

News release

Eight finalists awarded £50,000 each to narrow the legal gap with tech

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- Winning solutions revealed today include legal chatbot for people with learning disabilities, legal tools to help women and children protect themselves from domestic violence, and an online dispute resolution service for small businesses.
- Legal Access Challenge, run in partnership by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and Nesta Challenges, aims to broaden access to legal help for individuals and small businesses.
- Challenge demonstrates the positive impact regulators can have on the legal sector with proactive approaches to innovation.

Eight finalists have secured £50,000 each in funding to develop technological solutions to broaden access to legal services in England and Wales. Solutions include a tool to aid group litigation, AI technology that supports employees during disputes with their employer, and a one-stop-shop to help consumers exercise their digital rights and access systems of redress when online services fail them.

Run in partnership by Nesta Challenges and the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), the Legal Access Challenge aims to make legal support more accessible and affordable for individuals and small businesses through new technology. The Challenge attracted 117 high-quality applications from a diverse range of teams.

According to previous research commissioned as part of the Challenge, six in ten (58%) people in England and Wales think the legal system is not set up for ordinary people, whilst 43% of small businesses owners and self-employed people believe that legal advice is reserved for big businesses or those that can afford it.

Innovators were challenged to propose technological solutions to this 'legal gap' which sees vulnerable people and small and medium businesses trying to solve legal problems without the help they need. From the 117 entries received the judging panel – chaired by the SRA's Chair Anna Bradley – selected the eight most promising concepts to move on to the final round. Each team has been awarded £50,000 to develop their legal access innovation over the next six months.

The finalists are:



- **Formily:** Created by two family lawyers who grew frustrated with the time consuming and complicated way in which litigants must currently put together their financial disclosure during divorce proceedings. They realised there must be a way to use technology to make this process less time consuming and costly.
- **Glow by Duo Ventures:** Enabling individuals and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to efficiently take legal action against organisations in the form of Group Litigation Orders, a legal mechanism allowing groups of common individual claims to be treated as one, enabling collective bargaining power and cost sharing amongst claimants.
- **Litigation Friend by Solomonic:** A platform to assist employees and SMEs who are involved in employment tribunal claims to make more informed, data-backed decisions. Solomonic will use AI to analyse thousands of previous employment tribunal judgements and package the information into the 'Litigation Friend' platform.
- **Mencap:** A legal chatbot for people with learning disabilities that will deliver early legal help and advice around community care and welfare benefits, directly to people that need it most.
- **MyDigitalRights by Doteveryone and Resolver:** An accessible one-stop-shop to help people tackle problems they face online and hold tech companies to account.
- **RCJ Advice:** Enabling women and children to get legal help to protect themselves from violence, gain court-orders, access legal aid and navigate court-processes, as well as allowing the frontline workers who assist them to be confident using legal remedies.
- **Resolve Disputes Online (RDO):** A dispute resolution technology provider which will be developing online negotiation and mediation tools for UK consumers and businesses to allow rapid, convenient and cost-effective online dispute resolution.
- **TakeNote app by Organise:** An app for documenting harassment, discrimination and bullying in the workplace. The app lets users log time-stamped emails, diary entries, photos or voice entries, then helps them download a legal friendly case file that they can take to HR, lawyers, or your union rep.

The finalists will work with Nesta Challenges and the SRA to develop their products and bring them to fruition over the next six months. This will include support from the SRA on regulatory implications and consumer testing. In addition, finalists will receive:

- One-to-one pro bono legal advice from Hogan Lovells International LLP
- Support from the Regulators' Business Innovation Privacy Hub within the Information Commissioner's Office for guidance on privacy and data

protection issues

- Opportunities to engage with HM Courts & Tribunals Service

Two of the finalists will go on to be named winners of the Legal Access Challenge in March 2020, receiving a further £50,000 each to invest in their product, bringing the total prize fund to £500,000.

Over and above encouraging innovation in legal services for individuals and small businesses, the Legal Access Challenge aims to develop learning to inform the SRA's regulatory approach to innovation and to help the market provide technological solutions safely and ethically.

The Challenge is also working to support collaboration between innovators and to better understand the barriers to bringing ideas to market.

Anna Bradley, SRA chair and chair of the Legal Access Challenge

judging panel said: "With 117 entries and so many excellent ideas, we had a tough job. Many more could have made the cut, but the standard of the eight winners was exceptional.

"We have a great mix of winners, using tech in different ways, and offering solutions that will benefit people in very different situations. People in their personal and working lives, some of the most vulnerable - victims of domestic violence and those with learning difficulties - as well as small business.

"Legal services should be for everyone, not just the minority who currently use them. Technology could be a real game changer. We will be working closely with all the winners to support their work, and make sure our regulatory approach is up to the new questions technology will pose."

Chris Gorst, Head of Better Markets, Nesta Challenges said: "Too many people and small businesses struggle to access legal services in England and Wales when they need them. We believe technology can contribute to fixing this. From the range of proposals submitted to the Legal Access Challenge the UK's innovators clearly agree. We're looking forward to working closely with the finalists announced today to make their concepts a reality for the benefit of people and small businesses across the country.

"The Legal Access Challenge demonstrates the impact policymakers and regulators can have with proactive approaches to innovation where markets aren't delivering the outcomes we expect from them."

Business and Industry Minister Nadhim Zahawi said: "This government-funded Challenge will kickstart innovation in our legal sector, supporting firms to bring new products and services to the legal advice market that have the potential to change people's lives for the better.

"From providing legal advice for people with learning difficulties through chatbots, to an app that can document bullying in the workplace, I look forward to the creative solutions these successful contestants will develop thanks to our Regulators' Pioneer Fund."

The Challenge and associated projects and research supporting the wider programme, have been made possible by a grant from the £10m Regulators' Pioneer Fund launched by The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and administered by Innovate UK. The fund enables UK regulators to develop innovation-enabling approaches to emerging technologies and unlock the long-term economic opportunities identified in the government's modern Industrial Strategy.

For more information about the Legal Access Challenge, visit legalaccesschallenge.org [<http://legalaccesschallenge.org/>]

Finalist quotes

Alex Woolley, co-founder, Formily said: "We are over the moon to be a finalist in the Legal Access Challenge. Sorting out finances on divorce is difficult enough, litigants shouldn't have their access to justice limited by an inability to understand painfully complicated, court-mandated forms. Formily solves that problem. The award will allow us to radically improve the technology behind our solution."

Georgina Hollis, co-founder, Glow by Duo Ventures said: "We are delighted to be announced as a finalist of the Legal Access Challenge. The challenge is a great initiative and we hope that together, with the other finalists and partners, we can collectively drive change and improve access to justice for individuals and SMEs."

Kari Gerstheimer, director of information and advice, Mencap said: "This is an extraordinary opportunity for us. Mencap works to improve the lives of the 1.5 million people with a learning disability and their families in the UK. We are overwhelmed with requests for help from people who are being denied access to social care and welfare benefits. Mencap's legal chatbot would revolutionise the way people with a learning disability can access justice."

Hannah Kitcher from Doteveryone, creators of MyDigitalRights, said: "Doteveryone is thrilled to be a Legal Access Challenge finalist and join a community of organisations using technology to improve people's rights. Our research shows people struggle to navigate digital services with complex T&Cs and opaque complaints processes. Our service will empower people to understand their rights and seek redress when things go wrong."



Tara Grossman from Solomonic, creators of Litigation Friend,

said: "Solomonic is developing a platform to assist employees and SMEs who have employment law issues to gain access to key information which is not currently available. The Legal Access Challenge funding will allow us to analyse thousands of employment tribunal judgments, apply data analytics to such cases and then package the information into a software as a system (SaaS) platform. Our solution is targeted to help individuals and SMEs. Ultimately, we expect it will make for more rational decision-making in the context of employment litigation."

Alison Lamb, chief executive, RCJ Advice said: "The Legal Access Challenge funding will help us embed and further develop several solutions we have devised to ensure women facing abuse are safe, including CourtNav, our online application to complete a non-molestation order and be linked with a legal aid solicitor; a referral app for police where they can safely share details of women who have experienced domestic abuse with our FLOWS team, and; an online discussion forum for front line workers that creates a safe peer supported space. We want to ensure women experiencing domestic abuse access the protection afforded by legal aid and representation and that our technological developments widen access to legal advice."

Joe Al-Khayat, co-founder, Resolve Disputes Online (RDO)

"The Legal Access Challenge's mission to improve access to justice speaks to our whole ethos and why RDO started in the first place. We are very much aligned to the UN's sustainability goal to improve global access to justice and already we provide our technology to governments and private mediation centres in jurisdictions such the USA, Canada, Singapore, Thailand and Australia. As a team of UK lawyers, we are thrilled to be able to help our home jurisdiction innovate and ease the pain points of disputes for consumers and businesses in England and Wales."

Nat Whalley, executive director, Organise, creators of TakeNote app

said: "Thousands of people in the UK face harassment, bullying and discrimination at work. Gathering evidence is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to holding companies to account. That's why Organise applied to the Legal Access Challenge. We're helping people gather evidence and challenge illegal behaviour by employers through our 'TakeNote app'"