Solving legal issues through technology

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The latest funding grant from the Regulators' Pioneer Fund (RPF) will explore how online dispute resolution (ODR) can help tackle the unmet legal need of individuals, consumers and micro/small enterprises.

In a push to make the UK the world's most innovative economy, the RPF was launched back in 2018 by the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy. The RPF gave regulators and local authorities grants to speed up innovation in their respective areas.

This project is led by a group made up of The Access to Justice Foundation, the Solicitors Regulation Authority and The Law Society. The group aims to enhance access to justice by developing a digital tool, for use by vulnerable people, consumers, legal advice frontline agencies and micro/small businesses looking to resolve their legal issue.

November 2023 to April 2024

During the first six months, we carried out desk-based research to understand the current picture, as well as the potential use of ODR. From this research we know that ODR presents opportunities to enhance access to justice, but that gaps exist. In particular for marginalised users, individuals in social welfare law, and micro/small businesses with disputes that do not fit into existing frameworks.

May to September 2024

During the engagement phase, we wanted to talk to service provides and consumers, in employment, housing and small business disputes. As well as speaking to public sector bodies and charities working in frontline services, we also engaged legal professionals. The Access to Justice Foundation led a series of roundtables to understand more about the barriers both users and providers face, as well as possible solutions. The Law Society carried out qualitative interviews with employment, family and housing law solicitors.

More than 100 people have been involved in our ODR engagement so far, raising important issues and solutions. All of the feedback will be fed into the next stage, developing a brief for the possible development of an online tool and/or guidance for the sector.