

<sup>7</sup> ILA/1/3/4/1.

<sup>8</sup> ILA/1/7/5.

<sup>9</sup> ILA/3/11/3.

<sup>10</sup> ILA/3/11/2.

<sup>11</sup> ILA/4/14.

<sup>12</sup> ILA/4/6/1.

<sup>13</sup> Ilbert, C. P., 'Review: The Grotius Society — Problems of the War by Grotius Society', *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1916), pp. 381–383.

<sup>14</sup> See ILA/6/9 and ILA/6/10.

<sup>15</sup> ILA/6/12.

## Biography

Dr Ruth Frendo is the Archivist at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, London.

*Legal Information Management*, 17 (2017), pp. 102–108

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doi:10.1017/S1472669617000226

## CURRENT ISSUES

# The BIALL Annual Law Firm Library Survey 2015/2016

**Abstract:** The BIALL annual law firm survey was launched in October 2016. The aim was to understand standard practice across the law firm library sector and to benchmark certain aspects of a library's service against other firms, providing a year-on-year comparison of how the profession is changing. This is an overview of how the survey came about and a summary of the key findings from the first year's results. It was written by the Working Group members. The full survey results can be found on the BIALL website<sup>1</sup>.

**Keywords:** law firm libraries; surveys

## BACKGROUND

In February 2015, a request was emailed to the BIALL JISCMail list asking if any members would be interested in helping to create an annual law firm library survey. Seven volunteers came together to form a Working Group from a range of large to medium sized firms and from an outsourcing company. The group was spread across the country and, following an inaugural meeting in London, all communication was carried out via email and conference calls – a testament to how much can be achieved 'virtually'!

The survey's intention was not to create industry standards but to help information professionals understand where they sit in comparison to other law firms of the same size, against a backdrop of increasing supplier costs and budgetary pressures.

There were three main aims:

- **Comparison and benchmarking**  
The ability to understand standard practice across the law firm library sector and to benchmark certain aspects of a library's service against other firms, particularly when making a business case or

presenting data to senior management. There was not, at that time, any mechanism which law firm librarians could use to do this.

**• Identification of trends and issues**

The survey would identify and analyse trends and issues within the sector which could be used by BIALL to generate press attention, or by individual libraries to highlight themes and issues to senior management.

**• Reducing the need for ad-hoc surveys**

Looking at the archive for the Lis-Law mailing list, there had been a number of surveys posted in recent years that could perhaps have been covered by a BIALL benchmarking survey. Topics included the use of enterprise and federated search, outsourcing, electronic resource management, ebook usage, company and business intelligence resources, collection development policies and embedded librarians. This survey attempts to capture all such information in one place.

**WHO WAS SURVEYED?**

First and foremost, the survey was aimed at BIALL members across the UK and Ireland. We felt that it should be applicable to as many commercial law libraries as possible – for example, freelance librarians and those involved in outsourced arrangements should all be able to participate. We decided to restrict the survey to a defined list of participants with the aim of obtaining as high a response rate as possible and help to achieve consistency, which would be important for making year-on-year comparisons. We therefore decided to only send the survey to firms included within:

- The Lawyer UK Top 100
- Chambers Irish Top 15
- The Lawyer International Top 30

Using these categories allowed 68% of the law firms with BIALL members in the UK, Ireland or Crown Dependencies to participate in the survey. However, BIALL members from the remaining 32% of firms, or not on these lists, were also invited to participate if they wished to.

**CHALLENGES WE FACED**

We decided to keep the questions fairly general so that they could be repeated each year. It became clear, however, that the survey was an organic beast that would develop as the profession changes. There was feedback from some respondents, for instance, that the traditional roles referred to in some of the questions no longer exist in a number of firms. Future versions of the survey will therefore need to define recognisable staffing models that allow accurate and consistent benchmarking.

The survey needed to be short enough for members to be willing to complete it but long enough to capture all of the information required for benchmarking.

We initially hoped to mirror the content of the BIALL Academic Law Library Survey but it became clear that many of the questions included there were not particularly relevant to law firms. Drawing out comparisons between the two surveys was not as easy or useful as had first been envisaged and we ultimately revised a number of questions before launching the final survey.

**LAUNCHING THE SURVEY**

The survey was launched in October 2016. We chose to use SurveyMonkey as BIALL already had a subscription to this online survey service and a member of the working group was experienced in using this. Most importantly, it was agreed that the results of the survey should be anonymised in order to protect participants being directly linked with any sensitive data, such as budget or employee information.

Finding the correct names and email addresses for contacts in all the firms we wanted to target was not as straightforward as we had hoped, but we finally identified 132 employees with library and information responsibilities and invitations were sent to those firms. A further contact outside of our initial target list volunteered to respond.

**RESPONSE RATES**

In total, 39 firms completed the survey and a further 19 filed partial responses, making an overall return rate of 44%.

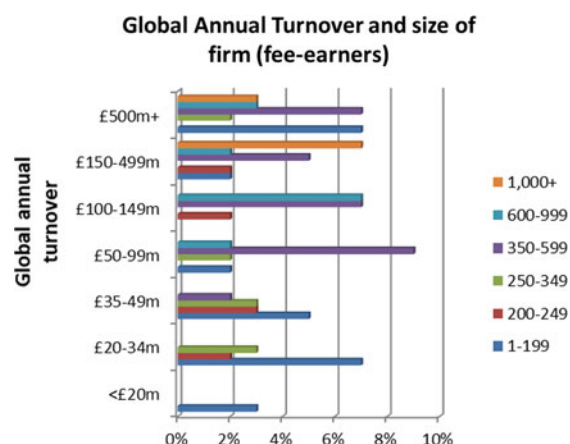


Figure 1. Global annual turnover and size of firm (fee-earners). N.B. This diagram may be better viewed in colour via the electronic version of LIM which can be accessed through Cambridge University Press' Cambridge Core subscription service at: [www.cambridge.org/core/journals/legal-information-management](http://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/legal-information-management)

## SECTION 1: THE LAW FIRM RESPONDENTS

Responding firms were fairly wide ranging in terms of size. The turnover, number of UK and global offices and number of legal staff are analysed in detail at the beginning of the survey but, to summarise, more than half of the responding firms had a turnover of £50m or above, with 22% being in the £500m+ bracket; 3% had a turnover lower than £20m. The chart below shows a basic analysis by global annual turnover and size of firm.

## SECTION 2: LIBRARY AND KNOWLEDGE STAFF

### FTE Library, KM team and PSL staff numbers

There was a high response rate to this question but we had feedback from a couple of the larger firms that their staffing arrangements did not fit easily into our categories. Several firms said they had non-traditional structures, with no central library or knowledge teams, others used offshore teams for some aspects of library work and research while still others had separate business research teams which did not sit within the library or knowledge teams. Future surveys will need to modify this section of questions in order to try to accommodate the increasingly diverse structures within firms.

### Ratio of library staff to legal staff

On average the number of fee earners that each FTE librarian is supporting ranges from under 50 (14% of firms) to over 300 (3% of firms).

Although only 22% of respondents reported having a separate knowledge team it is notable that firms with a turnover of £50m upwards have more staff designated as 'knowledge team' than library staff or as PSLs, whereas firms with lower turnovers have no staff in the knowledge team category. The average number of FTE library staff varied from 2 for firms with turnovers up to £20m, to 3.1 in the £50–99 m bracket and 8 for those with a turnover of over £500m. The number of PSLs also increased with turnover, ranging from 3 FTE for firms in the £20–£34m bracket to 15.8 FTE in the £500m plus bracket. It will be interesting to see how these ratios change over time and whether the trend for an increasing number of staff designated as part of a 'knowledge team' continues to increase.

Within each turnover band there are wide ranges in the number of fee earners each FTE librarian supports. For instance, in the £30–£49m turnover band 13% of firms have between 4–4.9 FTE librarians supporting fewer than 50 fee earners and 13% of firms have fewer than one FTE librarian to 300-plus fee earners. The ratios tend to be more polarised as turnover increases with

ranges for the firms in the £100m to £149m bracket from 9 FTE librarians supporting 50–99 fee earners (11%) to 2–2.9 FTE librarians supporting between 100–149 fee earners (10%); and in the £500m plus bracket the figure ranged from 9 FTE supporting up to 50 fee earners (25%) to 1–1.9 FTE staff supporting between 100–149 fee earners (85%).

Half of respondents with offices outside the UK and Ireland are supporting fee earners in those offices.

### Employment status

90% of respondents are employed directly by the firm with 5% employed through an outsourcing agency and 2% working on a freelance basis.

### Qualifications

The most common qualification in all sizes of firm is a LIS qualification followed by CILIP chartership, then a law degree. The qualification profile for all sizes of firm (apart from those in the under £20m turnover bracket where there were too few responses to analyse) is very similar.

### Reporting to

The title of the person to whom the Head of the Library/Information team reports varies widely, with 37 different titles from the 58 respondents to this question. Reporting levels and departments also varied widely from CEO, Director of Business Transformation, Director of IT, Director of Knowledge and Learning, General Counsel, Head of Knowledge Management, Managing Partner, Partnership Secretary, Operations Director, Director of Quality and Risk and Head of Learning and Development. There is a similar diversity in the departments within which the library function sits, ranging from Admin and Business Support, HR, Digital Information and Legal Systematics, Practice Development to Knowledge Management, Know How, Library and Information Services and Risk Management.

## SECTION 3: LIBRARY SERVICES

### Charging time

It is clear from the survey that most respondents (52%) do not charge library staff time to client matters. Of those which always charge (10%), firms reported a mixture of global turnovers but, unsurprisingly, the majority fell into the highest band at £500m+. At least one firm in every turnover bracket reported that library staff can and do charge their time, if only rarely.

## Library tasks

At least 90% of respondents reported involvement with traditional library tasks such as processing new resources, dealing with circulation queries and training users.

As with many other parts of the survey, these responses raise further questions. Of the 10% of teams which do not process or catalogue new resources, for instance, are resources not catalogued at all, or are their resources electronic only? And if these are uncatalogued hardcopies, are these respondents the same 10% who reported being asked several times a day to find missing books?

There may be scope for including some of the 'other' tasks reported by respondents in future iterations of the survey, or to redefine the specified task lists to make clearer the range of tasks they cover. 'Maintaining library intranet' might, for instance, fit under the 'updating specific pages on the firm's intranet' task.

Some of the less traditional library tasks reported as 'other', such as 'deal analysis' and 'vessel tracking for shipping group', demonstrate the variability in the library or information professional's role. As the trend towards electronic resources continues, will this list of library tasks grow in diversity?

## SECTION 4: ENQUIRIES

Respondents were asked if they collected enquiry statistics and if so, how many were received in an average week, how much time was spent answering enquiries and the frequency of different types of enquiries. The purpose of this section was to allow firms to benchmark the numbers and types of enquiry that they answer and the way they record them.

59% of respondents do collect statistics and submitted data. Unsurprisingly, the smaller firms (by numbers of fee earners) received fewer enquiries and the larger firms the most. The medium-sized firms, however, had a wider number of enquiries received per week, ranging from 0 to 500. The median range for enquiries received was 51–100. None of the respondents received more than 500 per week.

The amount of time spent by the UK and Ireland library services answering enquiries was provided by 86% of all respondents. Again, the medium-sized firms (by numbers of fee earners) had spent a wider range of time on enquiries per week, from 5 to over 50 hours. Over 20% of respondents spent more than 50 hours on enquiries in an average week. The median range for time spent answering enquiries in an average week is 21–30 hours.

31% of all respondents received enquiries from people based in offices outside of the UK and Ireland, some receiving as many as 40% of their enquiries this way.

The most commonly undertaken tasks included 'straightforward copying or retrieval requests' and 'legal research', followed by 'current awareness' and 'online technical (such as forgotten passwords)'.

## SECTION 5: LIBRARY BUDGET

The median budget for hardcopy and online resources is 1% of global annual turnover and the mean is 1.16% with 33% of respondents spending less than 1%, and 33% spending between 1% and 3%.

The only firms that spend over 2% of global turnover are those with larger numbers of fee earners – 11% of firms with between 600 and 900 fee earners spend 3% of turnover and 17% of firms with over 1,000 fee earners spend 2% of turnover. These figures perhaps reflect the increased costs of providing resources in multiple offices or jurisdictions. However, at the other end of the spectrum, 33% of firms with 1,000 plus fee earners were spending up to 0.5% of turnover. This figure may be a reflection of the economies of scale that larger firms can command.

### Spending on the major databases: Lawtel, LexisLibrary, LexisPSL, Practicallaw and Westlaw

The percentage of library budget absorbed by the big legal databases is substantial for most respondents, with 16% spending between 81 to 100% of their budget, 24% spending 60 to 80% and 22% spending 41 to 60%. Only 7% of respondents spend less than 40% of their budget on these databases and none spend less than 20%. Again, the 1,000 plus fee earner firms were the most polarised when it came to spending on these databases with 33% spending less than 40%, and 33% spending more than 81%.

60% of respondents charged the cost of these resources back to a single budget code with other approaches being to split costs between offices and practice areas, according to headcount or usage.

### Spending on other resources

In contrast, spending on other databases was low with 38% of respondents spending 10% or less, 10% spending between 11 and 20% and only 3% spending more than 50% of their budget on these. This time it was the smaller firms that tended to be the ones spending large percentages on other databases, 7% of firms with 1–199 fee earners and 6% of firms with 350 to 599 fee earners spending more than half their budget. Perhaps these are firms with niche practice areas requiring specialist resources.

## SECTION 6: HARDCOPY RESOURCES

There were some comments in the feedback section suggesting that participants found collecting the hard copy figures onerous and that they felt this information was not as valuable to them, perhaps reflecting the shift away from hard copy to electronic which has taken place.

Hard copy book collections are relatively small, with only 7% of respondents holding more than 9,000 titles and 16% holding less than 1,000. As would be expected, the number of books roughly correlates to the number

of fee earners with 27% of firms with up to 199 fee earners having 1,000 or fewer titles and 33% of firms with 1,000+ fee earners having over 8,000 titles.

Loose-leaf subscriptions again roughly correlate to the number of fee earners, 47% of firms with under 200 fee earners having fewer than 50 subscriptions and 33% of firms with over 1,000 fee earners having over 300 subscriptions.

The number of hard copy law report subscriptions is generally low, probably reflecting their availability on electronic resources. 26% of all firms had one or fewer subscriptions and only 10% had more than 8. However, some firms were bucking this trend with one holding 160 subscriptions.

### Location of hard copy resources

The majority of respondents still hold most of their hard copy collections in central or satellite libraries with only 2% of respondents having more than 81% of their collections held by individuals and 50% having less than 20% held by individuals.

Only 9% of respondents reported an increase in the size of their hard copy book collection since the previous year whilst 34% reported a decrease, with journals increasing in only 5% of firms and decreasing in 34% and loose-leaves increasing in 3% and decreasing in 45%. The reasons provided for the change included a move to online resources (47%), lack of space (19%), budget reduction (17%) and fee earner preference (10%).

In future years it will be interesting to see just how far the shift to electronic resources will go and whether we will see the eventual demise of hard copy.

## SECTION 7: ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The purpose of the sections covering electronic resources was to provide basic statistics showing how many firms were using particular services. It was not the intention to promote certain products and services as best of breed, although some are clearly used by more firms than others. Additional services to those initially listed in the survey were named by respondents and these can hopefully be built into the survey going forward. In most categories there is a good range of products being used, perhaps implying that there is still healthy competition in the market place.

### E-books

Take up of e-books is still relatively low, with only 29% of respondents subscribing to any titles. Again, the popularity of e-books tended to be most popular with the smallest and the largest firms and less popular with those in the middle. 33% of firms with over 1,000 fee earners and 50% of the firms with a turnover of less than £20m held more than 9 titles. It will be interesting to compare the relatively low use of e-books with the high usage of online databases

and to see whether this increases over time as licensing models and user preferences change.

### Legal research resources and systems

Unsurprisingly, the databases that are most widely used among respondents are Lawtel UK (59% complete service and 3% selected parts), Lexis Library (52% complete service and 19% selected parts), Practical Law (60% complete service and 7% selected parts) and Westlaw UK (40% complete service and 29% selected parts). Lexis PSL was the next most popular database with 49% of respondents having the full or selected parts of the service. Other services that were popular included Justis (26% full or selected parts of service) Perspective's Pendragon (35% having full or selected parts) Kluwer Arbitration (26% having full or selected parts) and i-law (24% having full or selected parts). No other service was used by more than 20% of respondents.

### Enquiry management systems

33% of respondents do not use an enquiry management system but across those firms that did, 15 different systems are in use, with Research Monitor being the most popular. Twelve per cent of respondents use their own in-house system.

### Library management systems

The most popular system is KnowAll, with 26% of respondents using this and 2% considering it. Also popular is Penlib, used by 10% of respondents. There are 12 proprietary systems in all being used with no respondents using their own in-house systems. Only 2% of respondents noted that the LMS was not used by offices outside of the UK and Ireland, whereas 34% said that it was being used by all or some of their global offices. As regards external hosting, 69% of respondents answered this question with 36% indicating that their LMS is hosted externally.

### Database access management systems

There are three systems in use, Research Monitor being the most popular, as used by 22% of respondents with a further 9% considering using it. 34% of respondents did not use a database access management system.

### Current awareness and aggregator products

In all, 13 different products are in use or being considered. Nexis is used by 30% plus of respondents. Interestingly, 14% are either using or considering using manual extraction of newspapers.

## Company and business intelligence resources

There is a diverse range of resources in use in this category, 42 in all. One respondent commented that there are just too many other databases to list! It is difficult to draw comparisons as each product meets slightly different company information needs. Databases in use by 30% plus of respondents included Legalinx, Nexis UK and Perfect Information Navigator. Interesting, very few respondents are 'considering' using as opposed to using any particular databases, indicating perhaps that firms are generally satisfied with the services they currently have in place.

## Knowledge management and search solutions

Sharepoint is being used by 28% of respondents and being considered by 5%. 19% are using an in-house system. There are 13 different systems in all either in use or being considered.

## KYC/AML services

20 services were named as either being in use or being considered. Of those in use, 192.com and Dun & Bradstreet are the most popular, each being used by 14% of respondents. 22% responded that no KYC/ALM services are being used or considered.

## Document automation and proof reading software

Seventeen per cent of respondents do not use document automation / proof reading software. Out of those that do, 12% use LexisDraft. A further 12% are unaware which software is being used.

## SECTION 8: TRAINING

Respondents were asked to consider a number of questions relating to the training they provide. From the responses it was clear all firms provide training of some sort to selected groups of staff. Firms seem to be quite inclusive in terms of the range of roles that are offered training; the selected groups include trainees, newly-qualified lawyers, 1 PQE lawyers, partners, secretaries and support staff and 41% of all respondents provide training for all of these categories.

Generally, the training is delivered by both library staff and vendors with some firms choosing to deliver exclusively one way or the other, whilst other firms have adopted a combination of both methods.

It appears that a wide range of training formats are being used; these include classroom demos, group hands-on sessions, in-house e-learning, desk-side, scenario based, vendor e-learning, video conferencing and webinars. Desk-side (71%) and classroom demos (66%) are the most

popular methods of delivery, whereas in-house e-learning is the least common. In subsequent surveys it will be interesting to see whether digital training methods will gradually supplant the more personal methods currently favoured.

'How to use online subscription services' is the most popular topic covered by training with nearly 70% of respondents offering this option followed in popularity by 'Legal research and information literacy skills'. In this digital age it is interesting to note that 'How to use hard copy research materials' is the third most popular topic covered (nearly 30%). The broader remit of some library teams is reflected in some of the other training topics covered, such as 'How to use automated templates', 'Matter inception' and 'Business research skills'.

The survey also explored how library teams prepare in advance for delivering training sessions for new trainees. Liaising with legal practices and surveying lawyers to identify training requirements are the most popular advanced planning routines. Contacting trainees before they commence their training contracts as well as liaising with law schools is also common practice. Library teams are also working with other business services teams such as HR, Learning & Development and Graduate Recruitment to prepare induction training. Feedback from second year trainees on their recent experience and what training they would have found useful is also part of some library teams' groundwork.

## SECTION 9: FUTURE CHALLENGES

The final section of the survey focused on future challenges. Improving or re-developing library training was identified as a key issue. Other issues identified included challenges raised by technology (ranging from intranet redevelopment to AI to document automation and password monitoring), growing demand for business support, dealing with mergers, reduced budgets and raising the profile of the library team within the firm.

## SURVEY FEEDBACK

We would also like to say thank you for all the feedback that was provided. This will be extremely valuable in developing the survey so that it meets the needs of members as closely as possible. There were some lovely comments about how good the survey was, how carefully the questions were crafted and that respondents were looking forward to seeing the first results and trends in the future. There were also comments about how onerous the survey was to complete, the difficulty of fitting each situation into the questions as worded, (several respondents required clarification of the questions on hard copies and budget spend) and complaints regarding several technical problems. Some other respondents commented that the questions could not be applied to their situation or that they did not have the data easily at hand.

This was the first attempt at trying to capture all the information and analyse the results in various ways that we hoped would be useful to as many BIALL members as

	Key issue	Aware of but not an issue	Not relevant or not of interest
Library training (improving or re-developing)	53%	16%	2%
Moving to online rather than hardcopy resources	40%	31%	0%
Negotiating global or multi-office licences	36%	17%	17%
Mobile or remote working (facilitating of resources)	34%	33%	3%
Reduction in physical space within the library	28%	22%	21%
Staffing levels	26%	22%	22%
Serving a growing number of legal staff in satellite offices	24%	21%	26%
Coordinating the library service globally across the firm	22%	19%	28%
Personalisation of online services, eg. user-tagging and self-service	21%	29%	21%
Information literacy	17%	43%	9%
Other key challenges	12%		
Federated search solution (increasing requirement for)	10%	28%	33%
Embedding librarians into practice areas	7%	24%	38%
Enterprise search solution (increasing requirement for)	7%	33%	31%
Offering library services directly to the firm's clients	7%	40%	24%
Library as a profit centre – charging for staff time	5%	31%	33%
Outsourcing of your service	3%	17%	50%

possible. Hopefully, in future years, the wording of the questions will more accurately reflect all the various situations required and the technical problems can be resolved. If anyone has any further feedback, please send this to [surveys@biall.org.uk](mailto:surveys@biall.org.uk) or alternatively, please send any comments to the BIALL President Elect.

## CONCLUSION

We hope the survey will prove to be a useful tool and would like to thank everyone who took part.

The BIALL President Elect will oversee the survey in the future and the next one is planned for the beginning of 2018.

## Authors:

The Working Group members were:

Karen Gray (Information and Research Services Manager, Gowling WLG)

Helen Gwinn (Legal Information Manager, Blake Morgan LLP)

Diane Nicholls (Knowledge Services Manager, Irwin Mitchell LLP)

Steven Riley (Library/Information Services Officer, Mills & Reeve LLP)

Janet Scoones (Director of Information and KM, Trowers & Hamlins LLP) (Interim Working Group Leader)

Helen Williams (Senior Information Specialist, Integreon)

Claire Greening (Head of Library and Knowledge Services, Withers LLP) was the key driving force in getting the survey off the ground and leading the Working Party until the survey was published.

Finally, a huge thank you to Shona McTavish for analysing the results and also to David Gee and Laura Griffiths for valuable guidance based on their experience of running the academic survey.

## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> [www.biall.org.uk/pages/biall-law-firm-library-survey.html?handle=biall-law-firm-library-survey.html](http://www.biall.org.uk/pages/biall-law-firm-library-survey.html?handle=biall-law-firm-library-survey.html) (BIALL members only).