



Bar Council of England and Wales Country report for the Vienna Bar Presidents Conference 2025

This report is an overview of the work of the representative side of the Bar Council of England and Wales, during the year 2024. This excludes the work of the independent regulator within the Bar Council, the Bar Standards Board.

International

The Bar Council organised:

- A conference examining the latest legal developments in the common law in Europe in June 2024 in Limassol, Cyprus.
- A day of workshops for senior lawyers in Mexico, which covered ethics and AI/technology as well as practical, interactive sessions on the examination of witnesses.
- A visit to the UAE for family practitioners. It included an event centred on family law at the Abu Dhabi Global Market which covered financial disputes and nuptial agreements in the UAE and UK, covering mediation, arbitration, and enforceability challenges.
- Our third visit to Kenya. Our visit included a day of seminars in collaboration with the Law Society of Kenya covering a range of topics including anti-money laundering and international climate change law.
- Programmes for delegations to London including representatives from the Ghana Bar Association, the California Lawyers Association and the Supreme Court of Singapore.
- We worked with the Law Society of England and Wales to invite 100 international guests to the Opening of the Legal Year. As part of the programme, we invited leaders from different jurisdictions across the world to discuss the role of Bar Councils and Law Societies in elections, as part of the Bar Leaders Discussion.

Trade Policy Work

- The Bar Council has provided expertise and input on a number of Free Trade Agreements (FTA). Of particular note is the legal services trade dialogue taking place under the UK-Australia FTA and the ongoing UK-India FTA negotiations.
- We published a research report on the short-term business mobility issues.

Rule of Law work

- The 2024 Bar Council International Rule of Law Lecture was delivered by Her Excellency Dr Fatou Bensouda, High Commissioner of The Gambia to the UK and former Prosecutor at the ICC. The topic was 'Defending the rule of law: global challenges and the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC)'
- We co-organised the 21st Ruth Steinkrauss Cohen lecture. The lecture, which took place in March, was delivered by Professor Kingsley Abbott and the subject was 'Tenacity and innovation: developments in the global fight against impunity'.

Regulation

- The Regulation Panel collaborated with the IT Panel to draft new guidance on considerations for barristers' use of Artificial Intelligence. The guidance was published in January and attracted coverage in the legal press.
- The Regulation Panel continues to respond to consultations issued by legal sector regulators to encourage evidence based, targeted and proportionate regulation.

Anti Money Laundering and sanctions

- Our new sanctions working group has issued guidance on sanctions for barristers. The guidance focuses on barristers' professional obligations and chambers' systems and controls.
- In July the Bar Council's Money Laundering and Sanctions Working Group published a practice note on the recent Court of Appeal decision in R (on the application of World Uyghur Congress) v National Crime Agency [2024] EWCA Civ 715. The judgment significantly alters the interpretation of the money laundering offences in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 ('POCA').

Law Reform

- Our Law Reform Committee regularly responds to consultations every year, mostly issued by the Law Commission and government departments. A current area of focus for law reform is employment law.
- We continued our popular annual Law Reform Essay Competition aimed at law students where students compete for prizes by making a persuasive case for a law reform.
- The Law Reform Lecture in 2024 was hosted for its 21st year and explored the rapidly evolving field of Earth law and the opportunities and challenges it presents for law reform and legal decision making.

Ethics

- The Ethical Enquiries Service continues to provide a valuable service to hundreds of barristers a month. A team of ethical advisers, supported by the Ethics Committee, respond to daily telephone and written queries from members of the Bar and

maintain an suite of ethics and practice guidance documents. The Ethics Committee also organises a number of ethics seminars and webinars throughout the year.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I)

The Bar Council continue to deliver:

- A helpline (for barristers and pupils facing unequal treatment and chambers/others looking to manage issues/develop good E&D practices) and AI/online reporting for incidents of discrimination, harassment, and bullying
- E&D Training as well as wider education on these issues across the Bar
- Guidance/Policy Support (on compliance with our regulator's E&D Rules and good practice)
- Research (data on the profile of the students, pupils, and the profession – intersectional, and including by different ethnic minority groups - and trends)
- Assistance to Bar stakeholders e.g., FreeBar, BBN & AWB; and
- Discrete Bar Council-led programmes to promote and support equality, diversity, and inclusion (see below).

Race.

- [Race at the Bar Research \(3 years on\)](#). We have published updated data on race equality at the Bar with recommendations for action, comparing progress since our last report in 2021. We have published a [Race Equality Toolkit](#) to help chambers take action on race equality.
- [10,000 Black Internship \(Bar\) programme](#). We have delivered a 6 week paid internship programme for 29 aspiring Black barristers. This is a bespoke Bar programme that sits within a wider [10,000 Black Interns](#) programme.

Modernising the Bar.

- Client Briefing practices and earnings. We have published earnings data ([0-3 years PQE](#)) exploring earnings inequality by sex at the Bar with a focus on emerging gaps in the first three years of practice. This supports ongoing work to tackle earnings gaps by sex supported by training and an [earnings monitoring toolkit](#), as well as working closely with chambers managers on a 1 to 1 basis.
- Practice Management and Standards. We continue to promote proactive [practice review](#) as key to encouraging barristers to secure the type of work they wish to undertake and to increase earnings (if they wish to).
- [Women in Law \(WiL\) Pledge](#). We continue to promote target setting to support greater equity between sexes – signatories are required to set targets and report progress.
- Tackling harassment and bullying. We have appointed Baroness Harriet Harman KC to lead a [Bullying & Harassment Review](#) in response to increased reports of bullying and harassment at the Bar. The Review will report in June 2025.
- [Wellbeing at the Bar](#) We continue to support an extensive wellbeing programme including online resources, access to counselling and a recognition programme for chambers taking action to improve their members' wellbeing. We are

currently exploring ways to promote reflective practice to support barrister wellbeing – this in recognition that barristers face trauma through their work.

- Disability: We are working closely with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service to improve access to the courts for disabled barristers and will be looking at chambers' access over 2025.
- Judicial Diversity. We continue to work closely with the Judicial Appointments Commission, the Judiciary and others to improve judicial diversity. We are a partner in a positive action programme [Pre-Application Judicial Education \(PAJE\)](#) targeted at under-represented groups.
- Guidance: We have published a new [gender reassignment and trans guide](#) and updated our [Deaf/deaf hard of hearing people – effective communication guide](#).
- Returners and Movers. We have initiated work to support return to the Bar and movement between practice areas and between employed and self-employed practice to support retention.

Sustainability work

- We continue to expand membership of the [Sustainability Network](#) which supports chambers in measuring, managing and reducing carbon emissions. This work is supported by a Bar Council Climate Crisis Working Group.

Pro Bono

- In 2024 we supported Pro Bono Week. This is an annual event that celebrates pro bono achievements at the Bar and encourages more barristers to volunteer/take on pro bono work.

Young Bar

- We participated in the 2024 Anglo-Dutch Exchange hosted by the Dutch Bar in Rotterdam, the Hague and Amsterdam.
- We hosted the European Young Bar Association's International Weekend in London in September 2024 and attended the Summer Conference in Copenhagen.
- We refreshed our "[Starting at the Bar: your essential guide](#)" as part of a suite of support offered to new practitioners which also included three seminars covering ethics and working at the Bar.
- We gave 25 young barristers from England and Wales grants to attend international events or conference that will help develop their practice.

Employed Bar

- We celebrated the best of the employed Bar, showcasing the diversity and quality of legal work undertaken by the employed Bar via the [Employed Bar Awards 2024](#).

The Courts

- The latest data published by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service shows that there is still a large backlog of cases in the criminal Courts. Despite Government targets, backlogs continue to rise.

Magistrates Court¹

	Month receipts (criminal only)	Disposals (criminal only)	Outstanding (criminal only)
Aug 2022	112934	105912	343842
Aug 2023	116098	111397	353700

Crown Court²

	Month receipts	Disposals	Outstanding
Aug 2022	8653	7429	60580
Aug 2023	10137	9411	65004

Legal Aid

In September 2024, the Bar Council published the report "Justice short changed - public funding of the justice system". <https://www.barcouncil.org.uk/resource/funding-for-justice-down-22-since-2010-new-bar-council-report.html> It found that:

- Public funding for justice in England and Wales declined by 22.4% in real per person terms from 2009/10 to 2022/23.
- Over this period the UK economy grew by 11.5% and overall government spending increased by 10.1% in real per person terms
- Funding for justice is 30.4% below where it would be if it had kept pace with UK inflation, population growth and the economy

The Government's Review of Civil Legal Aid (RoCLA) is ongoing. They have announced some legal aid fee increases for immigration / asylum and housing / debt. Further announcements on other areas of civil and family legal aid are expected.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-management-information-august-2023>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-management-information-august-2023>