

Why innovation matters

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Technology and innovation are already changing the legal services sector. The Covid-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on innovative technology-driven legal solutions. We have seen widespread adoption of new ways of working by the public and firms. This includes the:

- increased use of video conferencing
- application of paperless technology and digital signatures
- increased use of data analytics and the mining of data
- improved online collaboration between firms, their clients and other third parties

As a regulator, we can harness these opportunities responsibly in order to help people access legal help while protecting the public interest.

Innovation is not just about technology. It is also about offering new services or products, or significantly improving existing those services, and improving the delivery or marketing of services.

Innovation and technology have the potential to:

- support firms to provide legal services in new consumer friendly ways of increasing access to justice
- level the playing field between small and large legal services providers by, for instance, enabling new types of virtual legal teams to emerge to combine offering innovative models of 'one stop shop' for clients.
- create new online legal marketplaces connecting lawyers to clients in accessible and modern ways
- digitise and open up regulation enabling innovation in tech products to help firms manage their risk and compliance more effectively

What are we doing?

Since 2016 we have operated the SRA Innovate programme where forward-thinking businesses can test their ideas and the boundaries of regulation.

We have already allowed greater flexibility for solicitors and freedom for firms to innovate, compete and grow. We believe this will help improve access to quality services at affordable prices by:

- creating innovative ways of delivering and assessing legal education
- help support a dynamic and flexible market in legal services for example by allowing solicitors to work in new ways and new types of businesses
- encourage a diverse profession while keeping pace with changing legal services
- supporting initiatives that improve access to justice for the public

In 2018, working with Nesta [<http://www.nesta.org.uk>], the innovation foundation, we delivered the Legal Access Challenge. It was a success and has bolstered our view that legal technology can help people to access legal services more easily. We gained key insights into how legal technology is being used and the effect of regulation on innovation.

Our focus now is understanding the role technology can play in improving the delivery of legal services to the public, increasing access to justice, as well as improving law firm processes. At the same time, we need to protect the public by maintaining high ethical professional standards. We want to help solicitors and law firms understand and manage the risks that emerging technologies might bring