



BAR
STANDARDS
BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

Business Plan 2024-2025

The Bar Standards Board regulates barristers and specialised legal services businesses in England and Wales in the public interest.

Our organisational values are:

Fairness and Respect

We strive to achieve equal access and equal treatment, valuing and respecting our differences.

Independence and Integrity

We are objective and evidence-based, open, honest and accountable, and we expect everyone to meet these same ethical standards.

Excellence and Efficiency

We are committed to learning and improving, seeking to maximise our effectiveness by making the best possible use of our resources.

If you would like a version of this publication in an alternative format, please contact the Equality and Access to Justice (E&AJ) Team by telephone on 020 7611 1305 or: equality@barstandardsboard.org.uk

Foreword



The Bar Standards Board regulates the Bar in the public interest by promoting high standards, equality and access to justice. 2024-25 is the final year of our current three year strategy. This business plan sets out what we intend to do in the year ahead to further that strategy which aims to sustain high standards at the Bar, to promote the diversity of the profession and to improve access to barristers' services, while also enhancing the regulatory capacity and independence of the BSB itself.

We shall work, in a spirit of continuous improvement, to maintain BSB's evolution as a proactive regulator better able to act to identify and address threats to the public interest. The consumer interest will guide everything we do.

To that end, we shall continue to emphasise operational excellence. The quality of our decision-making remains high and we have significantly improved our productivity in the last year, but we must still do more to improve the timeliness of our decision-making so that all those who use our services can be sure that we shall take the right decisions quickly and responsively. To this end, we shall implement in the year ahead the recommendations of our independent review of enforcement and the first phase of our own parallel review of authorisations.

We shall make better use of the data and intelligence we collect and analyse so that we can deepen our understanding of the capacity the Bar will need to meet the future needs of consumers and the administration of justice. We shall work with chambers to set clear expectations for the crucial work they do to uphold standards, equality and access.

We shall be a more collaborative regulator working with the profession and other legal regulators wherever that best enables us to meet our objectives.

We shall take full part in the important current debate about ethical standards, including the ethical issues raised by climate change, strategic lawsuits against public participation and non-disclosure agreements. As core participants in the Post Office Inquiry we will also continue to monitor the evidence presented to the Inquiry with a view to identifying where we may need to take regulatory action.

Looking forward we also want to take a longer term view by moving from a three year strategy to a strategy covering the next five years. Consulting on that new five year strategy to ensure that it takes into account the views of all our stakeholders will be a major priority for the coming year.

We want the BSB to be recognised as a regulator that is committed to continuous improvement and our values of *fairness, respect, independence, integrity, excellence and efficiency*.

This Business Plan describes the programmes of work we shall be taking forward in all these respects. The Plan aims to:

- discharge our regulatory functions in a way which promotes the Regulatory Objectives (including the new objective of promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime) and respond to risks to those objectives;
- carry forward reforms of the BSB's approach to regulation which will enhance BSB's capacity to regulate proactively in the public interest;
- further the three year strategy begun in 2022/23 and associated programmes of work;
- begin implementation of the current reviews of our Enforcement and Authorisations work; and
- develop a new five year strategy to the end of the decade, guided by an updated vision.

Introduction

In discharging our regulatory functions our work is governed by the regulatory objectives set out in the Legal Services Act 2007.

Our Regulatory Objectives are:

- protecting and promoting the public interest;
- supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law;
- improving access to justice;
- protecting and promoting the interests of consumers;
- promoting competition in the provision of services;
- encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession;
- increasing public understanding of citizens' legal rights and duties;
- promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles (which are acting with independence and integrity; maintaining proper standards of work; acting in the best interests of clients; complying with one's duty to the court to act with independence in the interests of justice and keeping the affairs of clients confidential); and
- promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime.

We fulfil those objectives in part by undertaking a number of key regulatory functions which support continuing high standards at the Bar. These focus on the qualification of barristers and on the maintenance of professional standards. We also seek to encourage a diverse and competitive profession in the public interest.

Our current assessment of risks and opportunities highlights the following significant challenges to the achievement of our regulatory objectives:

- Continuing pressures on public funding and a lack of understanding of the legal services market by consumers are making it harder for people to access legal services;
- Innovation and new technology offer new opportunities for the delivery of legal services, but can also raise regulatory challenges, new training needs and problems for the digitally excluded. Meanwhile the rise in remote working has weakened the support which chambers can give to pupils and junior barristers;
- While the Bar is now a more diverse and inclusive profession for those beginning their careers, career progression and the retention of barristers who are women or from minoritised communities remains a challenge. Addressing all forms of bullying, harassment and discrimination is also still a vital objective; and
- Although the total number of practising barristers continues to rise, the profession is ageing and there is continuing pressure on the numbers of barristers and pupils at the publicly funded Bar.

In the light of these challenges and risks we have set five strategic aims for the current three year strategy running from 2022/23 to 2024/25. These are set out in our 2022-25 Strategic Plan and are:

Efficiency	delivering our core regulatory operations quickly, economically and to a high standard
Standards	ensuring that barristers provide a high quality and responsive service throughout their careers
Equality	promoting equality, diversity and inclusion at the Bar and at the BSB and the profession's ability to serve diverse consumers
Access	promoting consumer understanding of legal services and choice and good value in using those services and
Independence	strengthening the BSB's independence, capability and credibility.

Many of our activities contribute to more than one regulatory objective and more than one strategic aim. For example, our work to clarify our expectations of the role which chambers should play in support of our regulatory objectives will contribute to ensuring high standards, promoting equality and facilitating consumer understanding of legal services.

The Business Plan has also been written having regard to the LSB's strategy for [Reshaping Legal Services](#), which sets out the LSB's three strategic themes of "fairer outcomes, stronger confidence and better services".

We are very conscious that we are funded by the profession and we always seek to maximise our value for money. We set our budget for 2024-25 as part of this Plan showing how we propose to use the funds available to us.

You will be able to see how we performed against this business plan in our 2024-25 Annual Report.

Regulatory Reform

The Bar Standards Board itself is evolving and improving. To be effective as a public interest regulator, we must enhance both our operational capability and our ability to identify and respond to risks before they materialise and cause harm to consumers.

We shall, therefore, continue with our existing reforms in the year ahead.

We intend to:

- ensure there is a consumer focus to everything we do by continuing to implement the model approach developed by the Legal Services Consumer Panel;
- make better use of data and intelligence so that we are able to identify and manage risks to the Regulatory Objectives earlier, be more proactive, improve our efficiency, and model good data practices;
- reform our regulatory risk framework to ensure that our intelligence is joined up and flows both up and down the organisation;
- enable a better understanding of our regulatory requirements through a Handbook which is easier to use and understand;
- clarify our expectations of chambers and to support their vital roles - particularly in maintaining standards and promoting equality and access - while encouraging chambers to share best practice; and
- encourage the exploitation of new technology by both the BSB and the Bar as an enabler of both higher standards and better access.

Strategic Aim 1 – Efficiency: improving our performance

Delivering our operational services quickly, economically and to a high standard

Our regulatory decision-making is central to what we do. In 2022-23, we received 1,732 reports on barristers and had to assess the risks they presented. The Investigation and Enforcement team launched 140 investigations, and 79 reports were referred to our Supervision team. We also dealt with 873 applications for authorisations ranging from requests for waivers from our rules to approvals to provide Bar training or pupillage. Although the quality of our decision-making is high, it remains our priority to improve its timeliness.

Over the coming year we will:

- implement the recommendations of the independent end-to-end review of our enforcement policies and processes led by Fieldfisher and improve our key IT systems which support these processes to reflect the recommendations of the review by Deloitte;
- continue our review into our decision-making processes for authorisations while concluding its first phase and implementing its recommendations;
- establish a new balanced scorecard for monitoring performance which captures the quality of our decision-making, and our timeliness, productivity, and service standards more comprehensively;
- design and launch a new Pupillage Self Service facility which will enable pupils to register and record their progress online via MyBar;
- extend online access to MyBar to entities; and
- review our regulatory fees to ensure that we are achieving full cost recovery.

Strategic Aim 2 – Standards

Ensuring that barristers provide a high quality and responsive service throughout their careers

At the BSB we are responsible for setting the standards expected of those training to be barristers and ensuring that they are met and maintained throughout their careers. We do so through a range of measures, including:

- regulating those who provide vocational training and pupillage;
- setting the curriculum for training as a barrister and managing the centralised assessments in civil and criminal litigation and professional ethics;
- assuring standards across the Bar by supervising chambers - and regulating specialised legal services businesses known as “entities” - to ensure that they are meeting our rules, and targeting regulation where we see evidence that standards need to improve;
- continuing to meet our obligations under the money laundering and financial sanctions regulations in liaison with relevant stakeholders, other regulators, HM Treasury and law enforcement agencies; and
- maintaining the BSB Handbook, which defines the core duties and rules relating to practice at the Bar, and keeping the Handbook under review.

Over the next year we will:

- Continue our programme to assure the required standards of professional competence at the Bar. This includes collecting better data about standards of professional competence at the Bar, using that data to identify competence-related risks, reviewing our approach to continuing professional development, and reviewing how we handle competence-related concerns;
- develop a consolidated set of regulatory requirements for barristers in chambers in collaboration with best practice guidance provided by the Bar Council, the Legal Practice Management Association and the Institute of Barristers’ Clerks and others in order to support their work in maintaining standards, and promoting access and equality;
- continue to develop and implement arrangements for the assessment of advocacy and negotiation skills during pupillage as the final part of our reforms to Bar training;
- develop a strategy to address the new regulatory objective of “promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime”;
- support the development of an apprenticeship route for Bar training;
- continue our evaluation of the recent reforms to Bar training.

Strategic Aim 3 – Equality

Promoting diversity and inclusion at the Bar and the BSB and the profession's ability to serve diverse customers

We want the Bar at all levels of the profession and in all specialisms to be representative of the public whom we serve. To this end our Equality Strategy sets out four main objectives:

- to clarify the BSB's expectations of the Bar concerning equality, diversity and inclusion and to highlight opportunities for change;
- to hold the Bar to account for reducing racial and other inequalities across the profession;
- to promote a culture of inclusion at the Bar and in legal services more generally; and
- to build a diverse and inclusive workforce ensuring that the BSB is itself an example of the approach we are promoting.

Our regular research into the diversity of the Bar suggests that those beginning their careers are indeed now more diverse but at the senior levels of the Bar women and those from minoritised backgrounds continue to be under-represented and earn, on average, lower fees than their white male counterparts. Our work to review our Equality Rules and, in partnership with the profession, to ensure compliance with those rules, is therefore very important.

Over the next year we will:

- consult on the recommendations arising from our review of the Equality Rules to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and clearly set out the right standards for chambers' and employers' oversight of diversity, including appropriate governance.

In particular we shall be seeking views as to whether we should replace the current Core Duty 8 ('You must not discriminate unlawfully against any person') with a new and more positive duty to 'advance equality, diversity, and inclusion'. This new duty would apply to every individual at the Bar and seeks to achieve a step change in behaviours and culture within the profession in relation to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Our hope is that it would act as a foundation on which to base the specific equality duties that apply to the management of chambers, whilst strengthening our ability to continue our ongoing work to address bullying, discrimination and harassment at the Bar.

- Our Religion and Belief, Race Equality and Disability taskforces, which are made up of barrister and lay experts in these areas, will continue their work to advise us as to how best we can promote equality and inclusion.
- We also intend to research whether the experience of using barristers differs between groups of clients with different protected characteristics.
- Within the BSB we shall also be launching our Anti-Racist Strategy and action plan.

Strategic Aim 4 – Access

Promoting consumer understanding of legal services and choice and good value for those who use those services

As a public interest regulator, we must ensure that the Bar as a profession works well for consumers now and in the future and can effectively support the administration of justice. This means that we want the future supply of barristers across all specialisms to be sufficient to sustain choice and competition. It also means that consumers must be able to exercise choice effectively and to understand and navigate the legal services which will meet their needs.

Over the coming year we will:

- focus on promoting public legal education in collaboration with our fellow regulators and with other frontline providers of help to those in legal need;
- work with other regulators to look at how the Legal Choices website can develop a Regulatory Information Service which would provide consumers with a one-stop shop for reviewing regulatory information about any regulated lawyer;
- continue to ensure that our transparency rules are being complied with and are being effective;
- take forward our examination of the role of new technology in the legal services market both in improving the efficiency and lowering the cost of barristers' services and in facilitating access for consumers to those services;
- complete our market study which is considering whether consumers' interests can be well served by online comparison or by other intermediaries offering to broker access to barristers;
- look at the needs of digitally excluded consumers by taking part in research with other front-line regulators to examine the experience of consumers with limited access to, or ability to use, digital technology; and
- examine the extent to which solicitors offer their clients a choice of barrister.

In pursuing our activities in this area we shall remain mindful of the LSB's [Statement of Policy on Empowering Consumers](#) and of the findings of the Competition and Markets Authority that competition is not working well in the legal services sector for individual consumers and small businesses.

Strategic Aim 5 – Independence: culture and capability

Strengthening the BSB's independence, capability and credibility

We want to ensure that the BSB has the culture, values and associated policies appropriate for an independent regulator and that everyone is committed to continuous improvement.

Our Senior Leadership team will continue to lead this work by ensuring that everyone demonstrates the behaviours underlying our organisational values of fairness, respect, independence, integrity, excellence and efficiency. We will recognise those who exemplify our values or deliver marked improvements in our work through reforms to our systems of recognition and reward.

We have strengthened our operational teams and reformed our reward system in response to the difficulties we experienced in recruiting and retaining key people, a problem which has made it more difficult for us to complete timely investigations of alleged professional misconduct.

Our reviews of our enforcement and authorisations processes will ensure that we are operating efficiently and will supplement the changes we made in 2023-24 with advice from a respected independent delivery expert. We are determined to ensure that we have a culture of high performance, continuous improvement and strong customer service.

Over the coming year we will also focus on:

- completing the governance reforms in our action plan, while making the case for the operational independence necessary to complement the independence of our decision-making and to promote external confidence in our independence;
- designing and launching a new organisational learning plan;
- designing and implementing a new performance management and development policy and
- continuing to promote engagement and collaboration with consumer organisations, the profession and other regulators.

Meeting our Regulatory Objectives

The tables below show how our work will help us to meet our regulatory objectives:

The Regulatory Objectives

Our planned work in 2024-25	Protecting and promoting the public interest	Supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law	Improving access to justice	Protecting and promoting the interests of consumers	Promoting competition in the provision of services	Encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession	Increasing public understanding of citizens' legal rights and duties	Promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles	Promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime
STRATEGIC AIM 1: EFFICIENCY									
1. Assessing reports of potential professional misconduct and risks to our regulatory objectives, taking enforcement or other action where necessary	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
2. Dealing with requests for authorisation, exemptions and waivers	●		●	●	●	●		●	
3. Implementing the recommendations of the independent end-to-end review of our enforcement processes	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
4. Continuing our authorisations review while concluding its first phase and implementing its recommendations	●		●	●	●	●		●	
5. Consulting on our new five year strategy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
6. Developing a balanced scorecard	●		●	●	●	●		●	
7. Pupillage Self Service facility	●		●		●	●		●	
8. New data and intelligence strategy	●		●		●	●		●	●
9. Risk Framework Review	●		●		●	●		●	●
10. Entity access to MyBar	●		●		●	●			
11. Regulatory Fees Review	●				●	●			

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STRATEGIC AIM 2: STANDARDS									
1. Regulating training providers	●		●	●		●		●	
2. Regulating the Bar training curriculum and centralised exams	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
3. Assuring standards through supervision of chambers, authorising new entities and taking targeted regulatory action where necessary	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
4. Continuing to meet our obligations under the Money Laundering Regulations and the sanctions regime	●			●		●		●	●
5. Updating the BSB Handbook and keeping it under review	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
6. Clarifying our expectations of barristers in chambers	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
7. Continuing the Assuring Competence Programme	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
8. Developing and implementing arrangements for the assessment of advocacy and negotiation skills during pupillage	●		●	●	●	●		●	
9. Supporting the development of barrister apprenticeships	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
10. Continuing our evaluation of the recent reforms to Bar training	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	

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STRATEGIC AIM 3: EQUALITY									
1. Advancing equality, diversity and inclusion at the Bar with the support of our Taskforces	●		●	●	●	●		●	
2. Implementing our review of the Equality Rules	●		●	●	●	●		●	
3. Researching differences in satisfaction between different consumer groups	●		●	●	●	●		●	
4. Implementing our Anti-Racist Strategy within the BSB	●		●	●		●			

The Regulatory Objectives

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STRATEGIC AIM 4: ACCESS									
1. Developing and delivering our public legal education strategy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2. Working with Legal Choices to consider the development of a Regulatory Information Service	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
3. Evaluating and ensuring compliance with our transparency rules	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
4. Examining the role of new technology in the legal services market and taking part in the work of LawtechUK	●		●	●	●	●	●		
5. Researching whether online Digital Comparison Tools offer benefits for the public in choosing a barrister	●		●	●	●	●	●		
6. Reviewing the role of intermediaries and our association rules	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
7. Researching the experiences of digitally excluded consumers	●		●	●	●	●	●		
8. Researching the implications for consumers of the referral relationship with solicitors	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	

The Regulatory Objectives

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STRATEGIC AIM 5: INDEPENDENCE									
1. Embedding our values and behaviours to deliver continuous improvement	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2. Design and launch a new organisational learning plan	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
3. New performance management and development plan	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
4. Promoting engagement and collaboration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Calendar of events and consultations in 2024-25

Consultations

- Consultation on the regulation of barristers in chambers (October 2023-March 2024).
- Consultation on the BSB's proposed approach to revising the definition of academic legal training and to dealing with consequential waivers and exemptions (January-April 2024).
- Equality Rules consultation (April to July 2024).
- 2025/26 Practising Certificate Fee (PCF) and budget consultation (November 2024-January 2025).
- BSB Handbook revisions consultation (Autumn 2024)
- Consultation on the BSB's strategy for 2025-2030 (Autumn 2024).

Events

- Final roundtable on the regulation of barristers in chambers in Newcastle (April 2024): During 2023-24 the BSB Chair and Director-General held two events in London as well as events in Manchester, Leeds, Swansea, Newcastle, Bristol, Birmingham and Brighton.
- Roundtable in April as part of the authorisations review consultation.
- Presentations on reporting concerns, including bullying and harassment (March 2024-December 2024). Presentations will take place in London, Liverpool, York, Nottingham, Southampton, Cardiff, and Exeter.
- BSB vocational Authorised Education and Training Organisations conference in June 2024.
- Launch of the new website which will consolidate our regulatory expectations of barristers in chambers.

Our 2024-25 budget

Our budget year runs from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and we expect our total running costs - including our share of the costs of services which we share with the Bar Council – to be £17,805k.

Setting our budget

We independently set our own budget with regard to the forecasts for both the Practising Certificate Fees, which barristers pay annually in order to be authorised to practise, and other income streams. We always seek to ensure that our expenditure delivers value for money and we carefully prioritise our work as part of our business planning.

The Practising Certificate Fee (PCF)

Our income from the PCF is not within our direct control but is forecast using the latest available market data. The PCF is collected by the General Council of the Bar (GCB) and the income is divided as follows:

- 66.6% for the BSB (£14,227k)
- 27.8% for the Bar Council for some of its functions (as permitted under s51 of the Legal Services Act) (£5,944k) and
- 5.6% is paid to the Legal Ombudsman and the Legal Services Board (£1,198k) to fund their services.¹

The PCF income which we receive for regulation accounts for 81% of our total funding. Following consultation with the profession, the PCF for 2024-25 has received approval from the Legal Services Board.

Other sources of income

Our income streams other than the PCF come from charges we make for the specific services we provide to individuals and organisations, and we use historical and market data to forecast what we expect to receive. These income streams include the fees from Bar training providers, and the Bar Transfer Test (BTT), which is taken by qualified lawyers from other jurisdictions, qualified UK solicitors and others who wish to qualify to practise at the Bar of England and Wales as a condition for being granted exemptions from our standard training requirements. We can also draw on the General Council of the Bar reserves to meet any deficit and unexpected in-year calls on resources.

¹ This share of the PCF income is split proportionately between the BSB and Bar Council; the BSB income and expenditure for these items is not included in the tables below.

Income (£k)	
Total PCF income	14,227
Entity Regulation and ABS	71
Authorisations - Waivers and Accreditation	423
Bar Transfer Test	40
Bar Training Fees	1,651
Bar Training Conference	8
Prosecution Costs	40
Public Access	1
Certificates of Good Standing	20
Total non-PCF income	2,254
Share of estimated GCB investment income	249
Total BSB Income	16,730

Expenditure (£k)			
Department	Staff costs	Non-staff costs	Total
Regulatory Operations	1,776	185	1,961
Legal and Enforcement	1,889	765	2,654
Strategy and Policy	1,449	253	1,702
Standards	1,301	1,041	2,342
Communications and Public Engagement	325	135	460
Governance and Corporate Services	1,061	816	1,877
People (HR)	454	73	527
Project Management	222	144	366
Total BSB controlled expenditure	8,477	3,412	11,889
BSB contribution to shared services			5,916
Total Expenditure²			17,805

² Capital expenditure is not included in this figure. The BSB's direct capital expenditure in 2024-25 will be £40k and our portion of shared capital projects will be £666k

Further reading

To obtain a fuller picture of who we are, what we do, and the context in which this Business Plan was produced, please visit the following pages on our website:

- This Business Plan is designed to be read in conjunction with our [2022-25 Strategic Plan](#).
- More information about our work around [equality and diversity](#) can be found here.

Contacting us

We are committed to providing a high standard of service and dealing with everyone in a way that is fair, transparent, and proportionate. We welcome your feedback on our services, particularly where the level of service has exceeded or fallen below your expectations.

Your comments and suggestions are important to us as they will help us to meet our obligations to you and to improve our performance.

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