

# Why tech-driven skills are a career advantage



Since launching the online, part-time Master of Laws in International Commercial and Technology Law in 2022, The University of Manchester saw its students and graduates gain specialist skills and progress their careers.

This is evidenced by recent graduate Mark Farrell who, as a direct result of undertaking this course, progressed in his career from Senior Case Officer at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to Data Protection Consultant at Data Protection People, and has been invited to join the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance as a part-time intern.

The course is structured around four key areas: corporations and technology, online privacy and data protection, financial law and fintech, and intellectual property in the digital ecosystem. Together, these provide a clear framework for understanding how global commercial law is being reshaped by technological change.

The master's concludes with an in-depth dissertation, giving students the chance to investigate a topic that aligns with their professional interests in law and regulation. Mark used this project to focus on digital identity. Explaining his motivation, he said: *"Because no one had examined digital identity through this combined financial law and data protection lens, I had to build the analysis from the ground up. It pushed me to integrate sources in new ways and gave me the confidence to approach complex, emerging issues with original thinking."*

## Developing a career advantage through research: Mark's story

Mark's dissertation produced a series of findings focused on the UK's ongoing debate on digital identity. His research demonstrated that while digital identity is often discussed in broad policy terms, its practical implementation raises complexities around fraud prevention, regulatory compliance, and the protection of individual rights. By analysing these tensions, Mark was

able to articulate a nuanced position on how the UK might responsibly advance its digital identity ambitions.

The conclusion was that a centralised digital identity system, where the UK Government would assume sole responsibility for issuing and managing digital credentials, would face significant barriers to compliance with UK data protection law. Mark's analysis showed that a system such as this, although effective in reducing fraud in some jurisdictions, requires extensive data collection and centralised storage. This creates risks around purpose limitation, data minimisation, and governance oversight. In the UK, where public trust in government managed digital infrastructure remains fragile, he found that a centralised model would struggle to achieve both legal compliance and societal acceptance.

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In contrast, the research identified a federated model as the most viable pathway for the UK. Mark noted that the UK already possesses several foundational components of a federated ecosystem, including an emerging trust framework and a mature market of digital verification providers. His findings suggest that building on these strengths would allow the UK to progress more rapidly and responsibly than attempting to construct a centralised system from scratch.

He also explored emerging decentralised models such as self-sovereign identity, which leverages privacy enhancing technologies including zero knowledge proofs to minimise collection of personal data, but identified such models as more aspirational than immediately applicable due to incompatibilities with financial regulations, including Anti-Money Laundering rules which mandate collection and retention of identifiable personal data.

Beyond the technical and legal findings, the project had a profound impact on Mark's academic development. Undertaking research in an emerging field required Mark to synthesise materials across disciplines, from

financial regulation and data protection law to technology standards, policy papers, and international case studies and construct his own arguments. This process strengthened his ability to think critically, navigate ambiguity, and develop original legal analysis, skills that are increasingly essential in fast moving areas of commercial and technology law.

Mark credits The University of Manchester, and the guidance of Course Director Dr Joseph Lee, with equipping him to undertake this level of interdisciplinary research. The course's emphasis on connecting legal principles with real world technological developments enabled him to approach the dissertation with both academic rigour and practical awareness. Modules in Financial Law and FinTech and Data Privacy Law provided the conceptual foundation on which the project was built, while the programme's broader focus on commercial technology issues encouraged him to explore the wider societal implications of digital identity.

The experience also had a direct influence on Mark's professional trajectory. Completing the dissertation gave him the confidence to engage with complex regulatory questions and strengthened his expertise in an area of growing commercial relevance in addition to securing his role as a Data Protection Consultant and an invitation to join the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance as a parttime intern. His dissertation positioned him at the forefront of an evolving field, demonstrating the practical value of the programme in preparing graduates for emerging legal challenges.

## Online study for a changing legal landscape

International Commercial and Technology Law is delivered online and part-time, enabling professionals to study alongside their career. Teaching is informed by faculty engaged in international policy and digital regulation, giving students insight into current global developments; and completing this LLM adds academic legitimacy and professional recognition, strengthening your profile with employers, regulators and investors.

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