
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

David Mulholland

2nd March 2026

Dear Barrister,

You are receiving this letter because you have recently enquired about exemption from Bar Library membership, or you are currently exempt from Bar Library membership.

Attachments

With this letter you will find attached:

Exemption Pack

- an Exemption Application Form;
- Guidance Notes for Exemption Applicants;
- the Core Resources list and lists for all other Practice Areas specified in the application checklist;
- a Bar of NI CPD Record card.

Membership Pack

- a Bar Library Membership Application Form;
- the Value for Membership brochure inc. Bar Library Membership Fees for 2026;

Practising Certificate

- A link to the Practising Certificate application is contained within this letter.

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Background to Exemption

Under the current Code of Conduct every barrister in independent practice in Northern Ireland is required to be a member of the Bar Library, (see Rules 3.1 – 3.5 of the Code of Conduct referenced in the enclosed Guidance Notes).

This requirement has its roots in consumer protection. Compulsory membership of the Library better enables the Bar Council to verify and regulate the quality and skills of practising barristers thereby benefiting the consumers of the services provided by those barristers.

The Bar Council believes that significant benefits accrue to all barristers who are members of the Bar Library. The Library provides practitioner based legal resources including Northern Ireland specific legal information, a unique database of NI law (OLIB) only accessible to members, specialist librarians and other support services at very favourable rates. Members of the Library, and by extension those whom they advise and/or represent, benefit from unique advantages that cannot be matched by practitioners outside of the Library. For example, access to the vast LexisNexis and Westlaw databases is provided to members of the Library and included in annual subscription fees at a fraction of the cost compared with independent purchase. Members of the Library are also able to avail of favourable group rates of Professional Indemnity Insurance.

Membership of the Library also provides an important benefit to barristers in the form of facilitating ready access to many senior colleagues who are both able and willing to provide advice, assistance, and guidance in the areas of practice in which they have experience and expertise.

As is clear from Rules 3.1 – 3.5 of the Code of Conduct the requirement regarding membership is not absolute and an exemption facility does exist. However, it is important to note that the granting of exemptions will not be automatic. An Exemption Committee exists to consider applications from anyone wishing to pursue this option. All applicants must demonstrate, *inter alia*, that they have the necessary experience to practise outside the Library, that they have access to adequate library facilities and that they have the ability to manage their practices efficiently.

For anyone wishing to apply for Exemption a non-refundable application fee of £500 must be paid in advance of an exemption application being considered. Details of how this fee can be paid can be found in the pack accompanying this letter. The annual fee of £250 for a Practising Certificate is also payable in advance although the Practising Certificate fee will be refunded should the exemption be declined.

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Applicants whose Primary Jurisdiction is Outside Northern Ireland

The Bar Council is offering two more windows of opportunity to apply for exemption in 2026.

The opportunities are as follows:

- Application process opens Monday 02 March 2026 with deadline for return of Friday 20 March 2026, guaranteeing decision by 03 April 2026.
- Application process opens Monday 10 August 2026 with deadline for return of Friday 04 September 2026, guaranteeing decision by 30 September 2026.

No new applications to be considered until the opening of the cycle in mid-October 2026 for the following exemption year in 2027.

Any delay in submitting your application, or failure to properly evidence your application, may result in a delay to the issue of both your Exemption and Practising Certificates and you may, therefore, be unable to practice in Northern Ireland for a period of time while the applications are progressed.

If you have been exempt on a previous occasion, you are asked to note a recent change to the core resource list where, to ensure currency of this key resource, it is now a requirement to have the online Valentine's All the Law of Northern Ireland product available through LexisNexis and a CD Rom will not suffice. Your LexisNexis account manager will help arrange personal access for you.

Applicants should note that a requirement for the issue of a new Practising Certificate is that you have satisfactorily completed the Bar of NI's CPD requirements. The NI CPD requirements differ from the requirements of the regulatory body of your primary jurisdiction of practice and evidence of compliance with the Bar of NI standards must be submitted on the Bar of NI CPD Record card enclosed with this application pack.

Should you wish to apply for a Practising Certificate in 2026 you will have to fully comply with the Bar's CPD requirements. All practising barristers must accumulate twelve CPD points in each CPD year. Nine of these twelve points can be gained from accredited CPD activities which the barrister deems most relevant to his/her area of practice. Six of the nine general CPD points can be accrued from personal directed learning. [Please complete this form](#)

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The remaining three points must be gained from accredited mandatory CPD. Mandatory CPD is accredited CPD on the topics of Advocacy, Ethics and Practice Management. You must gain 1 point on each of these three topics in each CPD year.

Further details on the CPD requirements for exempt barristers in Northern Ireland can be found in the [Exempt Barrister CPD Guidance 2024-25](#). A dedicated guide for exempt barristers is also included for those who are not yet exempt but are preparing to apply. All applicants for exemption have the opportunity of purchasing the Bar of NI Remote Working Toolkit imminently which satisfies all three mandatory resources of Advocacy, Ethics and Practice Management. An advance order can be placed for a fee of £330 + VAT and can be requested from Donal Hannaway at donal.hannaway@barofni.org

Next Steps

To be able to practise in Northern Ireland you must now either join the Library by completing the enclosed *Bar Library Membership Application Form* or apply for exemption by completing the *Bar Library Exemption Form*.

You will also be invited to simultaneously apply for a Practising Certificate. Please note that Practising Certificates issued to exempt barristers will be restricted to practice areas in which the applicant has verified s/he has the resources to support.

Please follow the link below to apply for your Practising Certificate:

[2026 Practising Certificate Application, Exempt](#)

All applications for Exemption and applications for Practising Certificates for the forthcoming round must be received no later than Friday 20th March 2026 to guarantee a decision by 3rd April 2026.

Please contact pc@barofni.org for further information.

Yours sincerely,



David Mulholland
Chief Executive