

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey turtleneck sweater, is looking down at a white tablet device she is holding. The background is dark and out of focus. A large blue diagonal shape is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the main title text.

# **7 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL LEARNING STRATEGY**

**Guide for Legal L&D**

 **The College  
of Legal Practice**

# INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic, and the lockdowns experienced as a result of it, underlined the importance of a robust digital strategy. The immediate goal for law firms was understandably to achieve business continuity in exceptional circumstances. The vast majority of firms quickly adapted working practices, enabling teams to provide the same service levels away from the traditional office setting.

As firms emerge from this challenging time, attention must now turn to other crucial areas of the business, including learning and development. A comprehensive digital approach is required.

To drive real business value, your digital learning proposition needs to be strategic. This means investing in technology, resources and change management to develop a learning culture that supports the firm's overarching business and growth plans, rather than making investments tactically or speculatively. This guide will explore seven key steps to developing a successful digital learning strategy.

## Content

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>p.2</b>
<b>Step 1</b> Understand your firmwide strategy and align to it	<b>p.3</b>
<b>Step 2</b> Identify where you're starting from	<b>p.4</b>
<b>Step 3</b> Listen to your 'customers'	<b>p.6</b>
<b>Step 4</b> Explore the competitor landscape	<b>p.7</b>
<b>Step 5</b> Determine opportunities	<b>p.8</b>
<b>Step 6</b> Build your strategy	<b>p.10</b>
<b>Step 7</b> Create a roadmap for delivery	<b>p.12</b>
<b>Seizing the opportunity</b>	<b>p.13</b>

# **STEP 1:**

## **Understand your firmwide strategy and align to it**

To succeed, a digital learning strategy cannot be created in a vacuum. It must align with the firm's ambitions and direction. For example, practice-based training should be prioritised for the practice areas which the firm is looking to grow. If the firm is focused on cementing relationships in a particular sector, build your client learning strategy around that sector. Bear in mind that your digital learning strategy will not be static; you will need to refresh it periodically to stay aligned with where the firm is heading.



# STEP 2:

## Identify where you're starting from

It's important, particularly for junior lawyers' development, to include informal or tacit learning too. This can include learning through sitting in meetings to observe, listening to colleagues and joining taking conference calls.

In addition to the different kinds of learning, it is also useful to recognise how each type of learning is delivered. Examples may include:

- Compulsory learning for regulatory purposes or for compliance with internal policies (e.g. GDPR, AML, data security)
- Learning linked to 'moments that matter' in a lawyer's career (trainee training, NQ

training, transition into partnership, new lateral training)

- Learning linked to specific practice groups
- Generic skills training (e.g. resilience, giving feedback)
- Legal skills training (e.g. drafting, negotiating)
- Cross practice group learning around new developments, or changes in law or practice (e.g. legal technology, BREXIT)
- Client training (e.g. client academies, client briefings)
- Conferences or offsites

It's important, particularly for junior lawyers' development, to include informal or tacit learning too. This can include learning

through sitting in meetings to observe, listening to colleagues and joining taking conference calls.

In addition to the different kinds of learning, it is also useful to recognise how each type of learning is delivered. Examples may include:

- Classroom based (lecture or seminar)
- Classroom based (small group workshop or presentation)
- Offsite blend of plenary and small group learning (eg conference)
- Online questionnaire/quiz (e.g. for compliance training)
- Demonstration (legal tech training)
- Webinar
- Informally, through observation and feedback as part of the job





## **STEP 3:** Listen to your 'customers'

It is important to have a clear understanding of the lawyers' view of the firm's current learning and development proposition, recognising both their present and future training needs. Taking the time to gain this feedback will enable you to benchmark where you are now (which will be important when you come to assess the success of the strategy) and to identify any obvious gaps.

There are multiple ways to gain this information, ranging from a simple, targeted survey to more comprehensive (but more time consuming) approaches such as conducting a series of interviews. To be most effective, these should include discussions with lawyers in different offices and practice groups, at different levels of seniority. The more data you can get to help shape your learning strategy, the more confident you can be that it will be effective.

# STEP 4:

## Explore the competitor landscape

Successful digital companies are relentlessly paranoid about what the competition is doing. Search websites and other public domain sources and attend conferences where others in your field are speaking in order to build up a picture of where your L&D proposition sits versus that of your peers.

- How much learning are your competitors delivering digitally?
- What types of learning are they delivering digitally?
- Are they collaborating with third parties/training providers in their digital offer?
- How are competitors describing their digital L&D offering in their external marketing or recruitment material?
- How are your peers' L&D teams structured?
- What client training do they offer?
- How are they addressing summer vacation schemes during lockdown?
- What learning management systems are your competitors using?
- What learning software or courseware have they invested in?

Your clients are also a good source of inspiration. Ask to speak to a trusted client's L&D team about their digital proposition – there is much to be learned from other sectors. Speak to universities, law colleges and other educational providers to help inform your own strategy.

*A note of caution:* research must never cross the line into anti-competitive behaviour. When assessing the competitor landscape, be sure to stick to information in the public domain.



## STEP 5: Determine opportunities

By looking at your 'as is' position, customer feedback and competitor analysis, you will now be able to begin to identify opportunities to create digital value. During this process, assess each element of your proposition and ask the following questions:

- /// What are we doing now that we need to do better and/or differently?
- /// What needs are there that we have not yet met?
- /// Which parts of the learning proposition are no longer fit for purpose and should be stopped or retired?
- /// Which elements absolutely must be delivered face to face (be really honest in your evaluation)?
- /// What content can easily be repurposed to digital delivery?
- /// Where are the gaps? What new content or learning do you need to develop?
- /// Which elements will need a complete re-design to move to digital?
- /// Where could digital create quick wins, to support the case for further development (and budget)?



When determining your opportunities, your proposition should be assessed against a set of principles. The principles for each firm will vary and will depend on the philosophy of learning that your firm chooses to adopt. This may include things like:

- Anything that can be delivered digitally, should be delivered digitally
- Lawyers must ultimately be responsible for their own development path (the opportunity for personalised development, supported by a suite of digital learning resources and programmes, is a very positive message)
- Duplication must be minimised and repurposing/ reusing of content encouraged
- Less is more; aim for fewer, higher quality learning experiences
- Standardise and simplify wherever possible



# STEP 6:

## Build your strategy

Aim for a balanced portfolio of digital initiatives – a blended learning strategy that recognises that face-to-face learning is a rare commodity to be maximised. Divide the opportunities you have identified into those that are 'core', those that are 'adjacent' and those that are 'transformative'.

### Core

Opportunities to optimise essential existing learning experiences through digital delivery with minimal re-design. Examples will include moving regular face-to-face lectures to live webinars with Q&A functionality, and moving regular team meetings to a searchable Microsoft Teams channel.

### Adjacent

Existing training opportunities that previously were delivered face-to-face but need to be redesigned for the new world. These will include client training as well as learning modules for a cohort of lawyers at critical points in their development.

A good example of this is a traditional trainee or newly qualified transactional training programme. Typically, this would involve delivery of relevant practice know-how by more senior lawyers in classroom or workshop sessions over a period of time.

The sessions might include reference to case studies, with time at the end of sessions for questions and discussion on the instructional content. These programmes can be redesigned such that the bulk of instructional content is captured, allowing learners to access it at their own time at their own pace.

This content can then be reused and shared more widely, internally and with clients, without further opportunity costs and logistical issues.

The focus of learning design and senior lawyer time can then be targeted on face-to-face surgery sessions: discussing previous transactions and hypotheticals; legal and commercial issues arising from these; and providing higher value, more immersive socialised learning that draws upon the prior independent digital learning.

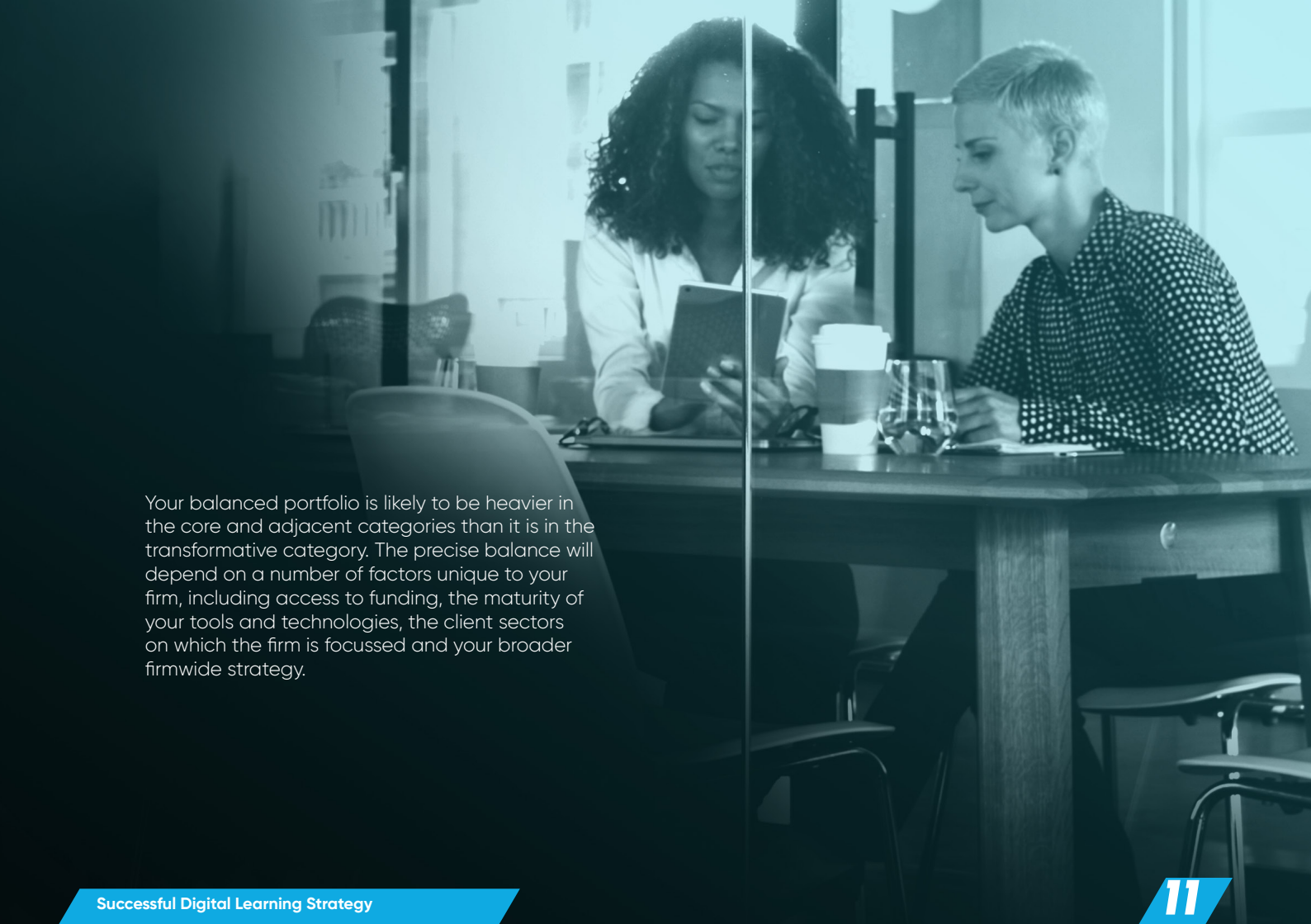
### Transformative

These are the more ambitious digital learning initiatives, which require more thought and, potentially, investment. An example here is the development of an entirely virtual partner conference or new, client facing training initiatives that experiment with immersive experiences, such as virtual or augmented reality.

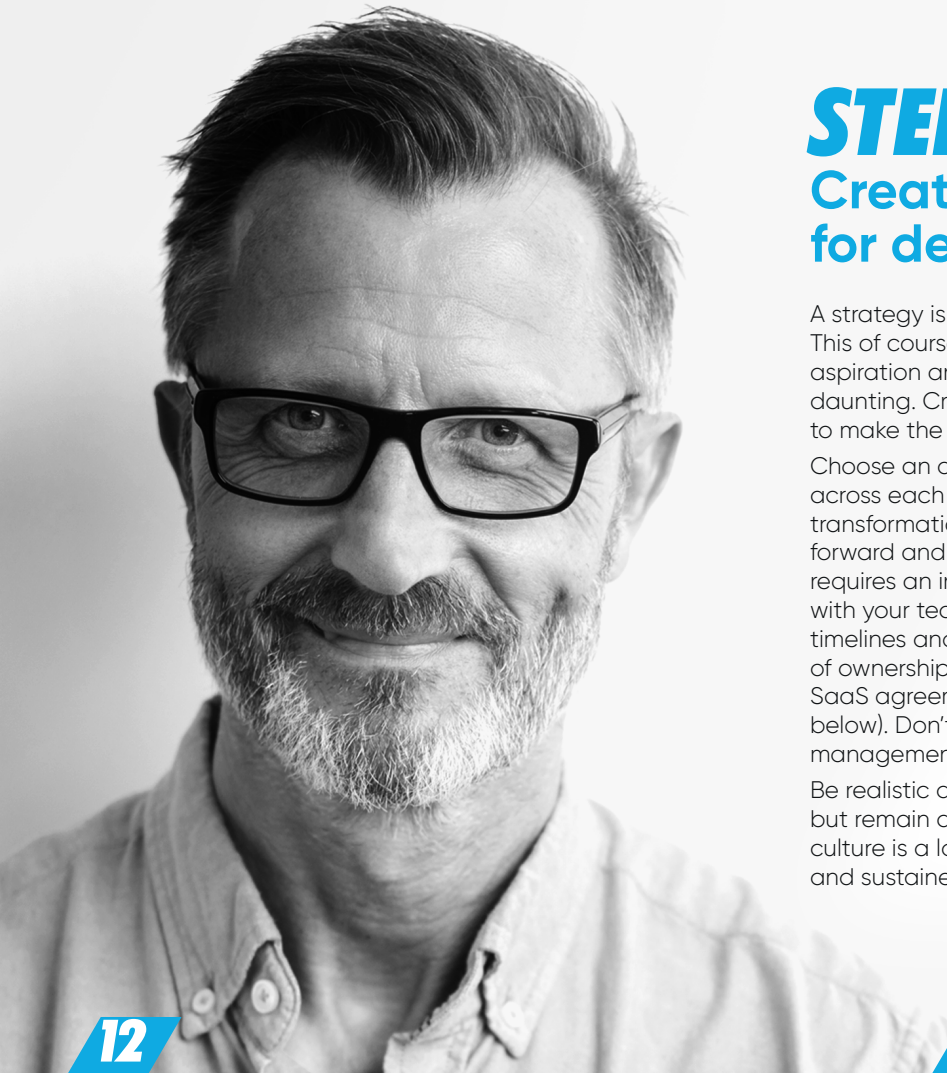
Transformative learning does not however have to be about cutting edge technologies or require significant financial investment. This is the space for creative thinking about the approach to learning, using a number of different digital channels and resources in an integrated way to provide a holistic learning experience that mirrors the realities of practice.

Firms may need external support, from experts such as The College of Legal Practice, to envision what a transformative learning experience would look like, and how to integrate the digital tools in which the firm has already invested.

### Portfolio balance

A photograph of two women sitting at a wooden table in a cafe or office setting. The woman on the left has dark curly hair and is wearing a white shirt, looking down at a tablet device. The woman on the right has short grey hair and is wearing a dark patterned jacket, looking towards the first woman. There are coffee cups and glasses on the table. The image has a blue tint and a vertical line down the center.

Your balanced portfolio is likely to be heavier in the core and adjacent categories than it is in the transformative category. The precise balance will depend on a number of factors unique to your firm, including access to funding, the maturity of your tools and technologies, the client sectors on which the firm is focussed and your broader firmwide strategy.



## **STEP 7:** Create a roadmap for delivery

A strategy is of no use unless it can be executed. This of course, is easier said than done; translating aspiration and ambition into action can be daunting. Creating a roadmap for delivery will help to make the strategy concrete.

Choose an achievable number of workstreams across each of the categories (core, adjacent and transformational) that you know can be moved forward and which will add value. If your strategy requires an investment in new technology, work with your technology teams to understand the timelines and dependencies, and the total cost of ownership of buying licenses or entering into a SaaS agreement (see Technology and the LMS below). Don't forget to factor in the cost of change management and communication.

Be realistic about how much you can achieve, but remain ambitious; changing the learning culture is a long game, requiring commitment and sustained energy.

# SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

With time spent in the office now at a premium, L&D teams must think strategically about how lawyers (and clients) learn and develop. But rather than treating evolution in working practices as a threat, it can instead be seen as an opportunity for a fundamental re-think of the entire law firm learning experience.

At The College of Legal Practice our courses can be tailored to meet the individual needs of your organisation. We provide the best platform to help your trainees qualify and progress as legal professionals. Our Developing Legal Professionals Programme will both help prepare them to pass the SQE and develop the legal transactional skills and competencies they need to succeed in the industry.



# ABOUT US

The College of Legal Practice is a digital provider of legal education. We create collaborative, interactive and practical learning experiences to help students progress in legal practice. This e-guide is part of our Online by Design content series, exploring ways to help L&D teams reimagine their learning experiences for a post-pandemic digital age.

## Contact us

If you would like to find out more about our programmes, please get in touch:

**Email** [info@collegalpractice.com](mailto:info@collegalpractice.com) **or call** 020 3884 4112

### Follow us



@collegalpract



@thecollegeoflegalpractice



@collegalpract



The College of Legal Practice

**Date of publication:** June 2021

### Written by:

Isabel Parker  
**Executive Director,**  
**Digital Legal Exchange**

Professor Scott Slorach  
**Director of Teaching and**  
**Learning, York Law School**

 **The College**  
**of Legal Practice**