England and Wales is the second largest market for legal services in the world, recognised and respected the world over – thanks to the stability and quality of our courts, our laws and legal professionals.

According to recent data, legal services:

* contribute approximately [£60 billion](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/contribution-of-the-uk-legal-services-sector-to-the-uk-economy-report) (gross added valued) to the UK economy per year (including around £34 billion from law firms/sole practitioners and around £26 billion from in-house legal teams)
* generate approximately [£7.25 billion in exports](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/datasets/3tradeinservicesthepinkbook2016) per year

English law is used around the world by clients seeking a neutral law to govern their international commercial contracts.

It’s considered the [industry standard](https://legaluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-value-of-English-law-to-the-UK-economy.pdf) in many sectors, including maritime, insurance and financial services.

[Many of the world’s largest law firms](https://www.thecityuk.com/media/5url4ni1/legal-excellence-internationally-renowned-uk-legal-services-2022.pdf) are based in England and Wales, and London boasts world-class facilities for commercial litigation and arbitration.

[Read our International Data Insights report 2024](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/international-data-insights-2024) for more information on the widespread use of English law.

**Strengths of English law**

Predictable outcomes and a robustly independent judiciary give clients the confidence to resolve their disputes in England and Wales.

**Tested and proven to work**

English law facilitates a huge amount of commercial activity across many sectors as the governing law of choice for international transactions. It has been tested and proven to work.

According to groundbreaking [research by Oxera for LegalUK](https://legaluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-value-of-English-law-to-the-UK-economy.pdf), English law likely governs at least:

* £250 billion of global mergers and acquisitions per year
* £80 billion of annual premiums on the London insurance market – the world’s largest insurance/reinsurance hub
* 80% of global maritime deals from ship construction and leasing to shipping contracts
* 40% of global corporate arbitrations
* $11.6 trillion of global metals trading in 2020
* $92.4 billion of global oils and fats trading – 85% of the global market
* $98.2 billion of global grain trade – 80% of the global market
* €661.5 trillion of global over-the-counter derivatives trading in 2018

**Predictable**

English law is predictable due to past precedent and our judiciary's non-interventionist approach.

Parties can freely choose their contractual rights and obligations, as English law respects the principle of freedom of contract and party autonomy.

Commercially oriented judges assess disputes based on the terms of the written contract between the parties and [do not enforce a general duty of good faith](https://www.latham.london/2022/11/meaning-of-good-faith-under-english-law-latest-clarification/) unlike judges in many other jurisdictions.

Clients can rely on established case law to forecast the most likely outcome of their dispute in many sectors, such as oil and gas, and financial services.

For example, between 2008 and 2018 there have been over 100 decisions in English courts on the interpretation of International Swaps and Derivatives Association (ISDA) master agreements, allowing clients to confidently predict how courts will apply the terms of their ISDA agreements.

**Flexible**

Our system of precedent means that English law naturally evolves to support new areas of commercial activity, while other jurisdictions need legislation for any change in the law.

An example is the rapid evolution of English law on digital assets, outlined in a [recent report by the Law Commission](https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/digital-assets/).

**Quality of litigation in England and Wales**

**Our judges**

English High Court judges have an international reputation for their quality, independence and professionalism.

Judges are robustly [independent, impartial and committed to upholding the rule of law](https://www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/our-justice-system/three-is/).

In England and Wales, judges are highly qualified and skilled specialists with a strong commercial understanding of the law, developed over years, if not decades, working in the legal profession as a solicitor or barrister.

You need at least five years of post-qualification experience to become a judge, and the [Judicial Appointments Commission](https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/eligibility-for-llegally-qualified-candidates/) carries out a rigorous selection process.

Commercial court judges are well-versed in disputes involving international clients, given the high volume of cases involving parties from other jurisdictions; [in the first half of 2022](https://www.thecityuk.com/media/5url4ni1/legal-excellence-internationally-renowned-uk-legal-services-2022.pdf), more than 70% of cases in the Commercial Court were international in nature.

**Our commercial court**

The London Commercial Court (LCC) is the leading centre for international parties seeking a trustworthy and reliable forum to resolve their disputes.

The LCC has a strong track record of resolving disputes quickly and efficiently.

Almost half (46%) of contested trials across the LCC were concluded within just four working days between October 2022 and September 2023, according to the [2024 Commercial Court report](https://www.judiciary.uk/guidance-and-resources/commercial-court-annual-report-2022-2023-published/).

64% of parties in LCC cases between April 2023 and March 2024 came from jurisdictions outside of the UK, according to [Portland’s 2024 report](https://portland-communications.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Portland-Commercial-Courts-Report-2024-.pdf).

Under the Hague Choice of Court Convention (2005), UK judgments can be recognised and enforced in the EU (plus Denmark, Mexico and Singapore), as long as parties have an exclusive jurisdiction clause stating that they want their disputes to be resolved in the UK.

[Read more on choice of court agreements](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/brexit/choice-of-court-agreements-after-brexit)

Other features that make the LCC an attractive centre for dispute resolution include:

* winning parties can recover their legal costs, which is not an option in other jurisdictions
* quick interim relief
* no unpredictable jury trials
* no punitive damages

[Find out more about the Commercial Court](https://www.judiciary.uk/courts-and-tribunals/business-and-property-courts/commercial-court/)

**Our lawyers**

The open regulatory framework in England and Wales means London is home to more than 200 foreign law firms from around 40 jurisdictions, including all 40 of the world’s largest law firms.

Find solicitors who specialise in not just every area of law (however small or niche it may seem) but all legal aspects of transactions, such as mergers and acquisitions, securities and financing.

Besides lawyers, London also attracts technical experts and consultants in every field, from construction to art forgery.

**Strengths of arbitration in England and Wales**

London is the world’s leading centre for international commercial arbitration.

The [London Court of International Arbitration](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/campaigns/england-and-wales-global-legal-centre#LCIA), the London seat of the [International Chamber of Commerce](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/campaigns/england-and-wales-global-legal-centre#ICC) and the [London Maritime Arbitrators Association](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/campaigns/england-and-wales-global-legal-centre#LMAA) consistently handle more cases than their counterparts in other jurisdictions, the majority of which are governed by English law.

Of 28,000 commercial and civil disputes resolved through arbitration, meditation and adjudication in the UK in 2021, more than 4,000 were mostly international.

London has consistently ranked as a top arbitration seat in Queen Mary University’s international arbitration survey, the most comprehensive global survey on arbitration since it began in 2010.

Over half of respondents (54%) listed London as their preferred arbitration seat in the [2021 survey](https://arbitration.qmul.ac.uk/research/2021-international-arbitration-survey/). Overall, London ranked in first place with Singapore, and was the top choice for respondents in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and North America.

London arbitration performs highly on key factors that international parties look for in a seat and venue to settle their commercial disputes, including:

* **support for arbitration by local courts and the judiciary**: the [Business and Property Courts](https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/the-business-and-property-courts) in London and the [Arbitration Act 2025](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/civil-litigation/arbitration-act-2025-explained) are friendly to commercial parties that decide to arbitrate in London and ensure that a modern framework is provided to arbitration in England and Wales
* **track record of enforcing judgments and awards**: UK arbitral awards can be enforced in 172 other countries (including across the EU), as the UK is a party to the [New York Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards (1958)](https://www.newyorkconvention.org/countries)
* **ability to enforce decisions of emergency arbitrators** or interim measures ordered by arbitral tribunals
* **a neutral and impartial local legal system**

**Commercial arbitration**

The [London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA)](https://www.lcia.org/Dispute_Resolution_Services/LCIA_Arbitration.aspx) is one of the leading international centre for commercial arbitration.

The centre:

* consistently administers more cases per year (based on the appointment of arbitrators) than comparable bodies in other jurisdictions, including Singapore and Hong Kong, the majority of which are governed by English law
* has a well-developed body of case law to deal with cross-border disputes; in 2023, 96% of cases involved at least one international party (an increase from 88% in 2022)
* made 445 new appointments of arbitrators in 2023, compared to 359 in Singapore and 284 in Hong Kong

In addition, London received [85 of the 870 new cases](https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/news/icc-dispute-resolution-statistics-2023/) filed in 2023 under the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) [Arbitration Rules](https://iccwbo.org/dispute-resolution/dispute-resolution-services/arbitration/rules-procedure/).

[Find out more about the International Chamber of Commerce](https://iccwbo.org/dispute-resolution/about-icc-dispute-resolution-services/)

**Maritime arbitration**

The [London Maritime Arbitrators Association (LMAA)](https://lmaa.london/about-lmaa/) is the leading global forum for dispute resolution in the shipping sector, with a reach extending across the maritime spectrum, international trade and offshore energy.

In 2023, the LMAA's members and affiliated arbitrators saw an estimated 1,845 new cases compared to 1,807 in 2022, consolidating London's position as the leading global centre for maritime arbitration.

Also in 2023, parties made an estimated 3,268 appointments of arbitrators in LMAA cases, compared to 3,193 the year before.

**Trade arbitration**

The [Grain and Feed Trade Association (Gafta)](https://www.gafta.com/Arbitration) is a London-based trade association. Its contracts govern approximately 80% of global trade in grains – valued at $98.2 billion in 2020.

In 2023, GAFTA's members received 337 referrals for their services, compared to 262 the previous year.

Hundreds of trade arbitrations are held in London each year and governed by English law, administered by:

* the London Metal Exchange
* the Federation of Oil, Seeds and Fats Associations
* the International Cotton Association
* the British Coffee Association
* the Refined Sugar Association

**Qualifying as a solicitor in England and Wales**

There is a clear and proportionate route for anyone who wants to become a solicitor in England and Wales, regardless of their background, previous qualifications or experience.

The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) is a centralised test with several key benefits, including that:

* it's open to law and non-law graduates from the UK and overseas
* both exams can be taken before, during or after gaining qualifying work experience, meaning it's highly flexible
* foreign qualified lawyers can apply for exemptions from parts of the SQE based on their qualifications or work experience – see the Solicitors Regulation Authority's [list of jurisdictions already eligible for exemptions](https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/sqe-exemptions/)