How does BIICL need to evolve?

Sonya Sceats

Naturally, I was very curious about what people think of BIICL when I arrived in April as our new Director and CEO. We had never systematically inquired into BIICL's standing before. And with our task to forge a new BIICL strategy from 2027, we knew it made sense to start by engaging with our wider BIICL community.

Many thanks to the hundreds of you who responded to our survey to help shape the future of BIICL. And congratulations to the three lucky survey respondents who won our prize draw for a free place on one of our renowned training courses.

The generosity with which people responded to our survey means we now have the most detailed audience insight we have ever had for BIICL. This includes valuable collective wisdom about which issues our community thinks are most likely to decide the role of law in the governance of our world - and how BIICL should evolve in response.

It is my pleasure to share with you the top insights from this survey:

1. Our wider BIICL community is concerned about the durability of the rule of law at the global and national levels, not for doctrinal reasons but because of broader socio-politico trends such as: geopolitical fragmentation and weakening commitment to international law; the failure of legal systems to keep pace with new challenges such as AI and climate change; the growth of populism, authoritarianism and political polarisation; and the erosion of judicial independence, institutional trust and democratic norms.

2. We asked our wider community what role BIICL should play in the face of these challenges. There was a strong consensus that BIICL should remain independent and research-led, but become more visible, more influential, more policy-facing and more publicly engaged via: practical applied research; stronger policy influence; greater public engagement; expanded audiences beyond lawyers; and thought leadership on the role of law in solving the challenges above.

3. High value is attached to our role as a convenor of events and high-level discussions, but otherwise our community wants to see BIICL evolve in various ways, especially to become less of an academic institution and more of a think tank.

4. This does not mean that BIICL should relax our standards for research excellence. This was no surprise to me, but it was gratifying to see in the survey responses how highly esteemed BIICL is by those who know us. We are seen as authoritative, intellectually rigorous and prestigious with a reputation for high-quality research. This is a credit to all our researchers and leaders, past and present, whose endeavours have earned for BIICL this enviable reputation, which we must protect.

5. Respondents consider "international" and "law" to be the most important elements of our name, and "British" the least important. Some respondents said that our name is important to the history of the organisation and warned that changing it could cause confusion, but more expressed a view that we should modernise our name and make it shorter, including to increase our reach.

Together with our Board of trustees and committed staff team, we are thinking through now how to use these insights to fortify BIICL and expand our impact at a critical time for international law and the rule of law around the world. Many of the steers above will find expression in the new BIICL strategy for 2027 and beyond, including our research priorities which we are debating now. Others will help us to modernise BIICL for the longer term and ensure we are the community of choice for people committed to our vision of a just, peaceful, and safe world where the rule of law is upheld and human rights respected, underpinned by resilient legal systems that respond to social, economic, technological, and environmental

change. This means leaning into our cherished status as a "bridge" between the academic, practitioner and policy worlds, creating opportunities for people to network, build knowledge and deliver change together.

For above all, BIICL is a membership organisation. If you are not already a member of BIICL and share our vision above, please join us today. Already we have seen an uptick in new members joining BIICL in recent months. Growing our community still further is a personal priority for me and we will be busy over the coming months translating what we now know about what you value most into exciting opportunities for networking and building solutions for some of the most pressing international and comparative law and rule of law issues of our era. Members also enjoy discounts on events and training courses and access to our journal the International and Comparative Law Quarterly (ICLQ). By joining BIICL, you will not only help to shape the future of BIICL but you will also have the chance to contribute towards informed, independent thinking in law and decision-making for a global community. At a time when space for lawyers to talk and share views freely is shrinking in many parts of the world, this has never been more important.

Author

Sonya Sceats, Director and Chief Executive Officer, BIICL

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