

About the Bar Standards Board

The Bar Standards Board (BSB) is the independent regulator of barristers and other specialised legal services businesses, and their employees and managers, in England and Wales. While the General Council of the Bar (Bar Council) is the approved regulator under the Legal Services Act 2007, it has delegated its regulatory functions to the BSB.

Our vision is to regulate the Bar in the public interest by promoting high standards, equality and access to justice. We are responsible for:

- setting the standards of education and training to become a barrister;
- setting the standards of continuing professional development to ensure that barristers' skills are maintained throughout their careers;
- setting the standards of conduct for barristers;
- authorising organisations that deliver education and training (referred to as 'Authorised Education and Training Organisations');
- authorising organisations that focus on advocacy, litigation, and specialist legal advice;
- monitoring the service provided by barristers and the organisations we authorise to assure quality; and
- dealing with reports about barristers and organisations we authorise and taking action where appropriate.

We have a duty to promote the regulatory objectives when discharging our regulatory functions¹, and to act in a way that is transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent, and targeted where action is needed. The 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;
- encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession;
- increasing public understanding of the citizen's legal rights and duties;
- promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles. These are that barristers should act with independence and integrity, maintain proper standards of work, act in the best interests of their clients, comply with their duty to the court to act with independence in the interests of justice, and keep the affairs of their clients confidential; and
- promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime

We are a values-based organisation. We aim to act with:

- 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.

¹ S28 of the Legal Services Act 2007 states that in discharging its regulatory functions, an approved regulator must, so far as is reasonably practicable, act in a way which is compatible with the regulatory objectives, and which the approved regulator considers most appropriate for the purpose of meeting those objectives.

Submission

The Bar Standards Board welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this call. We are responding to two of the questions posed, which align with our role as a legal services regulator and our activities in the areas referenced.

- **Question 6. How are the legal services regulators responding to their obligation to improve access to justice under the Legal Services Act 2007?**

The Bar Standards Board is committed to improving access to justice in the Bar, as reflected in our current strategy (covering 2022-25²). Our aims are to promote consumer understanding of legal services, and to encourage a market which provides choice and good value for those seeking and using barristers' services.

The oversight regulator for the sector, the Legal Services Board, set out a policy framework for how legal services regulators should help improve outcomes for consumers in 2022, particularly around the information that is made available to them by legal service providers and regulators.

We have used this framework in developing interventions, which include requirements for barristers to provide upfront information to consumers (including through their websites) to help consumers understand whether they are the right provider for their needs, these are referred to as 'transparency rules'³.

Our post-implementation evaluations and reviews of these interventions have shown that they have positively impacted consumers. Looking forward, we are now planning further work in this area, to develop further evidence-based interventions to improve consumers' access to information and through that, justice. These will be set out in our next strategy, to begin from 2026.

We also have a programme of consumer-focused research⁴, designed to ensure we are alert to issues as they arise, including service preferences or concerns. Most recently we have identified a growing demand for consumers to have more involvement in choosing their barrister when accessing service via solicitor referral. We are now undertaking more detailed research on this with the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA).

Further to this 'demand side' work we have also acted to ensure there are sufficient numbers of qualified and competent barristers to meet present and future need.

For those seeking to become a barrister, we have reformed the training pathway that students undertake to become barristers, which has increased both the numbers and diversity of the intake⁵. Finally, alongside the traditional route to the Bar, we have been working with partners to develop an apprenticeship route, to provide more opportunities for those wishing to become barristers⁶.

For barristers already practicing, we have introduced reforms to improve the experience of those using their services. We have created additional requirements for those working in coroners' courts and youth courts, to ensure they are suitably equipped to provide services tailored to the needs of those who find themselves in those often-stressful environments^{7,8}.

² See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/about-us/how-we-regulate/our-strategic-plan-for-2022-25.html>

³ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/Transparency-Standards-Guidance-1-Introduction.pdf>

⁴ Our most recent published report is available at: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/static/85c9559f-e76c-4033-8eea3244b7e55810/Public-Awareness-and-Confidence-Report-2025.pdf>

⁵ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/resources/press-releases/three-new-reports-from-the-bsb-show-the-impact-of-bar-training-reforms.html>

⁶ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/training-qualification/barrister-apprenticeships.html>

⁷ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/for-barristers/resources-for-the-bar/resources-for-practising-in-the-coroners-courts.html>

⁸ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/for-barristers/resources-for-the-bar/youthproceedings.html>

- **Question 9. What role is there for digital innovation and data collection in supporting access to justice?**

We believe that digital innovation, when effectively regulated, can help advance our regulatory objectives and support access to justice. Our current strategy identified innovation as a lever for improving access to and quality of barristers' services, and we have a policy team actively working in this space.

We published our first major research study on barristers' adoption and use of technology and innovations this year⁹. It found significant potential for innovation at the Bar and identified existing pockets of innovation where barristers have leveraged technology to enhance efficiency, improve working processes, and strengthen relationships with clients, law firms, and the courts. However, the Bar's structure (the majority of barristers are self-employed) presents fundamental barriers to technology adoption, especially in comparison with other legal professions.

We have used the report's publication as a spur to further work, including the establishment of a Joint Working Group with the Bar Council, as the Bar's main representative body, to help improve uptake and facilitate competent and effective use of new technologies and innovations.

One key way we see digital innovation helping the Bar is to offer new service models, that will also advance our regulatory objectives to promote market competition and an effective legal profession. We are currently conducting market analyses on two modes of innovative service provision. The first is the brokering of barristers' services by unregulated third parties. The second is on the provision of legal services in a way that allows some tasks to be undertaken by clients or third parties, a process also known as 'unbundling'. These analyses will help us better understand how these markets are developing and to design regulatory policy tools that can balance supporting innovation in service design while protecting consumers and the public.

We are also mindful of the risks presented by digital innovation, such as the now well-known phenomena of false information, including fabricated case citations, appearing in legal documents¹⁰, by both regulated professionals and lay litigants in person. These examples highlight the need for barristers to be competent in using and understanding the impacts of new technologies and of the importance of ensuring that professional conduct standards are adhered to. As part of our response to these issues we are developing resources for barristers to support their ongoing learning and development (also known as 'Continuing Professional Development' or CPD) to ensure they are able to meet our conduct standards when using technology.

Finally, digital innovation and data collection are also essential for effective regulation, in turn enabling us as an organisation to better deliver our regulatory objectives. Last year, we published our first Data and Intelligence Strategy¹¹, covering the three-year period 2024-2027. The projects we are conducting under this strategy will enable us to use the data we collect to operate more efficiently, identify trends and risks in the barrister market, make more effective decisions, and improve our interactions with the Bar and other external stakeholders, helping us to meet our access to justice objectives, and ensure consumers have the information they need to make informed decisions and enabling us to make evidence-based regulatory decisions.

As noted in the response to question 6, we are working to ensure more information is available for end users of barristers' services, to enable them to make informed decisions about resolving legal matters. As part of that work, we will be requiring barristers and BSB entities to collect information about their handling of complaints and submit it to the BSB on a periodic basis. We will then use this information to inform our regulatory activities, for example providing new information or guidance for the Bar or the public where we find issues of common concern around service

⁹ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/resources/press-releases/the-bar-standards-board-publishes-technology-and-innovation-at-the-bar-research.html>

¹⁰ See: <https://naturalandartificiallaw.com/ai-hallucination-cases-tracker/>

¹¹ See: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/about-us/how-we-regulate/data-and-intelligence-strategy-2024-2027.html>

delivery and how complaints are handled or resolved. This is in line with requirements placed on all the legal services regulators by the Legal Services Board¹².

We are also working to enhance the availability of information we make available, including on our Barristers' Register, to help end-users select a barrister. This new public data fits within our Data & Intelligence Strategy commitment to sharing data in ways that promote innovation within the sector and addresses opportunities identified in our pilot study into digital comparison services. By making this data available, we also contribute to Legal Services Board initiatives to facilitate the use of such tools across the legal services sector and make relevant information available on an open data basis¹³. To that end we have already enhanced our Register to make additional information available for end users. Further proposals, mostly with a focus on digital delivery, are currently being developed.

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¹² See: <https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/news/lsb-bolsters-requirements-on-how-lawyers-handle-consumer-complaints>

¹³ See: [LSB statement of policy on empowering consumers](#)