SURVEYS

The BIALL Law Firm Library Survey 2022

Abstract: It goes without saying that few things are more important to information professionals than data, all the more so when that data relates to their own profession. Which is why this third edition of BIALL's Law Firm Survey is so welcome, providing, as it does, data on a range of different information departments working in the library space, while also drawing comparisons from the results of earlier surveys. Here **Catherine Bowl** and **Diane Miller** explain the process of compiling the survey, its findings, and the interesting trends it has highlighted.

Keywords: law firm libraries; surveys; legal information professionals

BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

Following the 2016 and 2019/2020 BIALL Law Firm Library Surveys, the Association conducted a third survey in 2022, the aim being to provide members with useful benchmarking data covering library team size, budget, services and training provided, details of hard copy and electronic resources, and future challenges.[1]

At the beginning of 2022, Karen Brown, a member of the 2019/20 Survey Working Group, Diane Miller and Catherine Bowl met with Clive Morris, who ran and analysed the 2019/20 survey, to discuss the format of the 2022 Survey. It was agreed to retain, where possible, the same format as the 2019/2020 survey but with minor amendments, to enable a year-on-year comparison. As the 2019/2020 survey contained a number of fundamental changes to the 2016 survey's structure, questions and length, comparison of all three surveys isn't always possible. However, this article aims to compare the three surveys wherever possible.

Unlike the 2019/20 survey, where links were sent to participants directly from the SurveyMonkey platform but were not always safely received, this year it was decided to send each law firm a link in an individual email. Whilst sending individual links created an additional administrative task for the Working Group, we were able to ensure that participating firms' links were safely received.

Initial invites were distributed on 23 May 2022, and multiple reminders were sent before the survey closed on 21 June 2022. The survey results were published on 6 October 2022.

In total, there were 56 responses from the 154 contacts who received an invitation email, the same number as the 2019/2020 survey. However, the list of respondents was not the same for each survey. It is important to remember this when reading this article as there is likely to be a sampling effect based on the profile of those who answered the 2022 survey versus the previous one. The results of all surveys can only reflect the answers of the respondents and do not necessarily represent the overall picture.

REVISIONS TO THE SURVEY

One of the purposes of the 2022 survey was to provide a year-on-year comparison with the previous one, so the contents of 2019/20 survey were reviewed and the following minor revisions made:

- The bands for the number of full-time equivalent (FTE)[2] library/information staff were narrowed to make the analysis more useful.

- The bands for the number of hard copy law report subscriptions were also narrowed to make the analysis more useful.

- The Electronic Resources section was reviewed and amended where appropriate.

- CILIP Apprenticeship was added to the Qualifications section to reflect the growing number of library/information staff taking this route into the profession.

- Managing a firm-wide taxonomy and uploading documents to a Knowledge Management system were added to the tasks staff are involved with.

Although it was anticipated that participants may include Covid related responses as current challenges it was agreed not to duplicate the content from the recent State of the Nation survey.[3]

THE PARTICIPANTS

In keeping with the previous two surveys and to maintain a degree of consistency, as well as a good representation

of law firms across the UK and Ireland, the participants surveyed were:

- Top 120 of those with an entry in *The Lawyer Top 200*
- *Chambers Irish Top 15*
- Top 20 of *The Lawyer US Top 50*.

However, no law firms were excluded and members of firms which fell outside of these parameters were also invited to participate if they wished to.

TRENDS

In summary the 2022 survey revealed the following trends:

- There has been a decrease in hard copy resources coupled with a move to electronic resources.
- The number of central libraries has fallen and the number of departmental collections/satellite libraries only has increased.
- The need for libraries to research and test new products has increased.
- Libraries' mean budgets have decreased since the 2016 and 2019/2020 surveys.
- The use of company and business intelligence products has increased whilst the use of Know Your Client products has decreased.
- The use of video-conference style training has increased significantly.

SECTION A: FIRM AND LIBRARY DEMOGRAPHICS

Number of global offices

As in the 2019/20 survey, a broad cross-section of firms is represented in the survey. On average, respondents to the survey work for law firms that have 19 offices globally (up from 16 in the 2019/20 survey). 38% of respondents work for firms with five or fewer global offices and 19% for firms with over 30 offices.

Number of UK/Ireland offices

78% of respondents work for firms with five or fewer UK/Ireland offices, a figure which is in line with 2019/20.

Annual global turnover

The average global turnover of firms responding to the survey stands at £331.7m – an increase of £46m from the previous survey (£285.7m). 31% of firms have a turnover in excess of £500m, compared to the 2019/2020 survey where there were 20%.

Legal staff in UK and Ireland

Despite the increases in the average number of global offices and turnover, the average number of UK/Ireland legal staff has fallen – from 601 in 2019/20, to 546 in 2022.

Legal staff globally

The average number of legal staff globally has also fallen – from 1247 in 2019/20 to 1188 in 2022.

Library structure

As well as the fall in the number of legal staff, another change indicated in the survey concerns library structure: one in four law firms (25%) now have only satellite libraries/team collections, up from 18% in the previous survey.

Due to the format of the 2015/16 survey's analysis of the UK and global staffing levels and turnover it is difficult to compare these results with the 2019/20 and 2022 surveys.

SECTION B: LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STAFF

Size of library team and number of legal staff supported

On average, across firms responding to the survey, 5.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) library and information staff are employed in the UK/Ireland team. Of these firms 40% have fewer than three FTE and just 10% have 12+ FTE.

Support of non-UK and Ireland fee earners

Just under three in five (58%) UK/Ireland library teams are also supporting overseas fee earners – in line with the last survey (55%). Those teams are supporting, on average, 891 fee earners globally (876 in 2019/20). This increases to in excess of 1000 fee earners among those firms with over 10 global offices.

Employment status

As in the 2019/20 survey, most firms (96%) directly employ library and information staff, whereas instances of firms outsourcing these roles (6%) and use of freelancers (4%) are rare. Respondents were asked to select all categories which applied. These figures are in keeping with the previous two surveys.

Qualifications

The 2022 survey revealed that the most common qualifications among members of the UK/Ireland team are a degree (or equivalent) in library or information science

(98%), CILIP Chartership (42%) and a law degree (28%). 2022 saw a new category, CILIP Apprenticeship, comprising 2% of respondents.

These results are similar to the 2019/2020 survey in which 95% of library or information staff have a degree (or equivalent), 44% CILIP Chartership and 25% a law degree.

The way in which the data for the 2015/16 survey was collected made it difficult to compare the results of this survey with the 2019/20 and 2022 surveys.

Reporting lines

Two in five (40%) team heads have a reporting line into a Knowledge/KM function – up from 33% in 2019/20. The percentage of those reporting to a managing partner or board (13%) is down 5% compared with 18% in the 2019/2020 survey, and those reporting to operations (11%) is also down, from 16% in 2019/2020.

SECTION C: LIBRARY SERVICES
Library tasks

As evidenced in 2019/20, this year's survey continues to paint a picture of a multidisciplinary library service, with teams involved in an average of 12 different tasks. Teams are now more commonly researching and testing new products (96%, from 87% in 2019/20) and contributing to/formulating their firm's business strategy (34%, from 24% in 2019/20). Training remains the highest ranking task with 100% of teams being involved in this – up 2% from 98% 2019/20. A comprehensive list of tasks that the respondents are involved is set out in Figure 1.

The most significant library tasks in the 2015/16 survey were: training 93%, dealing with circulation queries 91%, processing/cataloguing new library resources 90%, researching and testing new products 90%, and fulfilling legal information and research requests 90%.

Charging time to clients

Some 43% of firms charge their time to client matters on at least some occasions – in line with 2019/20. However, there is an increase in the proportion without the option to charge their time (51%, from 44% in 2019/20).

SECTION D: ENQUIRIES
Enquiry statistics

Among the 70% of respondents who collect enquiry statistics, an average of 67 enquiries per week are reported (down from 77 in 2019/20). On average, 12% of these enquiries are from enquirers based outside the UK and Ireland which is in line with 2019/20.

In the 2015/16 survey, enquiries data were based on hours spent per week rather than the number of enquiries per week so it isn't possible to provide any comparison with the more recent surveys.

SECTION E: LIBRARY BUDGET

This question related to the total budget for resources, but not including headcount. Respondents were asked to give the figure in GBP for the UK/Ireland library and information service in their law firm's last financial year. They were also given the option not to complete this
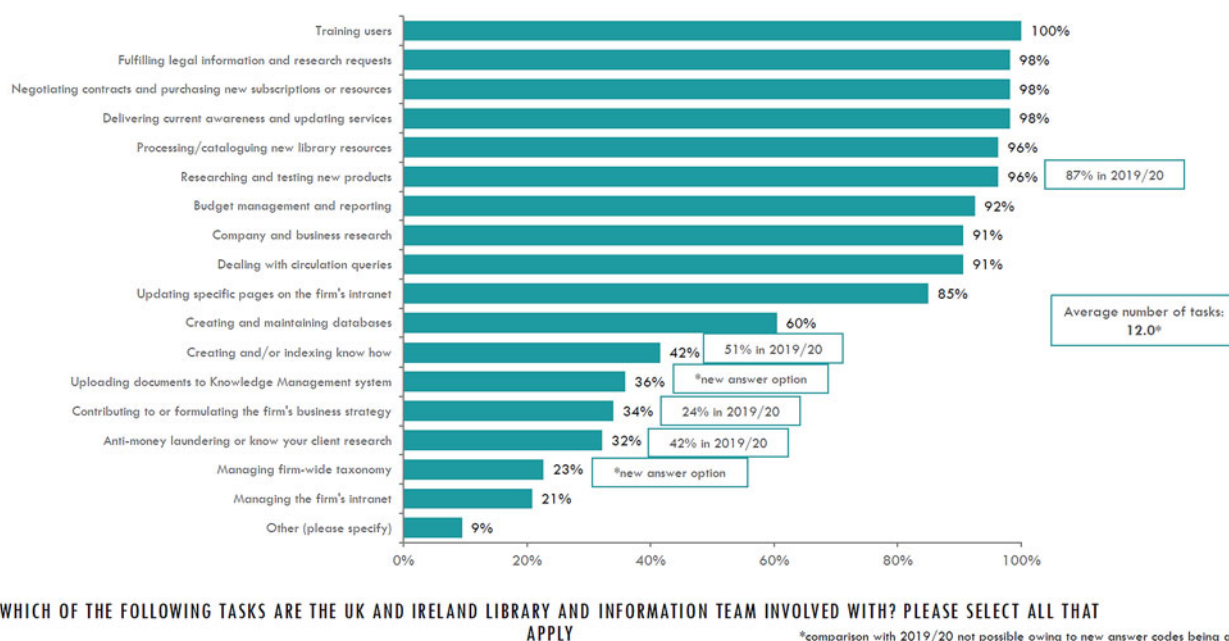

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TASKS ARE THE UK AND IRELAND LIBRARY AND INFORMATION TEAM INVOLVED WITH? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
*comparison with 2019/20 not possible owing to new answer codes being added

Figure 1

	Mean	Median
2022	0.72%	0.68%
2019/20	0.76%	0.63%
2015/16	1.16%	1%

Figure 2

question and 14 law firms opted not to answer this question.

Total library budgets and percentage of global turnover

The average total annual budgets – both at a nominal level and as a proportion of global turnover – are similar to those recorded in 2019/20 and slightly less than in the 2015/16 survey.

The median budget stands at £750k (£743k in 2019/20), and 0.68% of turnover (0.63% in 2019/20), whilst the mean budget is £1.19m (£1.27m in 2019/20) and 0.72% of turnover (0.76% in 2019/20). As with the last survey, this figure is driven up by the five libraries that report a budget of >£3m.

The mean and median[4] figures for all three surveys are set out in Figure 2.

Total budget – domestic v global fee earner support

The mean budget for libraries which support fee earners globally is £1.70m (£1.65m in 2019/20).

However, when looking at the budgets for those libraries which support only domestic fee earners, there is a notable drop of over £250k from the 2019/20 survey (£539k, from £791k).

Library budget per UK and Ireland legal staff

Library budgets in 2022 were broadly similar to those in 2019/20 but with the average number of legal staff having fallen, the library service budget per UK & Ireland legal staff member saw an increase from the previous survey:

- Median of £2248 per staff member – a rise of over £100 from 2019/20 (£2135).

- Lowest among firms with 300-499 staff members (£1717); highest among the smaller (100-299: £2274) and largest (1000+: £2435) firms.

- Four firms have a library budget per UK/Ireland staff member of less than £1000; conversely, the equivalent figure for four other firms is in excess of £4000.

SECTION F: HARD COPY RESOURCES

Year-on-year change in collection size

In comparison with the 2019/20 survey, the reduction in all categories of hard copy resources held by respondent libraries was significant, the most pronounced being hard copy journals (89%) and looseleafs (85%) collections. The average size of law firm hard copy collections at the time the survey took place is shown in Figure 3.

It is difficult to make a comparison with the 2015/16 survey because the results of this survey were reported differently. However, the survey did report a general decrease in hard copy.

Drivers for change in collection size

The most notable driver for the reduction of hard copy collections was the move to online resources which was reported by 75% of respondents. Other factors included management direction 6%, lack of space 6% and reduced budgets for library resources 3%.

Books	3140 books held in libraries (down from 3199 in 2019/20)
Journals	31 hard copy journal subscriptions (down from 56 in 2019/20)
Looseleafs	32 hard copy looseleaf subscriptions (down from 40 in 2019/20)
Law Reports	45% of libraries report not having any hard copy law report subscriptions (up from 32% in the 2019/20 survey)

Figure 3

11

SECTION G: ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Subscriptions including Legal Research Resources

The 2022 survey revealed that on average law firm libraries have 10 electronic legal research resources – up from an offering of nearly eight in 2019/2022 – with Lexis Library, Practical Law and LexisPSL being subscribed to by over four in five libraries. The most notable increases since 2019/20 being:

- LexisPSL (81%, from 74%)
- LawtelUK (79%, from 72%)
- FromCounsel (60%, from 36%)
- Bloomsbury Law Online (49%, from 32%)
- Kluwer Arbitration (45%, from 36%)
- Inframation (21%, from 13%)
- Lexis Advance Hong Kong (8%, from 0%)

Practical Law (85%, from 94% in 2019/20) and Westlaw UK (74%, from 94% in 2019/20) revealed the most notable decreases since 2019/2022.

Whilst the format in the 2015/16 survey was different from the two more recent surveys, results indicate that Lawtel, Lexis Library, LexisPSL, Practical Law and Westlaw were all subscribed to by over 50% of law firms.

E-book usage was considered in the 2015/16 survey but did not form part of the 2019/20 or 2022 surveys.

Enquiry Management Systems

In line with the 2019/20 survey 55% of respondents are using an Enquiry Management System, the most popular being an in-house system (21%) and ResearchMonitor/Quest (15%).

The 2015/16 survey revealed that 33% of respondents did not use an enquiry management system and of those who did most were in-house (12%) and Research Monitor (17%).

Library Management Systems

There have been notable changes in Library Management Systems (LMS) usage since the 2019/20 survey. SLLS (25%, from 7%) and EOS (15%, from 8%) have both increased, whilst KnowAll (25%, from 34%) is now less commonly used compared to 2019/20. Over four in five law firms (83%) use the same LMS suppliers across their different offices and locations.

Respondents to the 2015/16 survey indicated that KnowAll (26%) and Penlib (10%) were the most popular LMS in use.

Database Access and Control Systems

Database Access and Control System usage is similar to 2019/20 with 44% of law firm libraries (from 40% in 2019/20) using one of these. ResearchMonitor is used by 32% of respondents with a further 8% considering using this product.

Of the systems in use during the 2015/16 survey, results showed that ResearchMonitor was the most popular with 22% of respondents using it, while 9% were considering using this product.

Knowledge Management and Search software

KM and Search products continue to be used by around three in four libraries (77%), with SharePoint increasingly popular (32%, from 19%) whilst 26% of law firms use an in-house product.

Whilst reporting categories differed in the 2015/16 survey, SharePoint was the most popular.

Current awareness products

Whilst the number of law firms using current awareness products has remained similar to 2019/20 – an increase of 2% to 87% from the previous survey – there has been a significant change in the products used. Nexis (34%) down from 40%, Manzama (32%) up from 25% and Newsdesk (30%) down from 42%, are the most used products. Use of Vable (15% from 6%) has increased since 2019/20. Meanwhile, 2% of users are considering using Nexis, 6% Manzama, 8% Newsdesk and 12% Vable.

Of the current awareness products surveyed in 2015/16, Nexis was the most popular, being used by 33% of respondents.

Company and business intelligence products

On average, law firm libraries are using seven company and business intelligence products, compared with six products in the previous survey, the most popular being The Lawyer Online, used by nearly four in five (79%) of firms (73% in 2019/20). Use of the following products has notably increased from 2019/20: The Lawyer Market Intelligence (28%, from 16%), Pitchbook (17%, from 6%), and Fame (13%, from 6%). Products which have decreased notably from 2019/20 are: Law.com International (58%, from 71%), GlobalX (28%, from 37%), Experian (9%, from 29%) and Mint (4%, from 16%).

The results of the 2015/16 survey revealed that the most popular company and business intelligence resources were Nexis UK (34%) Legalinx 7side (31%), Perfect Information Navigator (31%), Dun & Bradstreet (26%) and Mint (26%).
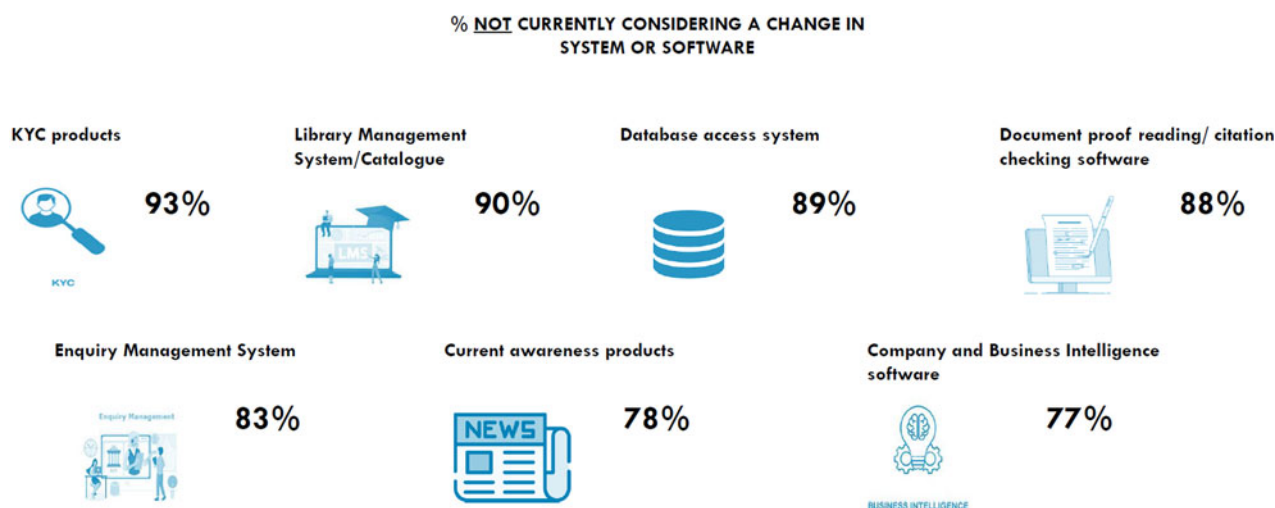
% NOT CURRENTLY CONSIDERING A CHANGE IN SYSTEM OR SOFTWARE

KYC products — 93%

Library Management System/Catalogue — 90%

Database access system — 89%

Document proof reading/ citation checking software — 88%

Enquiry Management System — 83%

Current awareness products — 78%

Company and Business Intelligence software — 77%

Figure 4

Know Your Client (KYC) products

The use of KYC products has reduced significantly and they are now used by just one in three libraries (34%, from 68%), the most popular being Dun & Bradstreet (15%, down from 32%) and Accelus World-Check (11%, down from 23%), although 2% of respondents are considering this product.

In the 2015/16 survey 22% of respondents did not use any KYC products and of those in use Dun & Bradstreet and 192.com were the most popular, each used by 14% of respondents.

Proofreading and citation checking services

Only one in three libraries use proofreading and citation products (it was similar in 2019/20 at 34%), with Lexis Draft (21%, from 15%) becoming increasingly popular – it is also under consideration by a further 8% of law firms. Lexis Draft was the most popular proofreading and citation product in the 2015/16 survey.

Consideration of Electronic Resources

A high percentage of respondents indicated that they are not considering a change in system or software, as indicated in Figure 4.

SECTION G: TRAINING

Training provision / provider of training

As in the 2019/20 survey, all bar one library participating in the survey (98%) provides training. This continues to be facilitated by a mix of library staff (100%) and vendors (76%).

Capacity in which training is provided

Trainees are near-exclusively trained in a predominantly formal capacity (96%); compared to the last survey, there's an increase in the proportion of lawyers with more than one year's post-qualification experience (PQE) receiving training in a predominantly ad-hoc capacity.

Training delivery approaches

Whilst the use of video-conferencing training has doubled since 2019/20 (61%, from 31%), in-person training remains the most common with the most popular being one-to-one at desk (75% down from 90% in 2019/20) and classroom demos and lectures (73%).

Whilst the reporting mechanism in the 2015/2016 survey differed from the 2019/20 and 2022 surveys, classroom demos and lectures and one-to-one at desk were the most popular training methods at that time.

SECTION H: CURRENT CHALLENGES

As with the previous two surveys, respondents were asked to consider the key challenges they were likely to face in the current financial year. Respondent libraries selected, on average, over five issues being faced in the current financial year, the most significant being:

- Structuring resources to facilitate mobile or remote working is now the most selected issue (73%, from 64% in 2019/20).

- Moving to online rather than hard copy resources has also increased (69%, from 62% in 2019/20), as has personalisation of online services (33%, from 23% in 2019/20)

The following were deemed less challenging than they had been in 2019/20:

13

- Information literacy (21%, from 30%)
- Use of Artificial Intelligence (15%, from 25%)
- Offering library services directly to the firm's clients (12%, from 19%)
- An increasing requirement for a federated search solution (10%, from 19%)

The most significant challenges in 2015/16 were improving or redeveloping library training, and moving from hard copy to online resources, whereas some of the less challenging issues were embedding librarians into practice areas, enterprise search solutions, offering library services directly to the firm's clients, and charging for staff time.

FUTURE OF THE SURVEY

The BIALL Law Firm Library Survey has to be a continually evolving piece to retain relevance. The commercial legal environment in Britain and Ireland is continually evolving as firms change size, merge, change names, legal services change, new areas of law continue to emerge, legal information providers develop new products to service new needs and knowledge, and library and information services teams adapt their services and resources to the requirements of their firms. We were grateful to learn from the experiences of Claire Greening and Karen Brown (the previous custodians of the survey) and we will look to pass on our observations to the next custodians. Amongst our observations were:

Administration

Verifying the contact details for each firm being invited to participate in the survey proved to be a very labour intensive task, as was creating individual survey links to be included in each individual invite. Knowing the contact details of the person who had responded to the previous survey didn't really help. People move between firms, firms merge and/or change email addresses and probably around 40% of contact details from the previous survey were no longer valid. Something for future custodians to think about is how best to refine and streamline the administration of the survey.

The Participants

We were keen to have consistency with previous surveys in terms of participants so that comparisons and trends could be extrapolated from the data. However, the value of the survey derives from having a large enough data set to be able to produce a meaningful benchmarking report. The challenge for future custodians is encouraging participation in the survey, whether that be by encouraging participation from the firms that meet the size criteria, or if it is about encouraging participation from any firm.

We did open up the survey to the wider BIALL membership and this did yield several responses. Whatever criteria are used to identify potential participants, a recommendation would be to have more engagement with them before sending out the survey. For the 2022 survey, we only had one communication with potential participants in advance of sending out the survey. We then sent out the survey and a couple of follow up reminders.

Revisions to the survey

As stated previously, although the purpose of the 2022 survey was to provide a year-on-year comparison with the previous survey we did make some minor revisions to the questions used in 2019/20. The next survey custodians will have to take into consideration the 2022 questionnaire and results. Emerging themes from the 2022 survey may warrant further exploration through the addition of new questions whilst some questions may be deemed redundant. They will also have to be aware of the commercial legal environment at the time of putting together the questionnaire. They should be mindful that the survey should evolve to retain relevance.

Engagement

These three areas lead back to our recommendation that future custodians of the survey would be advised to explore having more pre-survey engagement with potential participants. It would be useful from an administrative point of view to invite expressions of interest in participating in the survey. This could help to streamline the administrative processes in the background and gather up-to-date contact information. Giving potential participants the opportunity to input into revisions to the survey by asking them to suggest questions and key metrics of importance to them should encourage them to see the value of completing the survey and thus encourage more participants. BIALL has various mechanisms with which to engage with legal information professionals in law firms, including various email lists (e.g. the BIALL email list), LinkedIn, Special Interest Groups and affiliate groups. Future survey custodians would have the opportunity to use these mechanisms to encourage engagement with the survey.

BIALL SURVEYS

We think conducting benchmarking surveys is an important part of our offering to members and our salary survey in particular is held in high regard across the legal information sector. We hope that our members will continue to support our surveys and share experiences for many years to come.

Footnotes

[1] The 2022 survey is available to BIALL members at <https://biall.org.uk/membership-resources/law-firm-library-survey/>.

[2] The Full Time Equivalent (FTE) rate is used to compare part-time workers' hours against those working full-time. The standardised figure is 1.0, which refers to a full-time worker. 0.5 refers to an employee that works half of full-time hours.

[3] The State of the Nation 2021 survey is available to BIALL members via <https://biall.org.uk/covid-follow-up-survey/>.

[4] The "mean" is calculated by adding together all of the budget figures and dividing by the number of firms and the "median" is the middle value when the budget figures are ranked in order of size.

Biographies

Catherine Bowl was BIALL President for 2021/2022 and is Deputy Head of Research at City law firm Travers Smith LLP. She began her law librarian career in Perth, Western Australia. Catherine was Hon. Treasurer of the Association from 2004 to 2008, Conference Finance Officer from 2009 to 2014, Chair of the BIALL Conference Committee from 2015 to 2018 and a member of Council from 2018 to 2020.

Diane Miller is BIALL President for 2022/23 and is Senior Knowledge Officer at international law firm Gowling WLG (UK) LLP. She was a member of the Professional Skills Framework Working Group in 2015–2016 and Chair of the PR and Promotions Committee from 2018 to 2021.