

Information Memorandum

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Introduction

The Bar Council has formed the view that the current office premises of the Bar Association of Queensland are no longer suitable for its present and future accommodation. To address this problem, the Council has investigated the availability and likely cost of suitable alternative premises. The Council is also corresponding with Barristers Chambers Limited (the entity that owns the Inns of Court and, therefore, the Bar Association's landlord) to investigate whether it would be possible for the Bar Association to remain in the Inns of Court although, for a number of reasons, this does not seem likely.

The purpose of this document is to explain why the Council considers the current premises to be unsuitable and why re-location to a larger premises is appropriate. It explains the current and future growth needs of the Bar and the steps the Council has taken to identify alternative premises. It sets out why one of the options, the premises at 400 George Street, appears best suited to meet the Bar's present and future needs, and how moving to those premises might affect present and future members of the Bar.

In light of the Council's current view that the premises at 400 George Street is the best option, the Bar Association has signed <u>non-binding</u> heads of agreement with Cromwell REIT Holdings Pty Limited, the landlord of 400 George Street, the terms of which are presently confidential to the parties to that document. This has been done in order to preserve the ability to pursue that option in a non-competitive environment. The Council is expected to reach a final decision regarding the future premises within the next month.

Why is Bar Council considering relocating to a larger office?

The Council has undertaken a review of the office accommodation in response to sustained growth in operations, membership, and training activities. The existing premises, located on the ground floor of the Inns of Court, no longer meet the functional demands of the Association. Over the past decade, staff numbers, member services, and the scale of programs like the Bar Practice Course (BPC) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) have increased significantly.

These pressures have resulted in overcrowded workspaces, training sessions exceeding capacity, and a lack of suitable facilities for larger-scale education and other events.

The Bar Association has been graced with the use of the Supreme Court of Queensland and the Federal Court of Australia over the last few years for the conduct of the BPC. However, the available space within those Courts can no longer accommodate the growing BPC cohorts. This adversely effects the experience of the pupils, the teaching environment, the teaching quality, and the operation of the Courts themselves. The Bar Association aims to still hold parts of the BPC in the Courts to ensure that the pupils still experience being taught in the environment in which they will work, but to ensure that this can be done sustainably, the Association must find a daytime lecture space for the course that can appropriate manage the growing number of pupils.

Considering these challenges, and the growing cost of repairs to ageing infrastructure within the existing premises, the Council has reviewed several options, including expanding or renovating the existing premises, or alternatively relocating to a larger, unified site. The review sought to ensure the Association could continue to serve its members efficiently, support professional development, plan effectively for medium and long-term growth, and to do so in a way that has as little effect on member fees as possible.

What are the functional limitations of the existing premises?

Building Regulations

A significant drawback to leasing space of approximately 600m² is the capacity stipulation under the National Construction Code (NCC), relating to the number of people able to occupy a floor based on the building's use and area. Under the NCC, floor spaces have a standard maximum occupancy density of 1 person per 10m². The existing lease is for 610m², which provides for 61 people, does have additional approved capacity of up to approximately 100 people due to other factors such as location on the ground floor, additional fire exits and airconditioning and the number of amenities available.

This NCC prevents the Association from removing the existing caps on CPD sessions hosted in the Gibbs Room. It also further limits the number of attendees should the Association move to daytime CPD sessions as the staff numbers must also be accounted for in the 100 people allowable cap. The Council has formed the view that the answer is not to pivot to online CPDs. The experience is not the equivalent to in-person learning and, while it may be a practical and efficient form of teaching for some members, it does not equate to focussed attention for others.

Workstations

The Association's office currently contains 17 workstations.

Originally installed with 11 workstations in 2011, the office underwent a repurposing effort to better utilize its footprint. Through reconfiguration and internal adjustments, these 11 original workstations were retained, and an additional six workstations have since been integrated into the same footprint.

However, this expansion has come at a cost. The space, originally designed for fewer occupants, has become increasingly confined reducing individual workspace, leading to more restricted movement, tighter desk arrangements, and a limited capacity for storage or private meeting areas.

While the increase in workstation count has allowed more personnel to be accommodated, the current density now poses challenges in terms of productivity, comfort and operational flexibility. It should be borne in mind that many of the matters addressed by the Association's staff are of the utmost confidentiality, often dealing with the private affairs of individual members.

To better understand the key tasks undertaken by the Association and the need for the current workforce, and therefore the additional workstations, refer to <u>Attachment 1</u>.

Gibbs Room

CPD sessions regularly exceed the allowable capacity of the Gibbs Room, which effectively shuts the door on some members wishing to attend popular CPD sessions. Notably, over the last 6 months, 27% of sessions hosted by the Association in the Gibbs Room have reached full capacity prior to the event. Once this cap is reached, the only way to accommodate additional registrants is to enable online attendance. This poses a particular challenge for readers, whose mandatory sessions must be attended in-person under existing rules.

Additionally, limiting access to other general CPDs is also causing member frustration which is regularly expressed to staff members.

The Council reviewed the requirements for in-person attendance as part of the overall CPD review in 2023 and expressed the view that in-person attendance is important. It promotes collegiality and helps member interaction with the Association so those who might be struggling are identified. Unfortunately, the Association can no longer guarantee in-person attendance.

Ageing Infrastructure

The ageing infrastructure on the Ground Floor (of a B Class building) is having operational and financial repercussions. One example is the prolonged failure of air-conditioning in one sector of the premises, which remained non-functional for the first three months of 2025 and resulted in considerable repair costs (borne by the Association under the terms of the present lease). As ageing systems demand more frequent interventions, ongoing capital investment becomes a critical consideration for long-term asset management.

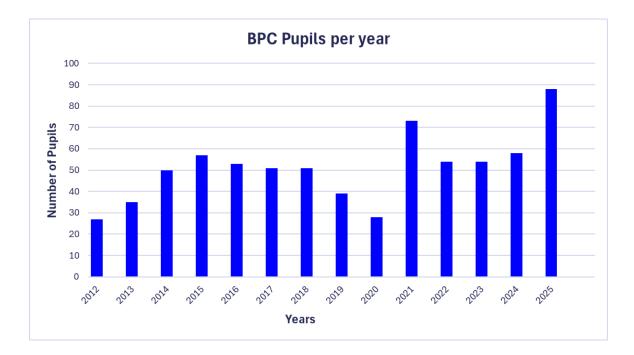
Bar Practice Course (BPC)

The Association does not have the space or facilities to host the Bar Practice Course (BPC).

From 2013 to 2019, the Association's Gibbs Room served as the venue for the BPC, with breakout rooms hosted on Level 5 of Inns of Court. During that time the course averaged between 39 and 56 pupils across two courses per year. In 2020, due to COVID-19, enrolments temporarily dropped to 28 pupils, and only one course was conducted that year. As a result, the BPC was relocated to the Supreme Court.

In 2021, a catch-up course was held to accommodate those who missed out in 2020, resulting in a spike in pupil numbers. Although enrolments returned to typical levels in 2022, they have since increased significantly, from 54 in 2023 to over 80 pupils in the current year. In March 2024, the course was relocated from the Supreme Court to the Federal Court, following advice from the Chief Justice that the Supreme Court no longer had the capacity to host the course over the two six-week periods per year.

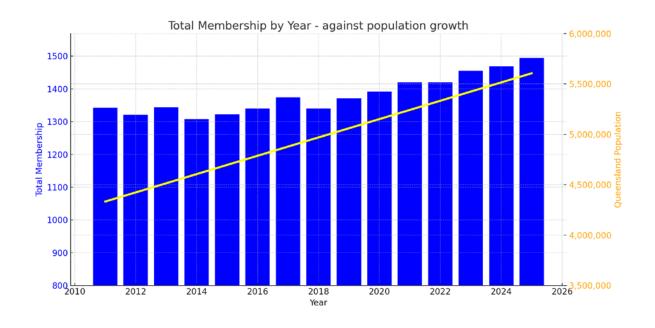
The 2025 figure (refer table below) includes 44 attendees from the April course, with additional enrolments expected in September from those who pass the May exam. 135 people registered and 120 sat the May exam. Given an approximate 50% pass rate (dependent upon the mix of papers sat), it is possible the September course will again exceed 40 pupils. A course of 40 plus pupils on its most active days requires a space with capacity for 70 plus people, including pupils, judges and witnesses. This substantial increase in numbers is now affecting the operations of the Federal Court, which has a limited number of courts that can accommodate the rising number of pupils. The Full Court sittings coincide with the BPC, and therefore Court 1 is unavailable. The only other Court that can accommodate that many pupils (and then, seat in close proximity with nowhere to take notes) is the Registrar's Bankruptcy Court. This Court Room is not available at least every Wednesday and sometimes not on other days. Mock hearings scheduled outside court hours are less problematic.



How does membership growth compare to population growth?

Membership of the Association is not growing at the same rate as the Queensland population. Over the term of the existing lease, membership has grown by 152 members or 11%, which is notably slower than Queensland's population growth for the same period (24%). Two of the key barriers to entry into this profession is the availability of the BPC and the availability of chambers.

As population growth continues, it is reasonable to expect increased demand for barristers within the jurisdiction. Given the current operational pressures, it is essential for the Association to prepare to effectively manage further growth in membership.



What future options has Bar Council considered?

The Council has reviewed four options:

- 1. Maintain the current office space and continue to rely on the Courts for assistance with any overflow activities such as large CPDs and the BPC.
- 2. Renovate the existing office and lease a separate training site for CPDs and the BPC.
- 3. Renovate the existing office and rent a short-term venue space specifically for the BPC, for the two 6-week sessions each year.
- 4. Relocate to a larger unified office space.

With the approval of the Courts, BPC mock hearings and the Advocacy Intensive Weekends are to continue being held in courtrooms, scheduled outside of core court hours. This ensures that pupils still have at least seven separate opportunities over the course to stand up and practise advocacy in actual court settings.

<u>Option 1</u>. Maintain the current office space and continue to rely on the courts for assistance with any overflow activities such as large CPDs and the BPC.

The ongoing and significant operational constraints present at the current premises, comprising 610m², mean that the office cannot support the needs of a growing Bar. The existing space fails to meet the functional requirements necessary for the effective delivery of core services, including regulation and important policy work. The premises lack sufficient desk space, and have overcrowded and inefficient working conditions. Regulatory and policy work is an area of significant expansion and will continue to expand. There is presently no room to add additional staff members to address these core areas of responsibility.

Enrolments for CPD sessions regularly exceed the capacity of the training room; the Council Chamber cannot accommodate a full sitting of the Bar Council; and the space is inadequate for hosting the BPC. These limitations raise serious concerns about the Association's ability to maintain a strong regulatory regime and the delivery of high-quality services into the future.

The availability of the Courts for assistance with these core training functions is entirely at the discretion of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Queensland and the Chief Justice of the Federal Court of Australia.

<u>Option 2.</u> Renovate the existing office and lease a separate training site for CPDs and the BPC.

While there are advantages to remaining at the current premises, such as familiarity with the surroundings and the absence of ongoing lease negotiations (until February 2026 when the present lease expires and a market review is required), the site presents fundamental limitations. As noted, the restricted training capacity and occupancy limits imposed by the NCC create constraints that cannot be resolved through a simple renovation of the Ground Floor.

Managing two separate sites would introduce greater operational complexity and require increased staffing, such as additional reception and support roles at both locations.

Furthermore, maintaining two premises would incur two times the fit-out costs, as the existing office and the new BPC training facility would require significant renovations to make the two sites fit for purpose.

<u>Option 3.</u> Renovate the existing office and rent a short-term venue space specifically for the BPC for the two 6-week sessions.

As outlined above there remains a fundamental capacity issue due to the existing building regulations if the Association is to stay at the current premises. There are also other operational issues addressed above.

Regarding the cost of renting space for the BPC, quotes from nearby hotels and training facilities, such as Cliftons, average \$10,000/week, totalling \$60,000 per 6-week course or \$120,000 per year. This would add approximately \$1,000 to \$1,500 per registrant to the existing fee of \$6,175, which would make the course cost-prohibitive for some.

Option 4. Relocate to a larger unified office space.

Relocating to a site within the North Quarter Precinct provides an opportunity to design a space that meets the long-term operational needs of the Bar. The greater square metreage would accommodate a higher capacity for the CPD training space.

Consolidating functions, such as CPD and BPC, improves efficiency and reduces duplication therefore requiring fewer square metres than running the office/CPD training space and a separate BPC training facility.

Purpose-built training rooms provide an opportunity for the Association to introduce new services, therefore new revenue streams, by making spaces available for mediation, arbitration, external training or reader rooms outside core BPC periods.

Importantly, the new revenue streams will assist in funding the additional square metres leased to accommodate a larger office space and training facility.

A unified space ensures ongoing collaboration and staff wellbeing.

Although not strictly necessary, the Council considers that it would be prudent to consider selecting a floor with a footprint exceeding current requirements, to provide for future scalability in the event that demand on the Association surpasses forecast. Any surplus space could be offered under a subtenancy arrangement (as a barristers' chambers), thereby offsetting the cost of the additional floor area and mitigating the potential need for relocation in the longer term. This would have the effect of opening up more space for new barristers, either in and of itself or with the domino effect of chambers movements.

Financial considerations

Does the Association pay market rates at the Inns of Court?

Yes. When the lease option was exercised five years ago, Barristers Chambers Limited based the rent increase on a market review prepared by Jones Lang LaSalle. This report considered rents in the area and other market conditions, such as COVID-19 impacts at that time.

Property	Lease Area m2	Maximum head count	Annual /m2 Rent	Rent Abatement	Total Rent/m2	Building Classification
107 Inns of Court	610	100	\$676.21	35%	\$439.54	B Class
400 George St	1,425	150	\$960.00	39%	\$585.60	A Class
32 Turbot Street	1,110	100	\$770.00	38%	\$477.40	A Class
300 George St	1,360	150	\$847.77	38%	\$525.62	A Class

How does the current rent compare to other sites in the area?

Note: Additional fees for common areas apply at all buildings except the Inns of Court. These range from $30/m^2$ to $165/m^2$ annually.

What is the approximate fit-out costs for two sites?

- Renovating the existing office: \$1,830,000 (610m² x \$3,000/m²*) plus fees** at approximately \$250,000. Total \$2,080,000.
- Leasing and fitting out a second site for training: \$1,800,000 (500m² x \$3,000/m²*), plus fees**, again approximately \$250,000. Total \$2,050,000.
- Therefore, the combined cost to renovate the existing office, plus a second site for BPC would be approximately **\$4,130,000**.

*Noting that \$3,000/m² - is the estimated cost provided by project managers, which is the industry standard used to calculate the cost of commercial renovations.

**Fees include project manager, architect, engineer, leasing consultant and certifier.

What would it cost to relocate during a renovation at Inns of Court?

• A temporary three-month lease would be required, costing approximately \$40,000 per month, totalling approximately \$120,000.***

*** Estimates received by the Association while investigating alternative sites for the BPC, noting that short term office space was costed at a premium.

What is the approximate fit-out costs for a unified site?

After reviewing offers from 400 George Street, 32 Turbot Street, and 300 George Street, it was determined that 400 George Street was the most suitable location for a new office. This decision was based on factors including rent, rent rebates, lease area, headcount capacity, provision for additional amenities, and overall annual cost. The approximate fit-out to relocate to 400 George Street (1,425m²) is equal to:

- Gross fit-out: \$4,275,000
- Less Landlord contribution on Make Good: \$1,140,000

- o Net fit-out: \$3,135,000,
- Professional fees approximately: \$500,000
- **Total estimate: \$3,635,000**, being the gross fit-out cost, less the landlord contribution, plus fees.
- There is no make good on the existing premises, pursuant to the terms of the current lease agreement.

Why select 400 George Street for relocation?

Why has the Bar Council shortlisted 400 George Street as a potential relocation site?

400 George Street has been shortlisted after thorough evaluation of current and future operational needs. This location offers advantages in several key areas:

Floor Size: 400 George St provides a significantly larger and more flexible floor plan than the Association's current premises. This allows for:

- Full consolidation of staff in a single contiguous workspace.
- Purpose-designed areas for training, CPD education, the BPC, and member services. The space can also be used as a mediation and arbitration centre outside the BPC core blocks, alternatively some of the space could be utilised by members of the regional Bar when visiting Brisbane.
- Future-fit layouts that increase efficiency and promote collaboration.
- A subtenancy arrangement is proposed to address the additional, unutilised space on the floor. This arrangement offers future flexibility to renegotiate terms and reclaim a portion of the sublet area for the Association's use, should operational requirements exceed current projections. The subtenancy would be to accommodate barristers' chambers, which operate independently of the Association, thereby opening up rooms for new members.

Location: Ideally located in the Brisbane CBD:

- Proximity to major courts and legal precincts.
- While not in the Inns of Court building, it is directly across the street and therefore remains central to most Brisbane-based members.
- Easy access to public transport (bus, train, ferry) for staff, members, and pupils.

Amenities: 400 George St includes or provides access to:

- On-site end-of-trip facilities (showers, lockers, bike storage).
- Modern building services including high-speed lifts, security, and flexible fit-out options.

Scalability: The site allows for:

• Immediate fit-out to meet current operational needs.

- Long-term growth potential without needing to relocate again.
- Greater flexibility to respond to increasing BPC pupil numbers, CPD demands, and member engagement activities.

Alternative Spaces: Currently available at North Quarter:

- <u>32 Turbot St:</u> does not solve the capacity issue currently experienced at the existing premises. Its floors are limited to a maximum of 100 people per floor.
- <u>300 George St:</u> is more expensive than 400 George St on a rent plus outgoings per square metre basis. The structure of the building is such that the training facilities would have pillars located within the training rooms. Furthermore, the floorspace does not allow for a subtenancy, therefore limiting the opportunity to recover cost on any excess space after building the offices and training centre. No make good rebate is on offer by the Landlord.

What is the forecast impact on the Association P&L should it relocate to 400 George Street?

Lease proposal - Level 1	15,4	400 George	e S	treet					* All figu	res exclusive GS1
	Ĺ									
Revenue		FY2023		FY2024	с	urrent FY25	ı	New Office (FY26)		
Revenue from PC & Member Fees	\$	1,748,002	\$	2,370,761	\$	2,445,607	\$	2,518,975	Based on growth 3%	
CPD Revenue	\$	249,750	\$	423,192	\$	367,727	\$	425,000	EIR conference year	
BPC Revenue	\$	377,427	\$	406,306	\$	467,450	\$	475,000	Based on trend	
Investment income - cash	\$	130,279	\$	193,441	\$	239,177		Unknown	Uncertainty in market	
Investment income - noncash	\$	134,875	\$	(21,729)	\$	(54,769)		Unknown	Uncertainty in market	
Other income	\$	472,853	\$	515,412	\$	300,000	\$	300,000	Conservative estimate	
Total Revenue	\$	3,113,186	\$	3,887,384	\$	3,765,193	\$	3,718,975		
Expenses	-				-		_			
Rent	\$	279,634	\$	274,803	\$	276,430	\$	879,840	See Lease Proposal tab	
Outgoings	\$	40,185	\$	59,260	\$	54,669	\$	88,771	See Lease Proposal tab	
Subtenancy offset							\$	(376,250)	Based on 350sqm	
Rent subtotal	\$	319,819	\$	334,063	\$	331,099	\$	592,361		
CPD expenses	\$	163,019	\$	231,644	\$	151,402	\$	250,000	EIR conference year	
BPC expenses	\$	55,570	\$	77,962	\$	80,000	\$	100,000	Conservative estimate	
Staff Salaries	\$	1,624,900	\$	1,848,397	\$	1,858,875	\$	1,900,000	Conservative estimate	
Other Expenses	\$	873,945	\$	854,794	\$	900,000	\$	950,000	Conservative estimate	
Total Expenses	\$	3,037,254	\$	3,346,861	\$	3,321,376	\$	3,792,361		
NET PROFIT	\$	75,932	\$	540,523	\$	443,816	\$	(73,386)		
		Covid year		Last year		Current year		Next year		

Note: this table includes the cost recovery for the subtenancy in 2026 but not the revenue generated by the portfolio, renting out the conference rooms for mediation/arbitration or reader rooms. It is anticipated that the room hire will significantly offset additional costs.

Impact on members

What will be the impact if the Association does not relocate?

With current premises at full capacity, the Association's ability to deliver high-quality services in a strong regulatory framework is increasingly strained. Without additional space or a new configuration, the Association risks:

- Ongoing limited member access to CPDs and training opportunities.
- Logistical issues relating to the BPC.
- Limited opportunity to grow members services.
- Ongoing cost related to B Grade building infrastructure.

Will member fees increase?

No fee increase is planned beyond CPI adjustments, noting there was no CPI increase applied for the 2025/26 Practising Certificate year. It is intended that the additional \$261,262 in rent and outgoings associated with a move to 400 George Street, being the difference between the existing premises (\$331,099) and the proposed site (\$592,361), as detailed in the P&L above, will be offset through the introduction of new revenue streams generated by the mediation/arbitration centre and the reader rooms.

A review of fees charged by mediation centres within the North Quarter precinct indicates that, if the rooms were booked for 20, 30, or 36 weeks per year, assuming 80% occupancy during those periods (to account for public holidays), potential annual revenue could range from approximately \$252,000 to nearly \$600,000. The total variance in earnings depends upon the number of weeks booked, as well as the split between bookings made by members versus non-member pricing, should the Association introduce a reduced member fee like QLS.

Scenario	Weeks Booked	50/50 Half/Full Day	50/50 Member/Non-Member
A	20 weeks	\$336,000	\$252,000
В	30 weeks	\$495,600	\$378,000
с	36 weeks	\$596,400	\$453,600

Annual Earnings Forecast (80% occupancy):

With continued prudent financial management, profitability is expected to be sustained, thereby enabling the Association to absorb the anticipated shortfall during the establishment phase of the mediation and arbitration centre. The recent profit results, \$75,932 in 2023, \$540,523 in 2024, and a forecasted \$443,816 for 2025, underscore the Association's strong financial position.

Furthermore, the estimated cost of fitting out a new premises, currently projected at approximately \$3,635,000, will be funded through a combination of self-funding, and possibly external financing, if the latter is considered in the best financial interest of the Association. While it is acknowledged that members may have questions regarding the affordability and sustainability of such an investment, the financial security of the Association will not be compromised. As noted above, no increase to member fees beyond CPI is planned, and the Association remains in a strong financial position to manage this investment responsibly. It is recognised that construction costs can exceed forecasts; accordingly, contingency planning and conservative financial modelling are embedded in the Association's approach to ensure fiscal discipline throughout the process.

Risks

What are the risks of relocating?

- Higher lease and outgoing costs.
- Temporary disruptions during the move.
- Planning and fit-out timeframes.

What are the risks if the Association stays?

- Reduced CPD/training access as the Bar continues to grow.
- Limited space for future staffing.
- Lower standards of service and support for members and the profession.
- Service degradation due to over utilised facilities.
- Higher repairs and maintenance cost due to ageing infrastructure.
- Whilst the Courts have been very supportive in hosting the BPC, due to the growing number of BPC pupils and the increasing demands on the courts, there is no certainty or security as to the continued availability of the Courts' facilities.

What is the risk of renovating the existing space and taking on a second space for the BPC?

- The cost to renovate the existing premises, plus a second site for the BPC (estimated cost \$2,080,000 plus \$2,050,000, total \$4,130,000), would be greater than the cost to renovate a unified space (total estimate \$3,635,000, after landlord contribution). The difference is approximately \$495,000.
- There are structural limitations to renovating the existing space due to the presence of internal structural pillars. These pillars particularly impact the Gibbs Room and the Council Chamber, limiting the ability to increase the room sizes without having to incorporate the pillars internally within the rooms.
- Two sites would require more square meters than a unified space due to the duplication of reception and administration workstations.
- Higher operational cost and staff demands when running two separate sites.
- Overall loss of efficiency when operating across two sites.

What is the risk to BPC if it does not find a more permanent home?

- Should the number of pupils continue to grow, at the current rate or at all, the Courts may no longer be an option to host the course in the future, as court sizes may not adequately accommodate the growing number of pupils, faculty and witnesses.
- Increased pressure on available courtrooms, causing disruption to court operations, may also force the Courts to reconsider the offer to host future courses.
- Increased logistical challenges when forced to run the course over multiple sites.
- The course may become cost prohibitive for many, if the cost of short-term venue hire is added to the registration fee.

Benefits

What are the key benefits of staying at the current premises?

- No short-term disruption to daily operations due to relocation.
- Familiarity with the location and existing facilities.
- Avoidance of moving costs and lease negotiations.

What are the benefits of relocating to a single larger office?

- Ability to design or choose a space that meets long-term capacity needs and consolidation of functions in one location.
- Purpose-built for CPD, BPC and office spaces. Improving space utilisation with shared and multi-purpose areas, therefore potentially reducing cost per square metre over running two separate sites.
- When not utilised for the BPC, the additional rooms could be used for mediation/arbitrations or reader rooms establishing new revenue streams.
- Capacity of up to 180 people if the move is to 400 George.
- A larger space provides an opportunity to incorporate space for members of the regional bar (hot-desking) when visiting Brisbane.
- Enhanced communication and collaboration.
- Improved working conditions and flexibility.
- Room for scalability and further growth, therefore future proofing of operations.

Conclusion

After extensive review, the Bar Council has determined that the current premises no longer support the operational and strategic needs of the Association. Growth in membership, staff, and key programs, particularly the BPC and CPD, has placed increasing pressure on facilities that are already at full capacity. Functional limitations, including building code restrictions, inadequate workspace, and insufficient training areas, are now impeding service delivery and limiting the Association's ability to adapt to future demands.

In response, the Council has explored four options and concluded that relocation to a larger, unified office space is the most sustainable and strategic path forward. A relocation offers the opportunity to consolidate services, expand capacity, enhance working conditions, risk-manage the delivery of core services and requirements in the future, and unlock new revenue streams, ensuring the Association can continue to meet its obligations to members, maintain a strong regulatory framework, and support the growth of the Bar in Queensland for years to come.