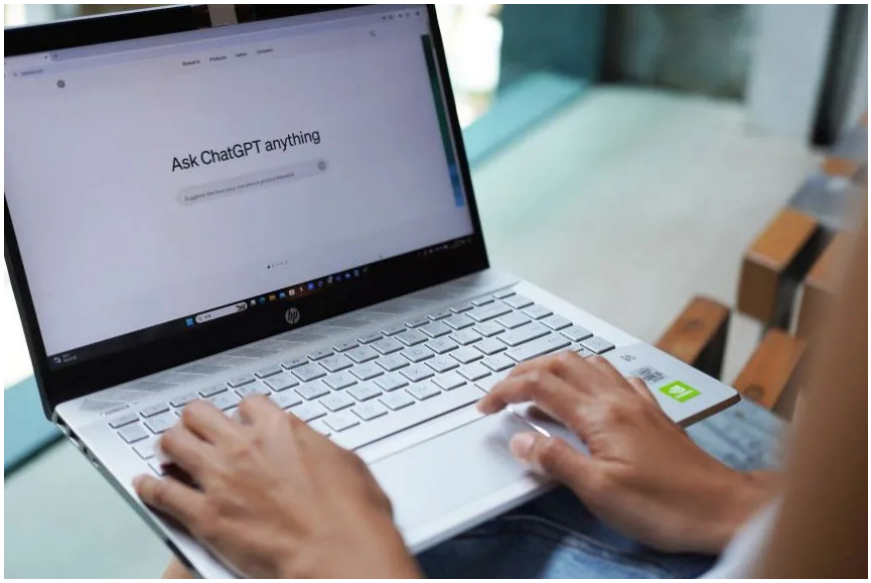
Law firm restricts AI after 'significant' staff use



An international law firm has blocked general access to several artificial intelligence (AI) tools after it found a "significant increase in usage" by its staff.

The firm said much of the usage was not in line with its AI policy, and going forward the firm would only allow staff to access the tools via a request process.

A spokesperson from the Information Commissioner's Office - the UK's data watchdog - told BBC News that firms should not discourage the use of AI in work An international law firm has blocked general access to several artificial intelligence (AI) tools after it found a "significant increase in usage" by its staff.In an email seen by the BBC, a senior director of Hill Dickinson, which employs more than a thousand people in the UK, warned staff of the use of AI tools.

The firm said much of the usage was not in line with its AI policy, and going forward the firm would only allow staff to access the tools via a request process.

A spokesperson from the Information Commissioner's Office - the UK's data watchdog - told News that firms should not discourage the use of AI in work.The spokesperson added: "With AI offering people countless ways to work more efficiently and effectively, the answer cannot be for organisations to outlaw the use of AI and drive staff to use it under the radar.Instead, companies need to offer their staff AI tools that meet their organisational policies and data protection obligations."

In the email, Hill Dickinson's chief technology officer said the law firm had detected more than 32,000 hits to the popular chatbot ChatGPT over a seven-day period in January and February.During the same timeframe, there were also more than 3,000 hits to the Chinese AI service DeepSeek, which was recently banned from Australian government devices over security concerns.It also highlighted almost 50,000 hits to Grammarly, the writing assistance tool.

However, it is not clear on how many occasions staff visited ChatGPT, DeepSeek, or Grammarly, or how many staff visited repeatedly, as several hits could have been generated by a user during every time they used the websites.

The email to Hill Dickinson employees said: "We have been monitoring usage of Al tools, particularly publicly available generative Al solutions, and have noticed a significant increase in usage of, and uploading of files to, such tools."Hill Dickinson, who have offices in several parts of England and abroad, later told BBC News: "Like many law firms, we are aiming to positively embrace the use of AI tools to enhance our capabilities while always ensuring safe and proper use by our people and for our clients."

The firm added that its AI policy, which includes guidance that prohibits the uploading of client information and requires staff to verify the accuracy of the large language models' responses, will ensure that usage "will remain safe, secure and effective".

The firm is now only granting access to AI tools via a request process. It is understood that some requests have already been received and approved.

A spokesperson from the Solicitors Regulation Authority, which regulates solicitors in England and Wales, told BBC News: "Despite this increased interest in new technology, there remains a lack of digital skills across all sectors in the UK."This could present a risk for firms and consumers if legal practitioners do not fully understand the new technology that is implemented."

According to a survey of 500 UK solicitors by legal software provider Clio in September, 62% anticipated an increase in AI usage over the following 12 months.

It found law firms across the UK were using the technology to complete tasks such as drafting documents, reviewing or analysing contracts and legal research.A Department for Science, Innovation and Technology spokesperson described AI as a "technological leap" that will "free workers from repetitive tasks and unlock more rewarding opportunities".

"We are committed to bringing forward legislation which allows us to safely realise AI's enormous benefits. We are engaging widely and will launch a public consultation in due course to ensure our approach effectively addresses this fast-evolving technology."

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