Richard Susskind

Richard Susskind recently made a presentation entitled '"Law Jobs" and IT' at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies as part of the Legal Skills Research Group's 2001 seminar series.

Richard Susskind

The seminar given by Richard Susskind at the IALS on 21 February gave him the opportunity to put forward ideas and approaches contained in his new book, *Transforming the Law: Essays in Technology, Justice and the Legal Marketplace*, published by Oxford University Press. The book contains 13 essays representing 20 years of thinking about how the work of lawyers and legal institutions is undergoing radical transformation as a result of the influence of IT. Some essays are practical in nature, others are more theoretical, and the rest seek to bring theory and practice together.

During the seminar Richard Susskind explained the four main reasons for why he has put together this diverse collection of essays. First, he has been encouraged to write about ideas he has evolved over the last few years relating to the Internet, electronic commerce, knowledge management and the impact of these phenomena on lawyers and their clients. In the book, two models that he has developed and are in quite wide use are set out: the legal grid, which clarifies the complex interrelationships between IT, information services and knowledge management within a law firm; and the client service chain, which explains how the basic elements of client service are being fundamentally changed by IT.

The second objective of the new publication is to update and refine the arguments and predictions put forward in an earlier book, *The Future of Law*. Third, the author revisits and republishes his work on expert systems, and finally he takes the opportunity to gather together some of his thoughts on the broader role of IT in the justice system more generally.

The target audience of the book is primarily legal practitioners, academic lawyers, judges, legal policy-makers, legal voluntary workers, law students and information technologists everywhere. However, Richard Susskind hopes that a more general readership will also be interested in aspects of his three main themes: the transformative effect of IT; the author's passionate belief that IT can be used to increase access to legal help and justice; and the benefits of knowledge management.

In his seminar address Richard Susskind demonstrated his ability to translate his views on the future implications of IT within the field of law into specific predictions on how they will affect the relationship between legal practitioner and client. While he feels that high-value, complex work will continue to be the preserve of traditional legal advisers, a lot of routine legal tasks can be broken down into work systems and made directly available to clients.

There is also a large market waiting to be realised by lawyers which involves the dedicated electronic delivery to clients of consultancy services on a 1:1 basis. Richard Susskind emphasised the need for lawyers to be proactive and offer dispute avoidance/risk management advice, rather than concentrating on solutions to disputes after the event. In this context he advised lawyers to think backwards, consider what fundamental demands are made by clients, and formulate services accordingly. Richard Susskind urged delegates to think of the future not as a foggy day but as a malleable property which everyone can fashion to their own requirements.

Julian Harris

Senior Information Officer, IALS