

Barristers in international arbitration

2026 to 2028

The Bar Council

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20 About the Bar Council of England and Wales

The Bar Council of England and Wales is proud that barristers in England and Wales play a leading role in international arbitration and the growth of the sector.

Clients' needs often go beyond borders, and law firms can draw on external global expertise to complement their own work.

Barristers combine a wealth of arbitration experience with a highly collaborative approach, a focus on their client and a commitment to the highest ethical standards.

We hope this guide offers ideas and inspiration for collaboration and closer ties between legal professionals across borders.

The benefits of working with barristers

The barrister profession has existed for nearly 800 years.

In England and Wales, the majority of barristers are independent and self-employed, and they work from 'chambers' which are not law firms, but rather groups or associations of barristers who share a building, overhead costs and staff.



Barristers are highly skilled specialist advocates

There are barristers who are employed and they represent 17% of the profession, often working in law firms or government legal offices, with 3% in dual practice, working simultaneously as both employed and self-employed lawyers.

Barristers in the same chambers are fully independent of each other. It's common that barristers from the same chambers would appear against one another on opposite sides of a legal case. Chambers are experienced in ensuring all parties' confidentiality by strictly separating practical and administrative arrangements.

You can find chambers in most cities and major towns in England and Wales. Many of the leading chambers are in the vicinity of the Temple area of London, near the Inns of Court.

Dating back to medieval times, the 4 Inns of Court still administer key parts of barristers' education, training and admission.

Barristers undergo a unique advocacy training programme after their formal legal education. This equips them to be able to present cases (both orally and in writing) to any court or tribunal in a way that's focused, rigorous and persuasive.

Each barrister must undertake extensive training before they're admitted to practice. This training usually includes a year-long postgraduate course known as the Bar Practice Course.

Barristers in training must secure a highly competitive position – known as pupillage – that lasts 12 months. During this training, 'pupil' barristers undertake practical advocacy work under the supervision of experienced colleagues. They also undertake compulsory advocacy courses administered by the Inns.

Their training prepares barristers to become effective, ethical and persuasive advocates who are trusted domestically and internationally.

King's Counsel qualified barristers.

There are more than 18,000 practising barristers in England and Wales and they work alongside 170,000 solicitors.

In 2026, there are approximately 2,200 barristers who have obtained the quality mark of King's Counsel (KC). King's Counsel barristers are also referred to as 'silks.' They represent approximately 1% of the legal profession in England and Wales.

To become a KC, a barrister must go through a rigorous selection process that evaluates their excellence in advocacy and other qualities including leadership and ethical work.

Many barristers act as arbitrators as well as advocates.

Disputing parties from around the world rely on barristers to advise and represent them in international arbitrations, and to act as independent arbitrators in resolving disputes.

Barristers provide specialist legal advice on complex and technical issues that require expert judgement and they also provide expert evidence on English and Welsh law to foreign courts and arbitral tribunals.

Barristers are highly effective advocates because they're experienced in co-counselling with lawyers from many jurisdictions (whether civil or common law).

Barristers are highly efficient, and generally charge lower fees (due to lower overheads) and have more flexible fee arrangements than law firms.

Barristers are effective arbitrators because they are highly qualified, independent and adept at dealing with high volumes of information at speed. They also have a practical understanding of various procedural rules and what a fair resolution of a dispute requires.

Barristers are highly trained to determine issues of fact, both on papers and from oral evidence, they can apply multiple systems of law for the purpose of resolving disputes and understand the international nature of disputes and differences in practice and procedure across multiple jurisdictions.

Today, some chambers have offices outside the UK including in Singapore and Dubai.

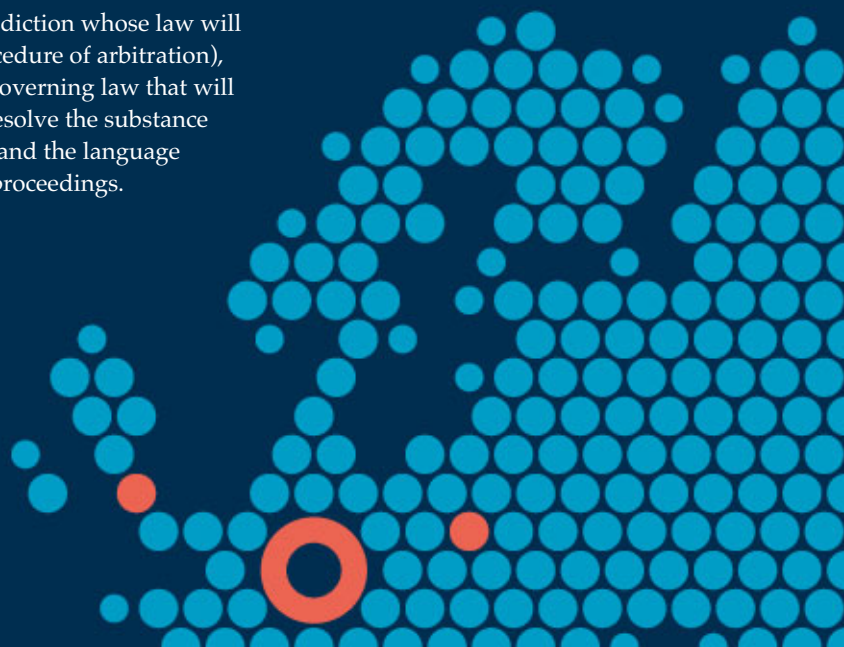
Key features of international arbitration

International arbitration has evolved, over centuries, as a means of resolving disputes in which legal relationships – especially those of trade and commerce – work across jurisdictional and cultural boundaries.

Arbitration has, for centuries, been an accepted means of resolving disputes (both locally and internationally) in England and Wales, and its evolution in this jurisdiction (among other centres of commerce) has contributed to shaping global legal practice.

When incorporating arbitration into a commercial contract, parties will often agree on the seat of arbitration (this is the jurisdiction whose law will dictate the procedure of arbitration), as well as the governing law that will be applied to resolve the substance of the dispute, and the language of the arbitral proceedings.

London is a hugely popular choice of seat, and English and Welsh law is a pre-eminent choice of governing law, because businesses around the world trust the stability of the common law, the efficiency and independence of English and Welsh judges and the reliable enforcement of arbitral awards in UK courts.



Common types of dispute in arbitration

Commercial arbitration

A large variety of cross-border contracts and transactions rely on arbitration to resolve disputes, embracing diverse sectors such as construction, energy, finance, intellectual property, IT and sport.

Investor-state arbitration

Investment treaties provide for arbitration as a means of resolving disputes arising out of foreign direct investment (FDI) between investors (these are generally multinational companies) and governments. These arbitrations may take place under the International Convention for the Settlement of International Disputes (ICSID) system, or otherwise via another institution or ad hoc setup. Barristers regularly act for claimant investors and respondent states.

State-to-state arbitration

Disputes between sovereign nations are often resolved using arbitration. With globally trusted expertise in public international law, barristers are frequently called on to represent states before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) and under investment treaties.

Benefits of arbitration to resolve disputes

For business relationships that work effectively across borders, international arbitration is the most popular choice of dispute resolution.

Businesses around the world value arbitration because it's:

Neutral

Usually the seat of arbitration and the arbitrators will be based in a different country from both parties.

Flexible

Parties can choose and shape their own procedure and language of arbitration.

Swift

Disputes can often be resolved more quickly through arbitration than via the courts because there are less procedures, formality and parties agree the timeframes.

Final

There are very limited rights to challenge or appeal an arbitration decision.

Confidential

Arbitration proceedings are generally held in private and parties often agree to keep the proceedings and terms of the final resolution confidential.

Effective

Arbitral awards are widely and readily enforced under the New York Convention 1958 (newyorkconvention.org/english).

Using a tailored approach

Arbitrations can be globally customised: a dispute may be legally seated in one jurisdiction, governed by the laws of another, with hearings physically held in a third and involving legal counsel from all over the world.

Barristers are highly skilled in multinational disputes, often working as co-counsel with foreign colleagues and using law other than that of England and Wales.

Many arbitrations are conducted through institutions including:

- The International Chamber of Commerce
- London Court of International Arbitration
- Singapore International Arbitration Centre
- Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre
- Stockholm Chamber of Commerce

However, arbitrations don't need to be administered by an institution and are frequently set up on an ad hoc basis.

Parties can draw on a variety of arbitration rules to govern their procedure. Popular choices include the ICC rules or the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) rules.

Some industries have specialised rules, such as those of the London Maritime Arbitration Association and the Grain and Feed Trade Association.

As arbitration has grown, so has a body of 'soft law' around it; i.e. guidelines, customs and best practice that parties and their lawyers may need to navigate.

Barristers' experience and immersion in the arbitration community means they can navigate the institutions and rules for their clients and advise on the best approach for different circumstances.

Arbitration services

There are different services on offer by barristers working in international arbitration, such as:

Advice

Drawing on legal expertise and analysis as well as strategic and tactical insights, barristers advise on:

- Clients' position, rights, risk exposure and strategic options for dispute resolution
- Making the most effective use of arbitration procedures
- The options on nomination or the appointment of an arbitrator

Advocacy

The essence of barristers' work is to communicate and persuade. This can include drafting written statements and advocacy documents, presenting the case orally at a hearing, and the oral examination of witnesses and experts.

Arbitrating

Barristers are often called on by parties around the world to sit as arbitrators. They're picked to be arbitrators because they're valued for their ability to analyse large and complex disputes in an objective and independent manner.

Expertise and clarity

Where expert witnesses on English and Welsh law, or international law, are required in arbitrations, barristers are often called on.

Some barristers develop highly specialised practices in which they become leading experts on some of the most difficult legal issues and are consequently instructed by lawyers around the world to advise on complicated points of law.

What barristers bring to arbitration

Barristers bring several key advantages to international arbitration, including:

Skills: the profession is very competitive and those who attain pupillage and then practice as barristers have a strong intellectual background and have demonstrated their excellence in education and training in order to enter into the profession.

Individual practice: clients can be confident that a barrister is undertaking the work personally and are responsible for their own expertise, clients and reputations.

Independence, objectivity and focus: the training for the profession and the mandatory ethical code requires barristers to be independent advocates, meaning their advice is objective and underpinned by continual legal and evidential analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of a client's case and overall strategy are kept under constant review as well as having a focus on achieving the best settlement.

Flexibility: a barrister can be involved as much or as little as you need. The work can range from bringing them in to advise on a discrete point to having a barrister handle the arbitration for you from start to finish.

Tailoring the team for the case: for larger cases where a team of lawyers is needed, barristers being independent and self-employed means that the team can be assembled around the demands of the case. A barrister can be brought in to deal with a specialist aspect of a case where expertise is needed. This is different from law firms, where a partner's team are permanent salaried employees. Barristers are used to working in teams that are made up of different individuals from other chambers and law firms.

Co-counselling: barristers are generally engaged by other lawyers, on a 'referral basis', rather than appointed directly by business clients. Law firms can bring in a barrister as co-counsel and be confident that the barrister will not seek to acquire a relationship with the law firm's underlying client or try to poach a law firm's talent. The barrister will often hope to build a relationship with the co-counsel law firm so there is the opportunity to collaborate on other cases in the future.

Efficiency on cost: barristers provide specialist and high-quality advice. The fees they charge are usually very competitive as they have significantly lower overhead costs compared to other professions.



Instructing a barrister

A non-UK law firm or an in-house lawyer can directly appoint any barrister (known as 'instructing a barrister') to assist in an international arbitration. There's no requirement to go through a law firm based in England and Wales.

Finding a barrister

Barristers specialising in international arbitration (and with expertise in a sector or subject matter) can be readily identified through popular guides such as Legal 500 and Chambers and Partners.

We have listed several commercial chambers known for their international work, with a table showing areas of expertise on pages 16-17.

Some barristers accept instructions from clients who aren't lawyers. This is known as 'direct access' and you can search our directory online via the Direct Access Portal: www.directaccessportal.co.uk

Getting support from clerks

All chambers have clerks or practice managers who assist in managing barristers' workloads and diaries. The role of clerks is long-established, and clerks are highly knowledgeable about their barristers' work. Clerks can speak to prospective clients and make suggestions. They offer confidential advice and tailored recommendations suited to each client and case.

Barristers' fees

Barristers' fees will depend on a range of factors such as:

- Their seniority and reputation
- The nature of the work involved
- The size and importance of the dispute



Barristers can be, and often are, engaged on an hourly rate basis, but it's also common to agree fixed or capped fees for particular tasks. Fee arrangements are often tailored to the circumstances of a case, taking into account the client's needs.

For advocacy work, and especially for preparing and representing clients at major hearings, barristers will almost always charge a 'brief fee'. This is payable in advance of the hearing (reflecting the fact that the barrister is unlikely to be able to accept any other cases in that period) and the brief fee covers the expected preparation time plus the first day of the hearing. Additional hearing days are paid at a daily rate and are sometimes referred to as 'refreshers.'

Chambers sectors and specialisms

This table lists some chambers working in international arbitration, denoting sectors and subject matters in which their barristers offer services as advocates and/or arbitrators.

	Commercial disputes	Aviation and travel	Construction	Energy and natural resources	Entertainment and media	Financial and banking	Insurance and reinsurance	Intellectual property	IT and telecommunication	Joint venture and company disputes	Professional negligence	Shipping and commodities	Sports	Investor-state dispute settlement	Inter-state disputes
11KBW	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•
2 Temple Gardens	•	•	•				•				•		•		
3 Verulam Buildings	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
39 Essex	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
4 Pump Court	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
4 Stone Buildings				•		•			•	•				•	
4-5 Gray's Inn Square Chambers	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
7KBW		•	•	•	•	•	•				•	•	•	•	•
Acumum Chambers LLP		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	
Atkin Chambers	•		•	•			•		•	•	•	•		•	
Blackstone Chambers		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•
Chambers of Ariff Rozhan	•		•	•		•	•			•					
Crown Office Chambers	•		•	•			•				•		•		
Essex Court Chambers	•			•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Gatehouse Chambers	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Keating Chambers			•	•			•		•		•	•			
Kings Chambers			•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
One Essex Court	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Quadrant Chambers		•		•		•	•		•		•	•			
Twenty Essex	•			•		•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•

Facts and figures

All references can be found on the back cover.

The UK is the largest legal services market in Europe valued at £52bn in 2024 and is second only to the US [1]

5,000 arbitrations take place in England and Wales annually [2]

London is globally the most popular seat of arbitration overall, and in ICC and LCIA cases [3]

English law is the first or second most **popular choice** of law at the top 5 arbitral institutions [4]

UK arbitrators are the most commonly appointed nationality in ICC arbitrations [5]

101 nationalities were represented by parties to LCIA arbitrations in 2024 [6]

Matters arising from arbitration make up almost a third of claims (30%) issued in the Commercial Court of England and Wales

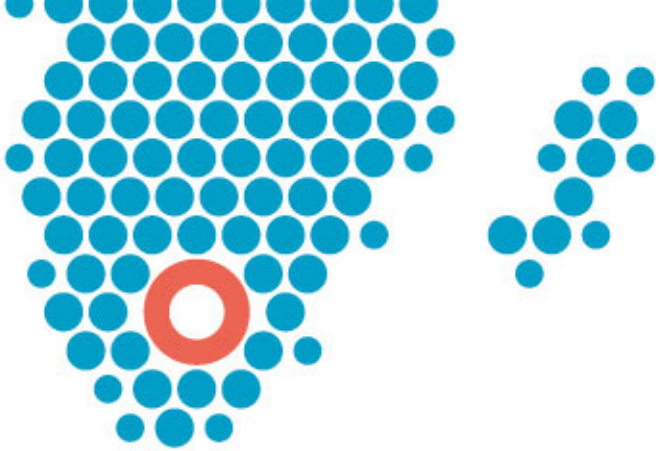
Over 80% of the world's maritime arbitrations are handled in London [8]

About the Bar Council of England and Wales

The Bar Council is the voice of the barrister profession in England and Wales. Our 18,000+ members – self-employed and employed barristers – make up a united Bar that aims to be strong, inclusive, independent and influential.

As well as championing the rule of law and access to justice, we lead, represent and support the Bar in the public interest through:

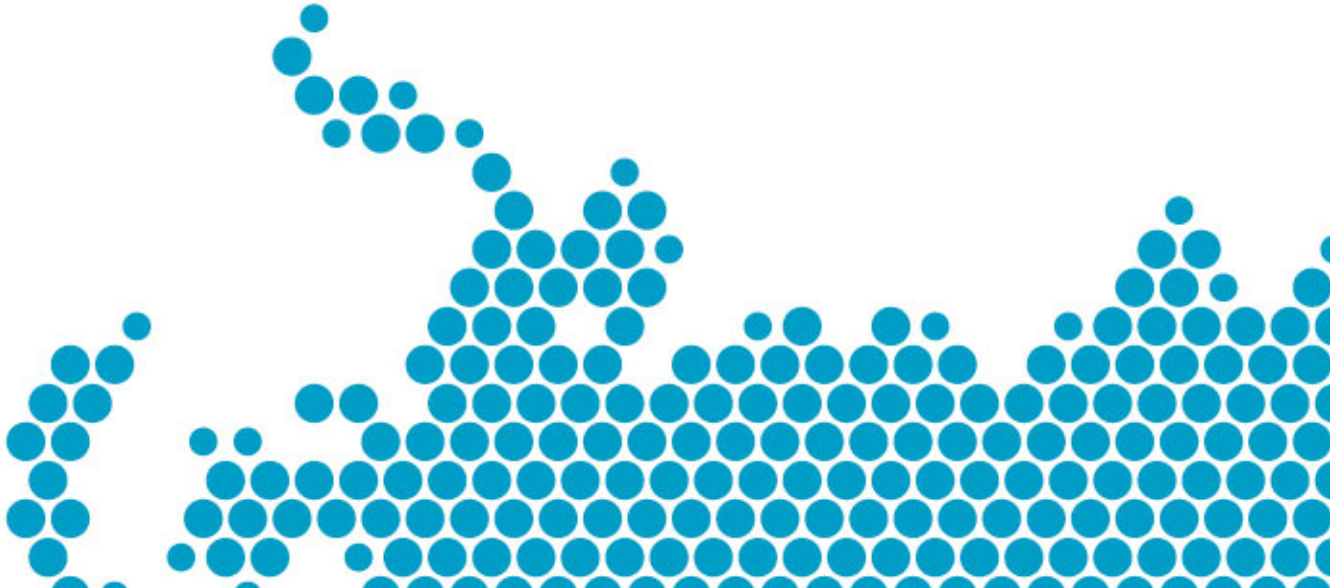
- Providing advice, guidance, services, training and events for our members to support career development and help maintain the highest standards of ethics and conduct
- Inspiring and supporting the next generation of barristers from all backgrounds
- Working to enhance diversity and inclusion at the Bar
- Encouraging a positive culture where wellbeing is prioritised and people can thrive in their careers
- Drawing on our members' expertise to influence policy and legislation that relates to the justice system and the rule of law
- Sharing barristers' vital contributions to society with the public, media and policymakers
- Developing career and business opportunities for barristers at home and abroad through promoting the Bar of England and Wales
- Engaging with national Bars and international Bar associations to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and the development of legal links and legal business overseas



The Bar Council

To ensure joined-up support, we work within the wider ecosystem of the Bar alongside the Inns, circuits and specialist Bar associations, as well as with the Institute of Barristers' Clerks and the Legal Practice Management Association.

As the General Council of the Bar, we're the approved regulator for all practising barristers in England and Wales. We delegate our statutory regulatory functions to the operationally independent Bar Standards Board (BSB) as required by the Legal Services Act 2007.



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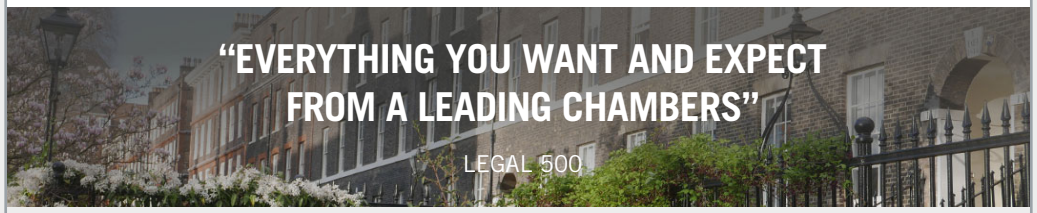
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References

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