MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SOCIETY’S LAW TECH GROUP HELD ON 24 MARCH 2022 AT 1PM IN PERSON AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

PRESENT: Kerry McCloy (Chair), Phillip Armstrong, Ruaidhri Austin, Angela Brady, Jamie Donnelly, Amira Graham, Anna Gray, Jane Hollway, Aine Hughes, Amy Jackson, Ian McFarland, Catherine McQuade and Ciarán O'Kelly.

APOLOGIES: Tracy Ann Collins

IN ATTENDANCE: Jamie Warnock (Head of Policy and Engagement), Brian Carson (Head of Non-Contentious Business) and Damien McCann (Policy & Research Intern)

1. Welcome and Introduction:

The meeting commenced with a brief introduction from each member with reference to their area of work, size of practice, experience with legal technology etc.

The Committee is in total agreement over the importance of digitisation and technology for the legal profession.

Early on Case management systems (CMS), electronic signatures and the electronic execution of deeds are mentioned by name as areas of special interest.

2. Terms of Reference:

The Group noted they are generally content with the Terms of Reference although there was agreement that they could be marginally expanded to include dedicated CPD and communication provisions and make specific reference to working to influence digital change with the Courts Service and Judiciary. It was agreed that these changes to the Terms of References would be rewritten and circulated to the Group for the next meeting.

3. Next Steps:

The Chair recommended extrapolating from the Terms of Reference some strategic priorities to focus on over the next 6-12 months. At this point the most common desires are education and CPD.

There followed a discussion of some of the issues members are aware of that require addressing, including:

- the continued use of free email addresses instead of professional providers like 365. Besides being an ongoing security concern, free email addresses like Gmail and Hotmail also appear unprofessional.
• Connected to this is another prominent issue, cybersecurity. Frequent e-informers and circulars from the Society inform solicitors of issues but do not advise on ways to address the issues. The link to professional indemnity insurance was discussed and also the need to potentially regulate on these issues in future.

• It is largely acknowledged that many firms simply might not have the capacity or the tech know-how to implement these recommendations.

• The Chair brings attention to the different needs of the membership. This is one of the biggest challenges facing the profession and will be a good gap to get bridged.

• Ms Hughes suggested the Law Society could construct a law tech web resource akin to Fintech-NI and other law societies.

• E-bundles and an inability to issue proceedings electronically were noted as a particular area of frustration.

• It was noted that the Department of Justice’s budget has been diluted and that as a result there is little left to invest in the court system.

• The LSEW has a system for granting a seal of approval to tech providers and it was suggested that this Group look into doing something similar in this jurisdiction.

The Group went on to discuss how information could be gathered to understand the needs of the profession. A survey was considered although drawbacks were noted including potential survey fatigue and the fact that many members may not understand what is available and therefore what could most assist them.

Dr O’Kelly informed the group of a research project at QUB designed to gather this information and perform a gap analysis on the technological needs of the profession. Part of the methodology would involve focus groups. The Group agreed to support this work and Ciaran agreed to provide an update at the next meeting.

4. A.O.B.:

The secretariat would be in contact with group members to arrange the time and date of the next meeting.

APPROVED ………………………