

International Weekend 2024

London, United Kingdom

26–28 September 2024

Conference Report

Introduction

1. The International Weekend 2024, co-organised by the European Young Bar Association (EYBA), the Young Bar of the Bar Council of England and Wales (EWYBC), the Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society of England and Wales and the London Young Lawyers Group, took place from 26 to 28 September 2024. The theme for this year is “Navigating Uncertainty: The Role of Lawyers in the Evolving International Legal Landscape”.
2. The International Weekend took place in London and delegates were hosted in some of the centrepieces in legal London. There were seminars and networking activities designed to give participants an opportunity to explore topical legal issues with like-minded professionals and expert speakers, concluding on a Saturday evening with the traditional gala dinner, held at the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple.
3. Francis Chung and Ernie Tung (from the Hong Kong Young Barristers’ Committee (YBC)) and Donald Ting (Young Barrister) are delegates attending the International Weekend.

Welcome Drinks Reception on 26 September

4. The International Weekend was kickstarted by a welcome drinks reception by the London Young Lawyers Group on the evening of 26 September. Among the attendees were not only delegates to the conference, but also law students and other junior solicitors based in London. The drinks reception provided an informal

occasion for us to mingle with and to get to know other delegates ahead of the packed schedule of keynote speeches and panel sessions that would follow in the next two days.

Morning of 27 September at the Bar Council of England and Wales

5. The International Weekend officially started the next morning (on 27 September) with a short reception at the Bar Council of England and Wales, where we were greeted by the Executive Committee of the EYBA and the EWYBC over coffee and light refreshments. In particular, we had a fruitful face-to-face discussion with Ms. Amrit Kaur Dhanoa, the current Chair of the EWYBC. Both sides reaffirmed that the Bar plays an important role in the administration of justice and upholding the rule of law in both jurisdictions and both YBC and EWYBC should continue to maintain constant communication and collaboration in the future.
6. We are also glad to have talked to delegates from other jurisdictions including Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey and Ukraine. The diversity of the delegates meant that we were able to learn about the legal profession and young lawyers in general in a number of jurisdictions and likewise share our own experience in Hong Kong with them.
7. The reception was followed by a welcoming address by Ms Barbara Mills KC, Vice-Chair of the Bar Council of England and Wales. Barbara introduced the work of the Bar Council of England and Wales and the EWYBC. We joined all delegates in applauding not only their work and success, but also Barbara, who we learnt would soon take office as the first woman of colour ever to chair the Bar Council of England and Wales in its 130 years of history.
8. After a short break, we welcomed the first keynote speaker, Mr Dan Neidle, former head of tax at Clifford Chance and founder of Tax Policy Associates, a think-tank for tax and legal policies. Dan shared with us his passion for law,

economics and politics which ultimately drove him to tax law and tax policies. Drawing on his own experience as a tax lawyer, he emphasised that often the rule of law does not concern matters that go before the courts, but they are upheld and enforced by diligent legal practitioners in their interaction with their clients. Dan's speech is a powerful reminder of our role and our duty to the rule of law as barristers.

9. The morning at the Bar Council ended with the EYBA's Annual General Meeting. Francis, on behalf of the Hong Kong YBC, was invited to speak at the meeting. He introduced the work of the YBC and invited delegates to the upcoming YBC Conference 2024. On behalf of the YBC, Francis has also accepted the kind invitation from the EYBA to join their organisation as Associate Member, subject to the approval of the Bar Council. We look forward to more intellectual exchanges and collaborations between the YBC and EYBA in the future.

Afternoon of 27 September: Visit to the Royal Courts of Justice and the Law Society

10. Just before lunch, we took a detour to the Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ). Situated on the Strand and next to Chancery Lane, the RCJ is a magnificent building with over 100 courtrooms and, so we have heard, even gym facilities for lawyers and judges. It houses the Court of Appeal and the High Court of Justice and is an icon of the English judicial system. The sheer vastness of the building, with its Gothic architecture, captivates every visitor that comes through its door.
11. We had the opportunity to observe a brief pre-case conference of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division). This immersive experience into the actual workings of the court gave us a better understanding of the English system on which our very own was founded but also from which we have diverged in many respects.

12. The programmes in the afternoon took place in the Law Society of England and Wales. We were welcomed by Mr Daniel George Peacock, Chair of The Law Society's Junior Solicitors Network Advisory Committee and the National Junior Lawyers Division Committee.
13. After a networking lunch where we met more delegates from Italy, Switzerland and the US, we heard from Ms Ellie Cronin and Mr Michael Devlin, policy advisors from the Law Society's 21st Century Justice Project. In particular, Ellie and Michael shared their findings on their research on reforming civil legal aid and on the use of artificial intelligence in the judicial system.
14. We also heard from Mr Marco Cilliaro, an international policy manager, who introduced the international aspect of The Law Society's work, including dealing with the continued impact of Brexit on foreign lawyers practicing in England and Wales, as well as the implementation of the Solicitors Qualifying Exam. Delegates from different jurisdictions were keen to share their experience and we benefit greatly from the intellectual exchanges.
15. The day concluded with a drinks reception at Davy's Wine House, situated right opposite the Bar Council. It was an informal and relaxing occasion for all delegates to gather to wrap up issues discussed that day and to learn more about each other through networking and social drinks.

28 September at 7BR Chambers

16. The second day of the International Weekend started off by the welcoming remarks of the Chair of EWYBC, Ms. Amrit Kaur Dhanoa, introducing the day's programme. The first seminar on "Law and Climate Action: Strategies for a Sustainable Future" was given jointly by Ms Catherine Higham, Policy Fellow at the LSE Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and Ms Estelle Dehon KC, co-chair of the Bar Council of England and Wales

Climate Crisis Working Group. Catherine gave an overview of her research on climate litigation globally, while Estelle shared about her experience litigating climate-related cases, including the recent case of *R (Finch) v Surrey CC* [2024] UKSC 20.

17. In the afternoon, we heard from the Rt Hon. Baroness Chakrabarti CBE who talked about her new book titled “Human Rights: The Case for the Defence” and shared her insight on what lawyers can do to promote the rule of law and raise the awareness of the public in understanding human rights principles. She also outlined some of the challenges the current world is facing such as war, inequality and climate change and their implications on human rights protection.
18. The last seminar, “The Rise of Corporate Accountability: A New Legal Landscape” was delivered by journalist and war reporter, Chris Stephen. In the seminar, he has shared with all participants that corporate prosecutions are the new front in war crimes justice in recent years. Although indicting corporations who support war crimes is not a new concept, the number of corporate war crimes cases remains small for now. It is anticipated that more proactive corporate prosecutions would raise the awareness of the boardroom about corporate social responsibility and corporate governance.

Gala dinner at the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple

19. The International Weekend was concluded by the traditional gala dinner held at the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple. Among the attendees were not only delegates to the conference, but also young barristers and young solicitors based in London. This is a valuable opportunity for all participants to discuss and exchange views beyond the network developed during the conference. It was truly an enjoyable occasion to meet like-minded young professionals to conclude the fruitful conference.

20. In particular, during the dinner, we have seized the opportunity to meet and discuss with Ms. Shannon Gawley, the President of EYBA, the proposals of collaboration of the EYBA. The proposals included (a) joint initiative for young lawyers from both organisations, (b) knowledge exchange through conferences, workshops and publication of articles and (c) opportunities for cross-border connection and exchange programs to broaden horizons for young legal professionals across the continents.

Concluding Remarks

21. In the premises, the participation of the International Weekend gives us an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between YBC and EWYBC and EYBA in various ways. First, we have had valuable face-to-face exchanges with the representatives from EWYBC and EYBA and also other delegates and expert speakers to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing young lawyers from our respective jurisdictions. Second, we have taken the chance during the International Weekend to discuss further collaboration with EWYBC and EYBA. Last but not least, we agree that the relationship and collaborations between YBC and EYBA will be further strengthened after YBC has joined the EYBA as Associate Members.
22. While the YBC has already developed solid relationships with young lawyers/barristers in Mainland China, England & Wales, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia, it is beneficial to the YBC to develop and expand the networks with young lawyers in the European jurisdictions. This would enable the YBC to exchange ideas with European young lawyers, and to discuss with them issues relating to the rule of law as well as the challenges and opportunities facing young lawyers in today's fast-changing legal landscape.
23. After YBC has joined the EYBA as Associate Member, we would encourage more YBs to take part in the activities and conferences organised by the EYBA and even

to contribute to the EYBA journals and to share with our European young lawyers the legal landscape and rule of law in Hong Kong.

24. Lastly, we wish to thank the Hong Kong Bar Association for their generosity in subsidising our conference expenses.



Photo with Ms. Amrit Kaur Dhanoa, Chair of the EYBVC



Photo with delegates of the International Weekend

Dated this the 16th day of December 2024

Francis Chung

Ernie Tung

Standing Committee on Young Barristers

Donald Ting

Young Barrister