




BAR
STANDARDS
BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

Business Plan 2025-2026



The Bar Standards Board regulates barristers and specialised legal services businesses in England and Wales in the public interest. In discharging our regulatory functions, 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 justice and keeping the affairs of clients confidential); and
- promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime.

In common with the other legal services regulators, we have an oversight regulator, the Legal Services Board (LSB). We perform our role independently, but we share common statutory objectives, and we perform our role with regard to rules and guidance set by the LSB. Our plans take into account the LSB strategy for *Reshaping Legal Services* under the three strategic themes of 'fairer outcomes, stronger confidence and better services'.

- **Fairer outcomes:**

- Lowering unmet legal need across large parts of society
- Achieving fairer outcomes for people experiencing greater disadvantage
- Dismantling barriers to a diverse and inclusive profession at all levels

- **Stronger confidence:**

- Ensuring high quality legal services and strong professional ethics
- Closing gaps in consumer protection
- Reforming the justice system and redrawing the regulatory landscape

- **Better services:**

- Empowering consumers to obtain high quality and affordable services
- Fostering innovation that designs services around consumer needs
- Supporting responsible use of technology that commands public trust

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.

Foreword by Mark Neale

Director General, The Bar Standards Board




The Bar Standards Board regulates the Bar in the public interest by promoting high standards, equality and access to justice.

This business plan, and accompanying budget, describes our business activity over the coming year and aims to: discharge our regulatory functions in a way which promotes the Regulatory Objectives and respond to the risks to those objectives; carry forward reforms of the Bar Standards Boards approach to regulation which will enhance our capacity to regulate proactively in the public interest; continue to modernise the delivery of our regulatory operations to improve efficiency with no loss of quality; further the plans for our five-year strategy which will guide our work for 2026-31.

The year ahead will be pivotal for the Bar Standards Board. It comes at a time of significant change, which has focused on enhancing performance and the timeliness of our operations. We are driving an ambitious reform programme to support us in being more proactive and consumer focused, in modernising our delivery, and in increasing the capability of our people. This business plan sets out what we intend to deliver 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 Bar Standards Board.

Against this backdrop we have adopted the following four priorities for our year ahead:

- **Priority One: The Bar Standards Board delivering in the public interest** – maintaining standards through authorisations, supervision and enforcement and hitting our existing operational targets as set out in the balanced scorecard;
- **Priority Two: Reforming the Bar Standards Board** – continuous change and improvement through our ambitious Reform Programme which will have a transformative impact on our business and the services we provide;
- **Priority Three: Strategic issues and developments** – focusing on completing key programmes of work, including the revision of the Equality Rules; and
- **Priority Four: Our Future Strategy** – laying the consultative, research and analytical groundwork for our next strategy. We are currently inviting feedback from our stakeholders on the proposals for our five-year strategy which will guide our work for 2026-31.



The context in which we exercise our regulatory functions is changing fast. Though the barrister profession has many strengths, there are continuing concerns about the culture of the profession, demonstrated particularly in allegations of bullying and harassment.

As the Post Office Inquiry has highlighted, there are questions about whether all barristers are always meeting high ethical standards. We shall not only pursue enforcement action against individual barristers whose conduct contributed to this miscarriage of justice but also address systemic issues through our continuing work to revise our *Code of Conduct*.


The professional and ethical standards of individual barristers will remain central to the public interest and to what we do. This is why we have created a Regulatory Standards Department to oversee all aspects of how barristers acquire, demonstrate, apply and update their professional skills from qualification to retirement. Especially now, those standards do not stand still. Consumer expectations, new technologies, new ethical challenges will re-shape what the public expects of its barristers. As regulator, we must ensure that our standards keep pace and lead the way.

We must ensure that barristers, and the legal services market in which they operate, works effectively for consumers and the wider public. The current economic outlook remains challenging with affordability issues for consumers and challenges of access to justice experienced by many. We must see to it that, in delivering our regulatory functions, we consider the needs of those in vulnerable circumstances. Technology, especially artificial intelligence, offers an opportunity to improve access to legal services and to reduce their cost.

In the year ahead, consistent with our Regulatory Objectives, we shall continue to use regulation to advance equality, diversity and inclusion. Following the consultation last year on the *Equality Rules*, we received a huge number of responses, and we will work constructively with the profession to make progress in areas like this where we have shared objectives.

Underpinning all this, we shall continue in the year ahead to focus on achieving operational excellence. We have made good progress and improved our productivity in the last year without impacting the high quality of our decision-making, but we know we can do more to improve timeliness for those that use our services. This is key to both public protection and to public confidence in regulation.

Alongside providing responsive regulatory services now, we shall also reform for the future. Our Reform Programme focuses on how we deploy to best effect in the public interest all the regulatory interventions in our toolbox: our research, our analysis, our supervision, our gatekeeping and our enforcement.



The Reform Programme aims, first, to ensure that our intelligence, analysis and research are of the highest quality so that the Bar Standards Board can look across the horizon to identify risks to the public interest before they manifest. Regulators are not a guarantee that nothing will ever go wrong with a regulated person, entity or business. But the public does rightly expect us to be alert in their interest. That is why we are reforming our Risk Framework and upgrading our ability to collect, analyse and use intelligence.

We shall also modernise the delivery of our regulatory operations. Following the recommendations of our independent review of enforcement, the work to design a new enforcement process is well underway and by the end of 2026, processes, regulations and IT systems will all be working together to enable faster, more efficient enforcement, with no loss of quality. Reform is also about the values and culture of the Bar Standards Board. We are building here on strong foundations, and we have a committed and highly skilled workforce. Our challenge in the year ahead is to boost our collaborative, inclusive and agile environment.

To support these changes, we have reorganised the Bar Standards Board and recruited to the senior leadership team. I want to thank all colleagues as we continue to embed changes and to recognise that for some this has been an uncertain period. Our diverse staff have been critical to balancing our operational requirements and the changes that we have needed to make to reform for the future. This has taken an enormous amount of effort and resource and, although we are not quite there yet, we are making good progress.

The Bar Standards Board has made great strides as an effective regulator delivering in the public interest over the last three years of our existing strategy. As we transition this year and plan for the next five years we want to be recognised as a regulator that is committed to continuous improvement and to prioritise an effective competitive market for barristers' services, with equal opportunity and a competent and ethical profession.



Achievements against the 2022-25 Strategy

We are now three years on from the adoption of our current strategy, with its focus on: *efficiency, standards, equality, access* and independence. Since 2022, we have improved the delivery of our services. Our work on standards has ensured that barristers provide a high quality and responsive service throughout their careers. The work on equality has promoted diversity and inclusion at the Bar and at the Bar Standards Board. Through our work on access, we have enhanced our understanding of consumers' needs and experiences in using barristers' services. The Bar Standards Board has strengthened its independence.

In support of all our priorities, we have worked with the profession to clarify the role which chambers can play in overseeing standards, equality and access and published new webpages consolidating regulations bearing on barristers' practice management responsibilities and linking to guidance on professional sites.

Strategic Aim 1: Efficiency

Our operational performance – particularly the timeliness of our enforcement work - has steadily improved without sacrificing the high quality of decision-making. We recognise nevertheless that we still have more to do and some challenges to overcome in reaching our targets consistently across all operational areas. Achievements include:

- developing a balanced scorecard to be transparent and accountable for our performance by measuring the quality of our decisions, timeliness, productivity and service responsiveness;
- eliminating a backlog of investigations which built up in the wake of a serious cyber-attack in Spring 2022;
- steadily improving the timeliness of our enforcement work;
- revising our rules governing interim suspensions better to protect the public;
- commissioning an independent review of the efficiency of our enforcement process which we are now implementing; and
- maintaining throughout the high quality of our decision-making which is independently audited by our Independent Reviewers.

Strategic Aim 2: Standards

Our work on standards has focused both on our role as gatekeeper and on our responsibility to ensure that the profession maintain standards throughout a working career. We have:

- progressed our reforms of Bar training, balancing the need to maintain standards whilst promoting access: the diversity of students undertaking Bar training and pupillage has continued to rise;
- designed and implemented an advocacy training framework for pupillage;
- agreed the framework for delivery of an apprenticeship route to the Bar;
- taken regulatory action on reports to the BSB about standards of pupillage and vocational training;
- conducted thematic reviews and tested compliance with the BSB Handbook in areas such as transparency rules;
- reviewed the standards of Bar training providers' admissions policies and procedures and how course providers support students to achieve the best outcomes they are capable of;
- reauthorised pupillage providers against the authorisation framework to ensure providers are meeting the four pillars of the framework – high standards, flexibility, accessibility and affordability;
- continued to deliver our central examinations in criminal and civil litigation as an essential guarantor of standards in Bar training and successfully introduced a mandatory examination of ethics in pupillage;
- introduced a new annual Bar Training Report – with three published to date - to provide stakeholders with an overview of our work in this area;
- commenced a programme of work to ensure our regulatory framework to assure barristers' continuing competence is fit for purpose;
- worked with profession to raise awareness of their obligations under the financial sanctions regime.

Strategic Aim 3: Equality

The Bar has become steadily more diverse over the last decade, but challenges remain particularly to promote equality of opportunity in advancing careers and in challenging bullying and harassment. To meet these challenges, the Bar Standards Board has:

- led the way in highlighting with our research and analysis the continuing challenges of assuring equal opportunity and combatting bullying & harassment at the Bar;
- brought forward proposals to ensure that our *Equality Rules* promote equality of opportunity at the Bar, which we are now reviewing in the light of consultation responses;
- published our Annual Diversity at the Bar report which shows improvements and areas that still need further focus;
- published a report on *Addressing Bullying and Harassment at the Bar* and followed this up with workshops in all the Circuits to explain how we, as the regulator, take forward enforcement action in relation to reports about bullying and harassment;
- collaborated closely with the Harman review on bullying and harassment at the Bar;
- built a diverse and inclusive workforce – a huge focus on this over the three years included launching our anti-racist strategy.

Strategic Aim 4: Access

Our work on access aims to ensure that consumers are empowered to make informed choices when engaging the services of barristers, whether directly or, more usually, through referral by another legal professional. To that end, we have:

- developed an extensive programme of public legal education, producing materials directly and in partnership with trusted partners such as *Law for Life*, *Citizens' Advice*, *Support through Court* and *Refugee Action*;
- renewed support for the *Legal Choices* website;
- initiated research, with the assistance of the SRA, to enhance our understanding of the referral relationship and its role in supporting choice;
- undertaken work with the Bar and other key stakeholders to understand the current use of innovative technology at the Bar and the key drivers and barriers to its adoption, which we will publish in early 2025-26;
- undertaken a market study of on-line comparison (known as digital comparison tools) serving the Bar to gauge consumer and Bar usage and attitudes towards these services. We shall publish this report in the first half of 2025;
- kept under review the Bar's compliance with our current transparency rules, including those relating to price transparency;
- worked in collaboration with CILEx Regulation and the ICAEW to progress work in respect of digitally excluded consumers – to finish in the coming year;
- given a stronger consumer focus to our regulation through our research and surveys.

Strategic Aim 5: Independence

Three years on, the Bar Standards Board is more self-sufficient and more effective in exercising our regulatory functions. We have stood up for the independence of our decision-making and underpinned that with much greater operational autonomy over our culture, values, pay and people policies. During the last three years we have:

- built and optimised our first independent People function, developed policies and strategies required of a successful regulator;
- implemented a new Reward and Recognition Strategy to align with the regulatory market and our own values, enabling us to attract and retain people with the right skills and of the right calibre;
- implemented a Learning and Development Strategy that delivers annual learning plans, an e-learning platform, broad spectrum of learning interventions and knowledge sharing;
- developed and implemented our own anti-racist strategy; and
- improved access for disabled people to our offices.

Our People & Culture

Everything we have achieved during the last three years is a testament to our colleagues, past and present, who have dedicated their professionalism to the Bar Standards Board. During this strategic period, we have built market leading engagement scores alongside our business achievements.

Four Key Themes for Our Year Ahead

The year ahead – 2025 - 26 - will be a bridge from our current strategy to a new five-year strategy on which we are currently consulting. Four themes will guide our work over the course of the next year.

Theme 1: Delivering in the public interest

Our priority is consistently to deliver our targets to ensure that our timeliness, service and productivity targets are reached, whilst not compromising our already outstanding record in achieving our quality targets consistently. In support of our continuing enforcement, authorisations and supervision activity we shall:

- take forward enforcement action against barristers for misconduct arising from the Post Office scandal and address the wider implications in our continuing work on the *Code of Conduct* and our future strategy;
- complete the re-design of our end-to-end enforcement process to implement the recommendations of the independent review which reported in April 2024;
- consult on changes to our Enforcement Regulations to support the new process and enable efficiency and timeliness gains;
- move forward with the re-engineering of our supporting IT systems;
- implement a strategy for best-in-class knowledge management to underpin consistent and high quality regulatory decision-making across the Bar Standards Board;
- review our existing balanced scorecard of operational measures and, as part of the development of a new strategy, extend that scorecard to capture regulatory impacts and people engagement;
- continue to process high numbers of applications from transferring lawyers and streamline our approach to handling these applications in future;
- sustain our work to ensure that the Bar is alert to the risks of money laundering and has in place the necessary controls to identify and report on suspicious activity;
- commence our regulatory review to renew agreements the Bar Training providers have with us;
- complete the recruitment into the new organisational structure launched in December 2024 and build the performance levels of the new departments;

- implement the recommendations from our review of our regulatory framework for assuring barristers' continuing competence where we identified gaps;
- refine our Continuing Professional Development approach, learning from the evaluation of the new materials launched in 2024-25.

Theme 2: Reforming the BSB in the public interest

We enter the new financial year with a fully mobilised Reform Programme to deliver the transformative changes needed for the Bar Standards Board to fulfil its public interest objectives. The thirteen projects that form the Reform Programme are now resourced to achieve the three principal reform objectives:

- proactive, consumer-focused regulation anchored on a much deeper, intelligence-based understanding of the market we regulate;
- modernised delivery of our authorisation, enforcement and supervision activity for operational excellence; and
- engaged, agile and committed people in a newly re-organised structure, that have the skills and capacity to achieve our business goals.

Programmes captured under reform to complete:

- conclusion of the people and values aspect of the reform programme with the revised organisational structure fully resourced and the complementary culture and values project progressed to completion.
- completion of two critical elements of the modernising delivery aspect of the programme with our end-to-end processes refreshed and deployed supplemented by enhanced knowledge management capabilities to drive efficiency into the process.
- implementation of our Risk Framework Review which will strengthen our ability to understand and respond to risks to the public.

Theme 3: Strategic Issues & Developments

We have made significant strides in the five priorities we adopted as part of our current strategy. That progress will now enable us to close a number of programmes of work and so to free up resources to focus on operational delivery and on reform.

The strategic themes of efficiency, standards, equality, access and independence will, however, remain central as we consult on and develop a new strategy. There are moreover important projects begun over the last three years which we intend to complete or to continue in 2025 - 26. We shall:

- take forward in dialogue with the profession and other stakeholders our important work to ensure that our *Equality Rules* play their part in advancing our shared objective to promote equality of opportunity at the Bar;
- consult on proposals to make more of our regulatory data available to consumers and other interested parties, with a particular focus on improving the provision of “quality indicators”. We will also consider our future transparency expectations of the Bar
- consult on proposals to improve the handling by barristers and their chambers of “first tier” complaints;
- continue our work to improve the relevance, intelligibility and navigability of our *Code of Conduct*;
- complete our Assuring Standards Programme by implementing our Assuring Standards Framework and delivering our Competence Monitoring Framework, using the data and insights it generates to support targeted regulation;
- publish resources on the adoption of technology, such as AI to improve access to barristers’ services and to improve the efficiency and cut the cost of those services. We shall also work with the profession to support barristers and chambers in their understanding of risk management as they adopt technologies, including AI with the potential to enhance the efficiency of their services and promote the growth of the profession;
- ensure that the Bar has the guidance that it needs to be vigilant in detecting and so preventing economic crime in furtherance of the new Regulatory Objective which the front-line legal regulators must promote in exercising their regulatory functions.

Theme 4: Groundwork for 2026-31 Strategy

In 2026, the BSB will launch a new five-year strategy, a comprehensive plan for the regulation of the barrister profession into the 2030s. The strategy will detail the BSB's priorities for the years ahead, offering a clear roadmap of how we plan to deliver our functions to support our strategy. We believe a strong strategy is forward-looking, based on evidence, and built on collaboration.

This year ahead will be crucial in developing this strategy. We shall introduce a refreshed vision, purpose and values to ensure our understanding of our goals, and how we should be seeking to meet them, is as strong as possible. We will use this as a basis to draft the five-year strategy, informed by our engagement with our stakeholders. We have already issued a call for feedback on our strategic approach, including on areas such as our proposed new vision and purpose, our emerging priorities and our performance. We shall carefully review this feedback, alongside other insights, including those gained from dedicated research on the consumer experience of using barristers' services and other evidence about the market for those services. This collaboration will inform a draft strategy, which we will share with stakeholders for formal consultation in the autumn, ahead of planned publication in early 2026.

Our 2025 - 26 Budget

Our budget year runs from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, and we expect our total running costs – including our share of the costs of services which we share with the Bar Council to be £21.141m.

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:

- 70.5% for the BSB (£17.476k)
- 24.8% for the Bar Council for some of its functions (as permitted under s51 of the Legal Services Act) (£6.140k) and
- 4.7% is paid to the Legal Ombudsman and the Legal Services Board (£1.142m) to fund their services.

The PCF income which we receive for regulation accounts for 84% of our total funding. Following consultation with the profession, the PCF for 2025-26 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 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.

Income (£k)	
Total PCF income	17,476,00
Entity Regulation and ABS	143,000
Fees and Charges	2,855,000
Share of estimated GCB investment income	331,000
Total BSB Income	20,805,000

Expenditure (£k)			
Department	Staff costs	Non-staff costs	Total
Policy, Strategy and Insight	1,557,280	245,050	1,802,330
Regulatory Standards	2,712,708	1,150,014	3,862,722
Regulatory Enforcement	2,646,470	590,841	3,237,311
Legal & Information Management	1,051,822	438,402	1,490,224
People and Culture	472,327	103,002	575,329
Planning, Programmes and Engagement	768,094	248,190	1,016,284
DG's Office & Governance	962,128	630,259	1,592,387
Reform Programme	821,599	190,000	14,588,135
Total BSB controlled expenditure	10,992,387	3,595,748	6,553,000
BSB contribution to shared services			5,916
Total Expenditure			21,141,135

Key Dates

Public Consultations

April 2025 – initial call for evidence to support development of 2026-31 Strategy closes (opened in February 2025)

May 2025 – consultation on the handling of First Tier Complaints (LSB Directive) opens – closes in July 2025

July 2025 – first of two consultations on proposed changes to our Enforcement Regulations – closes September 2025

September 2025 – public consultation on the BSB draft 2026-31 draft Strategy – closes December 2025

September 2025 – consultation on “Empowering Consumers” next steps – closes December 2025

Autumn engagement on consultations and activities planned with the Circuits of England and Wales.

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.

Contact us

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www.linkedin.com/company/the-bar-standards-board

<https://www.youtube.com/@TheBarStandardsBoard>

<https://bsky.app/profile/barstandardsboard.bsky.social>

In addition, if you would like this report in an alternative format, please contact the BSB Communications Team via communications@barstandardsboard.org.uk