Bar Council

Strategic Plan

2019 – 2024
1. The Bar Council represents 16,000 practising barristers in England and Wales and promotes the values they share.

2. A strong and independent Bar exists to serve the public and is crucial to the administration of justice. As specialist, independent advocates, barristers enable people to uphold their legal rights, often acting on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society. The Bar makes a vital contribution to the efficient and effective operation of criminal and civil courts. It provides a pool of talent, from increasingly diverse backgrounds, from which a significant proportion of the judiciary is drawn and on whose independence the rule of law and our democratic way of life depends. The Bar Council is the Approved Regulator for the Bar of England and Wales: it discharges its regulatory functions through the operationally independent Bar Standards Board (BSB).

3. In the context of the political, economic, social, technological, cultural and legal challenges and opportunities which the UK and its legal services face, the Bar Council seeks to achieve specific and measurable progress against the aims and strategic objectives set out in this five-year Strategic Plan. In doing so, we will work closely with the profession, Government and our many stakeholders.
The mood on justice and legal aid has changed, but how will politicians respond?
Our Vision

4. One Bar: strong, independent, influential and diverse.

Our Mission

5. To champion: the rule of law and access to justice for all in England and Wales; the Bar’s high-quality specialist advocacy and advisory services; the highest standards of conduct, skills, ethics; equality and diversity across the profession; and the development of business opportunities for barristers at home and abroad.

The Bar makes a vital contribution to the efficient and effective operation of criminal and civil courts.
Our Role

6. The Bar Council is the lead professional body for all practising barristers in England and Wales. In pursuing our vision and mission we represent, support and promote a strong and independent Bar and enable the independent regulation of the profession, in the public interest.

Championing the Rule of Law and Access to Justice for all

7. The independent Bar plays a crucial role in upholding and realising the constitutional principles of government accountability under law and vindication of legal rights through the courts. As the Bar’s professional body, we are ideally placed to draw on barristers’ expertise and dedication to lead on these issues, in the public interest. We will espouse these principles by:

a. Acting as a powerful influence on the development and implementation of Government policy, aiming to secure the highest standards of justice, equity, integrity, access and efficiency in our justice system.

b. Campaigning for a justice system which enables everyone to benefit from the rule of law and ensures their legal rights and liberties are upheld.

c. Championing and upholding the rule of law in England and Wales, and around the world, by highlighting its importance at every opportunity and ensuring that Government, the media and the public at large understand its vital role in society.
8. We will represent the Bar by:

a. Raising awareness and understanding of the importance of independent, specialist advisory and advocacy services to the rule of law.

b. Seeking the views of the Bar on key policy issues and working with Bar Council committees to develop proposals to government concerning all aspects of policy regarding law reform and legislative process. We will use data and information gathered from the Bar and from Bar Council research and analysis to influence public debate.

c. Providing leadership to equip the Bar to meet current and future challenges and to help barristers maintain and enhance their skills and the quality of their practice.

d. Striving to ensure that the work of the Bar remains committed to the highest ethical standards.

e. Providing services, guidance, information and training to maintain and raise professional standards, overcome challenges that hinder practice at the Bar and promote the wellbeing of individuals.

f. Supporting barristers, chambers and alternative business models with practice management disciplines in the interests of statutory and regulatory compliance as well as efficiency.

g. Working closely with the Circuits, Specialist Bar Associations (SBAs), Council of the Inns of Court (CIC) and the Inns of Court in our mutual interest.

9. We will support barristers by:

a. Securing a sustainable role for barristers, self-employed and employed, across all areas of practice.

b. Helping the Bar to thrive and flourish in the long-term through programmes which are designed to raise awareness and understanding of the profession, improve equality and diversity at the Bar and support the retention of practitioners.

c. Providing leadership to equip the Bar to meet current and future challenges and to help barristers maintain and enhance their skills and the quality of their practice.

d. Striving to ensure that the work of the Bar remains committed to the highest ethical standards.
Promoting the Bar

10. We will promote the Bar by:

a. Making sure that the Bar’s unique excellence in advocacy and specialist advisory services is recognised nationally and internationally.

b. Highlighting opportunities for broadening areas of practice, business and personal development.

c. Widening career opportunities at the Bar by ensuring aspiring barristers have ready access to information, options and routes to the Bar.

d. Raising awareness of the Bar’s contribution to society, including its pro bono work.

Enabling Regulation

11. As the Approved Regulator, the Bar Council enables the effective, independent regulation of the profession through the Bar Standards Board (BSB), to ensure the highest standards of professional practice and to protect the public interest. The Bar Council will apply fairness and rigour in assessing the resources reasonably required by the BSB, consistent with respect for the independent operation of the Board, and in discharging our statutory functions under the Legal Services Act 2007. We will work constructively with the BSB, the Ministry of Justice, the Law Officers’ Department and the Legal Services Board to ensure that regulation of the profession is of high quality, fair, proportionate and appropriate for the provision of legal services by barristers.
12. To achieve our strategic objectives, the Bar Council, as the lead representative body for the profession, needs to be influential, capable, organisationally sustainable and held in high regard by the profession, Government and partners. We will achieve this through:

- Ensuring that the work of the Bar Council is in the interests of the profession, the legal services sector and society at large.
- Increasing financial sustainability and resilience (materially increasing income through diversified revenue streams).
- Improving business intelligence by enhancing the Bar Council’s capacity to conduct research, gather and analyse data, report, advise and influence.
- Developing and forging innovative new partnerships and alliances to enhance our ability to deliver against our ambitions.
- Using technology and modern communications to increase the engagement of barristers with the Bar Council through various channels.

13. In seeking to fulfil the strategic objectives, the Bar Council will embody the following values:

**Respect**: respect for all, including respecting the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society and seeking to ensure they have the means to achieve equality before the law; respecting others within the profession and those aspiring to join.

**Fairness**: promoting equal access to justice for all and seeking to ensure that the increasing diversity of our society is reflected in the diversity of all who serve justice.

**Integrity**: trusted by the government, judiciary, clients, wider society and other professions, founded on the highest levels of professional integrity.

**Excellence**: an independent Bar of specialist advocates and advisors seeking to excel.

**Efficiency**: The Bar Council and the BSB will operate as effectively and efficiently as possible in support of their respective strategic aims and objectives and work to assist barristers (employed and self-employed), chambers, and entities to be more efficient.
Our Approach

14. To achieve our strategic and organisational objectives, in line with our values, whilst recognising the need to react appropriately to changing circumstances and emerging issues, risks and opportunities, the Bar Council will:

- Work collaboratively, including commercially, with the Inns, Circuits, Specialist Bar Associations, Legal Practice Management Association and Institute of Barristers’ Clerks, amongst others.
- Maximise the output potential of working with the new Information Management system.
- Maintain and improve the support for, and respect of, the profession, by improving engagement and communications with the Bar and all key stakeholders, throughout England and Wales.
- Lobby effectively for the interests of the profession, the rule of law, and access to justice for all.
- Reach a stable financial position through efficient operations and appropriate commercial activity which is of benefit to the profession.
- Mitigate key risks through active risk management (including building the financial reserves and insuring against activities that have inherent risk).

15. We will adopt the following principles in the design and implementation of our work programme.

- Evidence-based: everything we do will be underpinned by an empirical case for our involvement. This will justify the use of resources and enable us to evaluate our impact.
- With the profession: we will aim to increase the number of barristers who support our work (we will identify and support those who share our ambition and seek to influence those who do not) on the Circuits, with the SBAs and across all four Inns of Courts.
- Activity across the jurisdiction of England and Wales: we will support partners across all regions.
16. Performance against the Strategic Plan will be monitored and managed by tracking what we want to achieve (objectives), how we will measure success (key performance indicators - KPIs) and what we will do to achieve it, shown in the tables below. These are not exhaustive and will be developed further in future business plans.

<table>
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<th>Performance Management</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What we want (Objective)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Broader legal aid coverage and both fair and sustainable remuneration for publicly-funded barristers.</td>
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<td>2. The rule of law is understood, respected and promoted at home and abroad.</td>
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<td>3. A tailored and proportionate regulatory environment that meets the needs of a specialist Bar.</td>
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<td>What we want (Objective)</td>
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<td>4. The high ethical and regulatory/practice standards of the Bar are maintained and recognised.</td>
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<td>5. Legislation fit for the 21st Century and the Bar Council recognised as a thought leader.</td>
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<td>6. Government court reforms enhance both access to and the quality of justice, do not exclude users digitally or financially and ensure the court estate is fit for purpose.</td>
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<td>7. A Bar ‘of and for all’, that reflects the society it serves.</td>
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<td>8. Bar Training delivers high quality new practitioners ready for practice with requisite skills at a fair cost.</td>
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<td>9. The Bar is a flourishing profession, with improved career opportunities, in particular for the Young Bar, Employed Bar and publicly funded Bar.</td>
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<td>10. Consistently high standards of practice management across the Bar are developed.</td>
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<td>11. The UK reaches a settlement for leaving the EU that ensures legal certainty and upholds the rule of law, protects the position of UK legal services, including arrangements which enable barristers to practise their profession throughout the EU.</td>
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| 12. Value of the Bar’s international business to UK GDP continues to increase and the number of barristers undertaking work with a foreign element grows. | • Number of barristers with an international practice.  
• Value of earnings from international practice.  
• Feedback on programme activities.  
• International contacts/opportunities established and developed on behalf of the Bar. | • Develop and implement an international business development programme which raises the profile of the Bar in key growth markets. |
| 13. Bar Council finances ensure its continuing ability to meet the needs of the Bar. | • Levels of Practising Certificate Fee (PCF) and of non-PCF income.  
• Bar Representation Fee (BRF) income.  
• The Bar Council (RP&S) share of the PCF.  
• Level of financial reserves (progress against a target).  
• Level of commercial income. | • Run the Bar Council efficiently to meet the needs of the Bar.  
• Identify other sources of income, and partnerships, that may help to deliver our objectives. |
| 14. The Bar Council is recognised as the lead body for issues that impact on the whole profession. | • Number of BRF subscribers.  
• Website hits/feedback.  
• Percentage opting into receiving messages about Bar Council activities.  
• Percentage ‘click’ and read statistics for BarTalk and other publications.  
• Level of response to surveys, including the regular working lives survey.  
• Level of use of valued services (e.g. Ethics hub, wellbeing, training courses offered by the Bar Council).  
• Feedback from Specialist Bar Associations, Circuits, Chambers and the Employed Bar.  
• The number of barristers standing and the number of votes cast in Bar Council elections.  
• The number of chambers’ ambassadors. | • Communicate effectively and proactively with the profession, media, public, decision-makers and other stakeholders, including via an effective website. |
| 15. The Bar Council delivers a portfolio of tailored and popular commercial and non-commercial services. | • Feedback.  
• Take-up.  
• Income (where appropriate and relevant). | • Use our expertise to provide services (including Member Services and Training & Events) that are tailored to the profession. |
Sub-strategies and Business Planning

16. Several sub-strategies will complement the Strategic Plan and annual Business Plans will develop targets for the KPIs.

17. There will be a Policy Strategy, focussed on such matters as legal policy development, law reform and legislative change, professional regulation, accreditation and human rights and fundamental freedoms. A Services and Commercial Strategy will cover all the services that the Bar Council offers to the profession, whether provided to all practitioners without charge or discounted to those who pay the Bar Representation Fee (BRF) or which are made available for a fee. It will include a review of what the practising Bar values and a pricing review. An Engagement Strategy will link the Bar Council’s strategic objectives to specific communications and engagement activity, with the Bar, government and parliament, the media and our wider stakeholder base. A Digital and Information Strategy will capture & harness the intellectual knowledge and material that comes out of committees, consultations and other work.
The General Council of the Bar is the Approved Regulator of the Bar of England and Wales. It discharges its regulatory functions through the independent Bar Standards Board.

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