Session 3 Assignment

Build Your Firm's Tech Stack

Whitcombe Ashby Family Law LLP (a fictional firm, Peckham, London - England and Wales)

Nkiruka Esther Onyiri, Virtual Legal Assistant - 29 October 2026

1. The firm in brief

Whitcombe Ashby is a small private-paying family law firm in Peckham: divorce, money after separation, arrangements for children and pre-nups, with a growing cross-border caseload (for example a marriage that took place in Lagos, or a parent who wants to move children abroad). There are eight people and about 260 open files. Helena Whitcombe, the managing partner, is in court on Monday and Wednesday mornings and reviews files on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. First stages are charged at a fixed fee and contested work by the hour. I work as the firm's Virtual Legal Assistant from Port Harcourt on UK hours. I am an assistant: I do not advise clients or conduct litigation, and Helena signs every statement of truth.

2. The stack (task 1)

Each choice is justified in one line, tied to this practice area and to England and Wales.

Layer	Choice	One-line justification
Case management	Clio (UK edition)	Holds matters, documents, calendar, time, billing and communication logs in one system; the UK edition is built around the SRA Accounts Rules, which matters for a firm whose cashier looks after client money.
Second platform (comparison only)	PracticePanther	Same category and widely used in the course; I could not confirm UK / SRA accounting support, so I would use it to compare functions, not as the firm's system.
Cloud storage	Microsoft 365 (OneDrive / SharePoint) inside the firm's secure desktop	Already the firm's office suite; keeps client files off my own laptop, which matters because I work from Nigeria and UK data-transfer rules apply.
PDF and e-signature	Adobe Acrobat Pro + the firm's e-signature tool (Adobe Sign or DocuSign)	Court bundles must be indexed, numbered and bookmarked to Practice Direction 27A, and consent orders, client care packs and engagement documents need signatures from clients who are not in the office.
E-filing portal	MyHMCTS, fees by Payment by Account (PBA)	Divorce and financial remedy applications are filed here; children applications depend on the court, so Helena tells me how to file those. I stage the package; Helena or the associate submits.
Research	Practical Law, Family Procedure Rules, gov.uk and HMCTS guidance	What I would actually use to answer 'is a MIAM needed before a C100?' - find the source, say what I am unsure about, and leave the decision to Helena.

3. One platform, five core functions (task 2)

Platform worked: Clio Manage (UK edition), with a Clio trial account. **Official free training used:** Clio Academy beginner courses, the Clio live session 'Get Started: Clio Matters', and the Clio help centre, applied by entering the firm's fictional matters, contacts, time and bills into the trial account.

The five functions below are in my own words, each tied to a real task at Whitcombe Ashby.

#	Core function	What it does	What I would use it for at Whitcombe Ashby
1	Matters and contacts	Create the client, the matter, the other party, and the key dates in one record that the whole team opens.	Open 'Kalu v Kalu - Financial remedy (WA-2026-002)' with Mrs Kalu, the other side, their solicitor, the court and the next hearing, so anyone can pick it up.
2	Documents	Upload, name and version every document inside the matter.	Save the draft Form E, the D81, the stamped copies and the bundle with the firm's naming standard, so nothing lives in a personal folder.
3	Calendar and deadlines	Enter hearings and deadlines that appear in the whole team's diary, with reminders.	Diary the First Appointment (08/01/2027), the bundle deadline and the Tuesday/Thursday file reviews, clear of Helena's Monday and Wednesday court mornings.
4	Time and billing	Record time against the matter and generate a bill for approval.	Turn the day's diary and notes into draft time entries for Helena, and draft fixed-fee and hourly bills. I do not touch client money.
5	Communication log, templates and workflows	Log calls and emails against the matter, and build repeatable templates or checklists.	Log client contact, and build the intake workflow and the pre-filing checklist once so they are reused on every matter.

Learn one tool: official free Clio training I used

- **Clio Academy (clio.com/resources/clio-academy):** free courses with a certified badge (80% pass mark), used for the basics of matters, contacts, calendar, documents, time and billing.
- **Get Started: Clio Matters (clio.com/resources/get-started/clio-matters):** a 60-minute beginner live session on client information, calendar, to-dos, file storage and time and expenses.
- **Clio YouTube:** the official Clio YouTube channel (@GoClio) for short how-to videos on matters, calendar, time entries and billing.
- **Clio UK (clio.com/uk):** Clio's UK pages, which explain UK features including client accounting under the SRA Accounts Rules.

What I learned, in my own words: a matter is the one record that holds everything about a piece of work, so I always open the matter first and attach contacts, documents, dates, time and bills to it. If it is not in Clio, it did not happen.

4. The three Office practice files (task 3)

File	What it shows	How to open it
1. Tracked-changes client letter (Word)	Helena's draft letter to Mrs Kalu, containing deliberate errors (wrong year, misspelt name, wrong case number, wrong form, 11 months instead of 12, a date with the wrong weekday, a wrong phone number, a sentence that promises an outcome, and a wrong sign-off). 13 tracked changes correct the errors and update sentences (the First Appointment is now listed for 08/01/2027).	S3_File1_Tracked_Changes_Client_Letter.docx. Review tab: Reject All shows Helena's original; Accept All shows the corrected letter. Go change by change to practise.
2. Case-deadline tracker (Excel)	Columns for matter, task, due date and status; conditional formatting highlighting anything due within seven days (amber) or overdue (red); a second tab with expenses and a SUM formula (plus SUMIF by matter).	S3_File2_Case_Deadline_Tracker.xlsx. The dates use TODAY(), so the highlighting changes each day.
3. Outlook folders, rule and calendar kit	The exact settings for two client folders, an automatic filing rule, a hearing with day-before and one-hour reminders, a signature and an out-of-office reply.	S3_File3_Outlook_Folders_Rule_Calendar_Kit.docx and Hearing_Reminder_First_Appointment_Kalu.ics. The kit gives the exact folder names, rule conditions and reminder settings to apply in Outlook.

5. Standard operating procedure (task 4)

SOP-01: From new family-law enquiry to a completed intake

Item	Detail
Purpose	Turn a web or email enquiry into a complete intake file, with a conflict check done, a call booked and nothing waiting on the VLA, so Helena can decide whether to take the case.
Who	The Virtual Legal Assistant (VLA). Helena Whitcombe decides whether the firm acts.
When	Every time a new enquiry arrives; check the family inbox and the web-form notifications at the start of each working day.
You need	Access to the family inbox, Clio (via the secure desktop), Helena's diary, and the approved templates (acknowledgement, client care pack, ID and anti-money-laundering request, conflict-check form).
You must never	Give advice, promise an outcome or timescale, decide whether the firm takes the case, or send anything not on an approved template.

1. **Read the enquiry.** Open it and read to the end before doing anything else.
2. **Safety check.** If the client says she or her children are frightened or unsafe, stop. Do not reply. Phone Helena straight away, as the safeguarding protocol says, and note the time of the call in Clio. Carry on with the other steps only when Helena says so.
3. **Log the enquiry in Clio.** Create the contact and an enquiry matter with: name, contact details, date and source of the enquiry, type (divorce, money, children, pre-nup), any court dates or urgent deadlines mentioned, and any cross-border element.
4. **List every name for the conflict check.** Client, spouse or partner, other side, other side's solicitor if known, businesses and employers mentioned. Record them on the conflict-check form.
5. **Run the conflict check.** Search each name against the firm's contacts, matters and previous clients in Clio. Record the result and the date. If anything looks like a match, flag it to Helena at once and do not contact the client until she replies.
6. **Book the call-back.** Offer a 20-minute call-back in Helena's diary in UK time, outside her Monday and Wednesday court mornings and her Tuesday and Thursday afternoon file reviews. Check for diary clashes before sending the time.
7. **Send the pack.** From the approved templates, send the acknowledgement with the client care pack and the ID and anti-money-laundering document request through the client portal. Set up the e-signature envelope for the documents that need signing.
8. **Write Helena's summary.** Six lines or fewer on top of the email: who, what type of case, urgency or deadlines, conflict result, call-back time, anything unusual. Helena reads email twice a day (8:30 and 4:30), so send it before then.
9. **Record Helena's decision.** If she takes the case, move to onboarding (separate SOP). If she declines, send her approved decline template, log it and close the enquiry.
10. **Chase documents.** Log each chase in Clio. Second chase after three working days. If a third chase is needed, tell Helena in the daily summary (so she can decide how to approach the client).
11. **File what arrives.** Save every document to the matter with the firm's naming standard (Matter_Document_Status_YYYY-MM-DD.pdf). Check that every page is readable and complete.

12. **Tick the finish line.** Do not call the intake complete until all seven boxes below are ticked.
13. **Hand over.** Update the task tracker in Clio and add to the handover note: what is done, what is waiting, and your questions.

The finish line (all seven must be ticked):

- [ ] All client information is logged in Clio
- [ ] The conflict check is completed and dated
- [ ] The intake form is received and readable
- [ ] Documents are uploaded and labelled correctly
- [ ] Helena has a summary before the consultation
- [ ] The consultation is scheduled and confirmed
- [ ] The intake folder is ready for onboarding if the client instructs the firm

If something goes wrong

- **Unsure whether something is advice or administration:** Do not guess. Tell Helena what you know, what you do not, and what you need from her.
- **Portal or system problem:** Say so in the daily summary and agree the next step with Helena. Do not use a personal email or phone for client contact.
- **Conflict hit or doubt:** Flag it to Helena. A late intake is better than a wrong one.

6. Competency self-checks (task 5)

Marked after working through each test-yourself step. A tick under From memory means I can do it unaided in the time given; a tick under Need practice means I still look something up or need a licence I do not yet have access to.

A. Cloud storage

The course's Session 3 slides name this check but its list is not in the course pack I was given, so the lines below are my own, built from the course's reasons for using cloud storage (security, access, recovery, version history, collaboration) and its rule that personal cloud accounts are never the answer.

I can confidently…	Test yourself	From memory	Need practice
Sign in only with the firm's approved account (never a personal one)	Say which account you would use for a client file, and why.	✓	
Create a matter folder structure and name files to the firm's standard	Build Kalu v Kalu with sub-folders in 3 minutes.	✓	
Upload files and check that they have synced	Upload 3 files; find the sync status for each.	✓	
Share a file or folder with named people only, view or edit	Share a file with one person with view-only rights.	✓	
Stop sharing / remove access	Remove that access again.	✓	
Restore an earlier version of a document	Edit a file, then bring back the earlier version.	✓	
Recover a deleted file	Delete a test file; recover it.	✓	
Work in one document with someone else at the same time	Open one file in two places and edit both.	✓	
Find a file by matter name or date	Find a file without opening folders.	✓	

I can confidently…	Test yourself	From memory	Need practice
Explain why nothing client-related is stored on my own laptop	Explain it in two sentences.	✓	

B. Legal research (England and Wales version)

The course's list (Lesson Notes - Legal Research Tools) is written for the United States. I kept its eight skills and its 'is it still good law?' idea, and changed the sources to England and Wales equivalents. Check each source name before relying on it.

I can confidently…	Test yourself	From memory	Need practice
Look up a case by its citation or party name	Find one named family case in the firm's database and in a free source (for example the National Archives' Find Case Law or BAILII).	✓	
Find legislation or a rule by topic or section	Find a section of an Act on legislation.gov.uk, and a Family Procedure Rule or Practice Direction on the Ministry of Justice site.	✓	
Locate court listing and filing information	Find the HMCTS guidance for filing a financial remedy consent order.	✓	
Retrieve a document from the case record	Show where, in MyHMCTS or the case file, you would find the sealed order (as your access allows).		✓
Check that a case is still good law	Use the firm's database to see whether a later decision has overruled or limited it. A first free pass is to search for later decisions that mention it, but that is not a substitute for a citator or case-history check.		✓
Search with keywords, filters and date ranges	Narrow a search to one court and one year.	✓	
Save, organise and share results with the attorney	Write a half-page note: the question as asked, each source with date accessed, what you could not find, what you are unsure about.	✓	
Navigate the firm's preferred platform (Practical Law)	Find the practice note on MIAMs and its exemptions.		✓
Verify any citation against the source before use	Open the actual judgment or page. Never rely on a summary or an AI-generated citation.	✓	

7. Tools I can name on a CV (task 6)

A CV names only tools actually used. This is the list I would use, with an honest qualifier for each.

Group	Tool	Can I name it today?
Can name after	Microsoft Word (Track Changes, templates);	Yes. Used to build the

Group	Tool	Can I name it today?
completing the practice files	Microsoft Excel (trackers, conditional formatting, SUM); Microsoft Outlook (folders, rules, calendar)	practice files in this assignment
Can name with an honest qualifier	Clio (UK) - 'completed Clio Academy training and practised on a test matter'	Yes, with the qualifier: completed Clio Academy training and practised on a trial matter set
Must not claim yet	MyHMCTS filing, Adobe Acrobat Pro bundling, PracticePanther	Not yet claimed. Add only after real use
Next two to learn	1. Adobe Acrobat Pro (bundles to PD27A, redaction, bookmarks). 2. MyHMCTS (read the official user guides; practise on the guidance and demos available to professionals).	They are the two tools most tied to this firm's work and to hiring attorneys' first questions.

8. What this submission contains

- Task 1: tool choices with reasons (section 2).
- Task 2: one platform, five functions, training used (section 3).
- Task 3: three practice files (section 4): tracked-changes letter, deadline tracker with expenses, Outlook kit with calendar reminder.
- Task 4: the client-intake SOP (section 5).
- Task 5: both competency self-checks, completed (section 6).
- Task 6: CV tool list with honest qualifiers (section 7).
- Supporting: the Clio Practice Data Pack, the same fictional data for every file.

Fictional-firm note: Whitcombe Ashby Family Law LLP and everyone in it are made up for a course assignment. No real client data is used anywhere in this document.