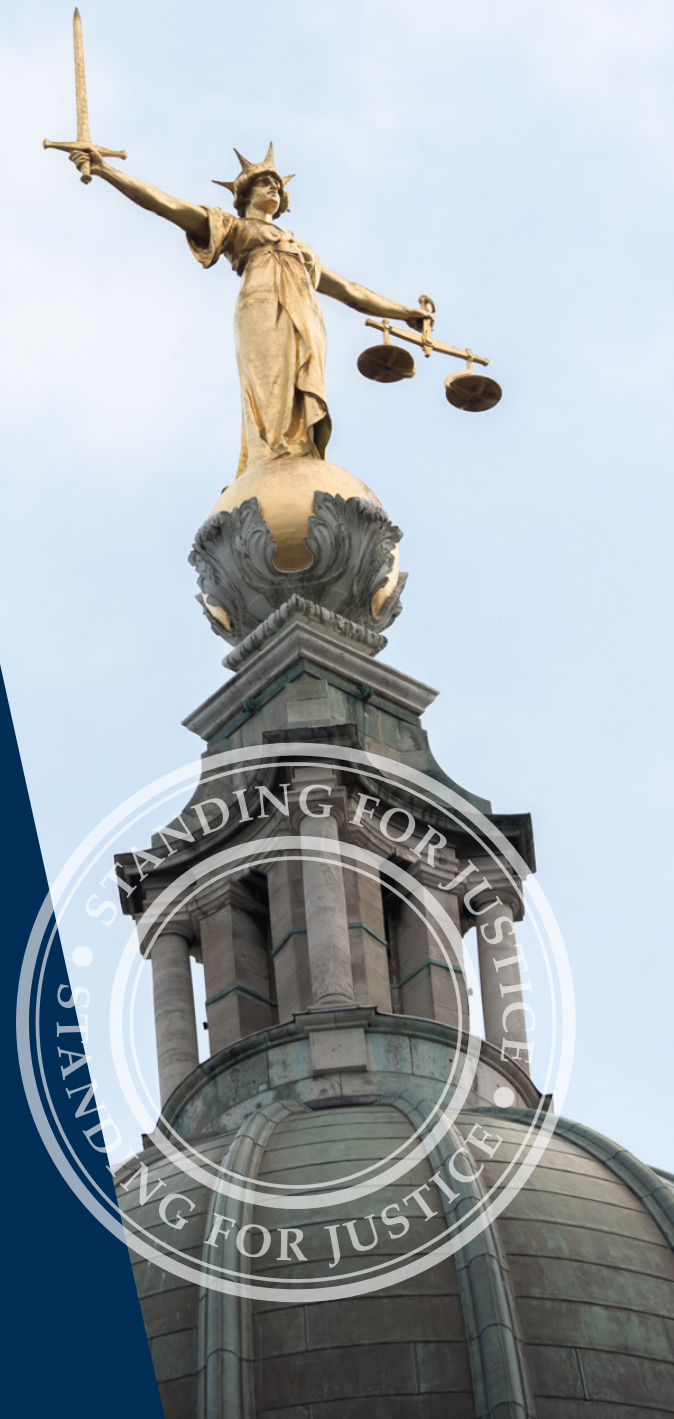


Standing for justice

Bar Council
Strategic Plan
2024–2029



The Bar Council



Foreword

We exist to lead, represent and support the Bar in the public interest. We champion the rule of law and access to justice for all.

2024 marks our 130th year, and it's been my immense privilege to lead the organisation through our previous five-year strategy. In developing this new strategy to 2029, we've been keenly aware of the context we work within.

The past few years have been politically and economically turbulent, marked not least by the global pandemic which brought about significant changes in the way we work. Many challenges (and opportunities) remain and will no doubt develop. Despite this, I'm proud of the many achievements we've made, some of which are highlighted in this document. As we embark on our new strategy, we also face the immediate upheaval of a UK general election.

Record court backlogs, full prisons and other pressures make it more important than ever that we continue to advocate

for a well resourced and resilient justice system. We must also champion the rule of law and support diversity, inclusion, and access to justice for all. Alongside this, we'll be developing an ambitious people strategy to make sure our staff can thrive and support the Bar over the coming years. Our organisational values will lie at the heart of all we do.

Our vision and mission are underpinned by key strategic aims. We'll measure our success against these aims through key performance indicators and annual business plans.

This new five-year strategy aims to ensure we can do all of this and more. It positions us as the leading representative body for a united Bar that is strong, inclusive, independent and influential.

Malcolm Cree CBE
Bar Council Chief Executive





Who we are

The Bar Council represents the barrister profession – nearly 18,000 members strong in 2024, and made up of both employed and self-employed barristers as one united bar. We work with our members to develop and implement policy and to provide the governance, resources, services, marketing, communications, training and events to support the Bar in the public interest.

As the General Council of the Bar of England and Wales, we are also the approved regulator for all practising barristers in England and Wales.

We delegate the regulatory functions of this role to the operationally independent Bar Standards Board (BSB).



Who we represent

Self-employed Barristers: specialist, independent advocates who enable people to uphold their legal rights, often acting on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society.

Employed Barristers: working across a range of areas of law and different types of organisations, providing independent legal advice and representation to their employers.

Our members play a crucial role in upholding the constitutional principles of government accountability under the law and the defence and vindication of legal rights through the courts. They provide a pool of talent, from diverse backgrounds, from which a significant proportion of the judiciary is drawn.



Our strategy at a glance

Vision

To be the leading representative body for a united Bar which is strong, inclusive, independent and influential



Mission

To lead, represent and support the Bar in the public interest and to champion the rule of law and access to justice for all



Values

- Diversity, inclusion and respect
- Commitment
- Collaboration
- Excellence



Strategic aims

- To lead, represent and uphold the independence of the Bar
- To champion, protect and promote the rule of law
- To support a sustainable, inclusive and resilient profession
- To maintain a sustainable, inclusive and resilient organisation



Our vision

- A **strong Bar** is adequately resourced, regulated in the public interest, maintains high ethical standards, and provides advice and advocacy services of the highest quality
- An **inclusive Bar** is a true meritocracy in which a diverse range of talented individuals can succeed, irrespective of background. It supports access to justice for all who require it
- An **independent Bar** retains intellectual detachment from the causes of its clients and is not influenced by political or other external agendas
- An **influential Bar** is an integral part of the justice system which is respected and sets an example both at home and internationally

We will be the leading representative body for a united Bar which is strong, inclusive, independent and influential.



Our mission

We will use our significant political and sectoral position to represent our members and their world-class advocacy skills, advocate for their best interests in the face of underfunding and political turmoil and continue to build on our position as a trusted voice for the profession.

We will provide leadership to the Bar, aspiring barristers and chambers professionals, helping to maintain the highest ethical and conduct standards. We will establish equitable and inclusive professional practices, and create opportunities to enhance professional life and skills.

We will seek to educate the public, media and politicians about the importance of justice, an adequately funded and fit-for purpose justice system, and barristers' vital contributions to our society.

**To lead, represent
and support the Bar
in the public interest
and to champion the
rule of law and access
to justice for all.**



Our values

Our **values** are the tenets we live by. They shape our vision and mission and inform how we work with and support each other and the profession.





Diversity, Inclusion and Respect

For the Bar

- We respect the rights of all and promote equal access to justice for all who need it
- We work to ensure that everyone has the means to achieve equality before the law
- We respect the diversity of the profession and enhance routes of access to it
- We recognise the varying needs of our stakeholders. We make sure that our

outputs are as inclusive as possible and that the Bar reflects the society it serves

In our organisation

- We're a diverse group of people who feel included, valued, and able to flourish in a supportive work environment
- We respect our colleagues, their skills and professional expertise, recognising and understanding the pressures people face



Collaboration

For the Bar

- We value and strengthen our relationship with the profession and with external groups serving the profession in the interest of justice for all
- We use insight and feedback from barristers to shape our work for their benefit and bring new opportunities to our members

In our organisation:

- We enhance our work relationships by listening to each other and collaborating effectively
- We recognise that we're at our best when we work well with each other



Commitment

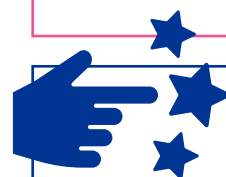
For the Bar

- We're committed to the future of the profession and to the needs of all barristers
- We're committed to continually improving the justice system in England and Wales and enhancing the reputation of our members

as world-class advocates at home and internationally

In our organisation:

- We show passion for our work and loyalty to each other
- We're committed to our goals and objectives



Excellence

For the Bar

- We provide barristers with high quality services, guidance, information and training
- Through our activities, we ensure that the government, judiciary, members of public, and others see our members

and the legal system within which they work as the best in the world

In our organisation

- We're an efficient and effective organisation with the highest levels of professional integrity



Our achievements

In developing our five-year plan, we've considered both our current operating context and our recent achievements. The timeframe of our previous strategic plan (2019-2024) included many significant events: the Covid-19 pandemic; the UK's exit from the EU; short-lived political appointments; the war in Ukraine; industrial action; the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; chronic underfunding of the justice system; court backlogs; the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements; and the climate crisis. Against this challenging backdrop, we are proud of what we've achieved.

Representing the Bar and promoting access to justice

- Shaping legislation and publishing reports championing the employed Bar and exposing the state of the justice system (including our Access to justice reports)
- Contributing to court reform programmes
- Working with the CPS to achieve measures such as better pay for self-employed barristers prosecuting for the CPS
- Using our expertise to build the evidence base which helped secure an increase in fees for the criminal Bar in 2022
- Promoting the united Bar and the jurisdiction of England and Wales through numerous international business development programmes
- Making the public access Bar more visible through our rebranded Direct Access Portal
- Establishing the Climate Crisis Working Group and launching a Sustainability Network for our members

Our achievements

Supporting the Bar and the next generation of barristers

- Launching new ethical guidance and wellbeing resources for the Bar
- Through our Covid-19 working group, securing a number of concessions for the Bar during the pandemic, including key worker status for barristers, legal aid, assurances on court safety and government funding to tackle court backlogs
- Launching the Talk to Spot reporting platform for the Bar to confidentially report inappropriate behaviour
- Hosting flagship events such as the Annual Bar and Young Bar Conference and Pupillage Fair
- Launching a new Pupillage Gateway, soon to be integrated with a contextual recruitment tool designed to enhance social mobility in the profession
- Providing support for Ukrainian lawyers through the Homes for Ukraine scheme and other initiatives like the Day in Court scheme

- Supporting barristers' chambers with resources and the new Chambers Management Working Group
- Delivering our training portfolio online through the pandemic
- Publishing our "Life at the Employed Bar" report and recommendations to ensure tailored support to employed barristers

Strengthening the Bar Council

- Launching our refreshed website
- Introducing online voting for our Council elections
- Enhancing our governance by introducing a procedure for dealing with misconduct by Bar Council members
- Boosting our social media presence and launching new targeted emails and newsletters to targeted areas of the profession

Championing diversity and inclusion

- Publishing our Race at the Bar report, recommendations to enhance equity in the profession, and the ongoing work from our Race Working Group, as well as delivering race awareness training
- Initiating the Accelerator programme focusing on diversity across the Bar, fair allocation of work and supporting young barristers
- Supporting the 10,000 black interns initiative creating opportunities for young black people at the Bar
- Introducing our work distribution and monitoring training course

Our operating environment

Our strategy and aims are informed by the context within which we work. In developing our strategy, we considered the political, economic, social, technological and environmental factors affecting us now and likely to shape the next five years.



Political factors

- Political instability and uncertainty exacerbated by over a decade of rapid rotation of Secretaries of State for Justice
- Ill-informed political and public discourse about the role of lawyers, and a lack of trust and confidence in the legal system and rule of law
- Legal reform and possible changes to legislation after the next general election
- The impact of geopolitics both domestically and internationally

Economic

- Historic underinvestment across the justice system
- Insufficient funding of legal aid provision and resulting problems with access to justice
- The cost of living crisis, high inflation, and the squeeze on public services

Our operating environment

Social

- The impacts of flexible and hybrid working as the “new normal”
- Barriers to candidates from less-advantaged backgrounds from entering or progressing within the Bar, despite progress in the profession in terms of diversity and inclusion
- Changing generational expectations of work and a growing prioritisation of wellbeing, work-life balance and flexibility

Technological

- Increased risk of cybercrime and the need for cybersecurity and data protection
- Growing automation, web-based business models and artificial intelligence

Environmental

- The climate crisis and growing public awareness of climate change leading to more pressure on organisations to demonstrate commitment to change by, for example, reducing their carbon footprint
- Increasing societal expectations of organisations on the basis of environmental or social justice principles

These factors will continue to affect our organisation and the wider Bar. While they present challenges, they also bring opportunities for our work and its impact. Our **strategic aims** will underpin all we do over the next five years in pursuing our mission and fostering a strong, inclusive, independent and influential Bar.

Our strategic aims

To move towards our vision and mission, we have four key strategic aims - each will be underpinned by measurable actions and activities.



Leading, representing, and upholding the independence of the united Bar

As the voice of the profession, the strength and breadth of our resources, connections and know-how uniquely positions us to lead the Bar. We will continue to guide and promote the profession under the principles of independence and justice.



To achieve this aim we will:

- Influence public policy on issues relevant to the Bar of England and Wales
- Raise public and political awareness of the Bar's contributions to society and the importance of independent specialist advisory and advocacy services to the rule of law (including pro-bono work)
- Highlight the Bar's excellence in advocacy and specialist advisory services so that it's recognised both at home and internationally by the public, media and policymakers
- Through our committees, panels and working groups, seek the Bar's views on key policy issues affecting the sector – such as the regulation of the profession, rebuilding and investing long-term in the justice system, and the use of AI and other tech
- Use our valuable data assets and research capacity to influence and inform public debate and respond to public consultations
- Continue to govern the Bar according to our constitutional principles

Championing, protecting and promoting the rule of law

No one is above the law, and everyone should be equal under the law.

In uncertain times, it's vital to educate the public, media and policymakers about the critical importance of the rule of law in a healthy society.



To achieve this aim we will:

- Promote the justice system of England and Wales internationally
- Influence the development and implementation of government policy on the rule of law and the justice system to ensure independence, equity, efficiency and access
- Be prepared to advise new governments and advocate for the justice system as a political priority
- Advocate for the extension of legal aid to improve access to legal services

Supporting a sustainable, inclusive and resilient profession

Our vision for the Bar is only possible if the profession is sustainable, adequately funded and open to all.



To achieve this aim we will:

- Widen access to the Bar by using innovative technologies and programmes, such as contextual recruitment and accessibility tools; by engaging with new and emerging qualification routes; and by educating aspiring barristers on routes to employed and self-employed pupillage and practice
- Inspire young people from all backgrounds to consider a career at the Bar and strive to enhance social mobility, diversity and inclusion in the profession to make sure it represents the society it serves
- Encourage retention at the Bar by providing and highlighting opportunities for barristers' continuing professional development, including bespoke training, events, services and guidance on professional standards and wellbeing at work
- Continue advocate for a properly funded legal sector and an appropriately resourced Bar for the good of society
- Provide guidance and services to ensure the highest standards of ethics in barristers' practice

Supporting a sustainable, inclusive and resilient profession

- Help the profession navigate the challenges and opportunities of AI and emerging technology in the legal sector
- Continue to provide guidance and practical resources to the profession through the Sustainability Network to help chambers meet net zero targets and reduce their environmental impact
- Provide support and resources to barristers in their roles as business owners and those who work with them around organisational management, equality and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and statutory and regulatory compliance
- Work with stakeholder groups across the profession (and across England and Wales), including the Inns, circuits, specialist bar associations, Legal Practice Management Association and Institute of Barristers' Clerks
- Encourage a positive culture at the Bar where wellbeing is prioritised and people can thrive



Maintaining a sustainable, inclusive and resilient organisation

To support the Bar, we need to be sustainable and resilient for the long term. As a small organisation, we need to recruit and retain the brightest talent from diverse backgrounds and foster an environment where employees can thrive.



To achieve this aim we will:

- Maintain financial sustainability and build fiscal resilience through investment and income diversification strategies, reducing our heavy reliance on practising certificate fees
- Continue to provide value for money for our members and maintain, and increase where possible, contribution levels through the Bar Representation Fee
- Develop a people strategy which embeds our values in our working culture and ensures our employment offer is competitive, relevant to today's labour market, incentivises excellence, and allows us to attract and retain top-tier talent
- Create an internal culture where difference is celebrated, inclusive practices are the norm and marginalised voices are actively amplified
- Enhance our digital and physical resilience by investing in efficient systems and cybersecurity, alongside regular reviews of our business continuity plans

Maintaining a sustainable, inclusive and resilient organisation

- Expand our research capacity to enable our analysis, influence and thought leadership
- Keep our internal governance arrangements under review to make sure the right people in our organisation are making the right decisions at the right time and place
- Clearly communicate the value of our contributions to the barrister profession



Measuring our success

We produce yearly business plans which define our planned projects in view of these strategic aims.

Our senior management team will develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure each of the activities underpinning our strategic aims. We'll regularly review and report on our performance against these indicators.



The General Council of the Bar's role in ensuring effective regulation

The General Council of the Bar is the approved regulator of barristers under the Legal Services Act 2007. As such, we make sure our statutory functions are properly discharged by holding the Bar Standards Board (BSB) to account for its performance. In doing so, we seek to ensure the regulation of the profession is of consistent high quality, fairness, proportionality and value for money.

To achieve this aim, we seek to work constructively with the BSB, the Ministry of Justice, the Law Officers' Departments and the Legal Services Board. We also ensure there are adequate assurance mechanisms in place internally to monitor regulatory performance.



Standing for justice

Bar Council Strategic Plan 2024–2029

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