



The Law Society of England and Wales Jurisdiction Report

This report provides a summary of key developments in the work and campaigning priorities of the Law Society of England and Wales, as set out below:

- 1) International Practice of Law
- 2) International Rule of Law and Human Rights
- 3) Court Reform and Access to Justice
- 4) Artificial Intelligence and Legal Technology
- 5) Regulation and Anti-Money Laundering
- 6) In-House Member Offer
- 7) Climate Change and Ethical Obligations
- 8) Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE)

1. International Practice of Law

London is home to legal professionals from 100 jurisdictions and to 200 foreign law firms. They are an integral and valued part of our legal sector. The Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW) is committed to ensuring that our jurisdiction remains open to all foreign lawyers. Lawyers from abroad are able to establish practices and firms in England and Wales, partner with solicitors, practise their home country law, international law, EU law, and English and Welsh law outside a small number of reserved activities.

Additionally, lawyers from abroad who wish to requalify in England and Wales can now sit the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) – the same exams taken by solicitors who qualify domestically. This replaced the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS) from 1 September 2021 and provides a route for international lawyers looking to requalify, bringing England and Wales in line with most other jurisdictions across the world.

2. International Rule of Law and Human Rights

In 2025, LSEW has been active in supporting lawyers at risk from Belarus, the Philippines, China and the Hong Kong SAR, Guatemala, Türkiye, the USA, and Zimbabwe.

One of the troubling key trends globally shows that lawyers are increasingly being silenced when exercising their right to freedom of expression. A thematic report based on LSEW research was published on 15 January 2026, highlighting how restrictions on lawyers' freedom of expression affect far more than the individuals targeted – they ripple throughout the entire profession and society. We are calling for governments worldwide to:

- Review laws to ensure they align with international standards on freedom of expression

- Repeal or reform vague or overly broad provisions that are open to abuse
- Immediately release lawyers detained for exercising their right to express their views
- Take strong, coordinated international action to condemn attacks on lawyers and safeguard their ability to perform their duties without interference

In August 2025, LSEW surveyed members on the risks and threats they have experienced in their day-to-day working lives. The [results](#) show that the level of threats to solicitors has significantly increased and extend across a wide range of practice areas, impacting personal safety, mental health and wellbeing, and the likelihood of them staying in the profession.

The UK was one of the first countries to sign the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer in May 2025 and LSEW played a significant role in developing the Convention. We are pressing the UK Government to be one of the first countries to ratify the Convention, so that it can come into force.

Domestically, LSEW successfully campaigned for the [Safety of Rwanda \(Asylum and Immigration Act\) 2024](#) to be repealed. We argued that legislating to overturn a finding by UK courts that Rwanda was an unsafe country would set a dangerous precedent. This has since been replaced by the [Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025](#).

LSEW has also recently partnered with the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law on a project examining the relationship between the rule of law and economic prosperity, which is ongoing throughout 2026.

3. Court Reform and Access to Justice

LSEW has successfully campaigned for fee increases for those working in criminal legal aid, with the fee rise being announced by the UK Government in December 2025. There are still further steps to be taken, and we will continue to call for improvements to the system to make criminal legal aid viable and sustainable.

There have also been positive steps towards fee increases for solicitors working in housing and immigration legal aid. We are asking the UK Government to commit to maintaining rates in real terms, as well as further investing in all areas of civil legal aid.

Legal aid provision was disrupted by a cyber-attack on the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) which administers legal aid applications and payments to providers. This led to a shut-down of LAA systems in May 2025 when the full extent of the attack, which resulted in the theft of firms' and client data was discovered. LSEW liaised closely with the LAA to ensure implementation of emergency contingency arrangements to enable legal aid provision to continue. Most systems were eventually restored in December, but legal aid providers are counting the cost of the extra administrative burden imposed by the emergency work-arounds, and cash flow has been impacted. The Government has now acknowledged that the vulnerabilities of the ageing digital systems were known. It is likely that some providers will seek compensation for the losses they incurred.

The UK Government have announced proposals to remove jury trials in some criminal cases and introducing a new court to hear criminal trials, in an attempt to reduce the backlog of cases in the Crown Court. LSEW are concerned that these measures will not reduce the backlog of cases

- the true issues lie in the quality of courts infrastructure and the number of judges, magistrates, court staff and lawyers able to deliver on cases. Almost two-thirds of respondents to a [LSEW survey](#) experienced delays in cases being heard due to the state of the courts, all of which add to the backlog of 361,027 cases in the magistrates' court and 78,329 cases in the Crown Court.

4. Artificial Intelligence and Legal Technology

LSEW is remaining up to date with developments in AI and other emerging technologies and their impact on the legal sector. The UK Government published its AI Action Plan for Justice in July 2025, which LSEW welcomed. This Plan highlights the opportunities that AI offers to strengthen the legal system, and acknowledges the role it has to play in justice and the legal sector.

The UK Government published its 10-Year Industrial Strategy in 2025, which has a strong focus on the legal sector and a commitment to the development of legal technology, including many things that LSEW asked for in its submission to Government on the Strategy:

- Enhancing the attractiveness of the jurisdiction by exploring the next steps for civil justice digitisation and continued support for digital tools to support early and online dispute resolution.
- Support LawtechUK for a further year for £1.5m, focusing on SME adoption of LawTech.
- Support with staff training and reskilling, in digital skills and cybersecurity.
- Support for 5,500 more SMEs to adopt new technology through the Made Smarter programme while centralising government support in one place through the Business Growth Service.

LSEW also continues to contribute towards AI, technology and justice initiatives, including on using AI for preparing court documents with the Civil Justice Council and giving evidence to the parliamentary enquiry on interpretation and translation services in courts.

5. Regulation and Anti-Money Laundering

The UK Government announced a significant shake-up of the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) supervisory regime in the UK in 2025. The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) will soon be the Single Professional Services Supervisor (SPSS), taking on the role of supervising and regulating AML/CTF for legal services providers - a role that was previously undertaken by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA).

LSEW is actively opposing this change, which despite its aims, poses great operational and strategic risks for the legal profession without offering proven benefits. We are also concerned about the speed in which these reforms are being implemented, as these changes will fundamentally reshape AML/CTF oversight across all sectors. LSEW are continuing to work with Government to shape these proposals and ensure that members are up to date on changes that impact them.

6. In-House Member Offer

Our in-house network provides support and advice on key issues facing all in-house lawyers, working in the corporate and public sectors, not-for-profit organisations and charities. We provide daily newsletters for in-house lawyers, and host events and seminars for in-house solicitors, including a successful In-House Conference in July 2025, which focused on ethical obligations for in-house members.

Our in-house ethics framework was also launched to complement this, focusing on the unique role of the in-house solicitor, strengthening the solicitor's position within organisations, developing the skills and confidence as well as signposting sources of advice and support.

While not solely for in-house solicitors, LSEW also launched a 'Get Involved' programme designed to provide members with flexible ways to contribute their time above and beyond sitting on Council and Committees, aiming to give members more opportunities to participate in our work.

7. Climate Change and Ethical Obligations

Following LSEW's climate change guidance for solicitors, published in April 2023, supplementary pieces of guidance to support consideration of climate risks and opportunities in different practice areas has been published. This includes a climate risk and property practice note, published in 2025, examining property lawyers' duties in being aware and communicating relevant climate-related risks to their clients.

2025 also saw the launch of the second iteration of LSEW's Ethical Practice Framework, adding a whistleblowing guide and policy model template for in-house solicitors. In 2026 we will be exploring how our Ethics Framework can work for solicitors in private practice.

8. Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE)

The roll out of the SQE, which started in September 2021, has continued. The previous routes into the profession will be closing in the coming year for most entrants as the transitional arrangements run out. There continues to be negative feedback from the profession about the SQE, particularly around the format of the assessment for SQE1, which are multiple choice papers, the lack of overt professional ethics taught and assessed and a lack of good information about the assessments including insufficient past papers.

The LSEW is undertaking a programme of work to bring about necessary changes from the SRA, to provide better information, backed up by clear data, and to gather further information from the profession and aspiring solicitors to inform our engagement with the SRA seeking to make the SQE as successful as possible.