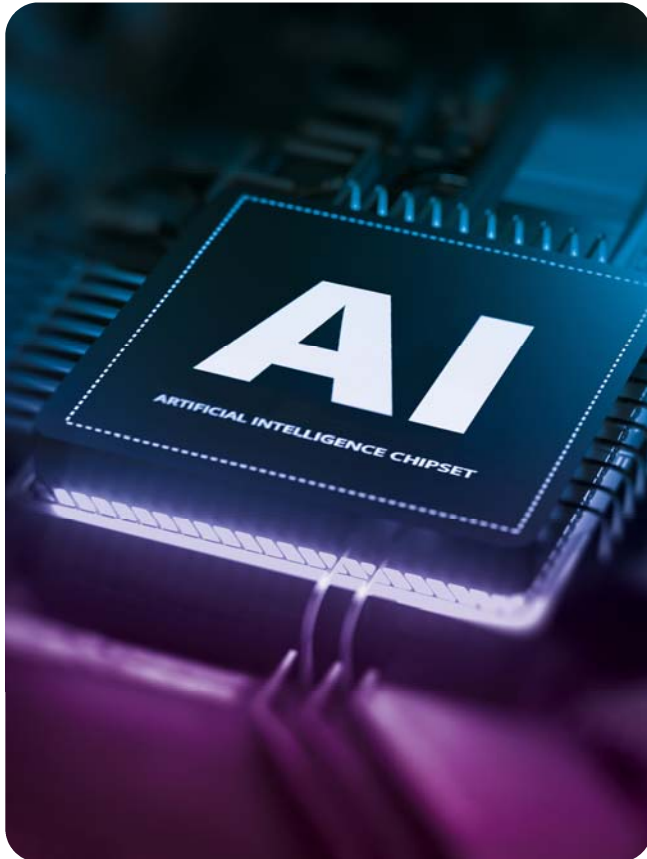


Law and AI: Shared Terms, Different Meanings

29 January 2026

As collaboration between legal professionals and data scientists becomes increasingly common, particularly in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) and its application within the legal sector, it has become clear that both disciplines often use similar terminology to describe fundamentally different concepts. This overlap can lead to confusion, especially as law and technology continue to converge in areas such as AI usage, algorithmic decision-making and data governance.



To support clearer communication and mutual understanding, I have compiled a glossary highlighting key terms frequently used in both professions, outlining their distinct meanings in each context.

In preparing this glossary, I liaised with the organisations referenced herein to obtain permission for the use of their terminology and, where appropriate, for adaptations to be made. As some source glossaries are subject to ongoing revision (i.e., LexisNexis), minor differences may arise between the definitions reproduced here and those appearing on the originating platforms to which the footnotes direct.

The data science and technological definitions draw principally from the Alan Turing Institute's Data Science and AI Glossary, the UK Data Service Glossary, and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Glossary, each of which provides authoritative and widely accepted definitions within the UK data science and AI communities. Where a term was not defined in those sources, I have drawn on the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) ^[1] Cybersecurity and Privacy Glossary, available via the NIST Computer Security Resource Center (CSRC) ^[2].

For legal definitions, I have drawn primarily on the UK legal framework. Where relevant, I have consulted the Law Society's public glossary, the Practical Law/Westlaw glossary, and the LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index to ensure consistency with established legal usage.

Where definitions reflect my own synthesis or paraphrasing of multiple sources, or have been simplified for clarity, they appear italicised, without external citation provided.

^[1] NIST is a United States federal standards agency

^[2] NIST's glossary terms are derived from its Cybersecurity and Privacy Program technical publications, including US Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS), Special Publications (SPs), and NIST Interagency Reports (NIST IRs)

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Adversarial</p>	<p><i>Adversarial describes the adversarial system of justice used in common law countries like the UK, i.e., one in which opposing parties present their cases before a neutral judge or jury.</i></p>	<p><i>In AI, adversarial usually relates to adversarial machine learning, where "adversarial examples" are inputs designed to deceive a model. An adversarial example is a specially crafted input that looks normal to a human but causes an AI model to misclassify it.</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: A modified testing sample that induces misclassification or misbehaviour of a machine learning model at deployment time¹.</p>
<p>Agent</p>	<p>Source: Thomson Reuters, Practical Law Glossary: A person who is recognised at law as having the power to create or alter legal rights, duties or relationships of another person, the principal. The agent facilitates contracts between the principal and a third party (the customer) by introducing the third party, soliciting orders from the third party or by concluding contracts with the third party on behalf of the principal. An agent usually benefits from the relationship by receiving a commission from the supplier. An agent does not contract with customers in the agent's own right and the agent therefore generally has no liability to them².</p>	<p><i>An autonomous entity (software or robot) that perceives its environment and acts upon it to achieve goals.</i></p>
<p>Attribution</p>	<p><i>Assigning responsibility or source to someone (e.g. attributing an act or statement to a person, or assigning liability/credit for an outcome).</i></p> <p>Source: LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index : [In the context of contaminated land,] [t][T]he process of apportionment of the liability for remediation action between different liability groups. Attribution occurs where one remediation action is referable to two or more significant pollutant linkages (i.e. it is a 'shared action'). This can occur either where both linkages require the same action (that is, it is a 'common action') or where a particular action is part of the best combined remediation scheme for two or more linkages (that is, it is a collective action).</p>	<p><i>Determining which features or inputs contributed to a model's decision (e.g. feature attribution in explainable AI, assigning credit for an output to specific inputs).</i></p>

¹ https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/adversarial_example

² [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-005-7364?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-005-7364?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default))

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Bias</p>	<p><i>Prejudice or predisposition that impairs impartial judgment (e.g. a judge or juror's bias that could unfairly influence a decision).</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>A systematic error in a model (a consistent deviation from the truth, as in the bias term in statistics);</i> 2. <i>an unfair prejudice in an AI system's results (e.g. algorithmic bias leading to discriminatory outcomes).</i> <p>Source: UK Data Service Glossary: Sampling bias occurs when a sample statistic does not accurately reflect the true value of the parameter in the target population. Sample estimates might be too high or too low compared to the true population values. This may arise where the sample is not representative of the population³.</p>
<p>Case</p>	<p><i>A "case" is the specific trial, but the "case law" from it becomes a rule for future cases.</i></p>	<p><i>An instance or example in a dataset or analysis (e.g. a single data point, record, or scenario under examination in a study or algorithm).</i></p> <p>Source: UK Data Service Glossary: A survey case is a unit for which <u>values</u> are captured. Typically, surveys use individuals, families/households or institutions/organisations as observation units (cases). In survey datasets, cases are usually stored in rows⁴.</p>
<p>Code*</p> <p><i>*This has been included for general context.</i></p>	<p><i>(Non-UK) A collection of laws or regulations organised by subject (e.g. a statutory code like a penal code).</i></p> <p>Note: <i>The UK does not have a single "legal code" as the law is derived from statutes, common law and various guidelines that offer rules, principles and best practices.</i></p>	<p><i>Computer program instructions written in a programming language (source code).</i></p> <p>Source: UK Data Service Glossary: "Codebook": A codebook describes the contents, structure, and layout of a data collection. Codebooks begin with basic front matter, including the study title, name of the principal investigator(s), table of contents, and an introduction describing the purpose and format of the codebook. Some codebooks also include methodological details, such as how weights were computed, and data collection instruments, while others, especially with larger or more complex data collections, leave those details for a separate user guide and/or data collection instrument.</p>

³ <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/glossary/?letter=B>

⁴ <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/glossary/?letter=C>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
Corpus	<i>(Non-UK) Latin for "body." Refers to a collection of texts or the entire body of laws on a topic (e.g. Corpus Juris = body of law).</i>	<i>A large collection of texts or documents used for linguistic analysis or to train language models (e.g. a text corpus used in NLP to learn language patterns).</i>
Disclosure	<i>Legal obligation for parties in a case to produce to their opposing party documents (meaning any information) relevant to the issues in dispute (in electronic or hard copy form).</i>	Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: Divulging of, or provision of access to, data ⁵ .
Discovery** <i>**This term no longer is applicable in the UK, but is used in other common law jurisdictions.</i>	<i>The pre-trial process of obtaining evidence an opposing party, including exchanging documents (historically called discovery; in modern UK practice, largely referred to as disclosure).</i> Source: Thomson Reuters Practical Law Glossary: In the context of civil litigation in England and Wales, the name for disclosure before the Civil Procedure Rules (CPR) came into force in April 1999 ⁶ .	Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: The act of locating a machine-processable description of a Web service-related resource that may have been previously unknown and that meets certain functional criteria. It involves matching a set of functional and other criteria with a set of resource descriptions. The goal is to find an appropriate Web service-related resource ⁷ .
Document/ Documentation	Source: LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index: Document: This word has a specific meaning within the cpr. Under CPR 31.4 it is defined as 'anything in which information of any description is stored'. It therefore extends from paper documents through to electronically stored information such as emails, text messaging and video files ⁸ .	Source: UK Data Service Glossary: Accompanying files that enable users to understand a dataset, exactly how the research was carried out and what the data mean. Usually consisting of data-level documentation i.e. about individual databases or data files and study-level documentation i.e. high-level information on the research context and design, the data collection methods used, any data preparations and manipulations, plus summaries of findings based on the data ⁹ .

⁵ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/disclosure>

⁶ [https://content.next.westlaw.com/Glossary/PracticalLaw/10f9fe625ef0811e28578f7ccc38dcbee?contextData=\(sc.Default\)&transitionType=Default](https://content.next.westlaw.com/Glossary/PracticalLaw/10f9fe625ef0811e28578f7ccc38dcbee?contextData=(sc.Default)&transitionType=Default)

⁷ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/discovery>

⁸ <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/document>

⁹ <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/glossary/?letter=D>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Evidence</p>	<p><i>Information or objects presented to prove or disprove facts in a legal proceeding (e.g. witness testimony, documents, physical exhibits). The court weighs evidence under rules of evidence and standards of proof.</i></p>	<p><i>Data or factual observations used to support a conclusion or model. In statistics, evidence can refer to the probability of the observed data under a given model (as in Bayesian evidence), essentially measuring how well data support a model.</i></p> <p>Source: UK Data Service Glossary: Sampling bias occurs when a sample statistic does not accurately reflect the true value of the parameter in the target population. Sample estimates might be too high or too low compared to the true population values. This may arise where the sample is not representative of the population¹⁰.</p>
<p>Execution</p>	<p><i>Carrying out or giving effect to a legal instrument or order. For example, execution of a contract means signing or otherwise formalising it, and execution of a judgment means enforcing a court’s order.</i></p> <p>Source: LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index: Execution, in the context of contracts, is the means by which a party enters into a written contract or deed and by doing so creates a legal relationship between the parties. This may typically be done by signing or sealing and dating. Additional formalities are required for deeds. The exact way in which a written contract or deed can be executed is determined by the type of legal entity executing it. Execution can be done in some cases virtually or by electronic means.¹¹.</p>	<p><i>The running of a program or algorithm by a computer. To execute code means to perform the instructions in a software program or model.</i></p>

¹⁰ <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/glossary/>

¹¹ <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/execution>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Feature</p>	<p><i>An aspect or characteristic of a case, statute, or contract (used in general English sense, not as a specialised legal term, e.g. "a key feature of this agreement is its indemnity clause").</i></p>	<p><i>An individual measurable attribute or property of data used by a machine learning model. For example, in an AI system analysing houses, features might include size, price, and location.</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: The basic elements through which artifacts are compared. Comparison of two features always yields a binary {0, 1} outcome indicating a match or non-match; because features are defined as the most basic comparison unit that the algorithm considers, partial matches are not permitted. Generally, a feature can be any value derived from an artifact. Each approximate matching algorithm must define the structure of its features and the method by which they are derived. For example, an algorithm might define a feature as a (byte, offset) pair produced by reading the value of a byte and storing it along with the offset at which it was read¹².</p>
<p>Hallucination</p>	<p><i>In a legal/medical context, a hallucination is a sensory experience of something that isn't present (relevant in law if assessing a person's mental state, e.g. in an insanity defense or competence evaluation).</i></p>	<p><i>The generation of a plausible-sounding but false or nonsensical output by an AI model, not grounded in the input. For example, a chatbot "hallucinating" might fabricate facts or quotes that were never given in its data.</i></p> <p>Source: ICO Glossary: Hallucination (also referred to as confabulation): When a generative AI model produces incorrect, misleading or fabricated content due to reliance on patterns in its training data rather than factual understanding.</p>
<p>Inference</p>	<p><i>A conclusion drawn from evidence and reasoning by a judge or jury. For instance, a court might infer intent from a series of actions even if there's no direct proof.</i></p>	<p><i>The process of applying a trained model to new data to generate outputs or predictions. (Inference in AI is the phase after training, where the model is used for decision-making). Additionally, in logic/AI, it can mean deducing new information from known facts or rules.</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: Refers to the ability to deduce the identity of a person associated with a set of data through "clues" contained in that information. This analysis permits determination of the individual's identity based on a combination of facts associated with that person even though specific identifiers have been removed, like name and social security number¹³.</p>

¹² <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/features>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
Issue	<p><i>There are a couple of legal meanings for "issue". In a general sense, a point of contention or question to be decided by a court (e.g. "the key issue in this case is whether there was a contract" or the List of Issues for Disclosure.).</i></p> <p><i>UK Wills/Trust usage: "issue" also means a person's lineal descendants (children, grandchildren, etc.).</i></p> <p>Source: LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="344 564 1218 719">1. The formal action by which the court starts a set of proceedings or an application. For example, in order to issue a claim, the claimant must provide the court with a claim form and the appropriate fee, and the court 'issues' the claim by processing the documentation and affixing the court seal.¹⁴ <li data-bbox="344 762 1229 1016">2. In the context of English wills, trusts and succession law, the term 'issue', unless a contrary intention appears, is given its established common-law meaning of all lineal descendants of every degree of a person, including children, grandchildren and remoter descendants. In accordance with modern drafting practice, references to a person's issue will generally be construed as including any individual treated in law as that person's child by virtue of adoption or applicable legislation relating to parentage, unless the context otherwise requires¹⁵. 	<p><i>A problem or bug in a system, or an item on a tracking list in project management. In general IT usage, "issue" denotes something that needs to be addressed or fixed.</i></p>

¹³ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/inference>

¹⁴ <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/issue-proceedings>

¹⁵ <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/issue-offspring>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
LLM	<p><i>A postgraduate degree, Master of Laws.</i></p>	<p>Source: The Alan Turing Institute Glossary: A type of foundation model that is trained on a vast amount of textual data in order to carry out language-related tasks. Large language models power the new generation of chatbots, and can generate text that is indistinguishable from human-written text. They are part of a broader field of research called natural language processing, and are typically much simpler in design than smaller, more traditional language models¹⁶.</p>
Model	<p><i>A template or standard example for others to follow. For example, a model law is a template statute proposed for adoption by jurisdictions, and a model contract is a sample agreement parties can use as a starting point. (In general, "model" in law means an exemplar form or conceptual framework.)</i></p> <p>Source: LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index: [In a finance context, a] [f][F]inancial model used for undertaking financial viability testing, often referred to as a ‘toolkit’ appraisal¹⁷.</p>	<p><i>A mathematical or computational representation of a real-world process or system that an AI/ML algorithm uses to make predictions or decisions. For instance, a trained neural network or a decision tree used for predictive analytics is a model.</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: A detailed description or scaled representation of one component of a larger system that can be created, operated, and analyzed to predict actual operational characteristics of the final produced component¹⁸.</p>
Precision	<p><i>Exactness or accuracy in expression or detail. Not a formal legal term, but lawyers value precision in language; a precisely worded contract or statute clearly delineates rights and duties (reducing ambiguity).</i></p>	<p><i>A performance metric in classification models, indicating the proportion of positive identifications made by the model that are actually correct. In other words, out of all items the model labeled as “positive,” precision is the percentage that truly belong to the positive class.</i></p> <p>Source: UK Data Service Glossary: Precision refers to the size of deviations from a survey estimate (i.e. a survey statistic, such as a mean or percentage) that occurs over repeated application of the same probability-based sampling procedures using the same sampling frame and sample size. Standard errors and confidence intervals are two examples of commonly used measures of precision¹⁹.</p>

¹⁶ <https://www.turing.ac.uk/news/data-science-and-ai-glossary>

¹⁷ <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/model>

¹⁸ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/model>

¹⁹ <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/glossary/?letter=P>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Recall</p>	<p><i>To recall in legal contexts means to call back or retrieve. For example, to recall a witness is to bring them back for further evidence, and the government might recall Parliament (end a recess) for an urgent matter. (Product recall, while not strictly legal terminology, is an official withdrawal of a faulty product from the market for safety reasons.)</i></p>	<p><i>A performance metric in classification, measuring the proportion of actual positive cases that the model correctly identified. In other words, recall (also known as sensitivity) is the percentage of all real positive instances that the model manages to catch in its predictions.</i></p>
<p>Representation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The act of speaking or acting on behalf of someone, such as legal representation by on behalf of a client.</i> <i>A statement of fact made in a contract or legal document (e.g. representations and warranties section of an agreement, where parties disclose certain facts as true at the time of contracting).</i> <p>Source: LexisNexis Legal Terminology Index: A representation is a statement of fact made by one party to the other party on which that other party is intended to rely as a positive assertion that the fact is true.</p> <p>A representation may be oral or in writing or arise by implication from words or conduct and mere silence is not usually enough</p> <p>Representations are often made pre-contractually in order to induce a party to enter into a contract but they are also sometimes expressly made or otherwise incorporated into the agreement itself. If a representation is untrue it may give rise to a claim for misrepresentation if it is relied on by the innocent party, induces the innocent party to enter into the contract and causes the innocent party to suffer loss²⁰.</p>	<p><i>The way information is encoded for processing by an AI system. For example, a neural network’s internal representation of an image might be a set of numeric features, and in NLP, word embeddings are vector representations of words. (In general, it refers to how data or knowledge is formally described within an AI model.)</i></p>

²⁰ <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/glossary/representation>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Sentence</p>	<p><i>The punishment imposed by a court on someone found guilty of a crime. For example, a sentence might be 5 years’ imprisonment or a £10,000 fine. (Usage: “The judge handed down a heavy sentence.”)</i></p>	<p><i>A unit of language consisting of a sequence of words, typically ending with a full-stop or other punctuation. In NLP tasks, models often operate at the sentence level (e.g. translating sentences, evaluating sentence sentiment).</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: The entire set of sentences that can be created or recognised as being valid using the formal syntax specifications of a formal language.</p>
<p>Stemming</p>	<p><i>“Stemming from”, a phrase meaning “originating from” or “arising as a result of.” (The term stemming has no special meaning in law beyond this common English usage.)</i></p>	<p><i>A text-processing technique that reduces inflected or derived words to their root form. For example, a stemming algorithm would cut “running, runs, ran” down to the root “run.” This is used in search and NLP to treat related words equivalently.</i></p>
<p>Test</p>	<p><i>A criterion or set of criteria used by courts to evaluate a legal question; a legal test (e.g. the “reasonable person test” in negligence determines how a typical person would act). Lawyers also use “test” in argument to refer to examining the validity of evidence or a proposition.</i></p>	<p><i>Evaluating a machine learning model’s performance using data it hasn’t seen before. After training a model, one uses a test set (or conducts a testing phase) to measure how well the model generalises. (For example, “test accuracy” denotes performance on unseen data.)</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: A type of assessment method that is characterised by the process of exercising one or more assessment objects under specified conditions to compare actual with expected behaviour, the results of which are used to support the determination of security control effectiveness over time²¹.</p>

Term	Legal Definition (UK context)	Data Science/AI Definition
<p>Theory</p>	<p><i>An intellectual framework or principle in law. For instance, legal theory might refer to an academic approach to understanding laws (natural law theory, critical legal theory), and the theory of the case is the underlying narrative or rationale that a lawyer advances to explain why their client should win.</i></p>	<p><i>A hypothesis or set of principles that explains a phenomenon, or a well-substantiated explanation in science. In AI, the term can refer to underlying principles like computational learning theory (which studies the capabilities and limits of learning algorithms); essentially, the mathematics and logic that explain how and why AI models work.</i></p>
<p>Training</p>	<p><i>Education or instruction to develop necessary skills. In the legal field, this could mean professional training (e.g. solicitor training). (There is no special meaning of “training” unique to law beyond general use.)</i></p>	<p><i>The process of teaching a machine learning model by feeding it data and adjusting the model’s parameters. During training, the model learns patterns from a labeled dataset (often by minimising a loss function). For example, training a neural network involves updating its weights through iterative exposure to examples.</i></p> <p>Source: NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary: The ‘Training’ level of the learning continuum strives to produce relevant and needed security skills and competencies by practitioners of functional specialties other than IT security (e.g., management, systems design and development, acquisition, auditing)²².</p>



Fiona Campbell
Director

AI Compliance & Dispute Resolution
+44 (0)330 460 6620
fiona.campbell@fieldfisher.com

²¹ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/test>
²² <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/training>