This initiative could boost lawyers’ IT skills

This includes what the report referred to as a solicitor’s duty of technological competence.
- Helping design continuing legal education programs to help lawyers build their technological skills.
- Building partnerships with the legal technology sector aimed at benefiting community legal services.

The report intended much of this to be undertaken in collaboration with the Law Society’s professional standards department — which now seems inevitable due to the society’s role in the hub’s governance structure.

The FLIP inquiry found the larger in-house legal departments were driving change by streamlining their work processes and using improved legal technology.

But while the report predicted the emergence of new roles and new areas of work for lawyers, it also found that lawyers’ level of skill and interest in technology required support.

Legg believes the Law Society’s decision to become involved with the hub will enable it to move ahead of the profession’s bodies in the North America and Britain that have also been examining the impact of technology and innovation.

“This will go from looking at anecdotal matters, what he hear is happening, to actually putting funds in to in-depth research,” Legg says.

“The university will look at those issues raised in the FLIP report and conduct critical, rigorous research around those topics with a view to both informing the Law Society and its members, but also towards informing law students and society generally.”

Its workload might cover matters such as the impact of artificial intelligence on the practice of law, project management for lawyers, legal analytics and alternative fee arrangements, Legg says.

While other universities have centres that are examining the legal system, Legg believes the UNSW hub is the first to focus on the legal profession and innovation.

As well as producing research for the profession and the general community, the hub will also offer internships to UNSW law students that will be credited towards their degrees.

Law Society president Pauline Wright says the focus on legal technology could lead to more effective ways of providing legal services — by the profession and the courts — in regional areas.

“This is going to help lawyers become more efficient, but it will also help with access to justice — and that is why we wanted to get behind it,” she says.

“We have got to help our members to understand the benefits of technology rather than being afraid of what it means.

“Everybody talks about disruption, but in fact technology means making our jobs easier,” Wright says.
Law Society president Pauline Wright with chief executive Michael Tidball and Professor Michael Legg