

Project update on ARC Linkage (LP190100966)

Designing gender equality into the future of the legal profession

This project investigates how women and men understand and experience the changing nature of work in the law. Using innovative and engaged research design, the project will generate new knowledge about the gendered dimensions of workplace change and workplace dynamics.

Project governance

The project is a collaboration with the University of Sydney, the Australian National University, the Law Society of NSW, and the Women Lawyers Association of NSW. The project governance board is comprised of nominees from both partner organisations. The board provides input into the recruitment of research participants, research design, the timing of research dates, and the development of reports and outcomes. It meets quarterly throughout the project.

Progress to date: Mixed method research

Interviews with 30 senior legal practitioners, including leaders in both public and private sector law, were undertaken between January and May 2021. These interviews produced diverse and nuanced perspectives on the changing nature of legal careers, emerging models of legal work, the application and impact of new technologies, the impact of COVID-19, and gendered dynamics in the profession. Insights from these interviews were used to develop an online survey. The survey link was shared with all Law Society of NSW members between 24 August and 28 September 2021, yielding 766 responses. Reflecting the diversity of solicitors in New South Wales, our survey sample included respondents from urban and regional NSW, across private practice, corporate, government, community, and not-for-profit legal sectors, as well as a range of practice areas, gender, age, and seniority. We would like to thank the Law Society of NSW and the Women Lawyers Association of NSW, and their respective members, for taking part in the study.

Emergent themes

The survey and interviews have produced data across a range of themes. The research team is now conducting in-depth analysis of the data, with a focus on the application and impact of new technologies, perceptions regarding the skills and capabilities required for success in the legal profession, and work dynamics and culture. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand the gendered impact of current changes and practices in the law, so as to build a more gender equitable future of the legal profession.

Next steps

In 2022, the research team will engage in a co-design process with legal practitioners to develop interventions and strategies to promote gender equality in the legal profession. The aim of this third phase will be to develop actionable insights to promote change.

Research Team

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