changing, and we are seeing more and more solutions being built, especially during the past year due to the pandemic. As a Legal Technologist one also has to consider whether we have a gap that we need to fill. We have to analyze if there is a tech tool that may be solving an issue that we currently don't have in our portfolio.

In a nutshell, one minute I could be doing some administrative task, the next minute, I could be automating a document suite and in the next moment, there could be a call with our IT and our legal team to come together to build a solution.

We suppose that everyone dreams of having a job where they can do numerous tasks in one day and not follow the same routine every day. Could you give as an example of a project which you particularly enjoyed, and which best outlines the role of a Legal Technologist?

Sure! It's hard to give just one. Let me give you two examples in this case. Firstly, I particularly enjoy projects which require building an end-to-end solution. This type of work very much falls in line with what a Legal Technologist does. When working on this kind of solution, we're responsible for every development stage from project inception through to its final element, where we then outreach to clients. One of the things I enjoy about this is that it tends to push the boundaries of what we're capable of and it fosters a

collaborative culture. While building these end-to-end solutions, we combine our expertise and knowledge with the professional competence of our developers and our legal team so that it comes together in sync. We deliberate upon opportunities to streamline this process to make it as user-friendly and efficient as possible.

Just to give you an example: we are now creating projects which encompass a document management system and also a document automation system, which gets its data from the AI platform³ which has extracted that information from documents that we are reviewing. It sounds pretty complicated, but it's genuinely fun, and I just think it's integral to innovate the firm, which is what we as Technologists are trying to accomplish.

The second project I enjoyed is the *ESGReady* tool, which is something that we built alongside our legal team using one of the tools that we already had in our tech stack. Again, the reason for my enthusiasm was that we were building it from scratch. When we assembled the tool, we anticipated what is going to become a challenge for our clients in the future, and we worked with our legal team to build a digital solution that meets the challenge appropriately.

ESGReady

ESG is short for Environmental, Social and Governance. In March 2021, the EU Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation came into effect and introduced new standards and obligations for firms selling financial products in the EU. Such firms now have to take ESG issues into account when deciding on investments and also disclose ESG factors on their websites and in product literature for more transparency. *ESGReady* is a compliance online tool designed for financial services firms, helping them to manage the above-mentioned regulatory changes to obey the new EU standards and ensure compliance.

For more information: <https://www.ashurst.com/en/innovation/esg-ready>

To my mind, both of these tools are collaborative, creative and scalable. We might be using similar tools, but how we combine them to create solutions is extremely wide-ranging. Same tech

every day but definitely a different job every day which makes it much enjoyable!

Do you see Legal Technologists such as yourself as a competitor to traditional lawyers or more as a collaborator?

It depends on what you mean by competition. As a Legal Technologist you're a competitor in the sense that, when it comes to career choices, the Legal Technologist path poses another career path where you're not going down the traditional lawyer route. However, the expertise and the function of a Technologist is different to that of a lawyer, in which case we are there to collaborate with our traditional lawyers. Our role is to work with them, in fact, enhance their work. So, it's a slightly different experience. Lawyers are insanely knowledgeable in their practice areas and they are able to give effective advice to clients, whereas our value is not necessarily the legal knowledge. We as Legal Technologists contribute by applying our technical skills to essentially develop a more cost-effective product for delivering services to our clients in a timely fashion. Referring to your question, I would definitely say there is a collaborative work environment.

Besides being a Legal Technologist, you are also an advisory panel member of the *Law Society of Scotland*. Would you like to tell us more about the *Law Society*, and specifically about the accreditation programme for a Legal Technologist?

Our *Law Society of Scotland* has an accreditation for Legal Technologists and it's the only one in the world. What I find noteworthy is the original role of the *Law Society*. In the beginning, it was a body to govern people from the legal profession, namely lawyers. Over the past few years, we have seen Legal Tech appear as an alternative career path. Its roots are very much embedded in the legal profession. The aim of the accreditation is to give a formally recognized specialism for people, who are working in Legal Tech or who are there to fundamentally drive the use of Legal Tech in firms. The promotion of the profession of Legal Technologists by the *Law Society* shows the importance of Legal Tech within the legal profession as a whole.

For whom is the accreditation designed, and what are the criteria to apply?

The primary audiences for the accreditation are those who drive excellence in the legal tech profession. That can be lawyers who push the use

³ For an explanation of what Artificial Intelligence (AI) is: *Lihotzky*, CTRL 01/2021, S. 4 ff.

of Legal Tech within their firm. However, it's not restricted to lawyers. Applicants can also be non-qualified solicitors, for example technologists who have an IT background. The decisive criteria are that you're someone who has a great depth of knowledge about Legal Tech tools and how you can apply them to the legal profession. You have to be confident enough to say: "I know what I'm talking about, and I have key insights that will be useful for anybody." It has to be someone who doesn't have queries on how to onboard Legal Tech or has questions on how to best apply it in a particular project.

Could an international graduate take part in the accreditation or is it specifically designed for Scottish graduates?

There is immense talent throughout the world in the emerging space of Legal Tech and we would absolutely love to accredit people from around the world.

With regards to all graduates applying: I think anyone with the experience can apply. But because you are looking at relatively high standards of experience in Legal Tech it's most likely to come from people who have been working in the field for a few years, having experienced a depth of understanding and practical application of their knowledge with evidence to showcase that.

Could you tell us more about the programme? Which modules are covered, and which requirements do you have to fulfil at the end to get the accreditation?

The accreditation is not structured in the same way that other accreditations by the *Law Society* are. Right now, we don't have any formalized modules. The key criteria are that whoever applies can actually showcase that they have excellent experience in Legal Tech and provide viable examples to underline it. For instance, it could be that you're working with your firm or your business internally and give examples of how you onboarded or implemented a key piece of Legal Tech or how you have enhanced specialism within the firm, and you've been a key player and educating people. It's all about the question "How much experience does the applicant have in the sector and whether they have been actively involved in the implementation?"

As it stands, the accreditation is valid for three years and you can reapply at the end of that period. Again, it's just a case of looking at how you actually excelled and what impact you have had in either your firm's life, your clients' life or in training people on Legal Tech.

The bar for a successful accreditation seems quite high. Do you know how many Legal Technologists get accredited per year by the Law Society?

To my knowledge, the accreditation has only been going for over a year and a half, and we have around 10 accredited Legal Technologists at the moment. It's hard to tell, because it depends on how many applications we receive. I only know about the ones where I am needed as an Advisory Panel Member. It also opened up to more people as the years progress and the accreditation is more advocated. I suspect we will see an increase in applications and thus an increase in our number of accredited Technologists in the future.

We have one final question: How do you think the landscape of the legal professional world will change in the future, and what are your hopes and wishes for the new emerging roles in this landscape?

I think, fortunately, we reached a stage in which law develops at a quicker pace than it has in the past decade. What I hope to see in the future - and this process has already begun - is the prevalence of roles that are there to support lawyers. We notice Legal Tech becoming an integral part of any firm. Indeed, there are lots of law firms that now establish Legal Tech teams. I hope to see that this continues to develop. What I'm keen to see is for people to realize the way we conduct business and the way we deliver services no longer has to be conventional. We have seen that development over the past years, we've seen the use of different tools to facilitate how we complete transactions, how we interact with our colleagues and our clients. Essentially, I want to see that become more normal. Every other industry in the world is developing and we need to make sure that we are also catching up to understand the challenges our clients are going through. The goal must be to operate similarly. Clients must not think "Oh well, I need to wait for a letter from my lawyer before I know what my advice is." We want to depart from the traditional route and think about how law can be accessible for many clients and for businesses generally.

Another thing I'm keen to see is a more open-minded approach to not just Legal Tech and its use, but lessons being shared with other people in the profession. When we look at other industries - banking for example - they have an open banking routine, which means that there

are a lot of people learning from one another. This is improving the way we access our banking services and I think it would be great if in the future law adopts this method - learning from one another and developing together.

As a community, Legal Tech is really friendly and willing to share. Hopefully, in the future, we will have stronger relationships with our clients for them to feel comfortable coming to us with ideas. Ideally, we will be well-equipped with the knowledge to help implement some of those ideas and advise them on how to build an efficient solution.

Law in itself is very risk-averse, so we're reluctant to onboard something new. However, I'm confident that we will start to fully understand these tools and bring them into our day-to-day work. Overall, I'm really optimistic!

Thank you very much for the interview!

The interview was led by Clarissa Kupfermann und Muskaan Multani.



Clarissa studies law at the University of Cologne and works there as a student assistant at the Institute for criminal law and criminal procedural law.



Muskaan studies business law at the University of Applied Sciences Cologne. Besides, she's Co-Head of Lab at Legal Tech Lab Cologne and is gaining work experience at a Legal Tech Startup.



Talking Legal Tech - Folge 7
„wie arbeiten wir morgen,
markus hartung?“



Talking Legal Tech - Folge 1
„was ist legal tech,
nico kuhlmann?“



Talking Legal Tech - Folge 25
„künstliche Intelligenz- was ist das
eigentlich, manuela lenzen?“

CTRL

Cologne Technology **R**&Law
review

+
Hier geht es zur
ganzen Ausgabe.

Dort findest du auf über
100 Seiten in 15 Aufsätzen
alles von NFTs über Legal
Tech im Strafprozess bis
hin zum Stand des
E-Examens in NRW.

