

News release

Legal Access Challenge prize fund doubles to support more innovations

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- 117 entrants have applied for the Legal Access Challenge run in partnership by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) and Nesta Challenges
- Reflecting the high number and quality of entries, an additional £250,000 will double the overall prize fund to £500,000, with the number of finalists and winners also doubling

The SRA and Nesta Challenges have confirmed that the Legal Access Challenge has attracted 117 high quality entries from entrepreneurs, legal professionals, technologists, law schools and charities.

Following the high number of entries, the total prize fund of the Legal Access Challenge was increased by £250,000 with support from the Regulators' Pioneer Fund¹ [n1]. The additional money will be allocated to the total prize fund – increasing the prize money available to £500,000 and doubling the number of finalists from four to eight, and overall winners from one to two. In September, eight finalists will now each receive a £50,000 development grant to build on their proposal over a six-month period. At the end of this period, the final two winners will each receive an additional £50,000 prize.

A core part of the eighteen-month programme is to bring people together to help build new networks and opportunities for collaboration. A number of entries were from individuals and organisations working together, with some showing evidence that the Legal Access Challenge had led to collaboration that otherwise would not have happened.

The Challenge aims to make legal support more accessible and affordable for individuals and small businesses through new technology. According to research commissioned as part of the programme, six in ten (58%) people in England and Wales currently think the legal system is not set up for ordinary people, with the vast majority wanting it to be easier for people to access legal support.

Anna Bradley, SRA Chair, said: “We are pleased with the number and quality of entries, and that the Challenge has helped bring different people, with different expertise, together. There are plenty of good ideas for how technology could help people better understand and resolve their legal

problems. And now with more funding available, we will be able to support even more innovators to the benefit of the public and small businesses.”

Chris Gorst, Head of Better Markets, Nesta Challenges, said: “Although the legal sector might have a reputation for being set in its ways, it’s clear from the strength and number of entrants that there is both an appetite for innovation and recognition that we need better legal services. We’ve received entries for nearly 120 products and services that could make a real difference to small businesses and individuals by helping them conveniently and affordably access legal services. We look forward to working with the successful entrants to support them in bringing the best innovative products and services to market and thereby closing the ‘legal gap’ we currently face.”

The application deadline for the Legal Access Challenge closed on the 11 August 2019 and entrants will find out if they have been selected to progress to the next stage in late September.

More information Legal Access Challenge can be found at legalaccesschallenge.org.

Note to editors

1. The Legal Access Challenge has 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 extra £250,000 in funding comes from a reallocation of funds within the Regulators’ Pioneer Fund. 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.