What Is the Role of Law Schools in the 21st Century?

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This is a working paper. All comments will be gratefully received.

1. Introduction

Historically, as Faulconbridge and Muzio write, legal education has been inherently connected to professionalism. From an orthodox point of view it was viewed as a bargain between the state, which protects professionals from unfettered competition in exchange for a promise to provide sufficient training to ensure competence and ethical conduct.¹ From a critical point of view, education has generally been, by contrast, seen as a ‘powerful exclusionary mechanism ... restricting ... access to [the profession]’.² Either way, this has traditionally given universities a key and nationally specific role on two fronts: providing the necessary professional credentials for lawyers, and allowing a distinctly national flavour to be retained by the profession.³ Not only, therefore, have universities had a significant impact on regulation of access to the profession,⁴ they have also been able to ‘influence the knowledge, values and practice of professionals’.⁵

Now, however, a series of factors, particularly the advent of digital technology, seem likely to upset that balance. Digital technology globally brings about novel legal, economic and societal challenges and inspires transformative ways of delivering legal services. As such, digital technology gives rise to new thinking and debate about the future role of law schools. This means that it is vital for universities to re-examine the purpose, function and organisation of law degrees if they want to ensure that they are well placed to remain pivotal to legal education and to have a role in shaping the legal profession of the future.

It is worth noting at the outset that the debates concerning law schools’ responses to professional re-structuring, new technology, changing organisational and employment models, and their impact upon skill needs, are but a microcosm of much broader discussions about the future of work, employment, and skills that are occurring at global and national levels.⁶ These debates, which are often branded

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³ Faulconbridge and Muzio, above n 1 at 1342.
⁴ Ibid at 1342.
⁵ Ibid.
under the heading ‘the Fourth Industrial Revolution’ or Work 4.0,\(^7\) are being led by international bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Economic Forum (WEF), the World Bank, multi-national consultancies and banks (such as McKinsey and Co, and Citi), and by national governments, think tanks and academic researchers. They focus on the potential impact of digital technologies on levels and types of employment,\(^8\) on organisational and job structures,\(^9\) and on the responses that may be needed from the education system to the resultant new demands for skills and knowledge.\(^{10}\) It is also the case that other professions and sectors are conducting their own inquiries and thinking about the impact of digitalisation on their future employment structures, skills needs and the required educational response. One example would be reports\(^{11}\) on the impact of Fintech on the UK finance and banking sector. Legal services and law schools are by no means alone in facing major questions about future roles, structures and functions.

Debates about the key generic or broader business skills that lawyers need to possess similarly mirror much wider discussions that are going on across the developed world about the need to embed within education the creation of a set of generic or employability skills, sometimes now also known as meta or 21st century skills.\(^{12}\) Within these broader discourses, the lists of required skills and attributes vary at level of detail, but cover broadly similar items. One example is provided by Garlick.\(^{13}\) He suggests that the skills needed to thrive in a more digitalised world and labour market will be: critical thinking and problem solving, creativity, communications, and collaboration.\(^{14}\)

The genesis of these debates long pre-date the current phase of digitalisation and have been ongoing since at least the early 1980s, with national and international bodies constructing successive multiple iterations of lists and associated definitions of such skills (see, for an overview of their development in the UK, Ravenscroft and Baker).\(^{15}\) On the whole, what can be said is that the detailed categories in these lists and the labels that have been used to describe them (employability, generic, life, transferable, essential, transversal, and now 21st century skills) have changed, but the basic underlying shape of what is being talked about has remained broadly constant. This suggests that whatever motivates and drives the need for such skills, digitalisation plays only a partial and relatively recent role in this, and that wider changes in employment, the economy and society are also important in driving thinking about the need for these transversal or generic skill sets.

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\(^7\) C.B. Frey and R. Garlick (eds.), Technology at Work 4.0 – Navigating the Future of Work, Oxford: Martin School/Citi GPS.


\(^9\) Various contributors in Frey and Garlick, above n 7.


\(^12\) Above n 10.


\(^15\) Ibid.
Drawing on this background literature, as well as a series of interviews conducted with law firms and other legal service providers as part of the AI for English Law project, and our experience in running an experimental Law & Computer Science masters-level course, this paper will argue that English universities must retain some of the key aspects of existing law degrees, but they must also develop further in two different ways; through increased interdisciplinarity, especially but not necessarily exclusively with computer science, and by remaining relevant as a source of ongoing education beyond the existing frameworks of undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees. Part 2 considers some earlier trends which have pulled universities away from their traditional roles as gatekeepers to the legal profession. Part 3 considers undergraduate numbers and the current state of the market for undergraduate law degrees in particular. Part 4 considers some more recent trends which provide both challenges and significant opportunities for university law schools and Part 5 examines how university law schools of all kinds can best position themselves to exploit that potential. Part 6 concludes.

2. Universities: No Longer Gatekeepers to the Legal Profession

A. Deregulation of Qualifications

The first, and perhaps most significant reduction to the impact or relevance of law degrees has occurred through the process of deregulation of qualifications. Unlike other countries it has long been possible to become a lawyer in England and Wales without a law degree, or indeed without a degree at all. At present the Bar Standards Board does still require either a law degree or a non-law degree (minimum 2:ii level) plus the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) before completing the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC), but from the autumn of 2021 qualification for solicitors will take place through the Solicitors Qualifying Exam, part 1 of which will test knowledge of substantive and procedural law currently taught on undergraduate degrees as well as on the postgraduate Legal Practice Course (LPC). This will effectively signal the end of the Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) for Solicitors, replacing it with SQE1, a series of written, mainly multiple-choice exams to test legal knowledge and SQE2, a series of practical assessments of skills such as client interviewing and giving advice.

It remains to be seen precisely how this will have an impact upon law degrees, since it will still be necessary to have an education in law to pass the SQE assessment, and that also seems likely to be something that employers would expect to applicants to have. For the same reason, plus the continued relevance of QLDS for barristers, it is similarly likely that there will still be a desire for ‘conversion’ courses akin to the current GDL or second BA for those who have a degree level qualification in a non-law subject. Nonetheless, one of the stated aims of the new SQE process was to ‘widen access to the profession, by allowing different routes to entry, including “earn as you learn” pathways such as apprenticeships’,16 which is why the new SQE process makes university law degrees even less central to a career as a lawyer than they may have been in the past.

B. The Pull of Law Firms

Conversely, as universities lose control over legal education, even in 2009 Faulconbridge and Muzio were able to identify an increase in the control on the part of law firms: ‘legal education is increasingly being captured by large organizations which are rearticulating its structure and content around their own strategic priorities’.17 As an example of this, in 2001 a number of large City law firms broke ‘away from the traditional stronghold of the College of Law (the educational arm of the Law Society) for the provision of the compulsory … “LPC”18 to initiate instead ‘their own training of associates with

17 Faulconbridge and Muzio, above n 1 at 1349.
18 Ibid at 1349–50.
different content and standards of assessment’. By 2008 there were firm specific LPCs for Clifford Chance and Linklaters, to be completed in nine months as opposed to traditional twelve-month training programmes. Falconbridge and Muzio quote a number of interviewees as explaining that the reason for this was that it enabled firms to combine the LPC with a firm-specific induction programme, instilling the firm’s values, loyalty and systems at an earlier stage. They also note that these developments change the focus of the indoctrination and identity formation of newly qualified lawyers from national professional associations to that of the international firms. This influence is then maintained through firm-specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which is key to career progression pathways, ‘suggesting that in law like accountancy the firm is replacing the professional association as the primary source of socialization and identity formation for many lawyers’. This does not, of course, immediately relate to the role of university law schools, since it is the post-university professional qualification that is being replaced. But it does suggest that law firms are exerting an influence on legal education which is not insignificant in comparison to that of law schools, especially because many firms report half of their intake of new solicitors do not have undergraduate law degrees.

C. Globalization

The very fact that many of these firms are international then gives rise to the third of the factors identified by Falconbridge and Muzio, namely globalization. Rather than recruiting only domestic law graduates, they note that many firms adopt a strategy which ‘is about a layering process through which for example, a German lawyer gains initial qualifications and the right to practice through a German university before gaining secondary postgraduate qualifications in Anglo-Saxon jurisdictions. ... Crucially, technical knowledge gained about the law is, here, less important than business skills and an understanding of Anglo-Saxon legal culture and business practices.’ In this context they note the importance of firm-wide global retreats in which lawyers from multiple jurisdictions come together for training, not in technical legal knowledge, but on client service and transaction building from the particular perspective of their firm. Again, on the assumption that such ‘secondary postgraduate qualifications’ tend to be the GDL as opposed to a second BA or LLM, that also puts such lawyers outside the range of UK university law schools’ influence, their qualifications comprising instead their initial qualification from their original jurisdiction, coupled with a GDL and some firm-specific training.

As a result, Falconbridge and Muzio conclude, these factors seem ‘to be leading to a situation in which the firm as a site of professional education is becoming as important as the university’, raising ‘some important ethical and deontological implications for the legal professions’, and by extension, those Universities. These questions concern, inter alia, the wider societal role of the legal profession and whether legal services are simply for the benefit of the client, or whether there is a wider duty to the public interest and the service of justice; the relevance of corporate logic as opposed to independence and specialism as opposed to the need for a broader, more rounded legal education.

20 See also our interview with Large UK law firm 2.
23 Falconbridge and Muzio, above n 1 at 1354.
24 Ibid at 1355.
25 Ibid at 1356.
3. Impact on Undergraduate Numbers

Against this background it might well be anticipated that the demand for university law degrees would fall, and in the US this certainly does appear to be the case. There, since 2010 there has been a substantial falloff in both the number and conventional qualifications of applicants to law school.26

In the UK, however, the picture is quite different. The Law Society’s annual report for 201827 states that numbers graduating from first degree law courses rose by 4.1% between 2017/18 and 2018/19, and indeed their annual report 2017 for shows a continuous growth of acceptances onto and graduations from first law degrees in England and Wales for almost the last 20 years.28

The location of these new law students is highly variable, with seven universities in 2017–18 taking on more than 500 new law students (Liverpool, (the biggest at 590), Nottingham Trent, Essex, Leicester, The University of Law, Northumbria and Leeds Beckett), up from only three having done so the previous year. Twelve law schools in 2017–18 took 400–500 students, while a further 12 took 300–400. Even among smaller schools there have been some sharp upwards trends with Brighton more than doubling its intake from 70 to 145, while Bath Spa took law students for the first time.29 Legal Cheek reports that this data fits with non-provider specific UCAS data which shows the number of law students both applying to and accepting places at UK universities increasing, as well as fitting with the more recent rises in numbers reported by the Law Society. While the number of students accepting places to study all subjects in 2017 fell by more than 1,000 (0.24%), in law acceptances have increased by 4% since 2016 and by 18% since the tuition fee hike in 2012.30

There are, to be sure, some law schools such as Aberdeen, Anglia Ruskin and BPP which have seen significant falls in the number of law students accepted,31 and it is too soon to see any impact which may yet arise from the changes to the new SQE detailed above. Nonetheless, given that the overall picture is so positive for university law schools, it might be wondered why there should be any cause for debate. In addition, it should be noted that of course the role of university law schools is far wider than simply the education of future solicitors, barristers, judges and in-house counsel. One reason why undergraduate law numbers continue their upward trend might well be because the skills offered by a law degree are so generally transferrable. The ability to read, assimilate and critically assess large amounts of material in an analytical and logical fashion before constructing a well-written normative argument for further improvement and reform are vital skills in a wide range of careers. Indeed, just as it is not necessary to have a law degree to become a lawyer, nor is it necessary to become a lawyer simply because one has a law degree, and many law undergraduates do in fact pursue careers in many other walks of life after graduating.32 Even within the sphere of law, large numbers of law graduates do go on to further academic study and indeed academic careers, where again the focus is on bigger picture law review and reform rather than immediate engagement within the legal profession. Many

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Source: data from Oxford University Careers Department.
universities also pride themselves on educating not just future barristers and solicitors, but judges, including those of the Supreme Court and senior Appeal Courts.

Nonetheless, there are reasons to suggest that while law student numbers have remained relatively high so far, this may not continue indefinitely and the influence of law schools over the future of the legal profession may weaken further. It is our argument, however, that these developments, in combination with a series of other more recent trends, in fact pose not a threat, but a significant opportunity for law schools from which those schools could benefit significantly.

4. More Recent Trends: Threats and Opportunities for Law Schools

A. Law and Digital Technology: The Rise of Computer Science

The first trend with the potential to significantly affect the future of law schools is, of course, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology—both in support of the legal process and as a source of potential legal disputes. Before we become too sanguine about university undergraduate numbers in law it is worth noting that Legal Cheek’s numbers in fact place law eighth in the list of largest subjects, after biological sciences, business studies, computer sciences, creative arts and design, engineering, medicine and allied subjects and social studies, suggesting that it already lags behind various more technical fields in attracting student numbers. It is also worth noting that one of the university law schools which has seen a drop in undergraduate numbers, namely Aberdeen, also started in 2019–20 a new joint undergraduate course in Computer Science. This is not surprising. Beyond the university context it is well known that AI, including machine learning, is already having a significant impact on legal practice, and even if one does not subscribe to the more extreme ‘death of law firms’ and ‘end of lawyers’ perspective, it is clear that AI has the potential to alter legal business models in a way that has ‘profound implications for the nature of the legal profession’. It seems highly likely, then, that while in the past there has been no specific single subject to rival law as the undergraduate degree for a lawyer, in the future computer science and related fields may provide precisely such a rival. More than one of our interviewees confirmed that they did indeed see themselves recruiting increasingly heavily from computer science and similar disciplines in the future.

B. Alphabet-Shaped Lawyers (and Do They Need to Code?)

This sense that other forms of expertise might be useful within law firms also fits with another recent trend away from the traditional shape of legal careers and thus legal skills acquisition, towards the suggestion that ‘lawyers of the future’ might need to acquire more and different skills from those of the past.

In 2014 Smathers developed the concept of a T-shaped employee. For lawyers this would be someone who as well as having a long, vertical stem of specialised technical legal skills and knowledge would also have a transversal element of generic business and digital skills and understanding that can support the mobilisation of knowledge in support of organisational/business objectives and adaptability and future learning and upskilling.

33 Above n 29.
35 E.g. our interview with Large UK law firm 1 or Global law firm.
Runyon and Carrel\textsuperscript{37} build upon the T-shaped model and produce a three-sided or ‘Delta’ model that encompasses traditional legal knowledge, business and operations skills and emotional intelligence formation/development.

More recently, a working group has established a project based on the idea of an ‘O-shaped lawyer’ which likewise argues that ‘although technical excellence will always be relevant and much sought after, it represents only the starting point of what is required, there being a general consensus amongst respondents on the breadth of skills that lawyers must embody’.\textsuperscript{38} Seeking to capitalise on the changes brought about by the SQE they argue that lawyers should be trained to develop not only technical legal knowledge, but also softer skills such as adaptability, the ability to create value through initiative and the ability to build relationships.

Similarly, Smith and Spencer argue that future legal roles will build on the existing concept of the ‘trusted advisor’ role by developing a number of additional broad capabilities including enhanced commercial awareness and client empathy; the ability to use law more proactively with clients; agile mindsets\textsuperscript{39} openness to concepts of ‘service design’ and ‘design thinking’; the ability to collaborate, communicate and facilitate at a high level; an understanding of data\textsuperscript{40} and greater diversity of experience in problem-solving.\textsuperscript{41}

These kinds of approaches envisage lawyers who are not just experts in their own fields (this is taken as a given) but who are also adaptable enough to be able to learn quickly about other fields, whether this is the businesses who are their clients, the technicians in computer science with whom they might develop a new piece of legal tech, or, combining the two, the legal implications of a form of technology developed by their client. One question which has arisen repeatedly in this context is whether in particular lawyers need to learn to code. Unanimously the answer to this seems to be ‘no’. None of our interviewees suggested that they did, though some did suggest that lawyers would perhaps pick up such skills incidentally from cross-disciplinary working. Instead, unanimously our interviewees felt that the key necessary skill would be the ability to be ‘bilingual’, i.e. able to communicate constructively and productively with those who did have such more specialist technical knowledge.\textsuperscript{42} Lawyers ‘just need to understand how [coding] works, not necessarily how to do it’.\textsuperscript{43} As one interviewee noted, ‘[w]hat you want to do is you want to sit above that, and understand how to harness the technology and to be sitting there at the marriage of law and technology, and how that technology can be applied. ... it’s really important that we have people who get both sides’.\textsuperscript{44} In fact, as we have outlined in a separate paper, this ability to understand the mindset of computer scientists was just one of five

\textsuperscript{37} N Runyon and A Carrel, \textit{ADAPTING FOR 21\textsuperscript{st} CENTURY SUCCESS: The Delta Lawyer Competency Model}, Legal Executive Institute/Thompson Reuters 2019.


\textsuperscript{40} See also our interview with City law firm 3, for example.

\textsuperscript{41} Above n 39 at 31–22.

\textsuperscript{42} See, e.g., the interviews with Global law firm and Medium UK law firm.

\textsuperscript{43} Our interview with City law firm 5.

\textsuperscript{44} The interview with Medium UK lawtech firm.
knowledge and skills gaps identified through our interviews as preventing law firms from making greater use of technology.45

C. Lattice-Structured Careers and Fluid Professional Identities

In addition to the potential threats posed by these first two trends, a third, connected trend in fact presents significant opportunities for law schools. There is increasing evidence that while in the past it may have been fairly standard for undergraduates to study law at university, undertake the necessary professional qualifications and then enter a law firm or chambers for the rest of their professional lives, this is no longer the case. Our interviewees reported46 an increasing sense that new employees might well want to move firms within a few years of joining, which is hardly surprising when set against a wider background of the emergence of new career structures, greater fluidity in professional identity and ‘gig’ working. As Spencer and Newton47 explore, within professional service firms and occupations new ‘career lattices’ are emerging, to accommodate early career skill development needs that extend beyond specific professional competences and knowledge into areas such as data awareness and an understanding of strategic management; and also to reflect changes in organisational structure.48 These more personalised career pathways, encompassing lateral as well as vertical moves, are seeking to match individual aspirations and interests with the firm’s need to assemble new teams and combinations of skills to improve their client focus and to retain talent. Thus, just as technology graduates may wish to work in law firms and may need additional education to enable them to do so, equally lawyers may wish to move laterally into the sphere of technology.

But if this is the case, and employees are less likely to remain with one firm or even within one discipline for the whole duration of their careers, then the pull of firm-specific education identified ten years ago by Falconbridge and Muzio may well be reduced. And rather than looking to a lifelong employer for CPD, employees pursuing a career pathway of their own initiative may increasingly look outside. Conversely, while the cross-firm international training sessions may have decreased in terms of long-term importance, the increased prevalence of technical as well as legal employees within firms may well increase the need for shorter-term cross-firm interdisciplinary training.49

5. What Does This Have to Do with Universities?

The way in which universities respond to such trends will inevitably relate in part to their individual missions and identities. Smith and Spencer refer to a number of university law school initiatives aimed at developing workplace and practical experience alongside legal knowledge,50 while Russell Group and Oxbridge universities might prefer to concentrate on more traditional forms of legal education, leaving such additional skills to postgraduate vocational qualifications. And yet there is reason to suggest that for all law schools, regardless of their usual characters, aims and priorities, the more recent trends detailed above present challenges and opportunities worthy of a positive response.

There are five key features inherent in university education that mean law schools are particularly well positioned to provide such a response. First, universities are inherently multidisciplinary. However

45 Other skills identified included agility of thinking, the ability to understand data, greater commercial awareness and an understanding of the law and ethics applicable to technology. See further V Janeček and R Williams, ‘Education for the Provision of Technologically-Enhanced Legal Services’ (2020), working paper.
46 E.g. City law firm 2 and City law firm 3.
48 Ibid.
49 Our interview with City law firm 3.
50 Above n 41 at 22–23.
‘silos’ the different disciplines within universities may appear to be, universities do nevertheless contain a range of such disciplines across the spectrum of knowledge. This means that even if some degrees of separation must be overcome in order to facilitate multidisciplinary work, universities are nevertheless better placed to do so than many other kinds of organisation. Second, universities already deal with education at various different stages of life, from undergraduate through masters’ level courses to postgraduate research. Third, they contain experts not just in fields of scientific or legal knowledge, but also pedagogical expertise, both in terms of research groups and faculties devoted to the academic study of education and in terms of cross-university support systems aimed at enhancing the pedagogical knowledge of researchers in the humanities, sciences and other social sciences. Fourth, university teaching is again, both in terms of legal or other subject matter, and often in terms of delivery format, shaped by and derived from a strong, peer-reviewed, independent and theoretical research base, as opposed to one based largely on market research. And finally, universities have considerable prestige, both in terms of their research and teaching excellence as discussed above, and in terms of their independence and objectivity of thought and research. This prestige also arises in part from the fact that universities are able to take a longer-term perspective, bringing a wealth of continuous, historical experience and institutional knowledge unrivalled by even the longest-established commercial enterprises.

These features should enable most (if not all) university law schools to exploit the opportunities presented by the trends identified above in various ways. First, it is clear that however useful the skills found in the transverse section of the ‘T’ may be, they are no substitute for the stem of core legal knowledge. As Spencer, Smith and Susskind note, ‘the “twist to the tale” ... is that it remains important to qualify as a lawyer and have a strong base of legal black-letter law expertise’. This is the source of their conclusion that any additional skills must build on the concept of the ‘trusted legal advisor. Of course, particular context-specific skills and knowledge can be acquired within the context of corporate legal education, but in terms of theoretical and historical depth as well as critical and normative analysis, universities have a clear advantage. As one of our interviewees put it, ‘I think in terms of our training and recruitment we’ll continue to look for really strong academics’ and universities are the obvious place to look.

Indeed, many other desirable skills are also an inherent part of a university education. Thus the O Shaped Lawyer project lists as ‘expected and a given’ a number of other desirable skills for lawyers of the future; ‘strong technical capabilities and intellectual agility’; the ability to ‘analyse documents and think 20 steps ahead’ and the ability to ‘take a giant pile of documents and analyse it thoroughly’.

There is no reason to suppose, therefore, that the need for these additional skills renders university legal education any less appropriate or desirable as a method of training in comparison to a purely corporate legal education; quite the opposite.

But beyond this, while some law schools might hesitate to wish to convey much in the way of business acumen on a traditional law degree, even those more traditional law schools might regard skills such as ‘courage; resilience; continuous learning’; ‘the skill to seek out information to identify areas for improvements’; ‘empathy’; ‘the skill to change the actions or mindset of others’, ‘communication’, ‘the skill to work effectively with people both in the short and long term’; ‘the skill to see ... opportunities in the face of legal challenges’; ‘the skill to find the optimal legal solution to a given ... opportunity or challenge’; ‘the skill to form sound judgments by combining information and determining its

52 The interview with City law firm 3.
53 Above n 38 at 6.
importance’; ‘the skill to distil the most critical elements into an easy to understand form’;54 ‘agility of thinking’55 and the ability to ‘develop comfort with unfamiliar areas’56 as central to their methods of teaching, not least because these skills are also central to the work of law review and reform conducted as research in those law schools. The skills to be found in the additional alphabet shapes do not, therefore, seem to require any radical change in such law schools. If any change is needed it is, perhaps, only a more conscious recognition and perhaps labelling of the fact that these skills are already being acquired alongside substantive legal knowledge, and perhaps a policy of reorienting the centre of gravity in particular course within the particular jurisprudential or other skills being developed and away from the acquisition of very detailed specifics of legal knowledge.

Third, if it is the case that, as suggested above,57 longer-term international firm-wide firm-specific legal education is losing ground in favour of shorter-term firm-wide interdisciplinary education, universities are ideally placed to contribute to step into this gap in a meaningful way. Their inherently interdisciplinary nature and their familiarity with education at different stages of life, in addition to the prestige they derive from a strong and independent research base, mean that they would be ideal providers of such forms of continuing education. And if the shorter duration of employees’ relationships with particular firms does mean that employers are no longer regarded as the principal source of CPD, employees’ alma maters seem a logical place for them to turn instead. Assuming that alumni have had a positive experience of a particular law school, the very fact that they have already successfully trusted their legal education to that provider once may well mean that they are willing or keen to do so again at a later stage in their careers.58 One key response, therefore, that universities might make to the more lattice-shaped career structures identified above would be to stop regarding their alumni simply as ‘former students’ and to start regarding them as lifelong students in need of ongoing educational development at various stages of their careers, as well as capable of assisting universities to provide it, on occasion, by reference to their own knowledge of practice.

The potential financial benefits to universities of doing this are obvious, but in addition it should be noted that another advantage of university education, derived from that strong and independent research base, is the ability to stand back from the day to day operation of a particular area in order to consider it from an independent, normative and ethical perspective. The potential to retain this kind of influence on an ongoing basis and to recoup some of the influence over legal education previously lost to private providers, and throughout a lawyer’s practicing lifetime should also be regarded by university law schools as a significant opportunity. It provides a key chance to redress the ethical and deontological questions raised by Faulconbridge and Muzio above,59 and to ensure that universities retain the ability to ‘influence the knowledge, values and practice of professionals’. 60

In addition, not only should law schools expect to welcome back their own alumni, but the increasingly lattice shape of career structures ought also to mean that they should expect to welcome the alumni of other departments or faculties, and to expect law students to go to those faculties in return. And again, this would ideally take place across the range of educational stages. Thus university law schools would be well advised also to enhance their interdisciplinary capabilities to produce students who are

54 The O Shaped Lawyer, above n 38 at 7. See also Spencer and Smith, above n 41 at 31.
55 E.g., our interviews with Large UK law firm 2, City law firm 1, and Global law firm.
56 E.g. our interviews with Large UK law firm 2 and City law firm 1.
57 See ‘lattice-structured careers’ above.
58 We are grateful to Nigel Spencer for a discussion on this point.
59 Above n 25 and associated text.
60 Above n 1 at 1342.
increasingly ‘bilingual’, particularly in relation to computer science (including questions of data science) given the particular new impetus created by the rise of AI and digital technologies. ‘Law &’ courses, particularly ‘Law & Computer Science’ courses, whether at individual module or whole programme level, are ideal for this. They also have the added advantage, as we discovered with our own course, of facilitating potential fertile grounds for future research, enabling the retention of the research-teaching symbiosis within universities. And again, such courses can be offered in the standard undergraduate or postgraduate contexts as well as in CPD format for those already in the workplace.

6. Conclusion
Suggestions that law, lawyers and law degrees are decreasing in importance are familiar but are, at least at present, not borne out in terms of the numbers of students doing first degrees in law. Equally familiar is the assumption that law schools will respond to market trends in varying ways, from much greater engagement with employment and practice in some instances and retention of a far more continuous, traditional approach in others. This paper has sought to step beyond those familiar positions to note that while in the past certain trends have pulled influence over the legal profession away from university law schools, three more recent trends provide all law schools with both a challenge and significant opportunities to reverse that trend. The rise of technology in legal practice, the reduction in the influence of single firm employers through the rise in lattice career structures, and the understanding that lawyers need a variety of skills in addition to legal knowledge and expertise all provide even the most traditional law schools with the chance to increase their significance to the future of the legal profession. In part this requires no change to their existing approach; simply a more explicit recognition that university education does indeed provide many of the skills required in addition to legal knowledge. But in addition there are two developments law schools might make to exercise this influence still further. By increasing their capacity for interdisciplinarity, particularly but not exclusively with the field of computer science, and by taking the opportunity to provide continuing as well as initial professional development, even the most traditional law schools have the power to exert an important normative and ethical influence throughout the lattice career structure of their alumni and others, and to continue to play a central role in the legal profession well into the 21st century.

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61 Above n 42.