

HRLA Report from the Chair 2024

Welcome to the HRLA AGM

I am very pleased to provide this report at the end of my first year as the Association's Chair. It has been another very successful year for the HRLA, although not without its challenges. We were also sorry to bid some fond farewells, which I return to later.

2023 was a turbulent year for human rights in the UK. We saw the eventual demise of the Bill of Rights Bill, a topic on which we had an edifying event with Edward Fitzgerald KC (one of our Patrons) and Maya Sikand KC. At the same time we saw a raft of human rights concerns over plans to export refugee protection to Rwanda, a process that has prompted yet more demands for the UK to abandon or limit its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

We had a varied programme of events in 2023. The undoubted highlight came in October, with a half-day celebration of our 20th anniversary. We took advantage of the occasion to celebrate significant milestones for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, with speakers including Baroness Chakrabarti and Robert Spano, the former President of the Strasbourg Court. My thanks to Shoaib Khan and his team for organising this outstanding event and to Kingsley Napley LLP for hosting us. Other highlights included an insightful discussion on the achievements and challenges of the Human Rights Act between our President, Lord Justice Singh, and Baroness Kennedy, a longstanding and active supporter and Patron of the HRLA. You can find more details of our 2023 programme in the main body of my report.

The Young Lawyers Committee had another excellent year. The annual Careers Day was in-person again for the first time after the pandemic and was very well attended, with some inspiring speakers. The YLC also produced some outstanding entrants for the Lord Kerr Essay Competition and the Judicial Review Mooting Competition. Further details on the YLC's year can be found in the accompanying report by our outgoing YLC Chair, Tooba Kazmi. We are very grateful to Tooba and the YLC's Vice-Chair Claudia Hyde for their sterling leadership during 2023, and we wish Tooba well in her future endeavours.

You will see from the Treasurer's report that the Association is in good financial health, but our finances have continued to be a cause for concern. One consequence of this is that we were unable to offer bursaries during 2023, although we plan to resume this important part of our programme in 2024 (more details on this in my main report). Following the departure of our Administrator in the summer of 2023 we decided not to employ a successor and to allocate her many tasks between members of the Executive Committee. This has helped our finances but we are still adjusting to the transition, so please bear with us. In the meantime our fundraising activities continue. Please help us if you can by encouraging your friends and colleagues to join us, and letting us know if you have any suggestions for prospective corporate members or sponsors.

You will have seen from the agenda that the Executive Committee is proposing various amendments to our Constitution, which we invite you to approve at the AGM. These are mainly minor changes to improve the drafting and consistency in the text. There are few more substantive changes, some of which seek to ensure that the Constitution reflects the way we operate in practice. More details are set out in the main body of my report and in the separate document setting out the proposed amendments.

As we move into 2024 we say goodbye and many thanks to Leanne Targett-Parker, who has been our Treasurer for more years than she cares to remember. We are enormously grateful to Leanne for her calm and diligent management of our finances and for persevering in the Treasurer role for so long. Thanks also to Camila Zapata Besso, who has kindly agreed to step into Leanne's shoes.

We have also said farewell to our long-serving Administrator, Karen Kinross. Karen has been a rock of support for the Association and has kept us in good order with her constant patience and efficiency. She will be greatly missed.

I am grateful to the Executive Committee members and especially to the Vice Chairs and other Officers, all of whom have provided a huge amount of support over the year. Thanks also to Lord Justice Singh, our President, who remains an active and much appreciated contributor to our events. I am also very grateful to the chambers and firms that have provided venues and other assistance in delivering our programme, and to all the speakers who have generously given up their time to share their wisdom.

Final thanks to you, our members, for continuing to support the Association in everything we do. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible, in person or online, in 2024.

Joe Middleton KC
Chair of the HRLA

Report from the Chair

HRLA Events 2023

In 2023, the HRLA has offered events in person and in hybrid format:

Date	Topic	Chair	Speakers	Host
22 May 2023	The Illegal Migration Bill: Implications for the Rule of Law and the UK's International Obligations	Rakesh Singh	Elizabeth Ruddick (UNHCR), Miranda Butler (Landmark Chambers), Zoe Bantleman (ILPA), Dragan Nastic (UNICEF UK), Adrian Berry (Garden Court Chambers)	Landmark Chambers (in person and online)
5 June 2023	The Bill of Rights and the Enemies of the European Convention	Joe Middleton KC	Edward Fitzgerald KC in conversation with Maya Sikand KC	Doughty Street Chambers
4 July 2023	Lord Kerr Essay Competition Award Ceremony	Claudia Hyde	Patrick Kerr, Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, Professor Geraldine Van Bueren KC, Dr Koldo Casla	CMS London (in person and online)
7 October 2023	Careers Day	Keynote speech from Amanda Weston KC (Garden Court Chambers)		Goldsmiths, University of London (in person and online)
12 October 2023	Marking the achievements and challenges of the Human Rights Act 1998	Joe Middleton KC	Lord Justice Singh in conversation with Helena Kennedy KC	Doughty Street Chambers
7 November 2023	HRLA Training Series: The Absolute Convention Rights (Articles 2-4 ECHR)	Conor Monaghan	Saara Idelbi, Edmund Garnett	Inner Temple

23 November 2023	HRLA Anniversary Event	Jessica Simor KC, Joe Middleton KC, Shoaib M Khan	Andrew Cutting, Baroness Chakrabarti, Caroline Cassin, Dominic Grieve KC, Jacqueline McKenzie, Lord Anderson KC, Professor Conor Gearty KC (Hon), Professor Parosha Chandran, Raza Husain KC, Robert Spano, Schona Jolly KC, Sir Geoffrey Bindman KC (Hon), Sophie Kemp	Kingsley Napley LLP (in person and online)
14 December 2023	Judicial Review Moot Competition Grand Final	Lord Justice Singh	Lord Justice Singh, Philip Rule KC, Camila Zapata Besso	Royal Courts of Justice

HRLA Anniversary Event

We were delighted to celebrate our 20th anniversary on 23 November 2023. 2023 was also the 70th anniversary of the ECHR coming into force and the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so it was a pleasure to be able to mark all these occasions together. We were honoured to be joined by an absolutely stellar panel of speakers as well as other friends who attended to celebrate with us. We are extremely grateful to all the speakers and attendees, and particularly to Kingsley Napley for their generous hosting and very warm welcome. Speakers at the event and other prominent human rights lawyers also very kindly contributed to our compilation of short articles to mark these anniversaries, which we have published on our website. Photos and videos of the event are also available to view online. It was a privilege to be able to celebrate our anniversary with the country's leading human rights lawyers and we wish to thank everyone who contributed to making the event such a great success.

HRLA Lord Kerr Essay Competition 2023

This was the third year in which the YLC has organised the Lord Kerr Essay Competition. The competition was established in honour of former Supreme Court Justice Lord Kerr. Following his passing, the HRLA received a gift donation from his family to create an opportunity that celebrates the formidable legal career that Lord Kerr had through his influential judicial understanding of human rights and the law.

The question for this year's competition was: "Is there a human right to live free from poverty? Should there be?". A total of 32 entries was received. This was a small increase from the number of entries received in the previous year. We are extremely grateful to the volunteer markers (Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, Patrick Kerr, Claire Hall, Emma Lough, Frank Soodeen, Helen Flynn, Jamie Burton KC, Priya Sahni-Nicholas and Jo Wittams) for their able assistance.

The prize-giving event was hosted at CMS London, thanks to their generous support. Before the winner and runners-up were announced, attendees heard an esteemed panel (Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, Professor Geraldine Van Bueren KC, Dr Koldo Casla) which discussed the topic: "Does the UK need a Bill of Socioeconomic Rights?". Attendance was open to all HRLA members and attended by approximately 30 people (online and in person).

Winner: Alexis Boddy

Runners up: Francesca Jackson and Rhiannon Maher

We are grateful to Claudia Hyde and Jess Wallis for their work in organising the competition and award ceremony.

HRLA Judicial Review Competition 2023

The HRLA Judicial Review Competition 2023 took place across September to December, with around 100 teams entering the competition. The problem question was drafted by Philip Rule KC on the issue of the right to education for a prisoner.

In the first round, each team made written submissions on behalf of the claimant. Eight teams progressed to the semi-final round where they made their oral submissions to a panel of esteemed judges. We are grateful to Conor Monighan, Annie Fendrich, Ana Jabauri, and James Lee for judging the semi-final and providing valuable feedback for the participants, and to Serjeants' Inn Chambers who provided us with Zoom facilities.

The final took place at the Royal Courts of Justice. The judging panel comprised Lord Justice Singh, Camila Zapata Besso, and Philip Rule KC. In this round, one team represented the claimant, and the other team represented the defendant. Attendance was open to HRLA members and approximately 15 people attended in person.

Winner: Jack Sheard and Harry Villa

Runners up: Sharon Winter and Ella Higgs-Sharrock

We are grateful to Church Court Chambers and Liberty for providing prizes for the winners.

Membership

Corporate membership

Our current Corporate Members are as follows:

Chambers

1. Goldsmith Chambers (Immigration Team)
2. Landmark Chambers
3. Monckton Chambers
4. Three Raymond Buildings
5. Doughty Street Chambers
6. 39 Essex Chambers
7. 5 Essex Chambers
8. Essex Court Chambers
9. No5 Chambers
10. 4-5 Gray's Inn Square Chambers
11. Great James Street Chambers

Firms

1. Hogan Lovells
2. SMK Law Solicitors
3. Corker Binning

In 2024, HRLA will attempt to recruit new Corporate Members among law firms. Anyone interested in becoming a Corporate Member should make contact with Markus Findlay.

Slaughter & May decided to step down as Corporate Members in 2023 as they are also supporting the Bar Human Rights Committee (BHRC). We are grateful for the firm's previous support.

Individual membership

At time of writing, we have a total of **987** individual subscribed members. This includes **155** new sign-ups in 2023.

Totals for the various membership types are as follows:

Membership type	Number
Patron	10
NGO	116
Academic	18
Judge	1
Full	461
Associate	40
Student	303

Junior (up to 5 years since qualification)	26
Senior (over 10 years since qualification)	12
Total	987

[Bursary Scheme](#)

2023

This past year the HRLA has worked on re-designing its bursary scheme. Our efforts have been driven by two aims: (a) improving access to the human rights profession; (b) securing the finances required to run the scheme in a sustainable way. The HRLA did not run the bursary scheme in 2023 due to financial constraints.

We have now secured, with Lui Asquith's able assistance, the agreement of Liberty, 5 Essex Chambers, and JUSTICE to run a new, fully-funded bursary scheme. Under the new bursary scheme the HRLA will offer applicants a fully-funded placement at a human rights organisation. This will be a significant improvement on the existing scheme (which requires individuals to have already secured a placement before funding is given to them), helping improve access to the human rights profession and assist those who would otherwise be unable to undertake an internship because they lack the financial means.

Conor Monighan has also helped lead the work on recruiting new corporate members. By working together the team has increased corporate members by 192%, bringing in thousands of pounds for the HRLA – a portion of which will be directed towards funding bursaries.

2024

The focus in the next year will be on securing the funds required to run the re-designed scheme in a sustainable way. If you are part of a business who would be interested in sponsoring the scheme, which would help secure high-quality human rights professionals for the future and enable your business to market itself to the next generation of human rights lawyers, then please get in contact with Conor Monighan.

[Website / Digital](#)

Action Plan 2024 – Enhancing Digital Presence and Connectivity

1. Website Redesign and Migration

Objective: Create a more flexible, updated, user-friendly digital platform representing our Association's identity and goals.

Details: Our current website, hosted on WordPress, is outdated and needs more flexibility. Recognising the need for a more dynamic and modern website, we plan to complete a redesign. This process will involve duplicating the essential elements of the current website

while implementing a fresh design. Key features will include improved navigation, enhanced content presentation, and better user-engagement capabilities.

Timeline: The current web hosting arrangement concludes in June 2024. Therefore, we aim to operationalise the new website by spring 2024, ensuring a seamless transition without downtime.

2. LinkedIn Page Development

Objective: To expand our digital footprint and engage a broader audience through professional networking platforms.

Details: We have initiated efforts to bolster our presence on LinkedIn. Our strategy includes regularly posting engaging content, such as blog posts from the successful YLC Careers Day and the commemorative anniversary booklet. The recent launch of the Anthony Lester Human Rights Fellowships was also featured, attracting significant attention and interaction. We aim to continue this momentum, increasing our followers and engaging with our audience.

Timeline: Ongoing, with periodic evaluations of engagement metrics and content strategy adjustments.

3. Social Media Integration

Objective: To create a cohesive digital presence by linking our social media activities directly to our website.

Details: To enhance user experience and maximise our digital outreach, we plan to integrate our social media channels, including LinkedIn, with our website. This integration will allow real-time updates and easier access to our social media content directly from the website.

Timeline: This is to be completed in conjunction with the launch of the new website in spring 2024.

4. Domain Transfer

Objective: To ensure a smooth transition to the new website with a continued online presence.

Details: A crucial part of our website migration involves transferring our existing domain name to the new website. This step is essential to maintain our brand identity and ensure that our audience can find us easily without disruption.

Timeline: The domain transfer will be completed before the end of June 2024, aligned with the expiration of our current web hosting arrangement.

Mailchimp

The HRLA uses Mailchimp to send emails to its membership mailing list. Since May 2023 until the time of writing, 19 emails have been sent to the HRLA's approximately 1500 subscribed members. The HRLA would welcome members' views on whether there is an appetite for a weekly/fortnightly email, setting out the HRLA's news and reminders to upcoming events, or whether this would be excessive in addition to the emails announcing individual events.

Twitter / X

Last year there were 43 posts by the HRLA on Twitter / X. Looking at the posts over the year, there can sometimes be a period of 4 weeks where there is nothing posted and then a flurry of activity for a number of days. The HRLA would welcome views on whether this is simply reflective of the HRLA's natural mode of operation, or whether there is an appetite for / benefit in more regular weekly posting.

In the past, some live-tweeting during events was undertaken by the HRLA's Administrator, before her departure. It has been suggested that in future, when event proposals are being submitted, they are accompanied by confirmation of whether the event will be live tweeted and who will do it.

Constitution Amendments: Proposal

The HRLA EC proposes to amend the Constitution to improve its clarity and consistency, to better reflect how the HRLA committees operate, and to introduce several substantive changes.

We have tabulated the proposed changes below to help readers navigate the accompanying tracked document (please note the rule numbers below refer to the Constitution in its current form (as last amended in January 2023):

Minor editorial amendment	Change to better reflect operations	Change of substance	Deletion of rules
Rules 3(g), 5(d), 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 43	Rules 4, 6, 7, 17, 37, 41, 42, 43	Rules 7, 8, 11, 17, 18	Rules 19, 37, 41, 42

A resolution to ratify the proposed amendments will be put to members at the AGM on 4 March 2024.