# Generative AI Use in the Legal Profession: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census

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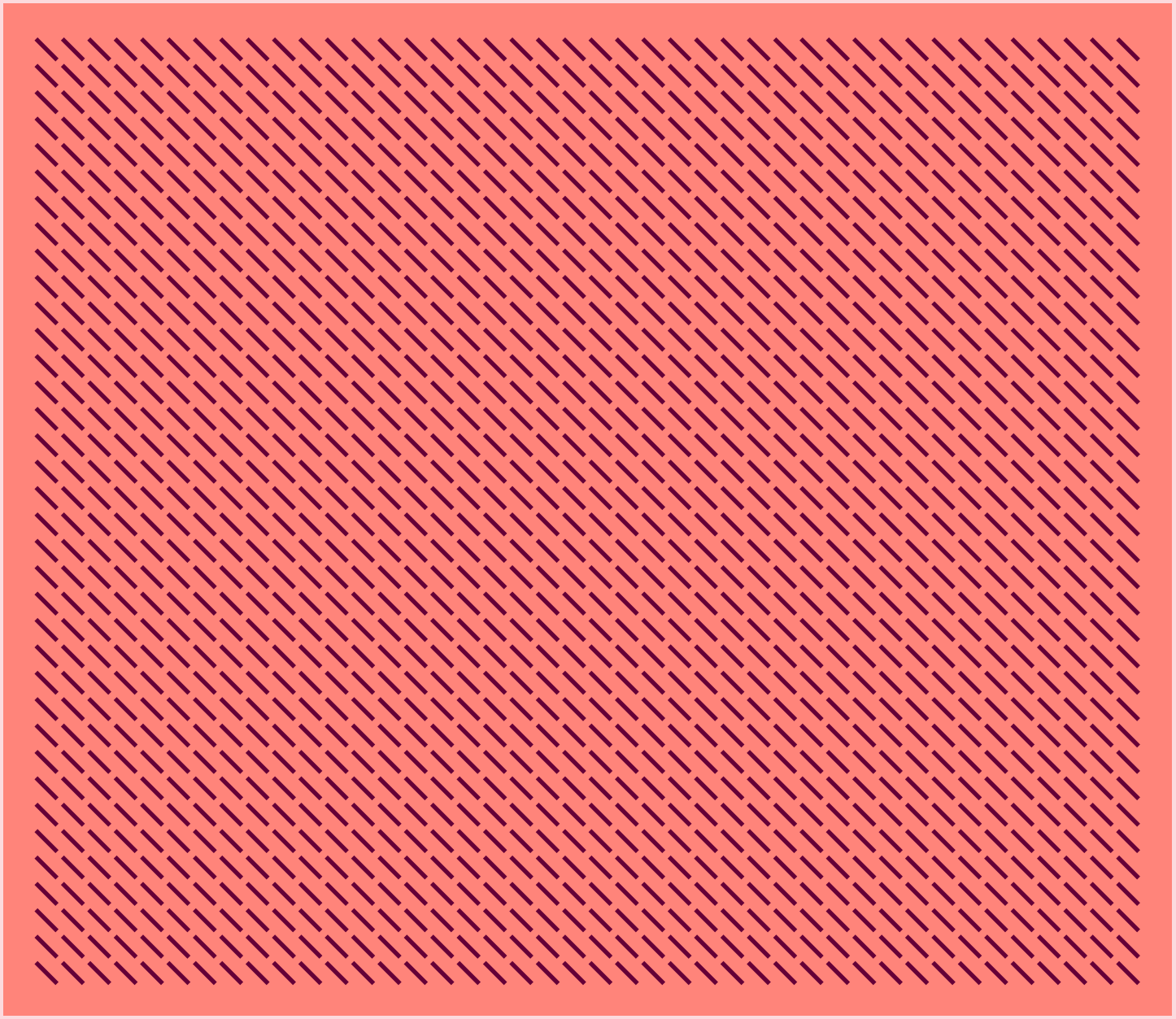

# Generative AI Use in the Legal Profession: Findings from the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census

VLSB+C – Legal Services Research Centre

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- protect and empower consumers
- maintain and enhance legal practice and ethics
- improve access to justice.

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# Acknowledgements

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# Contents

# Key findings

The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census considered several current issues facing the legal profession, including the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI). This report examines how lawyers use AI, the challenges and risks they associate with it, and the opportunities it may present.

### Use of AI in legal practice

Just over one third (36.7%) of respondents reported using AI tools in their legal practice, with over half of these doing so daily or weekly. Use was most common among those aged under 30 (48.7%) and use generally decreased with age and years of practice. Use was also notably higher among those who spoke a language other than English at home (47.7% vs 36.7%).

Adoption varied considerably by practice setting. Barristers (14.6%) and government legal practitioners (11.2%) reported markedly lower AI use than other practising certificate types, while those working for non-legal employers (53.9%), incorporated legal practices (48.3%) and law firms (46.0%) reported the highest rates. Sole practitioners, community sector workers and government employees reported far lower rates of use. Among practice areas, IT/telecommunications, trade practice, intellectual property, small business and corporate law all exceeded 50% adoption, while criminal law, administrative law and advocacy sat well below 30%.

### AI tools and purpose of use

General-purpose AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot, were by far the most widely used (64.8%), with commercially available legal AI tools attracting far lower rates of use. AI tools were most commonly used for background research on non-legal issues, legal research and case analysis, and client communication, followed by document review, transcription and contract drafting. Consequently the most common forms of use were in the areas of information-gathering, drafting and administration, rather than on legal decision-making or the production of court documents.

### Barriers to adoption and quality assurance

Almost half of non-users cited data, privacy and security concerns as their primary reason for not using AI, followed by the absence of clear legal and ethical guidelines. Some noted that their organisation had yet to develop an AI policy or that governance frameworks were still being developed. Others raised concerns about AI hallucinations and poor-quality outputs, environmental costs, or reported that their workplace simply prohibited the use of AI tools.

Among those who did use AI, the majority (88.7%) reported taking steps to ensure accuracy. Cross-checking against other sources was the most common practice, followed by checking specifically for AI hallucinations and consulting colleagues or experts.

### Training, guidance and workplace guidelines

Half of all respondents had received AI training in the past year, though rates were much higher among users (72.3%) than non-users (37.6%). There was significant demand for further training, with respondents expressing the greatest interest in training on using AI to enhance workflow and efficiency, and in safe and ethical use. More generally, non-users showed stronger interest in foundational topics, such as how AI works, while users were more interested in applied skills, such as prompt writing.

Sixty per cent of respondents had not read the Supreme and County Court of Victoria's 'Guidelines for litigants: responsible use of artificial intelligence in litigation' or the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's (VLSB+C) 'Statement on the use of artificial intelligence in Australian legal practice', including close to half of those who used AI. Workplace AI guidelines existed for 42% of respondents, and were more common in settings with higher adoption, particularly among in-house counsel and those working for non-legal employers.

### Attitudes and professional expectations

There was very strong agreement (95.5%) that lawyers have a duty to ensure AI use complies with professional obligations. Most respondents also indicated that AI use should be disclosed to clients and in litigation. Just over half agreed that AI is a necessary element of modern legal practice, despite only just over a third currently using it. Non-users expressed stronger support for disclosure and greater reservations about the role of AI in practice.

### Perceived risks and benefits

Accuracy, privacy and security were the most widely recognised risks. Other concerns included transparency, intellectual property, copyright and bias. Fears about AI replacing lawyers ranked lowest. Non-users exhibited heightened risk perception on all dimensions except inaccuracy of data, where perceptions were comparable between groups.

'Enhanced efficiency and productivity' was the only proposed benefit for which a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (71.3%). Fewer respondents thought AI enhanced affordability, accessibility or competitive advantage, and fewer still believed it improved quality or client satisfaction. AI is, in short, perceived primarily as a tool for workflow optimisation rather than service improvement.

### Composite measures of risk and benefit

Individual risk and benefit items were combined into composite measures using principal components analysis. AI use was associated with significantly greater perceived benefits and there was little change in respondents' risk perception between users and non-users. Respondents' perception of benefits increased as the frequency of AI use increased. The most frequent users of AI also identified the greatest number of risks associated with its use. The provision of training and workplace guidance were both associated with increased perceived benefits, without a corresponding increase in perceived risk.

Analysis by type of use revealed that court document preparation and contract analysis carried the highest risk perceptions, alongside strong benefit perceptions. Document review, client communication and transcription were associated with high benefits and relatively neutral risk. Those who spoke a language other than English at home showed a particularly favourable outlook towards AI, as they combined moderate risk perceptions with strong benefit perceptions. Younger lawyers had the highest perceived benefits alongside neutral risk scores.

Taken together, the data suggest that elevated risk is tolerated only when coupled with strong perceived benefit, and that a clear threshold of expected value must be met before AI adoption occurs.

## Looking ahead

Taken together, the findings point to 3 emerging challenges spanning the competence and conduct of legal professionals, and the accessibility and affordability of legal services.

As it relates to competence, findings indicate that general-purpose AI tool use, particularly for tasks extending beyond information-gathering to legal analysis and application, is concentrated among newer entrants to the profession. While users generally appear aware of quality limitations and report taking specific risk-mitigation steps, questions remain about the impact of these tools on the development and retention of core professional skills.

Regarding conduct, it is observed that lawyers working outside traditional legal practice settings – in-house, for non-legal employers, or within incorporated practices – may face particular tensions where enterprise-level AI guidelines are not adequately attuned to legal-specific professional obligations, or position these obligations in conflict with organisational objectives. With awareness of court and regulator guidance among these groups being comparatively low, these tensions may not necessarily be identified. Finally, the reported current adoption patterns suggest that AI's benefits are both narrowly conceived and unevenly distributed. The dominance of the efficiency narrative risks are self-reinforcing, while applications with greater potential to improve service quality, affordability and access to justice – such as translating complex legal concepts for lay clients, enhancing triage and intake, or enabling service unbundling – remain largely unexplored.

Without intervention to broaden how risks are managed, benefits are conceived, and to whom they flow, the use of AI risks reinforcing existing inequities rather than reducing them. Targeted support, particularly among services where the mismatch between demands and resources is most acute, may better enable the profession to realise the potential for AI to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of legal services, and to empower consumers and service providers.

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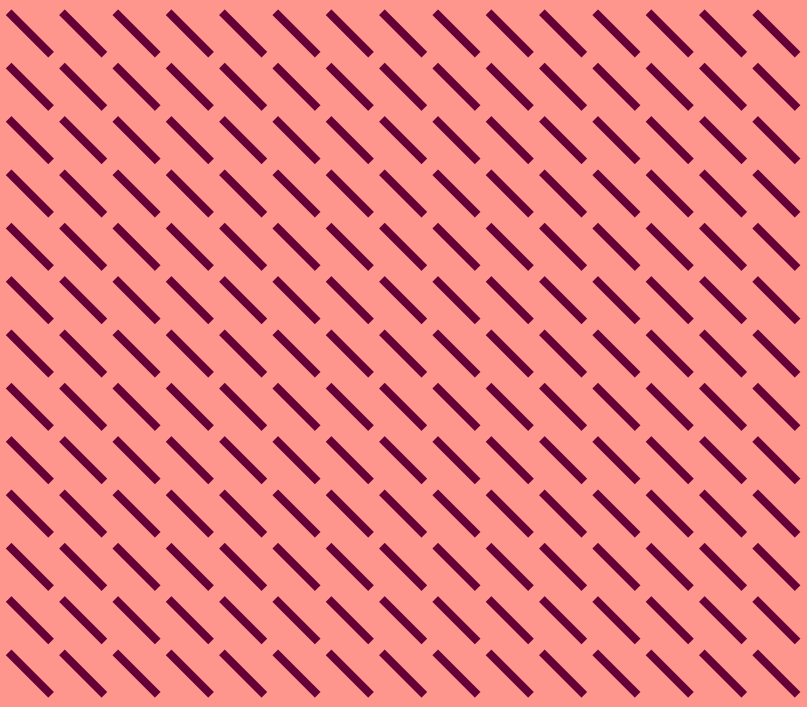
# Introduction and methodology

**This section provides background on generative AI use in legal services. It then goes on to describe the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census, the modules within it that this report draws on, and the methodology employed.**



## Artificial intelligence in legal service delivery

For over 5 decades, researchers have attempted to apply AI techniques to computationally model aspects of legal decision-making and to automate elements of legal practice. Emerging from an original focus on expert and case-based reasoning systems, the last 20 years has seen greater attention directed towards the development of specific machine-learning and natural language processing-powered tools.[1] This has given rise to a range of products intended to accelerate litigation discovery processes, to scale contract analysis, review and production, to enable natural language query-based search, and to support litigation analytics.[2]

These tools have typically been developed for, and adopted within, large commercial firms working with corporate or financial entities. While they have been credited with enhancing the efficiency of specific workflows, their benefits risk being largely confined to well-resourced practices capable of investing in bespoke legal technology solutions.[3]

The emergence of ChatGPT in late 2022 and the subsequent proliferation of general-purpose generative AI technologies, including Claude, Google Gemini and Perplexity, mark a fundamental shift in this landscape. Recognising the potential of these underlying technologies, established legal technology vendors have rapidly developed domain-specific applications that leverage large language models while constraining them to vetted legal libraries and resources.[4] But unlike these domain-specific applications, general-purpose large language models, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Perplexity, offer capabilities that extend across multiple professional domains, including law. Their low or no cost offering, wide availability and minimal barriers to entry essentially democratise access to sophisticated AI-powered tools.

1. Catrina Denvir et al., "The Devil in the Detail: Mitigating the Constitutional & Rule of Law Risks Associated with the Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Legal Domain," *Florida State University Law Review* 47, no. 1 (2019): 29–98.
2. Ibid. See also kCura Relativity, Ringtail, Logikcull and Thomson Reuters eDiscovery Point; Kira Systems; ROSS/IBM Watson; Lex Machina.
3. For example, American Bar Association, *2024 Legal Technology Survey Report* (ABA Legal Technology Resource Center, 2024); Drew Simshaw, "Access to A.I. Justice: Avoiding an Inequitable Two-Tiered System of Legal Services," *Yale Journal of Law & Technology* 24 (2022): 150–226; Milan Markovic, "Equal Justice and Generative AI," *Ohio State Law Journal* 87 (forthcoming 2026).
4. For example: "LexisNexis Announces Launch of Lexis+ AI Commercial Preview, Most Comprehensive Global Legal Generative AI Platform," LexisNexis, published 2023, accessed 27 February, 2026, https://www.lexisnexis.com/community/pressroom/b/news/posts/lexisnexis-announces-launch-of-lexis-ai-commercial-preview-most-comprehensive-global-legal-generative-ai-platform; James Ju, "Trusted Legal AI Tools to Power Research, Drafting, and Analysis," Thomson Reuters (blog), 2025, accessed 27 February 2026, https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/blog/legal-ai-tools-essential-for-attorneys/#what-is-an-ai-legal-assistant; "Fast-track Your Legal Research with Westlaw Advantage," Thomson Reuters, accessed 17 February 2026, https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/en/c/westlaw-advantage/fast-track-your-legal-research-with-westlaw-advantage

This accessibility theoretically extends the potential benefits of AI to a much broader spectrum of legal practitioners than ever before. Experimental work suggests these tools can deliver efficiency gains, with studies finding that law students using GPT-4 completed legal analysis tasks significantly faster than those working without AI assistance.[5] Yet the evidence on quality improvements remains mixed. The same study found that while lower-skilled participants saw some quality improvements on certain tasks, these gains were neither consistent nor universal. Crucially, the research did not examine speed-to-quality-threshold, which is arguably what matters most in practice.[6]

These uncertain quality outcomes are particularly troubling given the distinct risks that accompany democratisation. The very accessibility that makes these tools attractive also creates hazards. General-purpose AI systems rely on training data that remains largely opaque with potential biases that are difficult to identify, and accuracy that cannot be reliably guaranteed.[7] Low barriers to entry enable adoption by those who may lack the expertise to recognise these limitations or develop effective prompts. Use outside negotiated technology enterprise agreements also raises significant concerns about client confidentiality and data security, fundamental professional obligations in legal practice.[8] The phenomenon of AI hallucination, in which large language models produce inaccurate or fabricated legal information,[9] has led to sanctions for practitioners in several jurisdictions, including Victoria.[10]

5. That is, time savings did not result in the time taken by a lesser skilled individual to be equivalent to that of a higher skilled participant. Time saving was proportionate to the time it would otherwise have taken the individual without GPT-4 (Jonathan H Choi et al., "Lawyering in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," *Minnesota Law Review* 109 (2024): 153).
6. Ibid.
7. See, for example, Emily M. Bender et al., "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" ACM, published 1 March 2021: 610–23, https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922; Sebastian Farquhar et al., "Detecting Hallucinations in Large Language Models Using Semantic Entropy," Nature 630, no. 8017 (2024): 625-630F, https://doi.org/10.1O38/s41586-O24-O7421-O; Lei Huang et al., "A Survey on Hallucination in Large Language Models: Principles, Taxonomy, Challenges, and Open Questions," *ACM Transactions on Information Systems* 43, no. 2 (2025): 42, https://doi.org/10.1145/3703155.
8. See Legal Profession Uniform Law Application 2014, Legal Profession Uniform General Rules 2015, Legal Profession Uniform Conduct (Barristers) Rules 2015, Legal Profession Uniform Law Australian Solicitors Conduct Rules 2015 and Legal Profession Uniform Legal Practice (Solicitors) Rules 2015.
9. Matthew Dahl et al., "Large Legal Fictions: Profiling Legal Hallucinations in Large Language Models," *Journal of Legal Analysis* 16, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jla/laae003; Bob Ambrogi. "AI Hallucinations Strike Again: Two More Cases Where Lawyers Face Judicial Wrath for Fake Citations," LawNext, published 2025, accessed 17 February 2026, https://www.lawnext.com/2025/05/ai-hallucinations-strike-again-two-more-cases-where-lawyers-face-judicial-wrath-for-fake-citations.html.
10. Josh Taylor. "Lawyer Caught Using AI-Generated False Citations in Court Case Penalised in Australian First," The Guardian, published 3 September 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2025/sep/03/lawyer-caught-using-ai-generated-false-citations-in-court-case-penalised-in-australian-first. See also the case referred to in Tyrone Dalton. "Legal Services Board of Victoria Warns Lawyers about AI in Court", ABC, published 3 November 2025, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-03/legal-services-board-of-victoria-warns-lawyers-about-ai-in-court/105916628, which did not ultimately result in a sanction. See also examples from other jurisdictions: Robert Booth. "High Court Tells UK Lawyers to Stop Misuse of AI after Fake Case-Law Citations," The Guardian, published 6 June 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jun/06/high-court-tells-uk-lawyers-to-urgently-stop-misuse-of-ai-in-legal-work; "Lawyers Sanctioned After AI-Generated Cases Found False," Digwatch, published 15 May 2025, https://dig.watch/updates/lawyers-sanctioned-after-ai-generated-cases-found-false.

The promise of efficiency gains that drives much of the AI narrative in legal practice also raises important questions about the distribution of benefits from these technological advances. Whether efficiency improvements translate to enhanced affordability, accessibility, or quality for clients, or remain captured elsewhere, has significant implications for the profession's role in facilitating access to justice. These questions become particularly salient when considering the varying capacities across different practice settings to evaluate, implement and benefit from AI technologies.[11]

The legal profession's relationship with technological change has long been complex.[12] Professional obligations around confidentiality, competence and client service create considerations for evaluating new technologies. Existing regulatory frameworks lag behind technological development, creating ambiguity in assigning legal liability when AI errors occur, with responsibility potentially distributed among multiple actors including developers, deployers and maintainers – thus complicating accountability.[13] While these issues are not unique to legal practice, how these considerations play out across different practice areas, organisational settings and career stages, and what they mean for AI adoption, remains an open question.

As the regulator of the legal profession within Victoria, the VLSB+C's mandate spans protecting and empowering consumers, enhancing legal practice, and improving access to justice. Each of these objectives stands to be affected by patterns of AI adoption across the profession. Understanding these patterns, the factors shaping them, and their implications for both practitioners and the public they serve is essential for informed regulatory response.

In light of this, the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census included a new suite of questions designed to capture AI use among lawyers and understand the factors shaping adoption decisions. This report examines the current state of AI adoption in Victorian legal practice: which tools are being used, for what purposes, and with what safeguards. It explores perceived benefits and risks, barriers to adoption, and the role of professional guidance in shaping practice. Through this analysis, the report explores both how AI is being integrated into legal practice, and what this means for the profession's capacity to serve the public interest and advance access to justice in an increasingly digital age.

11. See, for example, "Tech, AI and the Law 2024 Report: Australian Edition," Thomson Reuters, published 2024, accessed February 27, 2026, https://insight.thomsonreuters.com.au/legal/resources/resource/tech-ai-and-law-2024-report-australian-edition, which sets out (page 28) that among half of the in-house legal professionals surveyed (52%) there was concern about the cost and time commitment required to implement professional grade generative AI solutions, and '[a]bout two in five in-house legal professionals (38%) believe[d] a perceived inability to prove ROI [was] a significant barrier within their organisation to experiment with or adopt GenAI'.
12. See, for example, the claim by some commentators only 10 years ago that the working practices of lawyers have remained largely unchanged since the time of Charles Dickens (Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind, *The Future of the Professions: How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Catrina Denvir et al., "The Devil in the Detail").
13. See, for example, Wallingford's work articulating these challenges and proposing a tri-phase model for assignation of liability. Estelle Wallingford, Liabilities and Modern Artificial Intelligence: A Tri-Phase Model, First edition. (Routledge, 2025).

## Methodology

The 2025 census was a voluntary online survey distributed to all Victorian lawyers holding practising certificates, with a total of 1,887 lawyers responding.[14] The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Full details of the census methodology, including the questionnaire and development process, are available in the accompanying technical report.[15]

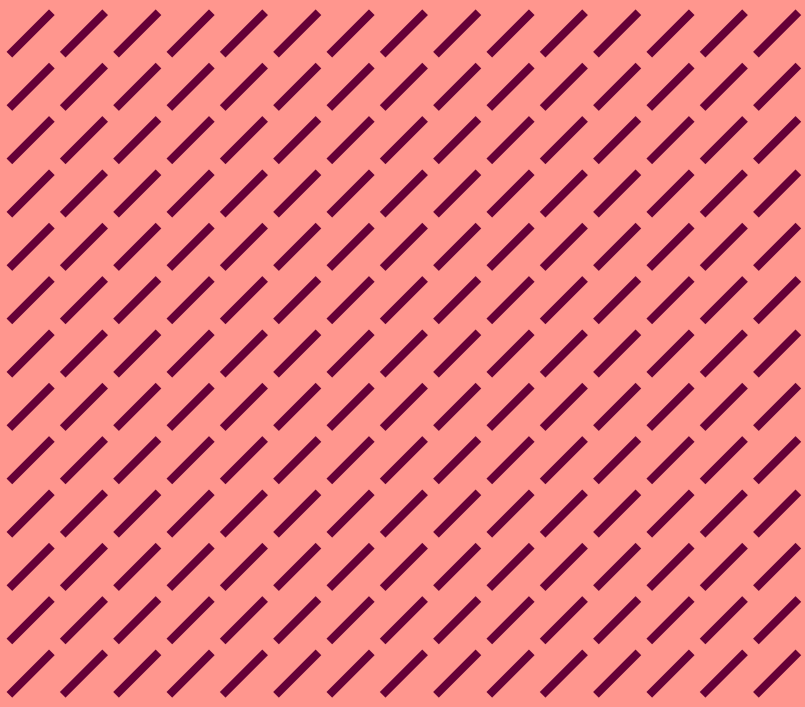
In addition to questions on generative AI, the survey also included questions about lawyer identity and ethics, competency, wellbeing, experiences of uncivil behaviour, and sexual harassment, alongside professional and personal demographic information.

To ensure the survey results accurately represent the broader Victorian lawyer population, post-stratification weighting was applied based on age, gender and practising certificate type. This statistical adjustment corrects for potential biases from under or over-representation of certain groups in the sample, using benchmark data from the VLSB+C's certificate renewal records. All analyses in this report use these weighted data to provide more reliable population estimates.

This report presents findings from analysis of this data and is organised into 3 sections.

Section 1 examines usage patterns, including which specific tools lawyers are using, the frequency of their use, and what tasks they are being used for. Section 2 examines the barriers and enablers of AI use and the expectations professionals hold regarding use. It also considers the reasons for non-adoption of AI tools, the quality assurance practices users employ, as well as respondents' exposure to, and demand for, training, their exposure to court and regulator guidance, and the existence of specific guidelines for AI use within their workplace. Finally, in Section 3 the report provides a detailed analysis of perceived risks and benefits of AI in legal practice and identifies the factors that shape different risk-benefit assessments among practitioners.

14. Of a total of 29,537 current practising certificate holders, a response rate of 6.4%.
15. Legal Services Research Centre, *The 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census: Technical Report*. (Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner,2025).



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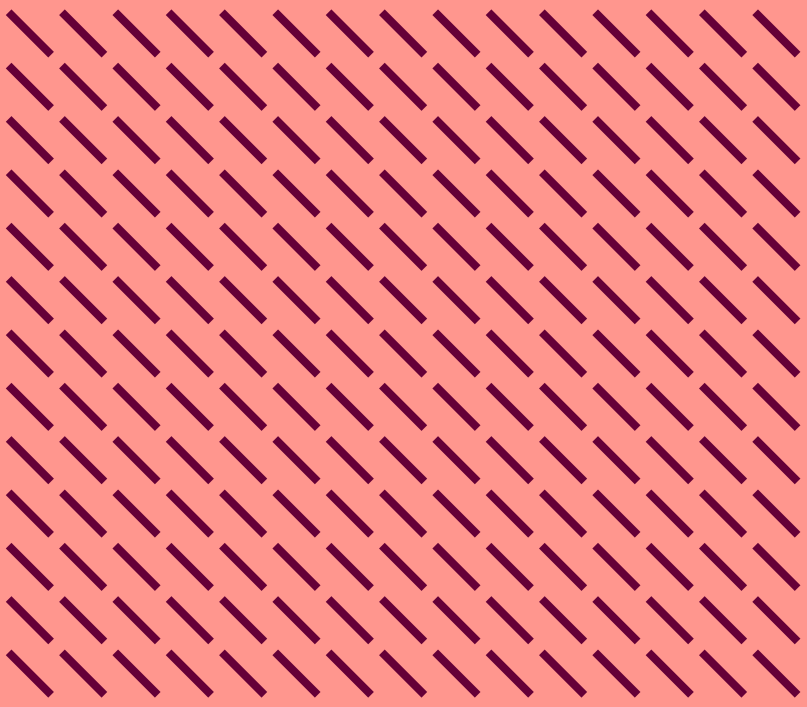
# Patterns of use

This section explores the patterns of generative AI use across the profession. It analyses use type and frequency across demographic and career characteristics, as well as practice area variations. It also sets out the different types of AI tools used and the purpose of their use.



## Use of AI tools

Of 1,739 respondents, 638 (37%) reported using AI tools in their practice.[16]

Among the 607 respondents who reported using AI tools in their legal practice and provided information on usage frequency, more than half reported regular use either weekly (35%) or daily (25%). Additionally, 33% of use AI tools occasionally, while 7% use them monthly.[17]

### Factors associated with use

*Demographic and career characteristics*

As shown in Table 1, the survey indicated that both respondent age and language spoken at home were associated with different rates of AI tool use. Specifically, AI use was reported more often among those under 30, with rates of use typically decreasing as age increased, with the exception of those aged 40 to 49. This same pattern was also reflected in rates of use relative to the number of years a practising certificate had been held, with more experienced (and therefore often older) respondents exhibiting lower rates of adoption compared to newer (often younger) entrants to the profession. Use was also more common among those who spoke a language other than English at home (48%), compared to those who did not (37%).

16. Of those answering 'yes' or 'no'. There were also 36 who were unsure about their AI use and 23 who preferred not to answer. Worth noting is that survey questions focused specifically on 'AI tools'. It is possible that percentage using AI would be significantly higher if it also included incidental use, for example, through search engines. It is also possible that some use is tacit, as AI becomes increasingly embedded in search engines and other software.
17. Of the respondents, 0.1% preferred not to answer.

**Table 1 – Personal and professional characteristics and use of AI in legal practice**

| | | Uses AI | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | No | | Yes | |
| | | Count | % | Count | % |
| Age group | Less than 30 | 163 | 51.3 | 155 | 48.7 |
| | 30–39 | 361 | 62.6 | 216 | 37.4 |
| | 40–49 | 255 | 69.1 | 114 | 30.9 |
| | 50–59 | 151 | 63.1 | 88 | 36.9 |
| | 60–69 | 99 | 68.9 | 45 | 31.1 |
| | 70+ | 58 | 78.7 | 16 | 21.3 |
| Language spoken at home | English | 893 | 63.3 | 517 | 36.7 |
| | Other | 31 | 52.3 | 28 | 47.7 |
| Years practising certificate has been held for | Less than 5 years | 262 | 58.3 | 188 | 41.7 |
| | 5–9 years | 170 | 59.3 | 117 | 40.7 |
| | 10–19 years | 243 | 67.2 | 118 | 32.8 |
| | 20+ years | 264 | 69.3 | 117 | 30.7 |
| Practising certificate type | Principal | 103 | 66.3 | 52 | 33.7 |
| | Principal with trust authorisation | 126 | 61.4 | 79 | 38.6 |
| | Employee | 388 | 55.7 | 309 | 44.3 |
| | Employee with trust authorisation | 17 | 60.8 | 11 | 39.2 |
| | Barrister | 113 | 85.4 | 19 | 14.6 |
| | Corporate legal practitioner | 126 | 48.2 | 136 | 51.8 |
| | Government legal practitioner | 213 | 88.8 | 27 | 11.2 |
| Whether a partner | No | 725 | 60.2 | 479 | 39.8 |
| | Yes | 108 | 60.0 | 72 | 40.0 |
| | Not applicable | 263 | 75.8 | 84 | 24.2 |
| In-house | No | 876 | 64.2 | 489 | 35.8 |
| | Yes | 211 | 59.4 | 144 | 40.6 |
| Organisation type | Law firm | 382 | 54.0 | 325 | 46.0 |
| | Sole practitioner | 194 | 75.6 | 63 | 24.4 |
| | Incorporated legal practice | 59 | 51.7 | 55 | 48.3 |
| | Government employer | 236 | 88.4 | 31 | 11.6 |
| | Non-legal employer | 86 | 46.1 | 101 | 53.9 |
| | Community sector | 81 | 73.3 | 29 | 26.7 |
| | Other | 47 | 67.5 | 23 | 32.5 |
| Number of employees | 1 | 153 | 72.0 | 60 | 28.0 |
| | 2–4 | 98 | 63.0 | 58 | 37.0 |
| | 5–19 | 146 | 56.8 | 111 | 43.2 |
| | 20–199 | 281 | 68.7 | 128 | 31.3 |
| | 200+ | 373 | 58.6 | 264 | 41.4 |

Variation in AI use by the type of practising certificate held was fairly modest across most categories, with the exception of barristers and government lawyers whose use was markedly lower (15% and 11% respectively). Variations in adoption by partnership status were minimal (40% among partners and 40% among non-partners), although adoption by in-house lawyers was slightly higher (41%) compared to those who did not work in-house (36%). More substantial variations in adoption were observed by organisation type, with those working for non-legal employers (54%), incorporated legal practices (48%) and law firms (46%) reporting the highest rates of use, while sole practitioners (24%), community sector workers (27%) and government employees (12%) reported the lowest.

### *Practice area variations*

As shown in Table 2, AI adoption rates varied substantially across different practice areas.

**Table 2 – Area of practice and use of AI**

| | Uses AI | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | | Yes | |
| | Count | % | Count | % |
| Administrative law | 179 | 75.7 | 57 | 24.3 |
| Advocacy | 92 | 73.7 | 33 | 26.3 |
| Banking / finance | 53 | 56.5 | 41 | 43.5 |
| Civil litigation | 233 | 60.8 | 150 | 39.2 |
| Commercial law | 261 | 52.1 | 240 | 47.9 |
| Conveyancing / real property | 138 | 55.9 | 109 | 44.1 |
| Corporate law | 137 | 50.0 | 137 | 50.0 |
| Criminal law | 211 | 79.8 | 54 | 20.2 |
| Debts / insolvency | 62 | 55.6 | 50 | 44.4 |
| Employment / industrial law | 111 | 58.7 | 78 | 41.3 |
| Environmental law | 23 | 54.0 | 20 | 46.0 |
| Family law | 202 | 70.7 | 84 | 29.3 |
| Immigration law | 43 | 64.9 | 23 | 35.1 |
| IT / telecommunications | 26 | 38.6 | 42 | 61.4 |
| Intellectual property | 56 | 46.3 | 65 | 53.7 |
| Litigation – general | 169 | 60.2 | 112 | 39.8 |
| Personal injury | 109 | 70.5 | 45 | 29.5 |
| Planning / local government | 24 | 49.5 | 24 | 50.5 |
| Small business | 43 | 46.9 | 48 | 53.1 |
| Taxation | 26 | 50.7 | 25 | 49.3 |
| Trade practice | 24 | 41.1 | 35 | 58.9 |
| Wills and estates | 157 | 56.5 | 121 | 43.5 |
| Other | 177 | 68.2 | 82 | 31.8 |

The highest adoption rates were observed in IT/telecommunications (61%), trade practice (59%), intellectual property (54%), small business (53%) and corporate law (50%), while criminal law (20%), administrative law (24%) and advocacy (26%) reported the lowest rates. Practice areas such as banking/finance, commercial law, conveyancing/real property, and wills and estates showed moderate adoption clustered around the overall average of 37%, with family law and personal injury exhibiting adoption rates of less than 30%.

These patterns align with the broader organisational findings, where in-house lawyers (41%) and those working for non-legal employers (54%) reported higher AI adoption rates compared to sole practitioners (24%) and government employees (12%). Those working in the areas with the highest AI uptake – IT/telecommunications, trade practices, intellectual property and corporate law – were more commonly those who reported working as in-house counsel and/or being employed by non-legal employers.

## AI tools and applications

### *Tools and platforms used*

Table 3 presents the types of AI tools and platforms used by the 638 respondents who answered this question.

**Table 3 – Types of AI tools being used in legal practice**

| AI tools / platforms | % |
|---|---|
| General purpose tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Google Gemini, Perplexity AI, Copilot Free/Pro Personal) | 65 |
| Microsoft 365 Copilot | 34 |
| Specific custom software | 13 |
| LEAP | 13 |
| Lexis+ AI | 12 |
| Other | 12 |
| JADE Professional | 9 |
| Westlaw Precision / CoCounsel (Thomson Reuters) | 5 |
| Cicero AI | 2 |
| Image generators (e.g. DALL-E, Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, Adobe Firefly) | 2 |
| Prefer not to say | 2 |

As shown, general-purpose/stand-alone AI tools were most widely used (65%), followed by Microsoft 365 Copilot (an AI assistant embedded within existing productivity tools offered by Microsoft) (34%). Bespoke custom software was used by 13% of respondents, while commercially available legal AI tools, such as LEAP, Lexis+ AI, and JADE Professional, attracted lower use rates. Of the other tools used by 12% of respondents, general-purpose tools (such as Grammarly, Fireflies, Synthesia, Calendly and Microsoft Teams' auto-transcription)[18] and legal AI tools (such as Archie.AI, LawPath AI, Relativity, Nuix, Joseflegal and Harvey.ai) were mentioned.[19] Use of image generation platforms like DALL·E, Midjourney or Adobe Firefly was rare, as might be expected given the nature of legal practice.

*Purpose of use*

Table 4 sets out the rates at which AI tools were used for specific purposes. As shown, background research on relevant non-legal issues was cited by the greater proportion of respondents (44%), followed by legal research and case analysis (40%) and client communication (35%).

While AI tools were generally less commonly used for preparing or drafting court documents (6%), or case prediction and litigation outcomes (1%), the use of AI tools for these purposes was more common among those practising litigation.

Respondents who selected 'other' (16%) described additional applications, including writing and editing tasks (rewording documents, proofreading and summarising transcripts), administrative support (calendaring, time recording, document formatting and business planning) and marketing activities (social media and website content). AI tools were also used for purposes such as generating ideas for cross-examination, brainstorming, developing training presentations, and assessing potential commercial applications within organisations.

**Table 4 – Purposes for using AI tools in legal practice**

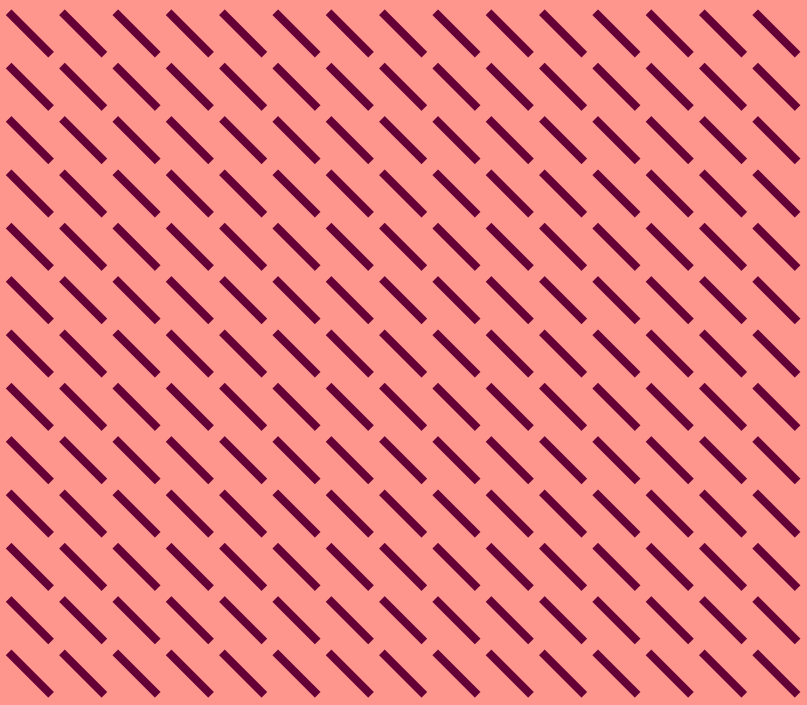
| Purposes for using AI tools | % |
|---|---|
| Background research (e.g. on relevant non-legal issues) | 44 |
| Legal research and case analysis | 40 |
| Client communication (e.g. drafting emails) | 35 |
| Document review and management (including technology assisted review and e-discovery) | 27 |
| Transcription and note-taking for meetings / calls | 26 |
| Contract analysis and drafting of other relevant documents (e.g. submissions, formal notices, letters of demand | 17 |
| Other (please specify) | 12 |
| Preparation or drafting of court documents | 6 |
| Case prediction and litigation outcomes | 1 |
| Prefer not to say | 1 |

18. Other tools mentioned by respondents: Otter.ai, VXT transcription, Krisp, PLAUD.AI, Sembly.ai and Grok.
19. Other legal-specific AI tools shared by respondents: Adieu.ai, Titan AI from Compliance Quarter, AI Legal Assistant, DiscoverReady, Luminance, courtaid.ai, Plexus.co and Smarter Drafter.

03

# Barriers, enablers and expectations

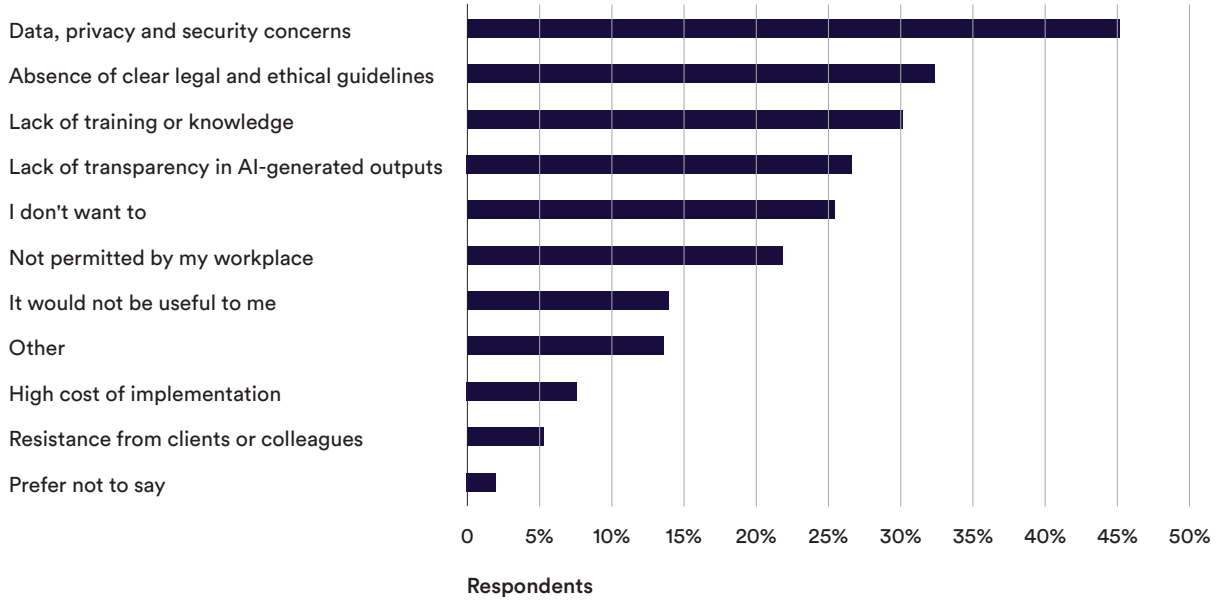
This section explores the barriers to adopting generative AI in legal practice that were identified by practitioners. It also considers quality assurance practices and discusses exposure to, and demand for, training, as well as workplace, regulatory and court guidelines. Finally, it looks at professional expectations around AI use.



## Barriers to adoption

As previously mentioned, 63% of respondents indicated they did not use AI tools in their legal practice. Figure 1 details the reasons given to explain this.

**Figure 1 – Reasons for not integrating AI tools into legal practice**




For almost half of respondents (45%), the decision not to use AI was a function of data, privacy and security concerns, followed by the absence of clear legal and ethical guidelines (32%). Among those who selected 'other', a range of reasons were given that spanned the issues of governance, reliability/ accuracy, usefulness and ethical concerns.

On the point of governance-related barriers, respondents raised the absence of clear internal policies; delayed implementation of AI tools within their organisations; insufficient time to investigate the utility of tools; or uncertainty about which tools are approved. Some noted that their organisation did not have an AI policy or framework or that AI policies or frameworks were still being developed.

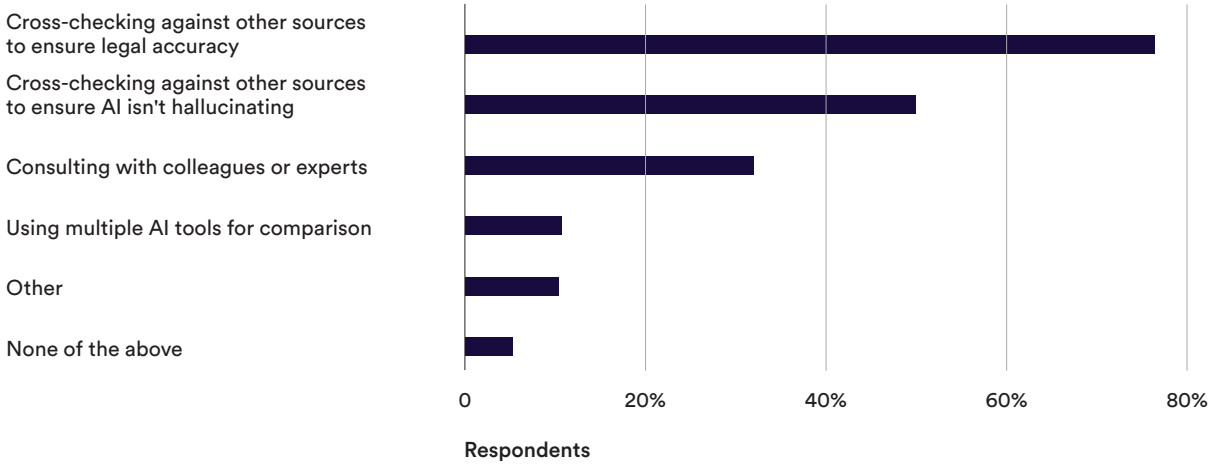
Those who expressed concerns around AI's accuracy and reliability in 'other' responses, cited the risk of false or fabricated information (AI hallucinations), poor-quality legal outputs, and errors as reasons for non-adoption. This meant that, in the words of one respondent, AI was: 'more trouble than it's worth…' as 'the time taken to check it for accuracy is the time I could have just done it myself originally'. While for others, there was a perception that AI tools could not (reliably) assist with key dimensions of their workload, for example, tasks requiring human judgment or direct client interaction.

Environmental concerns were also raised among 'other' responses with respondents noting the high energy consumption, carbon emissions and broader climate impacts of AI technologies as reasons for non-use. So too was the impact of the technology on the work of certain segments of the profession: 'AI is taking away young lawyers' jobs. I couldn't in good conscience participate in its use.' Others offered wider-ranging critiques, as reflected in the following statement: 'I find most AI like ChatGPT to be unethical, trained on stolen copyrighted material, and bad for the environment.'

## Quality assurance practices

As it relates to concerns regarding the reliability of outputs expressed by non-users, the majority of AI users (89%) who answered questions regarding quality assurance practices, indicated that they took steps to ensure the accuracy of output. Figure 2 sets out the various forms of quality assurance employed by these respondents.

**Figure 2 – Steps taken to ensure the accuracy of AI-generated legal content**




As shown, 76% of users reported cross-checking the legal accuracy of output against other sources. Nearly half (50%) also reported cross-checking information to guard against AI hallucinations, while almost a third consulted with colleagues or experts (32%). It was less common for respondents to report using multiple AI tools for comparison (11%). 'Other' practices described included undertaking human review and editing,[20] limiting the use of AI to discrete low-risk tasks (not using it for the purpose of obtaining legal advice),[21] using their own professional judgment,[22] using verification tools and custom scripts,[23] and prompting further for sources and transparency.[24]

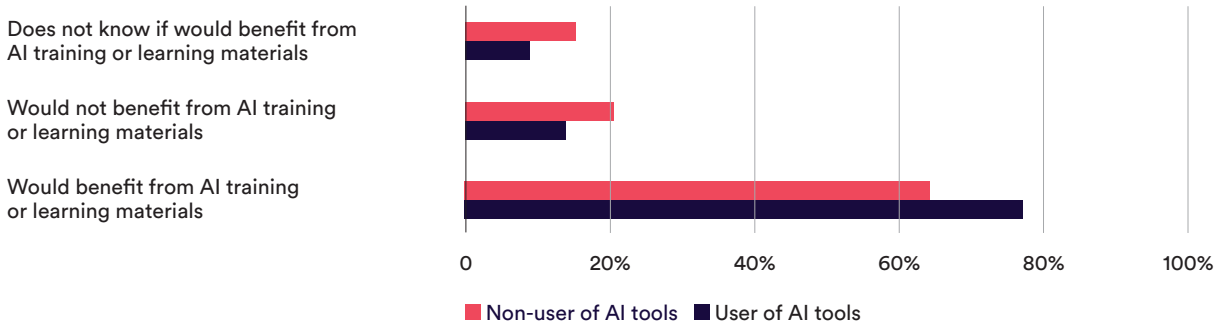
20. Many lawyers reported personally reviewing AI-generated outputs for accuracy, tone and alignment with legal context, often using their own experience and judgment. For example, 'I read it carefully and use my own judgment', 'treating AI as a junior employee who needs supervision', 'everything the AI writes I meticulously check', 'read and review myself', and 're-read/close read'.
21. Several practitioners reported restricting AI use to low-risk tasks such as email drafting, correspondence structure, or typo checking deliberately avoiding use for legal analysis or advice. For example, 'only use for wording - not legal issues, case law or facts', and 'I don't use for legal advice'.
22. Several users emphasised leveraging their own legal knowledge to validate outputs. For example, 'own professional knowledge', 'my own experience reviews the data produced', and 'self-review never ask AI something you don't already know the answer to'.
23. A few responses mentioned using built-in verification features in legal platforms (for example, LEAP's 'verify' option) or developing custom scripts and models to enhanced quality control. For example, 'I build my own scripts and models and verification steps'.
24. Some lawyers prompt the AI to provide sources or citations to better assess reliability or use it for consolidation and synthesis rather than original legal reasoning. For example, 'asking AI to show sources'.

## Exposure to, and demand for, training

Rates of training across the sample as a whole were relatively high (50%) but were less common among those who did not use AI tools in legal practice. Of current users, 72% had received AI education/training in the past year, while the rate of training was 38% among non-users. As Figure 1 shows, a lack of knowledge or training explained the non-use of at least 328 respondents. Yet further analysis revealed that only 89 of these attributed their non-use to a lack of training or knowledge alone, meaning that a lack of training and knowledge accounted for relatively little non-use in isolation.

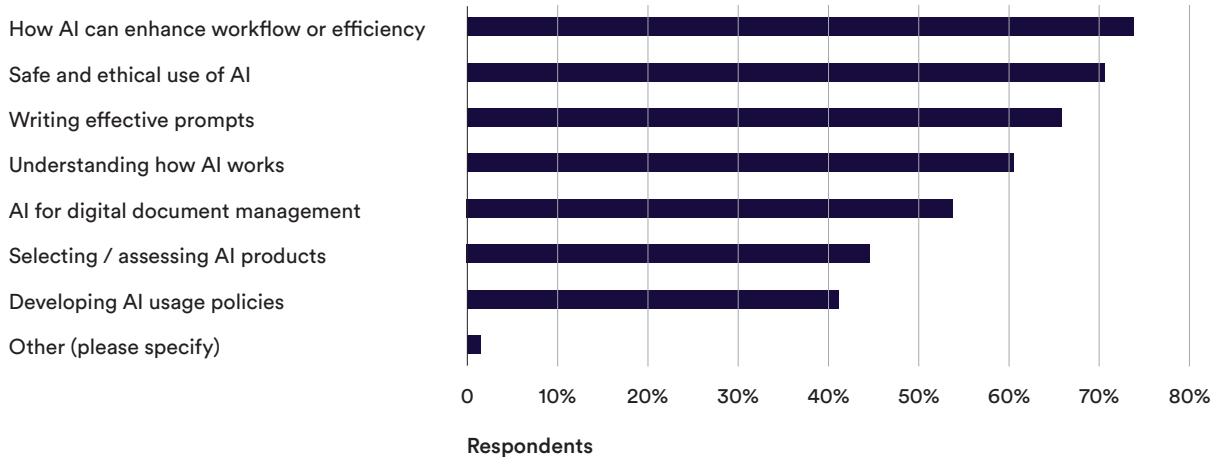
There was strong demand for (further) training across respondents. In total 70% of respondents felt they would benefit from AI training or learning materials, while only 18% felt that they would not benefit from it, and 13% were unsure. As shown in Figure 3, demand for training was stronger among those who used AI in legal practice than those who did not (77% vs 64% of non-users).

**Figure 3 – Demand for further training or learning materials by use/non-use of AI tools**




Where respondents felt they would benefit from training or other learning materials, they were also asked to identify the areas they would be most interested in, with these shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4 – Areas of AI training interest**



Interest was strongest for training on how AI can enhance workflow and efficiency (74%), followed closely by the safe and ethical use of AI (70%). Lesser demand was expressed for 'developing AI usage policies', which may reflect the position of the respondent within an organisation and/or the existence of already implemented policies. Respondents tended to express a demand for training in more than one category, with less than 10% selecting only one training option, and 19% indicating demand for training against all of the options (excluding the 'other' category). Those who selected 'other' expressed demand for training on legal risk, privilege and intellectual property concerns, confidentiality and privacy, practical usage and testing, and the social and environmental impact of AI.

Among AI users, there was higher interest in training on enhancing their use of tools, such as writing effective prompts (73% vs 61% non-users). Non-users showed relatively greater interest in foundational topics, such as safe and ethical AI use (73% vs 66% users), understanding how AI works (65% vs 53% users) and selecting/assessing AI products (48% vs 39% users). The differences between the users and non-users regarding other topics did not exceed 2%. The appetite for training regarding 'how AI can enhance efficiency and workflow' were comparable between users and non-users (73% vs 74% respectively).

## Exposure to guidance

### Court and regulator guidance

In total, 29% of respondents indicated that they had read the Supreme and County Court of Victoria's 'Guidelines for litigants: responsible use of artificial intelligence in litigation' while 29% had read the VLSB+C's 'Statement on the use of artificial intelligence in Australian legal practice'. Few respondents reported having read both documents (18.4%) with the majority having read neither document (60%).

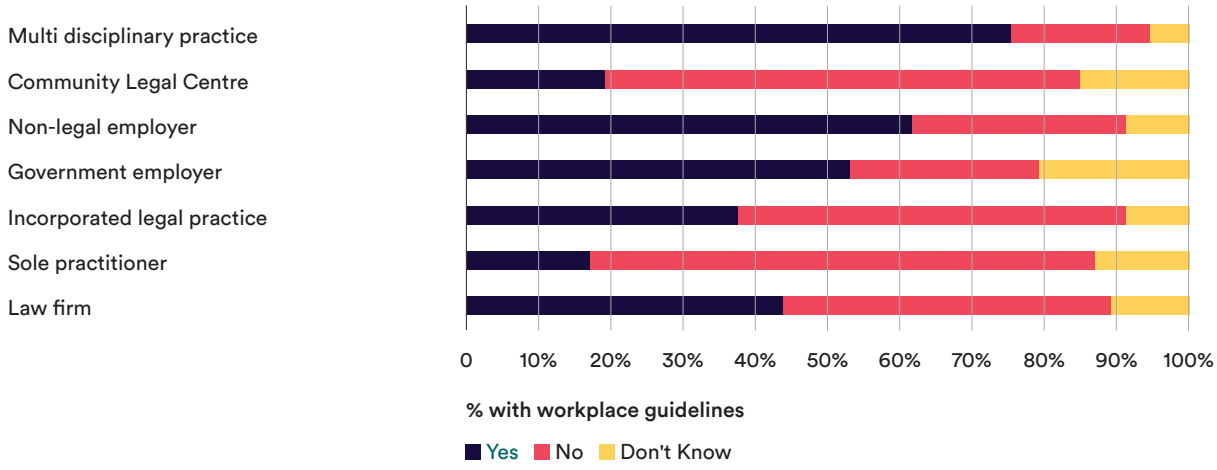
Using AI tools in practice was associated with a somewhat increased rate of having read either the court guidance or the VLSB+C statement, with 299 of 596 (50%) AI users reported having read at least one of the documents compared to 360 of 1,033 (35%) non-users. As it relates to each document specifically, the Supreme Court guidelines had been read by 38% of AI users, compared to 25% of non-users. Similarly, 37% of AI users reported having read the VLSB+C statement compared to 25% of non-users.

### Workplace guidelines

Of 1,674 respondents, 703 (42%) indicated that their workplace had established AI guidelines, 753 (45%) that it had not and 219 (13%) were unsure. Of those using AI, 63% were using them in workplaces where AI guidelines existed, compared to 31% who were using them in the absence of workplace guidelines. A further 7% reported using AI without being sure if workplace guidelines were in place, representing a possible organisational policy compliance risk. Consistent with the barriers to adoption shown in Figure 1, over half of non-users (54%) reported that AI guidelines did not exist in their workplace and 16% were unsure.

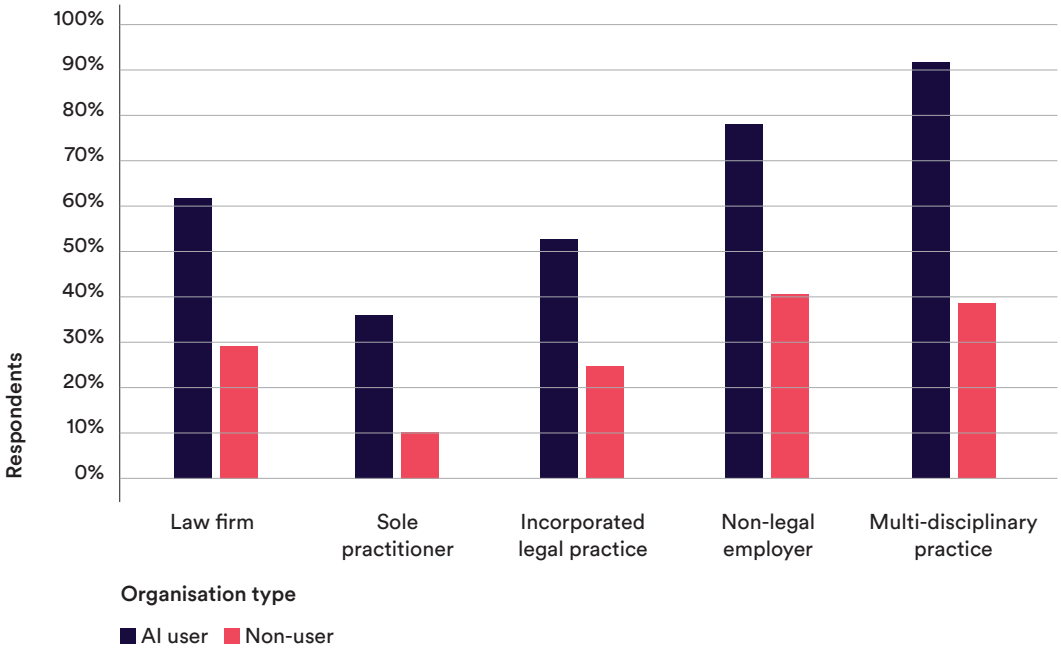
As shown in Figure 5, the presence of guidelines varied by workplace type, with higher rates of workplace AI guidelines reported among those employed in multi-disciplinary practices or by non-legal employers compared to other organisation types.

**Figure 5 – Presence of workplace AI guidelines by organisation type**[25]




In-house counsel also reported higher rates of workplace AI guidelines compared to other lawyer types (60% vs 37%). Across employer types, the distinction between the presence/absence of workplace guidelines was magnified when analysed with reference to AI use/non-use as shown in Figure 6, which shows clear discrepancies in the availability of workplace AI guidelines between AI users and non-users for each employer type. The discrepancy between rates of guidance between users and non-users of AI working for multi-disciplinary practices and non-legal employers was notable.

**Figure 6 – Existence of workplace AI guidelines for AI user and non-user, and by organisation type**

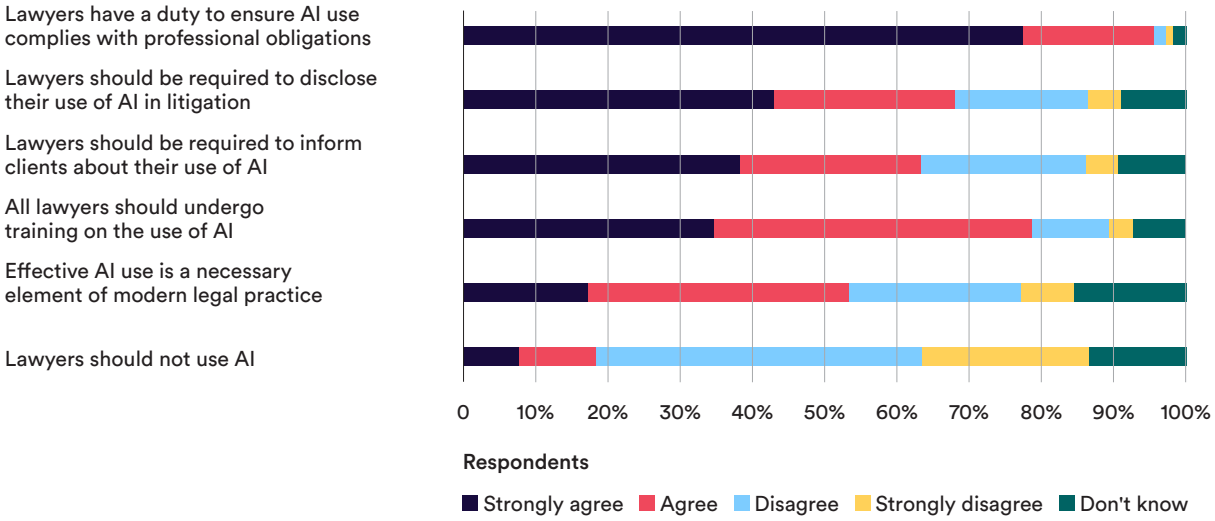



25. Figure excludes 'other' and 'prefer not to say' response categories. Responses for those within unincorporated legal services and ATSIL were also excluded due to small response rates.

## Professional expectations: use and transparency

Respondents – both users and non-users – were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements on the use of AI in legal practice that covered aspects of general use, the necessity of use, and expectations around training and disclosure. Responses to these statements are shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7 – Lawyers' attitudes toward AI integration and disclosure**

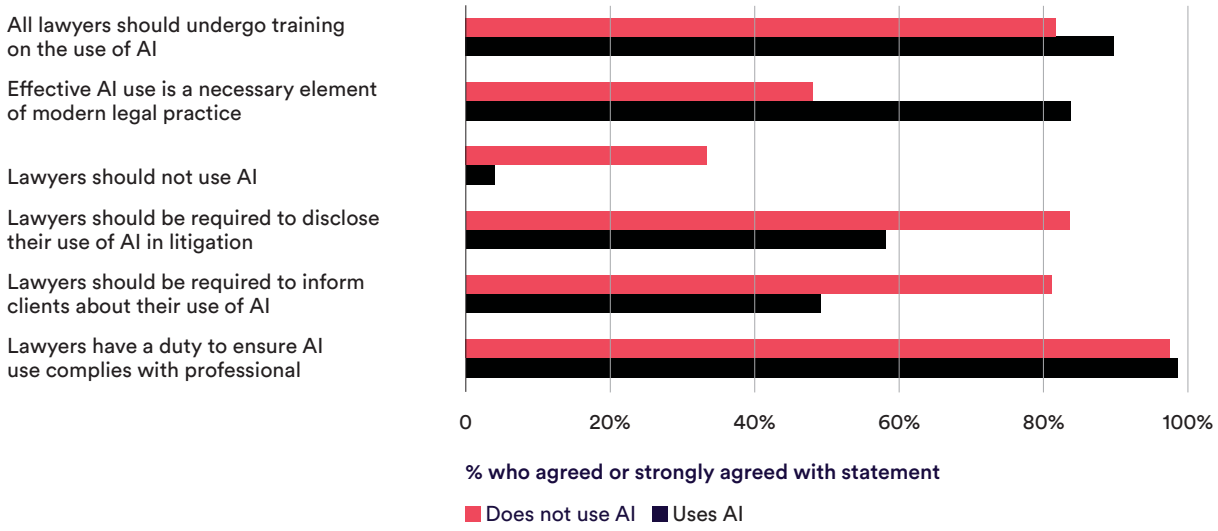



An overwhelming majority (95%) either agreed or strongly agreed that lawyers have a duty to ensure AI use complies with their professional obligations.[26] Related to this, 79% agreed or strongly agreed that all lawyers should undergo training on the use of AI (including the majority of those who agreed or strongly agreed that lawyers should not use AI). Most respondents also indicated that use should be disclosed to both clients (63% agreeing or strongly agreeing) or when used in litigation (68% agreeing or strongly agreeing). Interestingly, just over half of respondents (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that AI is a necessary element of modern legal practice, despite only 37% of respondents indicating that they used AI in their practice. A small, yet significant percentage (18%) felt that lawyers should not use AI.

Differences among users and non-users are shown in Figure 8. While there was little discrepancy in the rate at which users and non-users agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that lawyers have a duty to ensure AI use complies with professional obligations, non-users exhibited stronger support for disclosure requirements both to clients and in litigation, and for the proposition that 'lawyers should not use AI' and weaker support for the claim that 'effective AI use is a necessary element of modern legal practice'.

26. Among those who said 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' (n=38), 15 indicated that lawyers should not use AI. Taken together these findings may indicate that these people answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to compliance with professional obligations because they feel that AI use is incompatible with those professional obligations.

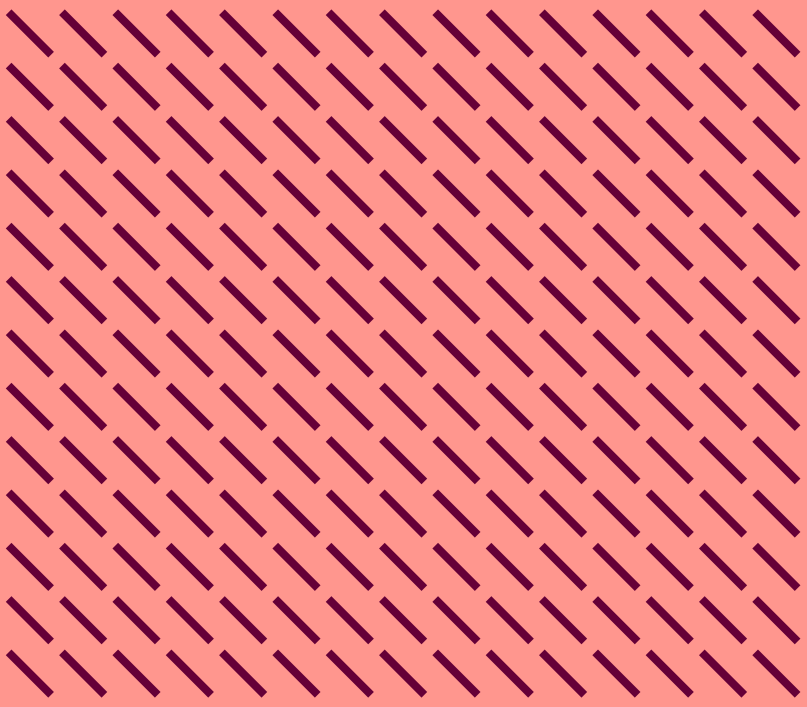
**Figure 8 – Lawyers' attitudes toward AI integration and disclosure divided by AI users and non-users**



04

# Perceptions of use

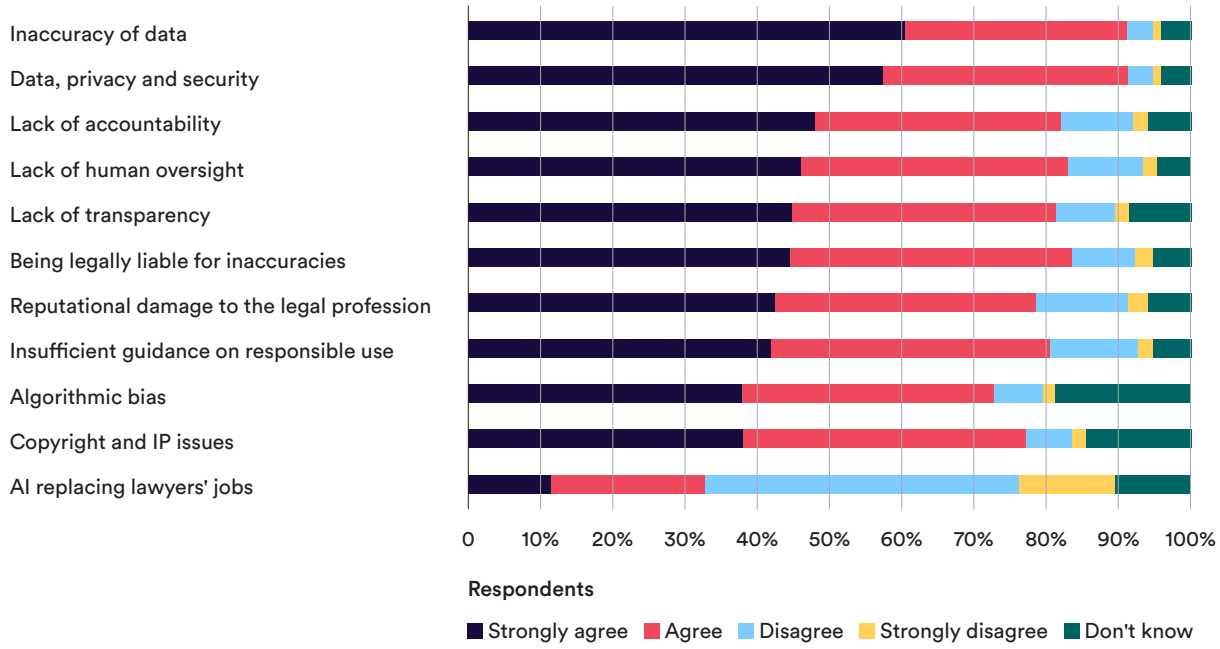
**This section discusses perceived risks and perceived benefits of generative AI use among practitioners. It explores how these risks and benefits differ according to demographic and career characteristics, practice area type, and the extent to which individuals have been exposed to training and guidance.**



## Perceived risks

Respondents assessed various potential risks of AI use in legal practice. Figure 9 shows the level of agreement or disagreement with each risk.

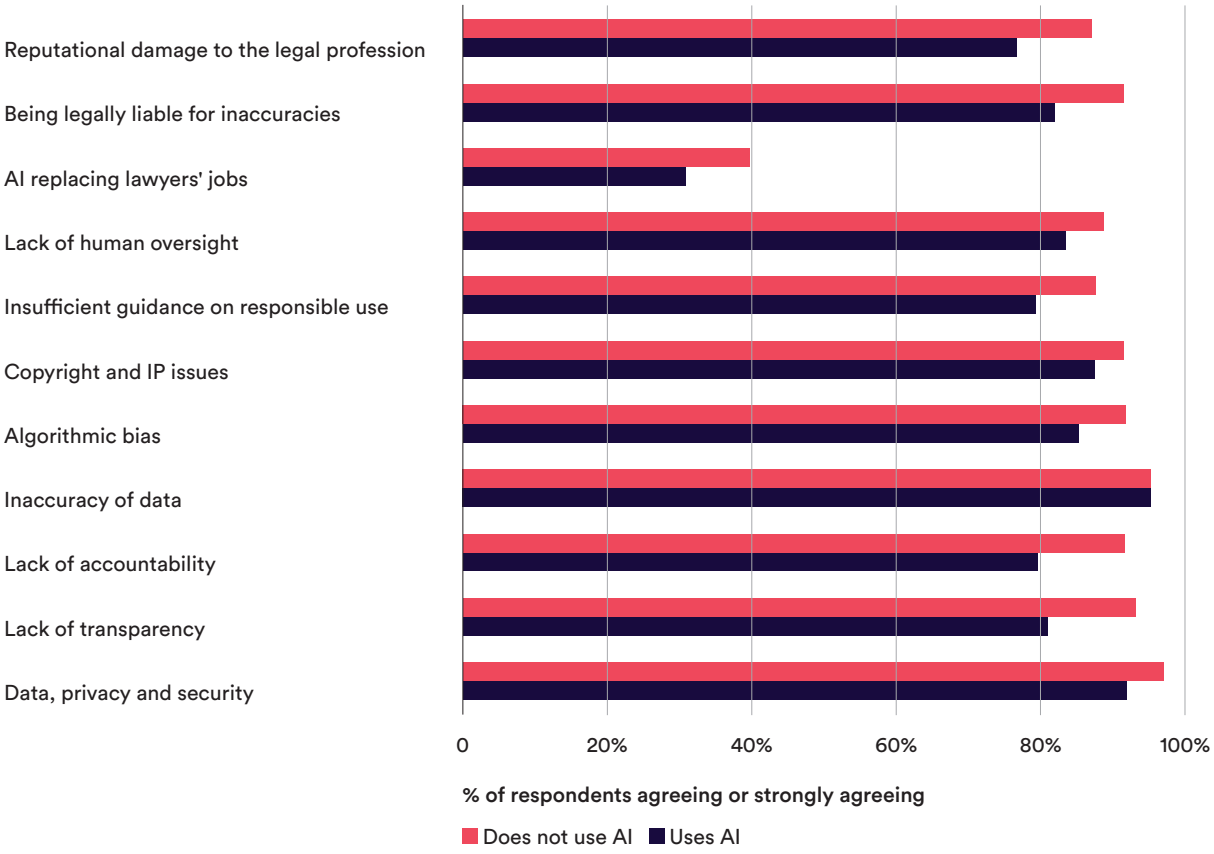
**Figure 9 – The perceived risks of AI use in legal practice**




Accuracy, privacy and security emerged as the most widely recognised concerns, highlighting the transparency challenges posed by the inherent complexity in AI systems. Beyond these concerns, respondents identified a broad spectrum of risks spanning accuracy, privacy and security, transparency, intellectual property and copyright issues, bias, accountability, liability, reputational damage, and insufficient guidance. Notably, fears about AI replacing lawyers ranked lowest among perceived risks, with only 36% of respondents (excluding 'don't know' responses) agreeing or strongly agreeing that this represented a significant threat.

As show in Figure 10, which depicts the proportion of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with each risk based on their use of AI tools (removing 'don't know' responses), non-users exhibited a heightened perception of risk on all dimensions with the exception of 'inaccuracy of data' where risk perceptions were comparable between users and non-users.

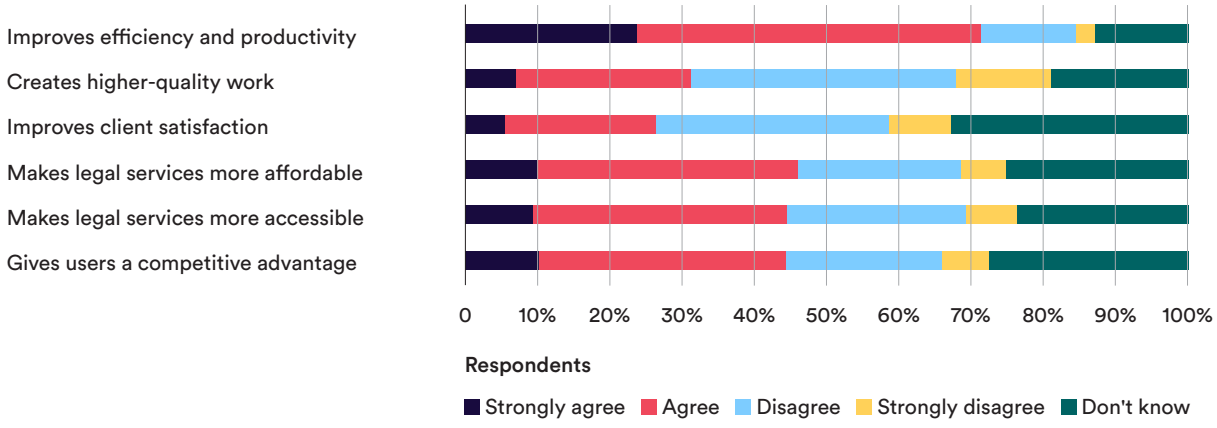
**Figure 10 – Agreement with perceived risks of AI use in legal practice split by AI users and non-users**




## Perceived benefits

Despite acknowledged risks, a significant proportion of respondents recognised the benefits of AI tools in legal practice as shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11 – The perceived benefits of AI use in legal practice**



Improved efficiency and productivity emerged as the most highly rated advantage, with 71% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This was the only benefit to exceed majority support. Just under half of respondents saw AI as capable of enhancing affordability, accessibility or providing competitive advantage, while fewer believed it could improve quality (31%) or client satisfaction (26%). These findings underscore the perception of AI being primarily a workflow optimisation tool that reduces time and costs, rather than a tool that enhances the quality, accessibility or affordability of services.

## Variations in the calculus of perceived risks and benefits

This section combines items on perceived risks (see Figure 9) and benefits (see Figure 11) of AI use in legal practice into composite measures of risk and benefit.[27] Resulting scores are what are known as standardised factor scores, where zero represents the average response across all participants, positive scores above average perceived risk or benefit, and negative scores below average perceived risk or benefit. These scores were analysed on the basis of 5 sets of factors: AI use (use, frequency of use and type of use), areas of practice, personal characteristics, professional characteristics, and exposure to training and guidelines.

### Risk and benefit by use

Table 5 and Figure 12 show perceived risk and benefits of AI use by respondent's actual use of AI. Use of AI was associated with far greater perceived benefits and little change in perceived risks. Perceived benefits also increased with frequency of use and were greatest among those who used AI most frequently. Interestingly, those using AI most frequently also had the highest perceived risk scores. This may be because frequent users tend to engage with AI tools across a broader range of tasks, including more complex or critical ones, or that more frequent use allows them to become more aware of both the opportunities and the limitations associated with AI use.

27. To assess lawyers' perceptions of AI adoption, we employed principal components analysis to derive composite risk and benefit scores across different legal practice areas. For risk assessment, 8 Likert-scale questions measuring various dimensions of perceived AI risk were reduced to a single-factor. Similarly, 6 Likert-scale questions capturing different aspects of perceived AI benefits were also reduced to a single benefit factor. The single-factor approach assumes that responses across related questions reflect an underlying common dimension – either overall risk concern or overall benefit recognition. This method reduces the complexity of multiple survey items into interpretable composite scores and appeared appropriate based on examination of a scree plot and eigenvalues. However, the items would benefit from more in-depth psychometric analysis (for example, Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, "Development of a General Legal Confidence Scale: A First Implementation of the Rasch Measurement Model in Empirical Legal Studies," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 16 no. 1 (2019): 143-74; Catrina Denvir et al., "Measuring the Perceived (In)accessibility of Courts and Lawyers," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 22 no. 3 (2025): 298-317).

**Table 5 – Perceived risk and benefit scores by AI use and frequency of use (higher scores indicate greater risk/benefit; cells shaded from dark (higher values) to light (lower values) by column)**

| AI use | | AI risk score | | AI benefit score | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Count | Mean | Count | Mean |
| Uses AI tools in legal practice | Yes | 638 | 0.08 | 638 | 0.46 |
| | No | 1,101 | -0.07 | 1,101 | -0.25 |
| Frequency of AI use | Daily | 153 | 0.25 | 153 | 0.87 |
| | Weekly | 213 | 0.03 | 213 | 0.39 |
| | Monthly | 42 | 0.21 | 42 | 0.38 |
| | Occasionally | 199 | -0.03 | 199 | 0.23 |

**Figure 12 – Perceived AI risks and benefits by frequency of AI use**

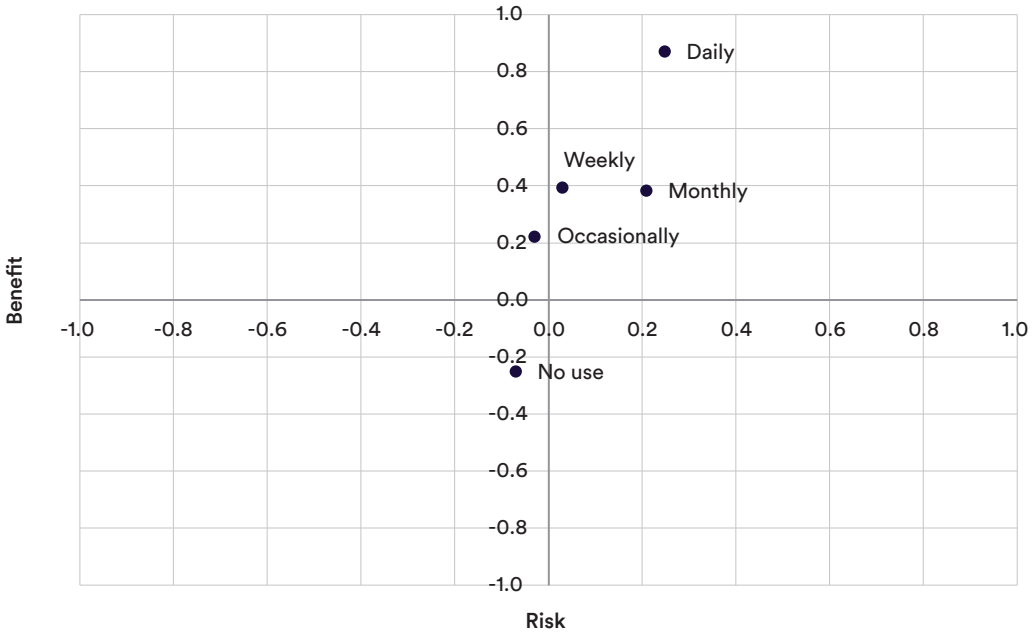


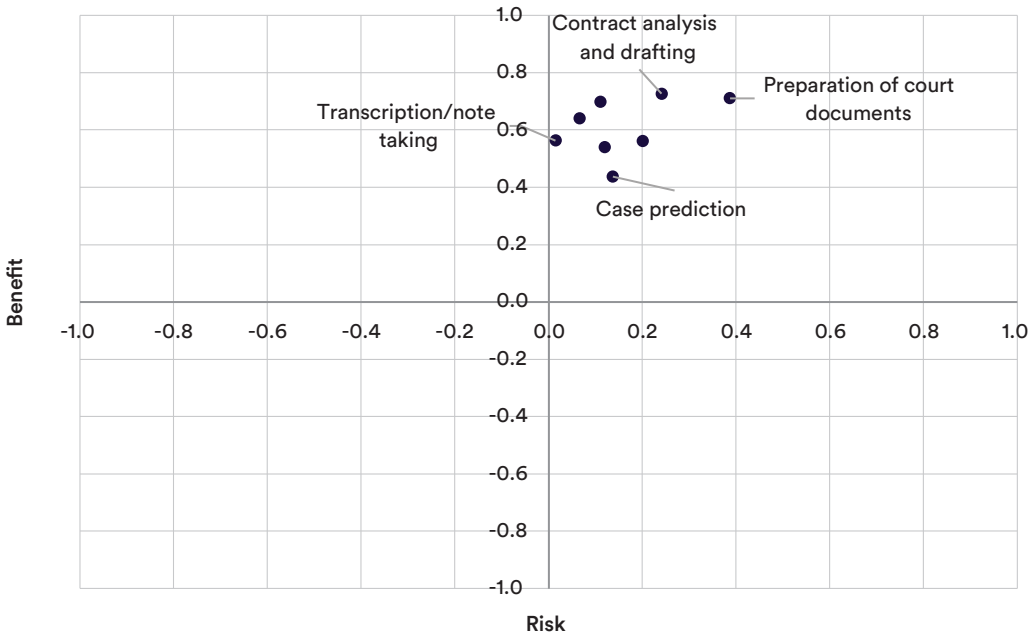

Table 6 and Figure 13 show risk and benefit scores associated with different forms of AI use (and among AI users only). Not surprisingly, all use cases were associated with increase in the perceived benefits of AI. Those using AI for court document preparation (risk 0.39, benefit 0.71) show the highest risk perceptions across all applications alongside strong benefits. Contract analysis and drafting users (risk 0.24, benefit 0.73) were also characterised by heightened risk perception paired with very strong perceived benefits.

However, not all uses of AI are associated with comparable risk perception. Some applications were associated with high perceived benefits alongside relatively neutral risk perceptions. These include document review (risk 0.11, benefit 0.70), client communication (risk 0.07, benefit 0.64), and transcription or note-taking (risk 0.01, benefit 0.56).

**Table 6 – Perceived risk and benefit of AI scores by type of use among AI users only (higher scores indicate greater risk/benefit; cells shaded from dark (higher values) to light (lower values) by column)**

| AI use | AI risk score | | AI benefit score | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Count | Mean | Count | Mean |
| Legal research and case analysis | 252 | 0.20 | 252 | 0.56 |
| Document review and management, including technology assisted review | 174 | 0.11 | 174 | 0.70 |
| Contract analysis and drafting of other relevant documents (e.g. submit) | 111 | 0.24 | 111 | 0.73 |
| Case prediction and litigation outcomes | 8 | 0.14 | 8 | 0.44 |
| Client communication (e.g. drafting emails) | 225 | 0.07 | 225 | 0.64 |
| Transcription and note-taking for meetings / calls | 166 | 0.01 | 166 | 0.56 |
| Preparation or drafting of court documents | 38 | 0.39 | 38 | 0.71 |
| Background research (e.g. on relevant non-legal issues) | 281 | 0.12 | 281 | 0.54 |

**Figure 13 – Risk and benefit scores for different AI use cases (among those using AI) with selected labels**



### Risk and benefit by personal and professional characteristics

Table 7 and Figure 14 show the perceived risk and benefits associated with AI use by respondent's personal and professional characteristics.[28]

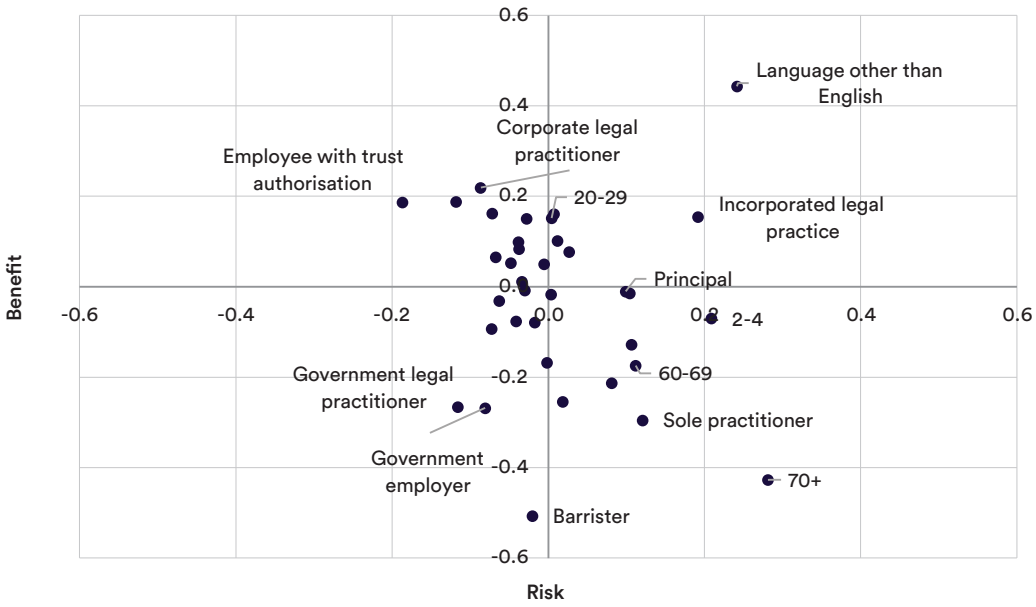
As shown, those speaking languages other than English at home (risk 0.24, benefit 0.44) showed a particularly favourable AI outlook, with moderate risk perceptions paired with strong benefit perceptions. Age also appeared to be an important factor. Younger lawyers aged 20 to 29 (risk 0.00, benefit 0.15) had the highest perceived benefits of any age group, paired with a neutral risk score. In contrast, older lawyers were characterised by higher perceived risks and lower perceived benefits, a trend most pronounced among those aged 70+ (risk 0.28, benefit -0.43) who had the highest risk scores alongside the most negative assessment of benefits. Corporate legal practitioners (risk -0.09, benefit 0.22) and non-legal employers (risk -0.12, benefit 0.19) both had a generally favourable view on benefits of AI alongside low-risk concerns. Similarly, a small number of employees with trust authorisation (risk -0.19, benefit 0.19) had low risk perception and comparatively high benefits scores. Those in incorporated legal practices (risk 0.19, benefit 0.15) showed high-risk concerns alongside strong benefit recognition. Conversely, sole practitioners (risk 0.12, benefit -0.29) showed elevated risk concerns with more negative benefit perceptions, while small practices (2 to 4 employees) (risk 0.21, benefit -0.07) demonstrated the highest risk perception across firm sizes. Government legal practitioners (risk -0.12, benefit -0.27) and particularly barristers (risk -0.02, benefit -0.51) were particularly negative regarding the perceived benefits of AI.

28. The characteristics included replicate those featured in the use of AI analysis in Table 1.

**Table 7 – Perceived AI risk and benefit scores by respondents' personal and professional characteristics (higher scores indicate greater risk/benefit; cells shaded from dark (higher values) to light (lower values) by column)**

| | | AI risk score | | AI benefit score | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mean | Count | Mean | Count |
| Age group | 20–29 | 0.00 | 347 | 0.15 | 347 |
| | 30–39 | -0.05 | 629 | 0.05 | 629 |
| | 40–49 | -0.03 | 394 | 0.01 | 394 |
| | 50–59 | -0.04 | 259 | -0.08 | 259 |
| | 60–69 | 0.11 | 157 | -0.17 | 157 |
| | 70+ | 0.28 | 77 | -0.43 | 77 |
| Language spoken at home | English | -0.03 | 1,440 | -0.01 | 1,440 |
| | Language other than English | 0.24 | 65 | 0.44 | 65 |
| Years practising certificate has been held for | Less than 5 years | 0.01 | 475 | 0.16 | 475 |
| | 5–9 years | 0.03 | 297 | 0.08 | 297 |
| | 10–19 years | -0.02 | 376 | -0.08 | 376 |
| | 20+ years | 0.00 | 390 | -0.17 | 390 |
| Practising certificate type | Principal | 0.10 | 161 | -0.01 | 161 |
| | Principal with trust authorisation | 0.10 | 214 | -0.01 | 214 |
| | Employee | 0.01 | 736 | 0.10 | 736 |
| | Employee with trust authorisation | -0.19 | 29 | 0.19 | 29 |
| | Barrister | -0.02 | 135 | -0.51 | 135 |
| | Corporate legal practitioner | -0.09 | 274 | 0.22 | 274 |
| | Government legal practitioner | -0.12 | 248 | -0.27 | 248 |
| Whether a partner | No | -0.01 | 1,257 | 0.05 | 1,257 |
| | Yes | -0.07 | 186 | 0.16 | 186 |
| | Not applicable | 0.02 | 362 | -0.25 | 362 |
| In-house | No | 0.00 | 1,426 | -0.02 | 1,426 |
| | Yes | -0.07 | 365 | 0.07 | 365 |
| Organisation type | Law firm | -0.03 | 740 | 0.15 | 740 |
| | Sole practitioner | 0.12 | 266 | -0.29 | 266 |
| | Incorporated legal practice | 0.19 | 122 | 0.15 | 122 |
| | Government employer | -0.08 | 276 | -0.27 | 276 |
| | Non-legal employer | -0.12 | 192 | 0.19 | 192 |
| | Community sector | -0.07 | 114 | -0.09 | 114 |
| | Other | 0.11 | 75 | -0.13 | 75 |
| Number of employees | 1 | 0.08 | 221 | -0.21 | 221 |
| | 2–4 | 0.21 | 162 | -0.07 | 162 |
| | 5–19 | -0.04 | 267 | 0.08 | 267 |
| | 20–199 | -0.06 | 423 | -0.03 | 423 |
| | 200+ | -0.04 | 666 | 0.10 | 666 |

**Figure 14 – Relationship between perceived AI risk and benefit scores by respondents' personal and professional characteristics (with selected labels)**




## Risk and benefit by practice area

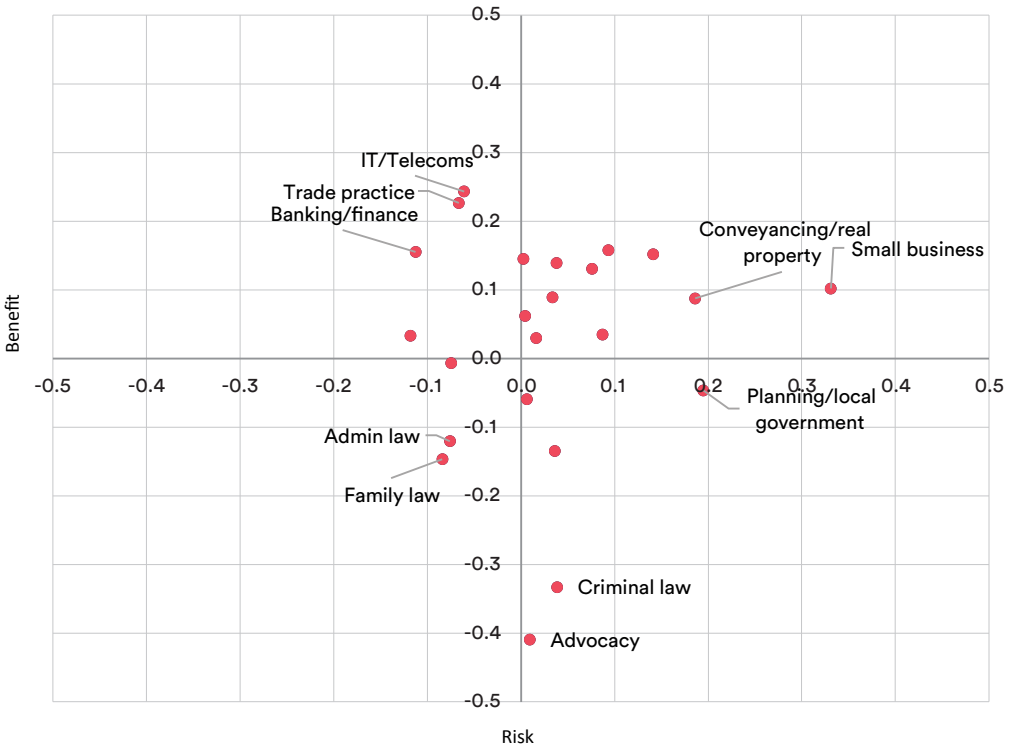
Table 8 and Figure 15 show perceived risk and benefit associated with AI use by area of practice. As shown, IT/telecommunications (risk -0.06, benefit 0.24) and trade practice (risk -0.07, benefit 0.23) demonstrate comparatively strong enthusiasm for AI with high perceived benefits and relatively low risk concerns. Banking/finance (risk -0.11, benefit 0.16) and employment/industrial law (risk -0.12, benefit 0.03) also reflected lower levels of perceived risk, though with more moderate benefit assessments. Small business law (risk 0.33, benefit 0.10) stands out for its higher risk perceptions despite moderate benefit recognition. Conveyancing (risk 0.19, benefit 0.09) likewise showed somewhat elevated concerns about risk. Taxation (risk 0.09, benefit 0.16) and debts/insolvency (risk 0.14, benefit 0.15) also demonstrated slightly stronger benefit recognition, although they were still accompanied by some risk concerns.

By contrast, planning/local government (risk 0.19, benefit -0.05) had comparably higher risk perceptions with slightly negative benefit perceptions. Criminal law (risk 0.04, benefit -0.33) and environmental law (risk 0.04, benefit -0.13) were also characterised by comparatively negative benefit perceptions. Family law (risk -0.08, benefit -0.15), administrative law (risk -0.08, benefit -0.12) and personal injury (risk -0.07, benefit -0.01) had comparatively low risk perceptions, but also relatively low perceived benefits to using AI.

**Table 8 – Perceived risk and benefit of AI scores by area of practice (higher scores indicate greater risk/benefit; cells shaded from dark (higher values) to light (lower values) by column)**

| Areas of practice | AI risk score | | AI benefit score | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Count | Mean | Count |
| Administrative law | -0.08 | 240 | -0.12 | 240 |
| Advocacy | 0.01 | 129 | -0.41 | 129 |
| Banking / finance | -0.11 | 98 | 0.16 | 98 |
| Civil litigation | 0.02 | 399 | 0.03 | 399 |
| Commercial law | 0.04 | 524 | 0.14 | 524 |
| Conveyancing / real property | 0.19 | 259 | 0.09 | 259 |
| Corporate law | 0.00 | 288 | 0.15 | 288 |
| Criminal law | 0.04 | 270 | -0.33 | 270 |
| Debts / insolvency | 0.14 | 119 | 0.15 | 119 |
| Employment / industrial law | -0.12 | 198 | 0.03 | 198 |
| Environmental law | 0.04 | 46 | -0.13 | 46 |
| Family law | -0.08 | 296 | -0.15 | 296 |
| Immigration law | 0.08 | 70 | 0.13 | 70 |
| IT / telecommunications | -0.06 | 74 | 0.24 | 74 |
| Intellectual property | 0.00 | 128 | 0.06 | 128 |
| Litigation – general | 0.03 | 299 | 0.09 | 299 |
| Personal injury | -0.07 | 162 | -0.01 | 162 |
| Planning / local government | 0.19 | 51 | -0.05 | 51 |
| Small business | 0.33 | 94 | 0.10 | 94 |
| Taxation | 0.09 | 55 | 0.16 | 55 |
| Trade practice | -0.07 | 61 | 0.23 | 61 |
| Wills and estates | 0.09 | 292 | 0.04 | 292 |
| Other | 0.01 | 272 | -0.06 | 272 |

**Figure 15 – Relationship between perceived AI risk and benefit scores by area of law, highlighting key practice areas (with selected labels)**




## Risk and benefit by exposure to training and guidelines

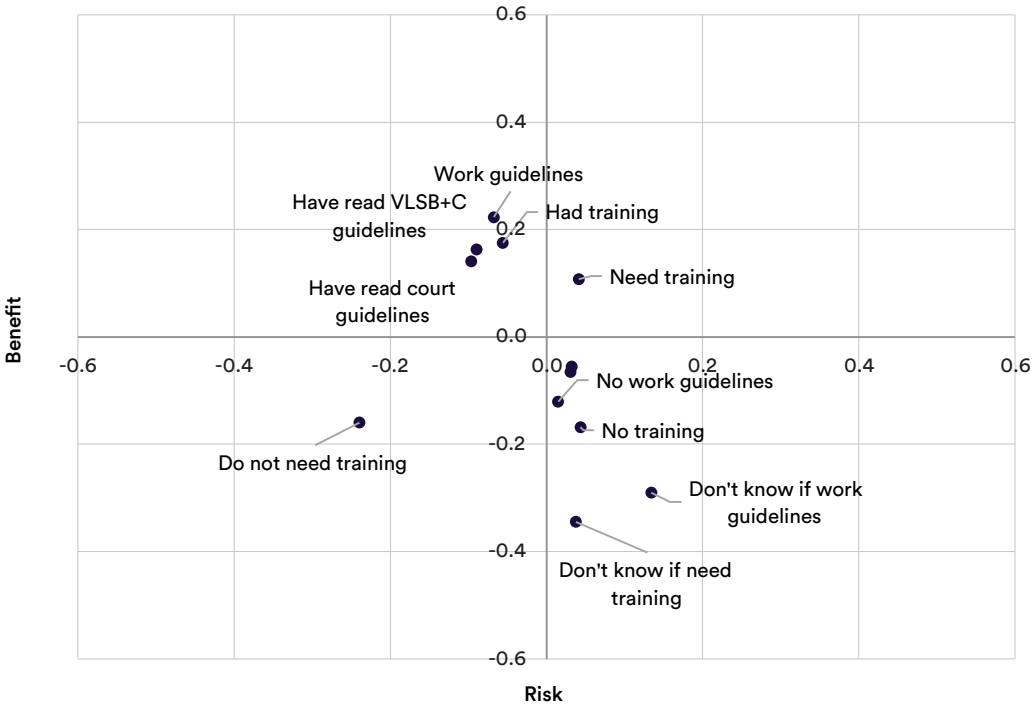
Table 9 and Figure 16 show the relationship between the perceived benefits and risks associated with AI use and respondent's exposure to training and guidelines. Training was associated with increased perceived benefits of AI use, though little change in perceived risk (risk -0.06, benefit 0.18 with training, compared to risk 0.04, benefit -0.17 without). Respondents were also asked if they felt they would benefit from training, with those who answered negatively characterised by lower perceived risk and lower perceived benefit scores (risk -0.24, benefit -0.16). While individuals who received AI training recognised greater benefits, their perceptions of risks remained relatively unchanged.

The presence of workplace guidelines was associated with increased perceived benefits and modest changes in risk (risk -0.07, benefit 0.22 where guidelines existed, compared to risk 0.01, benefit -0.12 where they did not). Interestingly, those who were unaware of whether workplace guidelines existed were characterised by higher risk and lower benefit scores (risk 0.13, benefit -0.29).

**Table 9 – Perceived AI risk and benefit scores by exposure to training and guidelines (higher scores indicate greater risk/benefit; cells shaded from dark (higher values) to light (lower values) by column)**

| | | AI risk score | | AI benefit score | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Count | Mean | Count | Mean |
| AI education / training in past year | Yes | 825 | -0.06 | 825 | 0.18 |
| | No | 828 | 0.04 | 828 | -0.17 |
| Workplace AI guidelines | Yes | 703 | -0.07 | 703 | 0.22 |
| | No | 753 | 0.01 | 753 | -0.12 |
| | Don't know | 218 | 0.13 | 218 | -0.29 |
| Would benefit from AI training or learning materials | Yes | 1,178 | 0.04 | 1,178 | 0.11 |
| | No | 300 | -0.24 | 300 | -0.16 |
| | Don't know | 226 | 0.04 | 226 | -0.34 |
| Read – Supreme Court and County Court guidelines on responsible use of AI | No | 1,191 | 0.03 | 1,191 | -0.06 |
| | Yes | 489 | -0.10 | 489 | 0.14 |
| Read – VLSB+C's 'Statement on the use of artificial intelligence in Australian legal practice'. | No | 1,189 | 0.03 | 1,189 | -0.06 |
| | Yes | 490 | -0.09 | 490 | 0.16 |

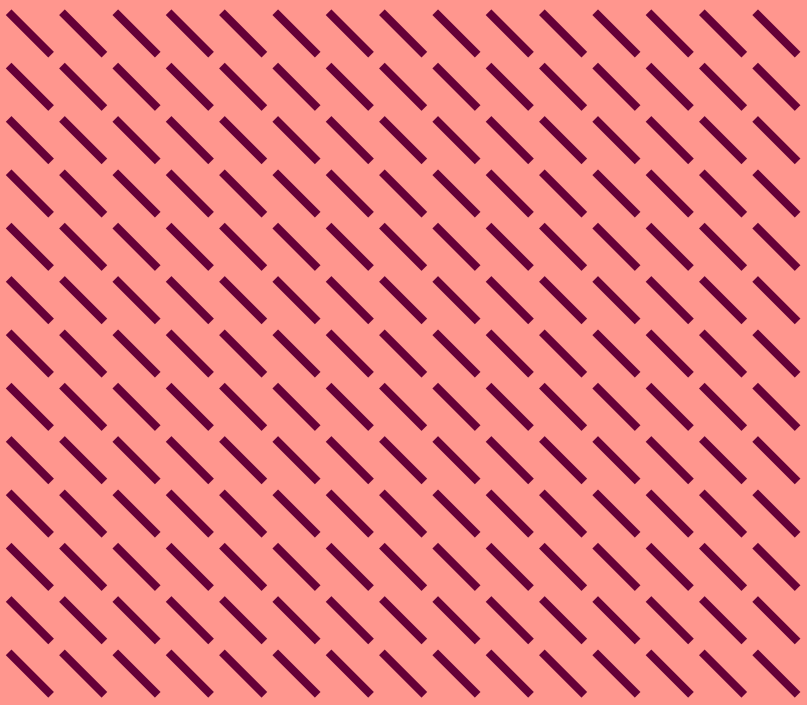
**Figure 16 – Relationship between perceived AI risk and benefit scores and exposure to training and guidelines (with selected labels)**



05

# Discussion

This section provides further commentary on the results detailed in the preceding sections. This includes AI adoption patterns, perceptions of efficiency, risk perception, and the consequences of a lack of guidance. It concludes by considering regulatory implications and the path forward.



### What drives adoption

AI adoption in legal practice remains limited, with just over one-third of lawyers using AI tools when the 2025 Victorian Lawyer Census was conducted. The data suggests that adoption is shaped primarily by perceived utility, that is, whether a lawyer sees a clear benefit from AI in the context of their specific work. This is, in turn, moderated by organisational context and capacity.

The profile of adopters supports this. Younger and less experienced lawyers – presumably, those who stand to gain the most from tools that assist with tasks their more senior counterparts can perhaps perform from experience – adopt at higher rates. Those from non-English speaking backgrounds, for whom AI may assist with professional communication, also show higher uptake. And adoption concentrates in practice areas where AI's current strengths (processing and synthesising natural language and numeric data) map most clearly to day-to-day work: IT/telecommunications, trade practices, intellectual property, and higher-volume transactional fields like commercial and corporate law. By contrast, relationship-intensive areas or those that involve a higher proportion of vulnerable clients, such as criminal and administrative law, show lower adoption. This may not indicate a failure of uptake but rather a rational assessment of where general-purpose AI tools currently add value.

Organisational context reinforces these patterns. Lawyers working in-house, for non-legal employers or in incorporated practices show higher adoption, likely reflecting broader technology integration across these enterprises. Yet organisational context cuts both ways. Under-resourced settings – community legal services, small practices and sole practitioners – may lack the time and capacity to evaluate these tools or support their integration. When resources are scarce, prohibition may become a default response, as evidenced by the 21.8% of non-users who reported workplace bans on AI.

The relationship between perceived risk, perceived benefit and actual adoption is more complex than it might first appear. Non-users report heightened risk perceptions on nearly all dimensions, and risk is clearly a source of hesitation given that 45% cited data, privacy and security concerns as reasons for non-use. It is possible that some non-users overestimate risks due to unfamiliarity with the technology, as suggested by their higher demand for training on how AI works. However, senior practitioners are disproportionately represented among non-users and their caution may reflect experience-based judgment that operates to sharpen, rather than dull, awareness of quality and reliability limitations, rather than reflect a lack of technological familiarity.

What is clear is that risk perception alone does not determine adoption. The data reveals that higher-than-average perceptions of risk are tolerated where they are coupled with higher-than-average perceptions of benefit. Conversely, low perceived risk does not drive adoption where perceived benefit is also low. The most straightforward explanation is that while risk can to some degree be mitigated, it is not possible to manufacture benefits that a user does not believe the technology can deliver. In short, there appears to be a 'what's in it for me' threshold that must be cleared before adoption occurs, and where that threshold is not met, even low-risk perceptions do not tip the balance.

This pattern holds across most demographic groups but is less consistent across practice areas, where several apparent paradoxes emerge. These inconsistencies point to factors beyond individual risk-benefit calculations. Organisational capacity to manage risk through guidelines, bespoke tools or enterprise solutions may matter considerably. And for in-house lawyers, those with non-legal employers, and those in government settings, the decision to adopt may not rest with the individual lawyer or even the legal team, but instead occur at the level of organisational strategy, where risks and benefits are evaluated in aggregate against broader operational objectives.

### The efficiency trap

The dominant narrative around AI in legal practice is one of efficiency. Over 71% of respondents agreed that AI improves efficiency and productivity, representing the highest positive rating of any purported benefit. Yet far fewer saw AI as enhancing affordability (46%), accessibility (45%), quality (31%) or client satisfaction (26%).

This concentration on efficiency is concerning given that the benefits of efficiency appear to accrue primarily to service providers, not clients. The comparatively low rate at which respondents associated AI with more affordable services hints at this dynamic, as does the quarter of respondents who did not believe clients needed to be informed about AI use. This risks an outcome in which productivity improvements translate to higher profits rather than lower fees.

The types of tools being used and the tasks for which they are deployed also raise questions about quality. Users gravitate toward general-purpose AI models that draw from wide-ranging sources and whose quality limitations are well-documented, rather than industry-specific alternatives with built-in professional guardrails. When these tools are applied to legal research (a task requiring careful source evaluation) or client communications (which carry privacy risks) the potential for quality degradation is real. That so few practitioners see AI as improving quality may reflect an accurate perception of these limitations. Such use is defensible where quality control processes are in place, as appears to be the case for the majority of users. However, if the gap between the rate at which respondents associate AI with efficiency gains and the rate at which they associate it with quality improvements reflects a broader acceptance that efficiency ought to come at the cost of quality, this warrants closer attention.

Training preferences reinforce the concern. The greatest appetite for training is in how AI can enhance workflow and efficiency (74%), with virtually no difference between users and non-users. If practitioners only expect speed or productivity improvements, that is all they will look for, and the dominance of the efficiency narrative risks that narrative becoming self-reinforcing.

## Implications

Taken together, the findings point to several areas warranting closer attention.

General-purpose AI tool use, particularly for tasks extending beyond information gathering to legal analysis and application, is concentrated among newer entrants to the profession. While users generally appear aware of quality limitations and report taking steps to mitigate them, patterns of use raise questions about whether AI-assisted practice may undermine the development or retention of core professional skills. Evidence from other domains indicates that generative AI use reduces cognitive burden in ways that can impede the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. This is a concern that becomes salient when considering professional development.[29]

Lawyers working outside traditional legal practice settings – in-house, for non-legal employers or within incorporated practices – may face particular tensions where enterprise-level AI guidelines are not adequately attuned to legal-specific professional obligations, or prioritise organisational objectives in ways that conflict with them. This concern is compounded by the low penetration of existing professional guidance. Sixty per cent of respondents had not read either the Supreme and County Court of Victoria's 'Guidelines for litigants: responsible use of artificial intelligence in litigation' or the VLSB+C's 'Statement on the use of artificial intelligence in Australian legal practice', including close to half of those who used AI. Where workplace guidelines exist – and they are more common in settings with higher adoption, such as in-house roles and non-legal employers – they may be designed for general workforces rather than legal professionals specifically. Without awareness of court and regulator guidance, lawyers in these settings risk compliance failures where workplace policies diverge from professional obligations. At the same time, the low rates of penetration also affect non-users. That a third of non-users cited the absence of legal and ethical guidelines as a barrier to adoption suggests that broader awareness could both improve compliance among users and reduce unnecessary hesitation among non-users.

29. Research demonstrates that AI facilitates cognitive offloading (Evan F. Risko and Sam J. Gilbert, "Cognitive Offloading," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 9 (2016): 676–88). While this can be positive, it can also significantly hinder learning and development (see the review of the literature in Sandra Grinschgl and Aljoscha C. Neubauer, "Supporting Cognition with Modern Technology: Distributed Cognition Today and in an AI-Enhanced Future," *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence* 5 (2022): Article 908261). Studies have also shown the way in which AI use reduces the active recall and problem-solving essential for cognitive development (Jose et al., "The Cognitive Paradox of AI in Education: Between Enhancement and Erosion," *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (2025): Article 1550621; Çela et al., "Risks of AI-Assisted Learning on Student Critical Thinking," *International Journal of Risk and Contingency Management* 12 (2024): 1–19) and its association with lower neural, linguistic and behavioural performance (Nataliya Kosmyna et al., "Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt When Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task," *ArXiv*, abs/2506.08872 (2025).) Excessive reliance on AI has also been shown to weaken information retention (Mahir Akgun and Sacip Toker, "Evaluating the Effect of Pretesting with Conversational AI on Retention of Needed Information," *ArXiv*, abs/2412.13487 (2024); Long Bai et al., "ChatGPT: The Cognitive Effects on Learning and Memory," *Brain-X* 1 (2023): e30) and to reduce creative confidence through cognitive fixation on AI-generated suggestions (Sabrina Habib et al., "How Does Generative Artificial Intelligence Impact Student Creativity?" *Journal of Creativity* 34 (2024): Article 100072).

Current adoption patterns reveal that AI's benefits are both narrowly conceived and unevenly distributed. This narrow vision may reflect both the limitations of the general-purpose tools that dominate current use and the ways AI has entered the profession to date. Yet it also represents a missed opportunity. It is plausible that the efficiency focus reflects current usage patterns rather than inherent technological limitations. Notwithstanding AI's documented limitations, there is scope for it to enhance quality, accessibility and affordability – for example, by translating complex legal concepts in ways accessible to lay clients, enhancing triage and intake processes, providing quality and completeness checks alongside human oversight, or enabling service unbundling for those of limited means. These applications may remain unexplored because practitioners are not looking for them.

The question of whether AI adoption distributes advantage widely or concentrates it among well-resourced providers takes on particular urgency given broader concerns raised by respondents. A not-insignificant proportion were unequivocal in their view that no benefit AI can provide justifies its environmental and societal costs. That this view exists may in part reflect the narrow conception of benefits that currently dominates, where efficiency gains accrue to service providers rather than translating to improved outcomes for clients. Yet it also underscores why expanding and distributing AI's benefits more equitably is both desirable and necessary. If the environmental and societal costs of AI are to be justified at all, it cannot be on the basis of concentrated efficiency gains for well-resourced providers. Rather, it must be through demonstrable improvements in access to justice: benefits that reach across a diverse range of providers and, through them, the clients and communities they serve.

Addressing these challenges requires a response that goes beyond raising awareness of AI's existence. Generative AI tools, concentrated among a small number of powerful technology corporations, are not short of publicity. What is needed is effort to expand understanding of AI's potential beyond efficiency and to equip resource-constrained organisations to evaluate and implement these tools safely. Training must go beyond workflow optimisation to address safe integration and build awareness of the professional guidance that already exists. While demand for training on developing AI usage policies is relatively weak overall, it is notably stronger among non-users in law firms and community legal services. Given over half of non-users report that AI guidelines do not exist in their workplace, targeted support for policy development could address both workplace bans and the data, privacy and security concerns that represent the most commonly cited barriers to adoption.

The greatest need for support is likely to arise in under-resourced settings (community legal services, small practices and sole practitioners) where lawyers face the most acute mismatch between demands and resources. Without support, there is a risk that AI adoption will continue to be driven by the benefits it holds for practitioners or their employers, rather than for consumers of legal services. There is value in the VLSB+C considering how it might raise awareness of different use cases, make implementation tools available (such as templates for workplace guidelines or risk assessments) for different areas of practice, and support capacity building where it is most needed, for example through grants that enable the potential of AI to be realised and its benefits made available for a wider range of stakeholders.

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