



Making the case

Sydney as a global legal hub



OCTOBER 2026



Committee
for
Sydney



The Law Society
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Acknowledgement of Country

The Committee for Sydney acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land. Sovereignty was never ceded: this was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Partnership

This work has been undertaken in partnership with The Law Society of NSW and The Business of Cities.



Use of artificial intelligence

The report has been written by the Committee for Sydney, with inputs from The Business of Cities.

Specific elements of this report have been developed with the assistance of generative AI tools:

- > Data visualisation and diagrams
- > Report layout
- > Case study identification

All elements of this report have been reviewed, edited and approved by the report authors, and the report has been peer reviewed externally.

Who has been consulted

The following organisations have been consulted in the development of this report.

Australian Centre for International Commercial Arbitration (ACICA)

Allens

American Express

Ashurst

Baker McKenzie

Bird & Bird

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of NSW

Colliers International Australia

Corrs Chambers Westgarth

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu

Ernst & Young

Fiducian Group Limited

Gadens

Google Australia

Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer

Law Firms Australia

LexisNexis

Maddocks

MinterEllison

Thomson Reuters

University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

WiseTech Global

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Executive summary >

Executive summary

Sydney's legal sector is a hidden gem of its economy. Already Australia's legal capital, it is home to more than 35,000 practising solicitors and two law schools in the global top 20. Its common law system, respected courts, commercial expertise and substantial legal technology sector provide strong foundations for competing internationally.

Among the 30 cities that register most frequently as legal centres with international reach, Sydney sits in an advanced second tier, ahead of many peers on scale, legal education and rule of law. However, Sydney is less frequently recognised as a top centre and, relatedly, does not benefit from as diverse an international firm base or depth of arbitration caseload.

The world's leading cities have legal sectors that serve international markets and help shape commercial decisions far beyond their borders. As Sydney's economy diversifies, a stronger international legal role could create skilled jobs, attract corporate investment and support the industries that will define its next phase of growth.

Yet Sydney's international legal role has not matched its capabilities. Much of the profession serves domestic regulatory and employment

needs, while international arbitration activity remains limited. In 2025, Singapore's arbitration institution commenced approximately 50 new cases for every one commenced through the Australian Centre for International Commercial Arbitration (ACICA), Australia's institution based in Sydney.

Singapore, Dubai, Dublin and Miami demonstrate how legal centres can expand their international reach through deliberate investment, institutional reform, industry specialisation and sustained promotion. Sydney has many of the same foundations, but needs a clearer shared ambition and more concerted effort to compete for international work.

International legal work is often won when contracts are drafted, years before disputes arise. Sydney needs to influence the businesses and counsel choosing governing law, arbitration seats and institutions, beginning at home. The aim is to make NSW law, a Sydney seat and ACICA regular choices in commercial agreements.

Emerging industries offer a particular opening. In quantum technologies, medical technology and digital assets, commercial practices are still taking shape. Connecting legal specialists with founders, investors and research institutions early can help establish NSW law within industries where Sydney has growing expertise and international ambitions.



This report proposes six ideas across two areas. Greater coherence and communication would bring government, business and the legal profession behind a shared international proposition, promote NSW law to domestic and overseas decision makers, and embed legal expertise in priority industries. Greater capacity and capability would strengthen ACICA, improve international access to NSW courts and attract corporate legal functions and specialist talent.

Success would mean more contracts choosing NSW law, more disputes resolved in Sydney and more international business activity anchored here. As Sydney consolidates its position among the world's great cities, a globally competitive legal sector can help deepen its economic specialisation, strengthen its role in international commerce and extend its influence in the industries of the future.

Six ideas to build Sydney's case as a global legal hub

Coherence and communication

Idea 1: Put NSW front of mind, at home and abroad

- › Promote the single overarching case for why NSW and why Sydney
- › Prosecute the case for NSW law, a Sydney seat and the ACICA Arbitration Rules in contracts, via domestic businesses
- › Increase global awareness of Sydney and NSW's legal and arbitration capabilities

Idea 2: Build sector relationships

- › Engage with representatives from key sectors to understand their legal needs
- › Encourage sector-standard term sheets and model clauses naming NSW law, a Sydney seat and the ACICA Arbitration Rules
- › Map practitioners in NSW firms with expertise in each priority sector
- › Embed legal specialisation within NSW Government industry and innovation policy

Idea 3: Build the coalition to tell Sydney's story

- › Promote a coherent, sector and market-relevant narrative that clearly articulates the case for NSW
- › Ensure each channel uses material fit for its own audience but consistent in substance
- › Work with retired NSW Supreme Court and Federal Court of Australia judges who now sit on international courts or work as international arbitrators to become advocates for NSW's legal capabilities

Capacity and capability

Idea 4: Back ACICA to compete

- › Enhance government and sector-body funding of ACICA's operations, including national and international roadshows
- › Facilitate sectoral advocacy for and collaboration with ACICA
- › Equip ACICA with a dedicated space to hold arbitrations and events

Idea 5: Connect the courts to international parties and to arbitration

- › Present the courts as an integral part of Sydney's arbitration offer
- › Establish and publicise service standards for arbitration-adjacent matters
- › Continue building digital access so international parties can file, appear and give evidence without travelling

Idea 6: Compete for legal functions and legal talent

- › Engage with companies already running Asia-Pacific legal teams from Sydney
- › Develop a targeted in-house counsel attraction program
- › Expand who is considered an 'experienced practitioner' for foreign lawyers seeking conditional admission, from 7+ to 5+ years' experience
- › Shift from qualification-based to experience-based recognition, with specific frameworks for common law jurisdictions

INTRODUCTION

THE ARGUMENTS
FOR SYDNEY'S
LEGAL SECTOR

HOW SYDNEY
COMPARES

THE RISE OF THE
GLOBAL LEGAL
HUBS

TURNING
ATTRIBUTES
INTO AMBITION

SIX IDEAS TO
BUILD SYDNEY'S
CASE

1

Introduction >

Introduction

The Committee for Sydney has collaborated with The Law Society of NSW and The Business of Cities to examine Sydney's potential to position itself as a global centre of law and attract a higher share of international legal activity – from arbitration hearings to international law firms.

It builds on the Committee's 2024 report *Transforming Sydney's Economy*, which outlined the industries that will shape Sydney's future economy and the role Sydney will play in the Australian economy. It also builds on the 2024 and 2025 *Benchmarking Sydney* reports, which highlight how Sydney suffers from a perception–performance gap: our performance across a number of economic and urban indicators is not reflected in how we are perceived on the world stage.

Our 2026 *Beyond the Postcard* report found that broadening what Sydney is known for as a global city, and closing the perception–performance

gap, could generate an additional \$3.3 billion for the NSW economy.

Purpose of this report

This report does four things:

- > Raises awareness of Sydney's established credentials as a centre for legal activity, and NSW's credentials as a highly efficient judicial jurisdiction.
- > Identifies what makes a successful global legal hub, by examining recognised global legal centres around the world.
- > Identifies Sydney's potential to position itself as a global centre of law, by benchmarking the city against others.
- > Proposes six ideas to position Sydney as a global centre of law.



Credit: Transport for NSW

The rise of global legal centres

The idea that a city or jurisdiction can be chosen as a place to resolve a dispute, rather than simply being the place where a dispute arises, is a relatively recent one. With the rise in global trade over the past fifty years, businesses across the world are increasingly part of global supply chains, be it through the buying and selling of goods, the procurement of services or the management of complex, high-value projects.

The contracts that bind these agreements increasingly involve parties sitting in different countries, with different governing laws and different legal and judicial systems. Contracts therefore need to agree on the governing law and the seat of arbitration in which any dispute will be contested. These decisions are agreed by the parties at the drafting table, usually years before a dispute arises, and sometimes with no connection to where either party is based.

The framework that made this workable was built over the second half of the twentieth century, through the New York Convention on the recognition and enforcement of arbitral awards and the UNCITRAL Model Law on International

Commercial Arbitration, which together gave parties confidence that an award made in one jurisdiction would be enforced in another. As cross-border trade and investment expanded, so did the volume of contracts requiring a neutral place to resolve disagreements between parties from different legal systems. That created a market in jurisdictions, and cities began to compete in it. Decisions were made on a jurisdiction's sectoral specialisation, the depth and expertise of its legal profession, the efficiency and integrity of its judicial system, its neutrality in the dispute – or, more often, a mix of several of these.

Cities have competed for this work because the work is worth having. A dispute seated in a city draws in counsel, arbitrators, expert witnesses, funders and forensic accountants, and the institutional reputation that follows tends to attract the transactional and advisory work that sits upstream of it. Some cities, like London, have competed on history and perception. Others, such as Singapore and Dubai, have intentionally sought to build a global role as an international centre of law.



Credit: Breeana Dunbar

What successful hubs have in common

Not every hub has all of these characteristics, and the mix varies with the route each city has taken, but the recurring features are:

1 A recognised legal system

Common law status, or a bespoke common law regime, that international parties and their advisers already understand and can price.

2 A credible arbitral institution

Well resourced, with the caseload, panel and administrative capacity to be nominated as a matter of course rather than as an exception.

3 Courts that support arbitration

Rather than compete with it – dealing with enforcement, interim relief and arbitration-adjacent applications quickly and predictably.

4 A concentration of international firms

With depth in the practice areas that generate cross-border disputes, alongside the arbitrators, experts and funders of the wider ecosystem.

5 Access for foreign practitioners

Through registration, recognition or rights of appearance that allow international counsel to work on matters seated in the city.

6 History, or a deliberate strategy

Cities without deep legal history have needed sustained investment – typically over decades rather than budget cycles.

7 Coordinated promotion

Government, the profession, the judiciary and business carrying one account of the city's offer to international audiences.

8 Sector specialisation

Legal capability attached to the industries a city already leads, so the jurisdiction becomes the default before those industries mature.

This report examines Sydney's case for positioning itself as an international centre of law – and why having the attributes alone is not enough to compete with the cities and regions that have intentionally positioned themselves in this global market.

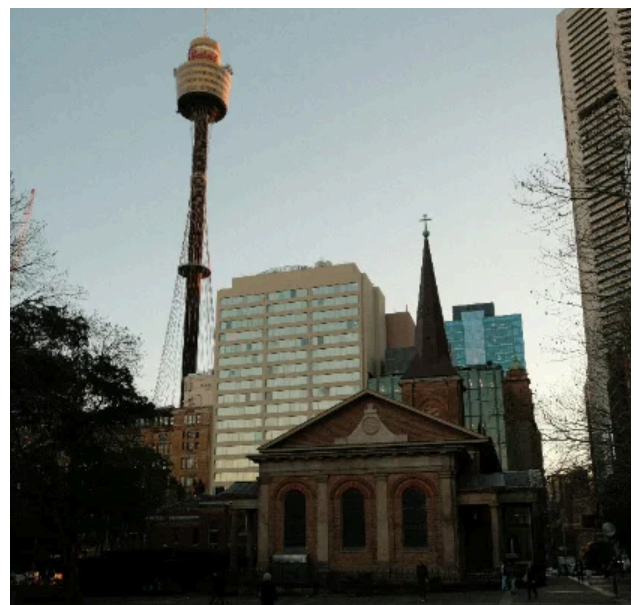


Photo Credit: Dominic Kurniawan Suryaputra

2

The arguments for Sydney's legal sector >

The case for Sydney

Sydney is not viewed as a global centre of law in the same way as the cities examined later in this report. When Sydney's legal capabilities are examined, however, a picture emerges of a city with all the characteristics to become known as one. Currently, much of Sydney's and NSW's legal activity is focused on domestic markets and activities.

Table 1, reproduced from the Thomson Reuters *State of the Legal Market Australia* (2025), shows net spend anticipation by work type across major jurisdictions for July 2024 to June 2025. Australia's

high levels of regulatory and labour work relative to global peers, and relative lack of work in areas such as intellectual property, banking and mergers and acquisitions, reflect a domestic compliance orientation.

But the characteristics that make Sydney Australia's domestic centre of law are many of the same characteristics that can be built on to position Sydney as a global hub. As a common law jurisdiction, NSW has the advantage of a globally recognised legal system.

Table 1: Legal spend anticipation by work type, July 2024 – June 2025

Work type	Global	Australia	US	Europe	Japan	China	South Korea
Regulatory	+26	+33	+24	+30	+34	+5	+57
Labour and employment	+16	+20	+19	+7	+32	0	+33
Corporate	+13	+5	+16	+3	+14	+1	+24
Disputes	+10	+13	+13	+8	+26	-1	+33
Intellectual property	+6	-1	+8	-1	+21	-1	+10
Mergers and acquisitions	+5	0	+20*	-3	+33	-5	+5
Banking and finance	+3	-9	+4	+1	-1	+1	+19
Insurance	+3	-1	+5	-2	+5	0	0

Source: Thomson Reuters, *State of the Legal Market Australia*, 2025. Figure 9: legal spend anticipation. Net spend anticipation = percent of buyers increasing spend minus those decreasing spend in each work type. Responses: Global (2,550), Australia (118), US (1,222), Mainland Europe (268), Japan (76), China (103), South Korea (21). *The source prints +613 for US mergers and acquisitions, evidently a data error; the cell is summarised to +20 to reflect the colour.

The domestic centre of gravity for Australia's legal sector

35,000+

Practising solicitors in Greater Sydney – 80% of the NSW total and 30% of Australia's.

56%

Of Greater Sydney's practising solicitors work in the Sydney CBD, which gives the area critical mass.

11 days

Average NSW Supreme Court corporations list judgment time. Victoria: 51 days.

72%

Civil cases resolved within 12 months. The Federal Court benchmark is 74%.

43%

Greater Sydney's concentration of legal practitioners above the national average.

14%

Growth in Commercial List filings in the NSW Supreme Court over the last four measured years, to 2025.



Sydney's bench depth

- > Greater Sydney accounted for 30% of Australia's legal services workforce at the last Census, underlining the extraordinary concentration of legal activity in one city.
- > Greater Sydney has the highest concentration of legal services in Australia, 43% above the national average, confirming its dominant position as Australia's legal capital.
- > The CBD alone is home to approximately 20,000 practising solicitors, which makes it the centre of gravity of Australian law.
- > NSW's practising profession has more than tripled since 1997.¹

Commercial strength

- > Commercial law is the largest segment of the national legal industry. Banking and finance, and government, are the two largest client sectors.
- > A number of top-tier firms by revenue – including Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, MinterEllison, King & Wood Mallesons and Allens – are headquartered or majority-staffed in Sydney.
- > Demand for legal services grew by over 5% in FY2026, one of the strongest years in a decade, led by workplace relations (+8.5%), dispute resolution (+6.8%) and insolvency (+6.6%).²

A highly regarded and highly efficient judicial system

- > The NSW Supreme Court has an average corporations list judgment time of 11 days (2022–25). Victoria: 51 days.³

- > 72% of civil cases in the NSW Supreme Court are resolved within 12 months (2023–24). Victoria: 61%. Federal Court: 74%.⁴
- > The Court of Appeal clearance rate – cases finalised within 12 months – was 95% in 2025, up from 90% in 2024.⁵
- > Commercial List filings reached 192 in 2025, up from 168 in 2021 – suggesting growing use of NSW as a venue of choice for complex commercial disputes.⁶

A world-class legal education environment

- > Sydney is home to two of the global top-20 law schools in the QS World University Rankings 2026 – The University of NSW (13th) and the University of Sydney (17th).
- > Sydney is one of only four cities in the world with two or more law schools in the QS global top 20, alongside London, New York and the San Francisco Bay Area.⁷

A world-class national arbitration institution

- > The Australian Centre for International Commercial Arbitration (ACICA) is based in Sydney. Established in 1985, it is Australia's international dispute resolution institution.
- > In 2025 it administered 14 new arbitrations, with almost 40% involving at least one international party and Sydney the chosen seat in half of the arbitrations filed.
- > The value of matters under ACICA's administration rose from A\$3.3 billion in 2024 to more than A\$5.4 billion in 2025.⁸

3

How Sydney compares >

Four tiers of international legal centre

Understanding Sydney's strengths requires comparing them with the cities Sydney would compete with. A global scan of over 30 legal cities, grouped on 13 indicators across four pillars (scale, influence, firm presence and legal education) points to three main tiers of international legal centre having emerged in the last decade, with a group of emerging legal markets behind them:

- > **London and New York** occupy a tier of their own, combining dominant scale, the deepest concentration of the world's largest firms and default global recognition.
- > **Sydney sits in a competitive second tier** not far behind cities such as Singapore, part of a cohort that is characterised by a sufficient mixture of scale, influence and skills to compete globally, with strong national institutional foundations.
- > **A broad third tier** holds the established remainder of the field, from Shanghai and German commercial centres such as Munich to the smaller European and Asian markets. These are characterised by narrower specialist strengths or more regional generalist roles.
- > **A fourth group of emerging legal markets** including Hanoi, Mumbai and Riyadh is expanding the range of explicit and implicit competitors in the medium term.

Table 2: Tiers of global legal centres

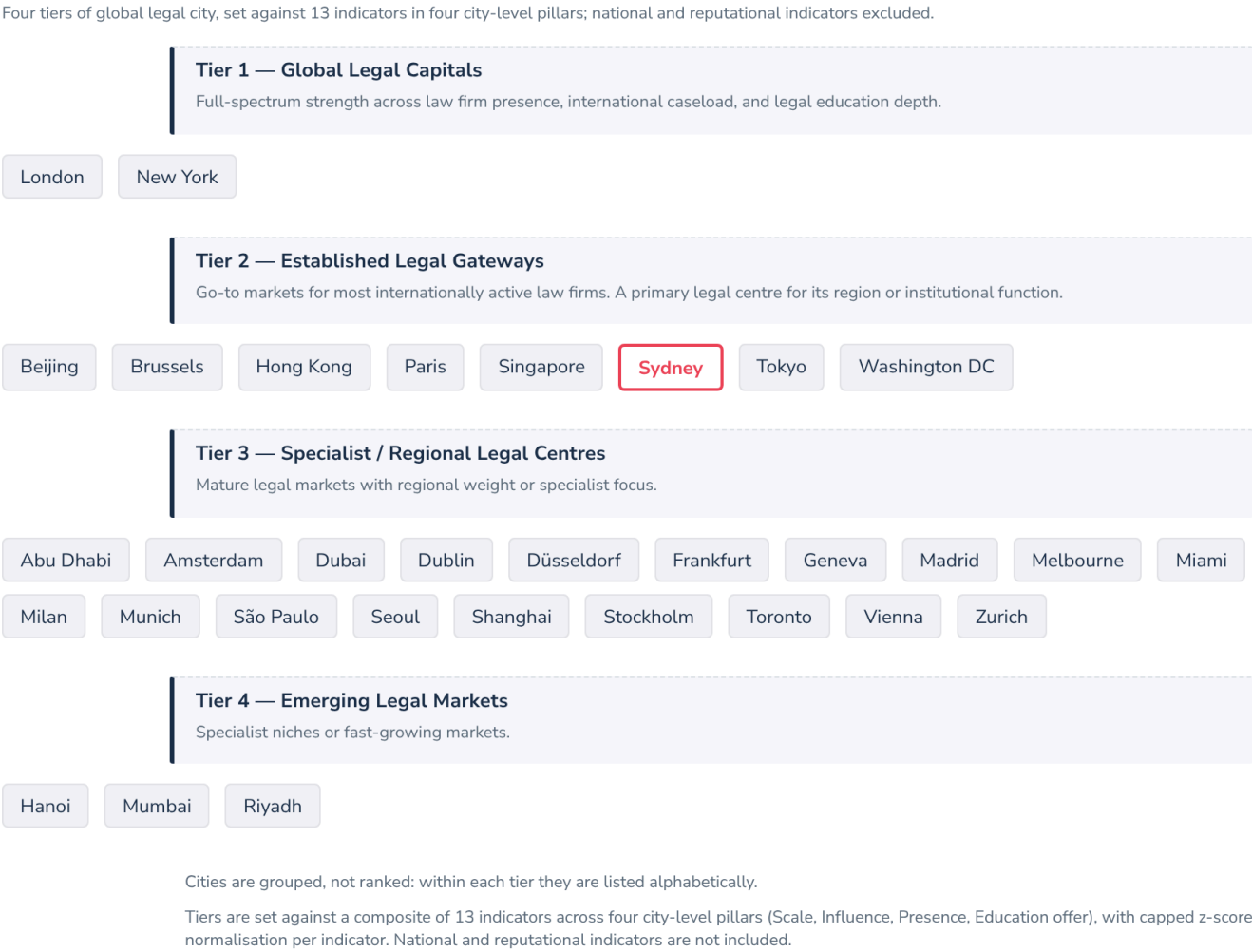
Tier	Key traits	Cities
Tier 1 Global legal capitals	Dominant scale, the deepest pool of the world's largest firms, and default recognition as the first-choice seat and governing law	London, New York
Tier 2 Established legal gateways	Strong institutional foundations plus a mix of scale, influence and education; competitive across several dimensions without leading on any single one	Beijing, Brussels, Hong Kong, Paris, Singapore, Sydney , Tokyo, Washington DC
Tier 3 Specialist and regional legal centres	Credible markets with regional or specialist strengths, and narrower international reach and firm presence	Abu Dhabi, Amsterdam, Dubai, Dublin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Geneva, Madrid, Melbourne, Miami, Milan, Munich, São Paulo, Seoul, Shanghai, Stockholm, Toronto, Vienna, Zurich
Tier 4 Emerging legal markets	Fast-growing markets or specialist niches	Hanoi, Mumbai, Riyadh

Sydney is now an established global top-10 city on many dimensions of city competitiveness, including economic weight, talent appeal and concentration of professional industries. But it has been playing catch-up on international commercial reach and market influence, with performance running ahead of perception. So while Sydney is the 10th most globally connected city into professional service networks, it is only rated 23rd as a financial centre, which partly

reflects executive perceptions.⁹ Sydney is cited as a significant legal centre by 24 of 67 major international industry sources, the 7th highest count of any city.¹⁰

An aggregated index only tells you so much, and there are insights and lessons for Sydney in cities across all four tiers. Exploring Sydney’s performance across a number of these benchmarks is important if Sydney is to turn its impressive attributes into true global recognition.

Figure 1: Tiers of global legal centres

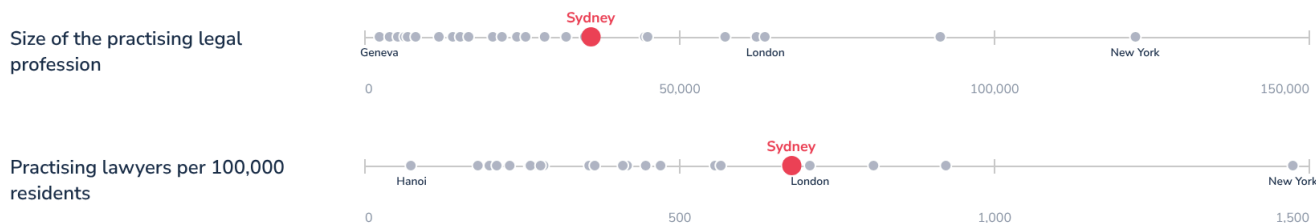


Source: The Business of Cities analysis of 13 indicators across four pillars (scale, influence, firm presence and legal education), 2026.

Method: the 13 indicators cover scale (profession size and lawyers per resident), influence (arbitration cases seated, mediation caseload, commercial court tier, foreign lawyer regime), firm presence (Global 100, Am Law 100 and top 10 firm offices, foreign firm share) and legal education (top 100 and ranked law schools, law graduates). Each is converted to a standardised score (a capped z-score) and averaged with equal weight within and across pillars.

Sydney has the scale and concentration necessary to position itself as a legal hub

Figure 2: Size of the practising legal profession and lawyers per 100,000 residents



Sources: The Law Society of NSW, Practising Solicitor Statistics, June 2025; national and city bar and law society statistics and 2024 metro population estimates, compiled by The Business of Cities, May 2026. On a comparable broad definition Sydney's practitioner base exceeds Singapore and Hong Kong combined.

Sydney's concentration of practitioners gives it substantial capacity to serve international as well as domestic markets.

Although the overall scale of Sydney's practising legal profession is not as large as global leaders London and New York, on a per-head basis the profession is comparable to London and other larger markets – suggesting an existing depth of talent that is already competitive by some measures (Figure 2). At 677 practising lawyers per 100,000 residents, Sydney's density is very close to London's (707) and more than three times Singapore's (210) or Hong Kong's (200).

The revenue base reflects this concentration. Commercial law services generate \$11.2bn in revenue, 31% of total legal industry revenue¹¹, with banking, finance and government combining for approximately 33% – the practice areas most naturally aligned with international dispute work. Incorporated legal practices now have nearly twice as many solicitors as traditional partnerships¹², and the major firms are all headquartered or majority-staffed in Sydney.

Sydney holds a latent international network that the current strategy does not activate: more than 2,300 holders of NSW practising certificates were working overseas as of June 2025, 5% of the

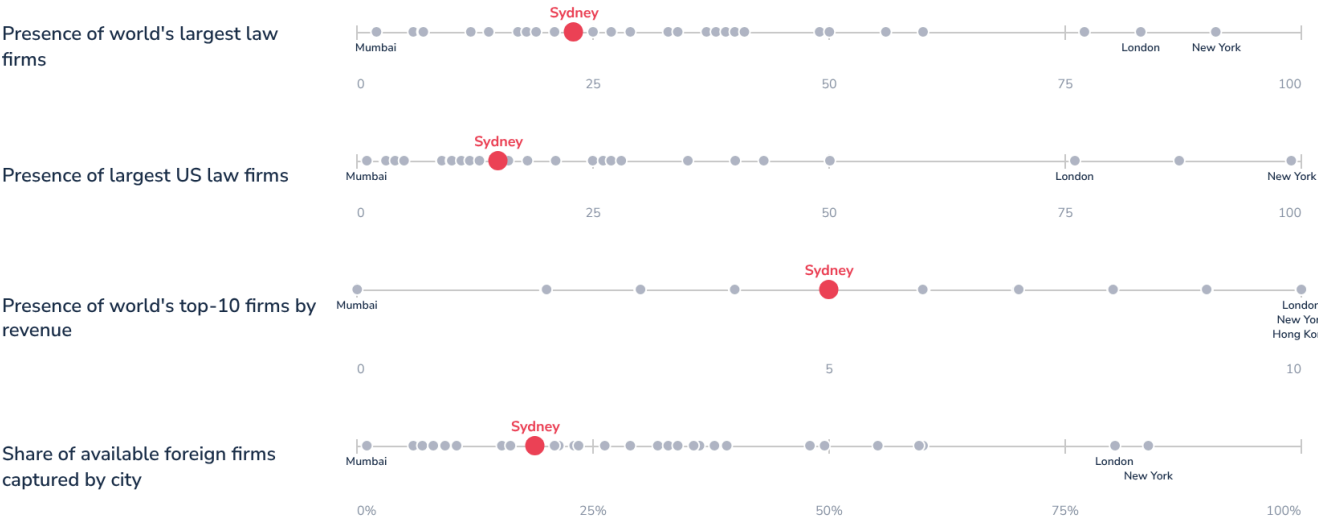
profession and 11% of corporate legal practitioners, and more than a third of them were in London, Singapore, Hong Kong or New York.¹³

2,300+

Holders of NSW practising certificates working overseas as of June 2025 – 5% of the profession.

However, while overall demand for legal services is growing, Australian in-house legal spend remains concentrated in regulatory and labour work while lagging global peers in the transactional and IP categories most associated with international legal centre activity. M&A demand also contracted 2% in FY2026¹⁴ – a vulnerability if the international positioning strategy relies primarily on deal flow. The structural work of building a governing-law pipeline and attracting in-house teams matters partly for this reason.

Figure 3: Presence of the world's largest law firms



Sources: Global 100 and Am Law 100 directories 2024–25 and firm office pages; Legal Business, *Beyond New York and London* (March 2026) for the 10 largest firms; compiled by The Business of Cities, May 2026.

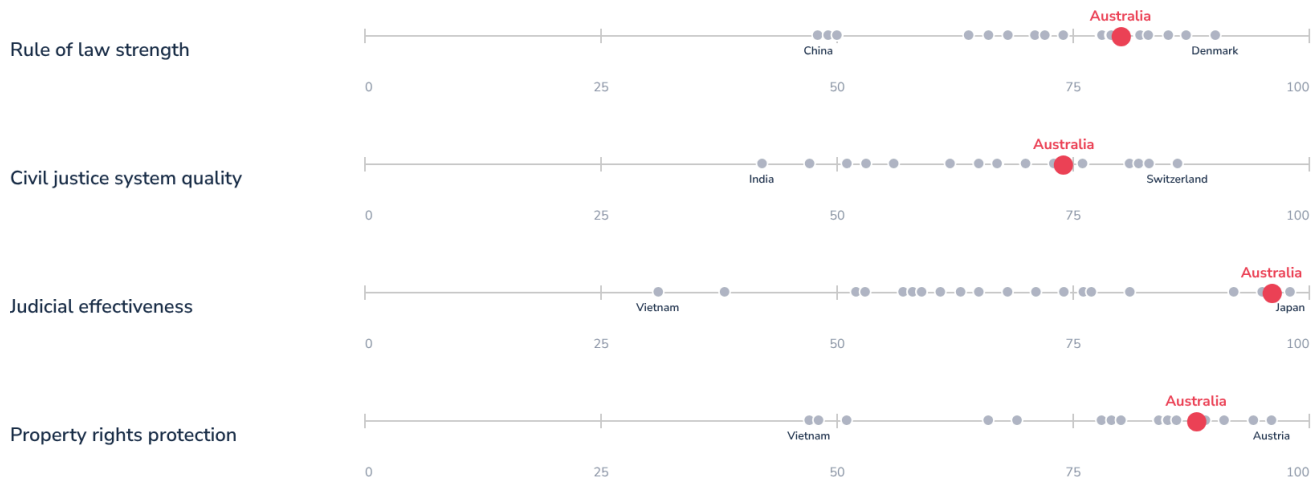
Sydney’s strong representation among the very largest firms creates a platform for broadening its wider international legal networks.



Credit: Breeana Dunbar

Australia's court performance and rule of law support Sydney's legal sector

Figure 4: National rule of law and judicial indicators, with Sydney assessed through Australia's institutions



Sources: World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2025 (overall score and Factor 7, civil justice); Heritage Foundation, 2026 Index of Economic Freedom (judicial effectiveness and property rights components). All scores are national: Sydney's position reflects the overall performance of Australian institutions rather than NSW courts specifically.

Australia's institutional quality is an important foundation for Sydney's international legal credibility, although these measures assess national institutions rather than NSW's commercial courts directly.

Australia is rated 11th of 143 countries for rule of law¹⁵, ahead of the UK (14th), Singapore (16th) and the United States (27th). Its judicial effectiveness score of 96 out of 100 is among the ten highest in the world, and Australia is rated the fourth-freest economy of 176 nations.¹⁶ Sydney is broadly in the second tier of international commercial court infrastructure, alongside Paris, Amsterdam and Hong Kong.¹⁷

The gap between the NSW Supreme Court's 11-day and Victoria's 51-day average time to deliver judgment in Corporations List matters makes a strong business case for NSW law.¹⁸

Australia's judicial effectiveness score of 96 out of 100 is among the ten highest in the world.

Source: Heritage Foundation, 2026 Index of Economic Freedom

A technology and innovation advantage

AI capability in the legal sector is best understood as three distinct tracks: AI-enabled practice and service delivery; legal technology (legaltech) company formation; and AI-literate practitioners. These distinctions are important as they avoid conflating adoption of AI tools with genuine sector leadership or companies building AI-native legal products.

On AI-enabled practice and service delivery, Australian law firms are ahead of global peers. In Thomson Reuters' 2025 benchmarking, Australian law firms report being ahead of their global peers in generative AI adoption, integration policies and training.¹⁹

On legal technology company formation, the ecosystem is also substantial: 104 firms of scale, \$1.8bn enterprise value and \$470m in venture capital funding.²⁰ Among six top-tier legal cities, Sydney places 3rd for legaltech venture funding – behind New York and London and ahead of Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai.

AI-literate practitioners sit between these two tracks. This capability is less directly measured but underpins both effective adoption and the development of new products, shaping how deeply AI is integrated into legal practice. Early signs of pipeline-building are emerging, including Monash University's cross-disciplinary degree in engineering, quantum computing and law.

The technology advantage should be positioned with precision. In mature tech sectors – general software, cloud infrastructure – Sydney cannot compete with the scale of San Francisco or New York, and general technology law is more likely to follow those centres. The opportunity lies in sectors where Australia has its own industry depth: quantum technologies (where Australia holds early research leadership), medtech and digital assets. These are also the sectors where ACICA is already seeing growth in dispute filings, and where Sydney's neutrality and cost advantages are most relevant to international parties.

Figure 5: Legaltech ecosystem indicators



Source: Dealroom.co, March 2025, compiled by The Business of Cities. Six cities with comparable data.

Sydney's legal technology ecosystem provides a base for developing internationally competitive specialist services, with commercial scale the area to grow.

The arbitration gap

A review of international evidence shows Sydney is not yet a default jurisdiction for the arbitration or mediation of legal disputes, with low demonstrated case volumes, and rarely cited

among the top five preferred seats for arbitration. Sydney also competes with other Australian cities to host international arbitrations.²¹

Figure 6: International arbitration and mediation caseloads and preferred arbitration seats



Sources: 2024 annual reports and case statistics of SIAC, LCIA, ICC, HKIAC, CIETAC, SHIAC, DIAC, SCC, DIS, the Swiss Arbitration Centre, KCAB, JCAA, VIAC, CAM Milan, MCIA, ICSID and ACICA for seated international cases, and of the principal mediation institution in each of 13 cities, compiled by The Business of Cities; Queen Mary University of London and White & Case, 2025 International Arbitration Survey (share of 2,402 respondents naming the city among their top five seats). Mediation counts use each institution's international commercial caseload where it is published (Milan: 30 international cases of 1,051 total filings) so that the definition matches the arbitration comparison. Sydney is not among the 15 seats listed in the survey and is shown as a hollow marker.

Sydney's relatively lower performance in this area is directly related to its lower institutional and governmental investment in arbitration, lower brand recognition of Sydney as a preferable option for arbitration, and a lack of coordinated government support.

Dispute resolution demand in Australia grew 6.8% in FY2026²² – organic momentum in exactly the area Sydney wants to develop internationally. ACICA is already seeing growth in energy, infrastructure, crypto, digital assets and medtech disputes.

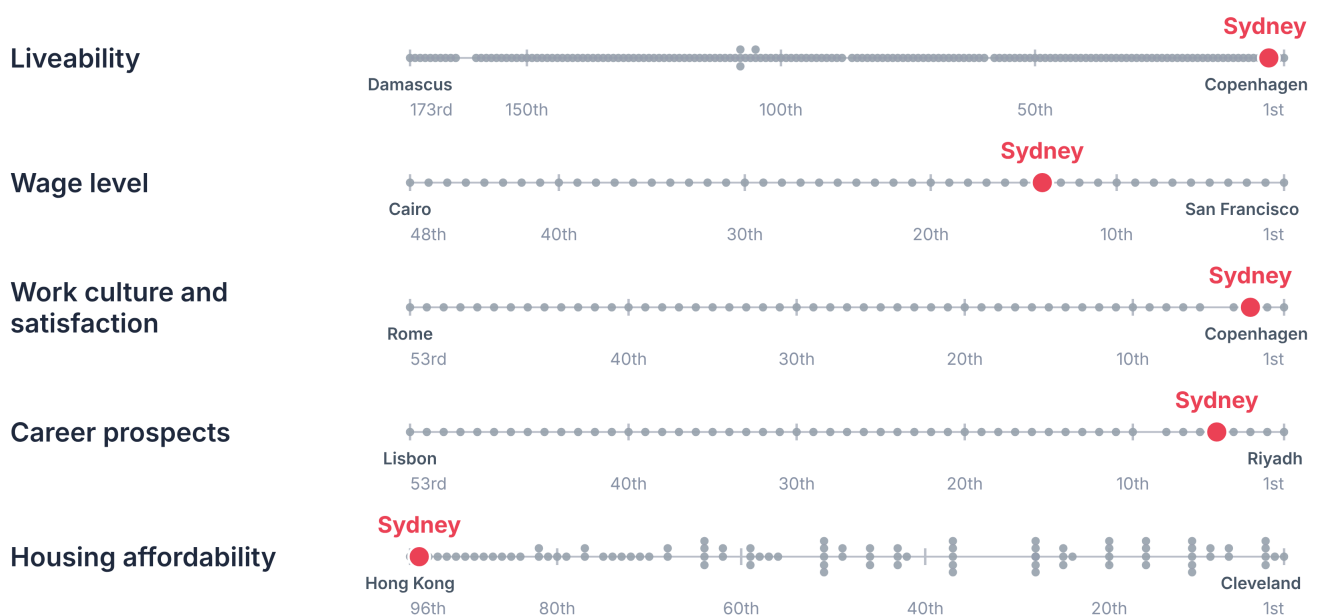
Sydney's neutrality is an underused asset for Asia-Pacific parties needing an independent seat, particularly in transactions with a China dimension where neither Hong Kong nor Singapore may feel fully neutral.

A great place to call home

Sydney competes for globally mobile lawyers on the quality of everyday life, where it ranks among the world's leading cities for liveability and work culture.



Figure 7: Liveability, pay and work-life indices



Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit, Global Liveability Index 2026; Mori Memorial Foundation, Global Power City Index 2025 (wage level); InterNations, Expat Insider 2024, Urban Work-Life Index; Demographia, International Housing Affordability 2026; compiled by The Business of Cities. Positions show rank among the cities each index covers.

Attracting, nurturing and retaining talent

Sydney faces a two-sided talent challenge. On the outflow side, early-career lawyers leave for international experience – and rarely permanently – and geopolitical tensions are not a deterrent to that flow. Close to 60% of Sydney university law graduates working at global law firms practise in Sydney. At international-origin firms the share is 53%, with the rest dispersed mainly to London, Hong Kong and Singapore.²³ The lifestyle proposition is real for long-term retention but competes against higher remuneration at

established hubs. Federal tax settings add to that pressure, with other jurisdictions around the world seen to be more advantageous for income tax.

Talent competition is not only international. Perth offers comparable remuneration with materially lower living costs, pulling talent within Australia. Sydney also ranks close to the bottom globally on housing affordability – Demographia rates it 95th of 96 cities²⁴ – and this is a material issue for attracting and retaining talent.

Figure 8: Foreign lawyer regime openness

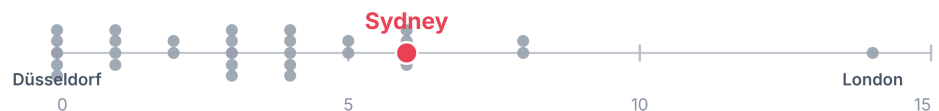
Foreign lawyer regime openness
Score



Source: The Business of Cities assessment of published regulator rules, May 2026. Dubai and Abu Dhabi are scored on their free zone regimes.

Figure 9: Globally ranked law schools and annual law graduates

Globally ranked law schools



Annual law graduates



Sources: QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026 and Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026 (Law); national and state education and bar statistics for graduates (the London figure is UK-wide), compiled by The Business of Cities.

On the inflow side, restrictions on foreign-trained lawyers practising in NSW can limit the attractiveness to practitioners wanting to work in Sydney, even temporarily, and recognition of international qualifications remains predominantly qualification-based.

Sydney offers something the traditional legal hubs do not: a sustainable working culture. Younger Millennial and Gen Z practitioners increasingly seek alternatives to the relentless pace of London, Singapore and Hong Kong.

INDEPENDENT BENCHMARKING

InterNations rates Sydney 3rd of 53 cities on work culture and satisfaction, 5th on career prospects and 6th on its overall Urban Work-Life Index.²⁵

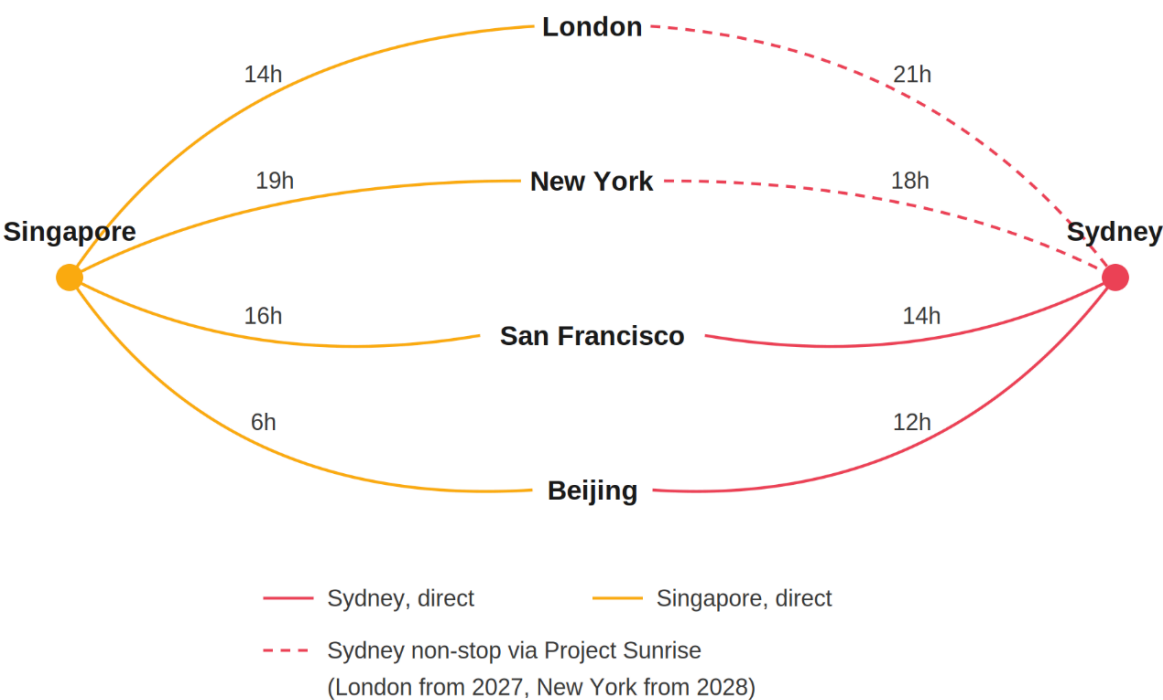
Geographic and geopolitical advantages

When it comes to geography, Sydney and Australia often suffer from perceptions of the tyranny of distance. While we may be a long-haul flight or two from the European and North American hubs, Sydney’s timezone overlap with Asian markets is high – and many of those Asian cities have limited overlap with North America and Europe. Sydney’s working day overlaps Singapore’s and Hong Kong’s by five hours, Tokyo’s by six and San Francisco’s by three.

Sydney also shares greater overlap with San Francisco than many other cities, providing an opportunity to connect into the tech-dominated markets of the US West Coast.

The tyranny of distance is also lessening, with aviation technology increasing connectivity to European and US East Coast markets through direct flights. With non-stop flights to major northern hemisphere centres, by 2028 Sydney will be closer to New York than our closest legal hub, Singapore.

Figure 10: Flight times to Sydney and Singapore from global hubs



Source: Published airline schedules, October 2026; Qantas Project Sunrise announcements, June and September 2026.

Figure 11: Timezone overlaps



Source: Committee for Sydney analysis of standard office hours by time zone. Overlaps shown in Australian Eastern Daylight Savings Time.

Attributes alone are not enough

On the national frameworks Sydney already outscores Singapore on rule of law and judicial effectiveness and is comparable on economic freedom. The gap relates to market share in arbitration cases, firm presence and practitioner recognition. Attributes such as institutional and sectoral scale, legal education quality or rule of law are essential if a city is to become a global legal hub; they are pre-conditions, not determinants. Sydney has many of the attributes that should make it a globally recognised centre of law. International arbitrations seated in Sydney remain comparatively few, despite the scale of its legal profession.

Dubai and Miami sit in the third tier, yet both handle materially more international arbitration than Sydney. Australia's legal profession is concentrated on domestic matters, and our low number of arbitration hearings compared with cities in both Tier 2 and Tier 3 indicates that Sydney is leaving opportunity on the table. The following case studies examine how other legal centres have used policy, institutional investment and promotion to attract international work.

4

The rise of the global legal hubs >

Seven cities with insights for Sydney

For Sydney to develop a reputation as a global centre of law, it is instructive to examine how the cities and jurisdictions we would compete with have developed and maintained their global status. This chapter examines seven cities that have each carved out a global role as legal centres.

Singapore: an intentional strategy to compete

Preferred by just 7% of corporate counsel in 2010, by 2021 Singapore had become the world's joint most preferred seat alongside London, named by over half of respondents,²⁶ with a high international share and wide geographic reach.

This reflected a deliberate choice to specialise in commercial arbitration, built on decades of government investment: Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) as the handler of private arbitration, followed by Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC) as a courtroom for international commercial litigation, Maxwell Chambers as a purpose-built, internationally recognised hearing centre, and the consistent updating of arbitration legislation. Singapore has focused on giving arbitration and mediation – both relationship-driven sectors – the density, convenience and institutional clustering capable of reinforcing its reputation.

Attracting global firms has been key to the competitive task. Singapore now hosts over 130 foreign law firms under different structures, making the city a base for regional transactions, arbitration, finance and corporate work. The Lawyers Go Global program, launched in 2018 by Singapore's Ministry of Law (MinLaw), the Law Society of Singapore and IE Singapore (now Enterprise Singapore), supports firms venturing overseas through mission trips, training, branding and marketing, with the stated purpose of helping Singapore capture more international demand for legal services.

A number of elements of Singapore's strategy offer insights for how Sydney competes in the next decade:

- > **Legal services as a strategic export sector.** Singapore has treated legal services as a key underpinning of its ambitions as a gateway for trade, finance and investment. Government policy, court reform, arbitration institutions, foreign law firm access, legal technology, treaty diplomacy and international promotion have all been part of the story. MinLaw continuously makes the case for legal services as a contributor to economic growth, and describes its aim as making Singapore a leading legal and dispute resolution hub.
- > **Linking law more clearly to finance and innovation.** The Singapore IP Strategy 2030 aims to strengthen the city as a global intangible assets and IP hub, while insolvency and restructuring reforms were framed as keeping Singapore's laws progressive. On technology, the 2020 Legal Industry Technology and Innovation Roadmap set out a decade-long adoption plan, and the 2022 Legal Technology Platform Initiative supported smaller practices with matter management, collaboration tools, funding and engagement.
- > **Name association to build the brand.** The Singapore Convention on Mediation opened for signature in 2019, creating a framework for cross-border enforcement of mediated settlement agreements – attaching Singapore's name to a global instrument in commercial dispute resolution.



Photo Credit: Anthony Lim

Dubai: custom-fit jurisdiction design

Dubai has developed substantially over the last two decades into an important legal hub in the Middle East and beyond. Since the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and its English common law courts were established in 2004, the city has established itself as a top-ten global arbitration seat whose institution, the Dubai International Arbitration Centre (DIAC), registered around 300 cases a year between 2022 and 2024, and the gateway hub for legal services across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.²⁷

Dubai's model has been deliberately segmented. The DIFC operates as a common law island inside a civil law country, with its own commercial laws, an independent regulator and proceedings in English, so that international parties can use a familiar legal environment. Foreign lawyers can register to appear before the DIFC Courts, lowering the barrier for international firms to base disputes work in Dubai. The district has since drawn a dense cluster of international law firms, banks and professional services that sustains the dispute hub's activities.

Three decisions are viewed as having made a difference in recent years:

- > **Opening the courts to the world.** The 2011 amendment allowed parties with no DIFC link to choose the DIFC Courts in writing, converting them from a free zone court into a wider dispute resolution option for regional and international contracts.
- > **Simplifying the arbitration architecture.** In 2021 the DIAC was restructured as an independent body with a board, an arbitration court and an administrative body, consolidating a previously fragmented landscape into a single institution.
- > **Specialising the courts around the economy's direction.** The Technology and Construction Division was established in 2017, and later the Digital Economy Court for disputes involving big data, blockchain, AI, cloud services, unmanned aerial vehicles, 3D printing and robotics – tuning the jurisdiction to the industries the wider economy was pursuing before their disputes began to arrive.



Photo Credit: Zq Lee

For Sydney, which already operates within a common law system, the transferable lessons lie less in the DIFC's enclave model than in the coordinated investment, consistent international promotion, specialist capabilities and accessibility that Dubai has built around it.

Dublin: building legal roles within the wider European market



Photo Credit: Juho Luomala

Dublin is one of the fastest emerging legal hubs of recent years – the common law backup inside the EU. More than half of its nearly 40 international law firms have opened since 2020, drawn by Brexit, Ireland’s common law system, and existing strength in technology, pharma, aviation leasing and financial services. The number of practising solicitors has grown to almost 13,000, up by about a quarter over the past decade.²⁸

The Irish government has deliberately streamlined the processes for foreign lawyers to practise, while IDA Ireland’s most recent strategy explicitly names Dublin’s legal hub status as a priority. A unified promotion vehicle, Ireland for Law, launched by the Minister for Justice in 2019, put the Law Society, the Bar, the Attorney General, the President of the High Court, four government departments and IDA Ireland behind a single campaign, governed by an implementation group that coordinates promotion abroad. It targets the sectors where Ireland already has depth: aviation finance, funds, insurance, technology, pharma and life sciences.

The effect on choice of law is beginning to show. The International Swaps and Derivatives Association (ISDA) has published Irish law versions of its standard derivatives documentation, and

some financial institutions have started lending under Irish law where they would previously have used English law. Ireland has also worked to host international dispute resolution capacity, positioning Dublin as a venue and not only a place to incorporate.

Overall, Dublin did not try to outcompete larger, more established neighbours such as London. Rather, it has provided common law continuity inside the single market, and built strong promotional machinery, government priority and practitioner access to carve out a larger market share.

London: a unified legal voice and a convening platform



Photo Credit: Giammarco Boscaro

London has found coordinated promotion and advocacy critical to riding out successive economic cycles. Since 2010, TheCityUK has acted as the industry’s central representative body for finance, insurance, banking, asset management, legal services, accounting, consulting and related professional services. It is an industry-led membership body, set up to speak to government, regulators, international markets and the media on behalf of the whole sector – founded on the view that London needed a stronger voice to promote it overseas, explain its value domestically and influence policy. It is a non-profit, funded through seven tiers of membership and sponsorship, with turnover of around A\$16m.

TheCityUK publishes sector reports, export data, legal services figures and competitiveness analysis, which helps engage ministers, regulators, judges, ambassadors, firms and professional bodies. Over a decade it has aligned otherwise fragmented interests across banking, insurance, law, accounting, consulting and technology.

London also keeps itself visible through London International Disputes Week, which exists to maintain the city's standing as one of the world's leading places to resolve international commercial disputes. For ten years it has brought the global market to London for a week each year and shown the full ecosystem in one place: judges, law firms, barristers, arbitrators, mediators, funders, expert witnesses, legal technology firms, forensic accountants and corporate lawyers.

London International Disputes Week

8,000

Dispute resolution experts from over 100 jurisdictions at its fifth edition in 2024 – up from around 60 founding and supporting institutions.²⁹

Miami: becoming the preferred partner in its sphere of influence

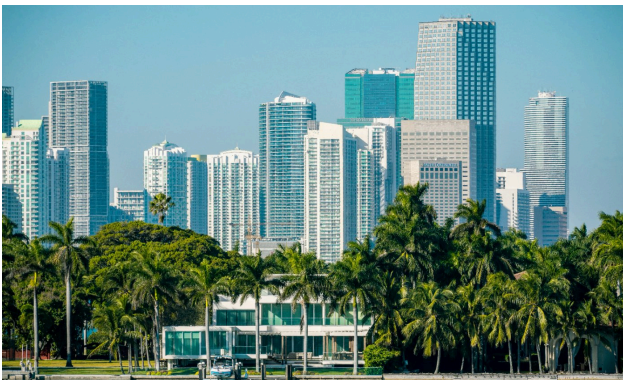


Photo Credit: Avi Werde

Miami has gone from a regional US legal market to a genuinely international one by positioning itself as the gateway to Latin America. Of the 25 largest US firms by headcount, 18 now have a Miami office, with a steadily growing lawyer population.

Florida's two-way merchandise trade has reached nearly US\$200 billion, more than half of it with Latin America and the Caribbean, and around three-quarters of it moves through the Miami customs district.³⁰ It is increasingly where cross-border Latin American legal work is done, thanks to proximity, language, and a concentration of bilingual practitioners and regional corporate headquarters. It has become a specialist in cross-border corporate work, private wealth and family-office advice, and the arbitration of Latin American commercial disputes, drawing on US legal infrastructure and Latin American connectivity.

Florida changed its rules in 2005 to let foreign attorneys represent clients in international arbitrations seated in the state, and in 2010 adopted the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law through the Florida International Commercial Arbitration Act. International arbitrations administered in Miami through the American Arbitration Association (AAA)'s International Centre for Dispute Resolution (ICDR) rapidly doubled, and by 2021 Miami was reported to have overtaken New York as the most frequent US seat for ICDR international cases, supported by bodies such as the Miami International Arbitration Society.

Toronto: strategic specialisation around emerging industry strengths



Photo Credit: Mwangi Gatheca

Toronto has spent two decades building sector-specific legal capability in artificial intelligence and legal technology. The initial catalyst was the MaRS Centre, which opened in 2005 as a downtown commercialisation platform, part-funded by the provincial government, connecting startups with capital, customers, talent and advisers. This gave the nascent legaltech sector access to accelerators, mentors, investors, corporate buyers and university talent. MaRS later launched LegalX as a legal entrepreneurship cluster connecting technologists, designers, coders, engineers and lawyers, while Toronto Metropolitan University launched the Legal Innovation Zone, the world's first legaltech incubator.

In the 2010s Toronto became home to some of the defining companies in AI contract analysis, serving major law firms and corporate legal departments, and began to attract the R&D headquarters of AI legal research firms emerging from the University of Toronto.

Ontario's Law Practice Program launched in 2014 as an alternative to articling, using four months of skills training and four months of work experience, including simulated online legal work and a virtual law firm model. This made technology, simulation, process design and new practice models part of lawyer formation in Ontario. The Law Society of Ontario's Access to Innovation program later set up a five-year regulatory sandbox, letting providers of innovative technological legal services serve users while complying with regulation – reducing uncertainty for services near the boundary of legal advice, automation and consumer legal help.

A series of challenges (the Access to Justice Challenge and the AI Legal Challenge) run with the province's Ministry of the Attorney General, offered seed funding to startups to improve legal services and processes, giving legaltech a public policy rationale.

University leadership with national support has also driven legal specialisation. The Vector Institute launched in Toronto in 2017 with CAD\$135 million in combined funding commitments over its first five years, supported by the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and nearly 40 companies. Canada's wider Pan-Canadian AI Strategy created a national AI research and talent infrastructure around Vector, giving Toronto a credible talent base for machine learning, natural language processing and applied AI.

Over ten years, Toronto's legaltech companies clustered around legal tasks where data volume, repeatability and expert verification matter. In 2025 Harvey announced it would open a Toronto office as a long-term investment in Canadian legal AI, citing the city's strong base of AI engineers, legal buyers, legal AI history and a credible implementation market.

Boston and Cambridge: legal capability built along the commercialisation chain



Photo Credit: Osman Rana

Boston and Cambridge have built a legal specialism on the life sciences, biotech and medtech ecosystem. On top of the industrial advantage of locating in Boston, life sciences companies gain a legal and administrative benefit: a mature innovation system connecting universities, teaching hospitals, technology transfer offices, investors, incubators and law firms.

New York, a near neighbour, was already undisputed as the broad global finance, capital markets and legal centre. That left Boston free to build a narrower and more defensible advantage: proximity to the science, hospitals, labs, founders and specialist investors at the point where life sciences companies are formed and commercialised.

The public sector catalyst was the Massachusetts Life Sciences Initiative: US\$1bn committed in 2008 over ten years, delivered through the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center and since renewed. This built a long, state-backed runway of companies, facilities, licensing deals and financings requiring specialist advice.

The commercialisation pipeline is also central. MIT's Technology Licensing Office licenses MIT intellectual property; Harvard research has seeded more than 300 startups since 2000 that raised more than US\$22bn; and Mass General Brigham Innovation handles collaborations, venture investing, licensing and company creation. These institutions make IP ownership, licence terms, founder equity and spinout governance core legal tasks.

Boston has also turned recurring legal bottlenecks into shared market infrastructure. Academic institutions, investors and firms such as Goodwin, Cooley and Wilson Sonsini developed a representative term sheet for life sciences spinouts, reducing licensing friction so products reach market faster.

Founder infrastructure brings lawyers in early. LabCentral has awarded more than 150 Golden Ticket company residency incentives since 2013, MassChallenge Healthcare runs commercialisation programs, and M2D2's challenge offers in-kind legal, regulatory and reimbursement support. Legal advice enters at formation, years before companies become conventional clients. MassBio convenes more than 1,700 members, and its General Counsel Roundtable gives Boston a standing legal and commercial forum for life sciences.

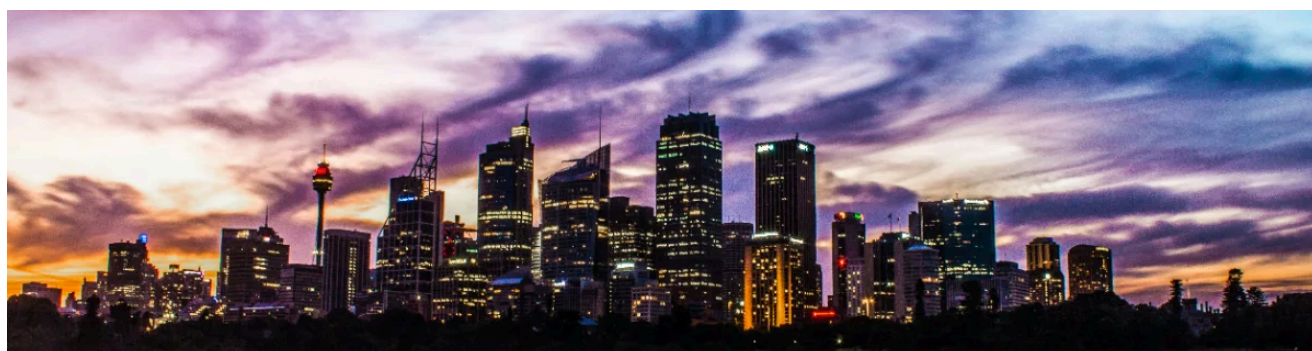
Industry scale makes the specialisation commercially meaningful. Massachusetts companies attracted US\$2.75bn in venture funding in the first half of 2025 – nearly a quarter of US biopharma venture dollars.³¹ This sustains demand across formation, IP, licensing, clinical trials, regulatory advice, M&A and disputes. Leading firms market Boston's capability across the full company lifecycle, and international entrants are following: Freshfields opened in Boston in 2025, focused on private capital and life sciences.

Lessons and implications for Sydney

Each of the cities explored has taken its own path. What is clear from all of them, though, is that they recognised attributes alone are not enough. The cases show how sustained investment, international promotion and closer links to growing industries can extend and amplify a city's legal market.

Table 3: Seven cities, seven strategies for success

City	Strategic model	Lever for Sydney
Singapore	State-backed specialisation: SIAC, SICC, Maxwell Chambers, continuous law reform	Sustained government investment compounds over decades
Dubai (DIFC)	Common law enclave inside a civil law state; courts opened to the world in 2011	Coordinated institutional investment, specialist capability and sustained international promotion can build a hub's international reach
Dublin	Common law backup inside the EU; one promotion vehicle, Ireland for Law	A single coordinated voice across government and profession
London	Industry-wide voice (TheCityUK) plus an annual flagship event (LIDW)	Fragmented interests can be aligned behind one message
Miami	Gateway to Latin America; rule change opened arbitration to foreign counsel	A regional-gateway play, mirroring Sydney's Asia-Pacific position
Toronto	Legaltech cluster built on university R&D and a regulatory sandbox	Aligns with Sydney's innovation city potential
Boston & Cambridge	Legal specialism built along the life sciences commercialisation chain	A template for a Sydney medtech or quantum play



5

Turning attributes into ambition – the case for Sydney >

Unlocking Sydney's industry specialisations

Success for Sydney as a global centre of law relies on more than simply the attraction of more arbitration hearings. In some respects, these are the outcome of a more substantive and intentional investment in Sydney's legal ecosystem.

Core to this is the strategic intertwining of Sydney's legal sector with the industries that are emerging as competitive advantages for Sydney not just nationally, but internationally. These are the industries – and the businesses and innovations that are defining them – that will become major export opportunities for NSW over the coming decade.

Many of these industries have been identified at either a state or national level as priority industries, and have had a suite of industrial and innovation policies established over recent years to double down on their growth and success prospects. What has often been missing from these industrial policy aspirations is the support of the wraparound industries that are essential to their success. Legal services are chief among these.

For these emerging priority industries with a clear export focus, the parallel capacity building of the legal services sector – to help navigate international expansion, mergers and disputes – is

essential. It also creates a significant opportunity for Sydney and NSW to build substantive, sector-specific legal expertise that can itself become an export opportunity, as well as establish Sydney as the premier location for arbitration and legal services globally.

Case study

London's evolution from a mercantile city to a global legal hub

Building a legal services sector on the back of a larger industry is precisely how London built its global specialisation in trade law. Well before London's more recent focus on law and professional services, the expansion of British trade across the 18th and 19th centuries saw a number of mercantile businesses based in London and Liverpool. As trading networks grew, and the scale and diversity of goods traded along with them, so too did the insurance and common law needs of businesses. London's specialisation in insurance, law and exchange made it the centre of the shipping world. An industry that grew centuries ago has come to define the service sector of London to this day.

Case study

Sydney's quantum computing cluster

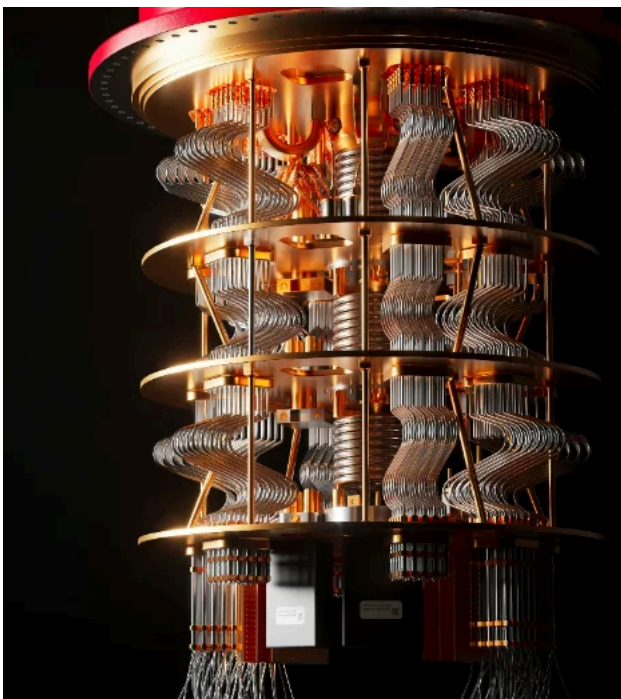
One of the most significant economic opportunities for Sydney in this regard is the city's globally recognised cluster of quantum technology research and innovation. Sydney hosts the overwhelming majority of Australia's quantum computing activity, both institutional and commercial.

Four of Sydney's major research universities – The University of NSW, the University of Sydney, the University of Technology Sydney and Macquarie University – underpin a cluster of quantum research that spans Sydney's innovation ecosystem. This network is anchored by the NSW Government-supported Sydney Quantum Academy and the Quantum Terminal, the country's first dedicated quantum collaboration space.

This is the approach taken in Boston, which went beyond marketing legal services to life sciences companies. It built legal capability into the infrastructure founders already used, such as a shared term sheet for spinouts, legal support inside LabCentral and M2D2, and a General Counsel Roundtable at MassBio.

Sydney is the birthplace of many of Australia's home-grown quantum businesses that have spun out of this ecosystem – Silicon Quantum Computing, Diraq and Q-CTRL. Combined funding across Sydney-headquartered quantum firms is approximately US\$530 million, with eight funded companies as at September 2026.³²

Australian quantum research is cited around 60% above the global average, and the country has attracted roughly 3.6% of global quantum venture capital against a 1.6% share of global GDP.³³ CSIRO estimates that commercialising quantum technologies could support an Australian industry worth \$2.2 billion and 8,700 jobs by 2030, within a global market it values at at least \$86 billion by 2040.³⁴



The wraparound economy: the missing piece of NSW's industry policy

In 2025 the NSW Government released the NSW Industry Policy, the NSW Innovation Blueprint and the NSW Trade and Investment Strategy, identifying the industries that will drive growth and investment attraction – from construction, manufacturing and net zero to agriculture, biomedical and life sciences.

What is missing is recognition that these industries need a strong ecosystem of wraparound services – including legal services – to grow. Those sectors sit just outside the policy boundary and are often forgotten.

Figure 12: Industry policy often focuses on the target sector without sufficient recognition of, and support for, the wraparound services



Industry policy tends to draw its boundary tightly around the industry itself. The sectors that make growth possible – legal, financial, technical and logistical – sit just outside that boundary and are often forgotten in industry policy and economic development.

Six things the world should know about Sydney

It's clear that Sydney has the attributes to position itself as a global centre of law. Lessons from cities across the world that have carved out this role reinforce this. But in a globally competitive landscape, attributes alone are not enough. They must be matched by ambition and action if success is to be forthcoming.



A city of unparalleled depth and diversity in the ANZ region

Sydney is the legal capital of Australia and a major centre in the Asia-Pacific. It is home to more legal practitioners than any other capital city – nearly one in three people working in the sector nationally are based here. Most global law firms with an Australian presence base their national headquarters in Sydney, and demand for legal services continues to grow.



A judicial system of integrity, efficiency and transparency

NSW's legal system is the most efficient in the country. The NSW Supreme Court delivers Corporations List judgments more than four times faster than Victoria's – a vote of confidence in our judicial system.



Home to Australia's international dispute resolution institution

Sydney is the headquarters of ACICA, with the capability and capacity to administer domestic and international disputes. Sydney is the most popular seat for arbitration in Australia, selected by the parties in 50% of ACICA arbitrations filed in 2025 and 69% of newly administered arbitrations in 2024.³⁵



A home to the industries that will shape Australia's future

Sydney is Australia's urban economic engine, accounting for 21% of economic activity³⁶, and the highest-ranked startup ecosystem in the southern hemisphere³⁷ – from quantum, cybersecurity and biomedical technologies to software and cleantech. New industries will need wraparound legal systems to negotiate, defend and grow into domestic and international markets.



A globally recognised centre of education

Sydney is home to two of the global top-20 law schools – the University of NSW (13th) and the University of Sydney (17th) – making it one of only four cities in the world with two or more law schools in the global top 20.



A beacon of integrity and stability in an uncertain world

At a time when geopolitical headwinds are creating uncertainty in global markets, Australia is a safe harbour. As a common law jurisdiction with strong global networks and good trade relationships with key countries that are increasingly fractious, Sydney can position itself as the Switzerland of legal hubs – neutral ground with deep expertise, strong legal capabilities and a trusted, transparent system. Australia sits in the 99th percentile worldwide for regulatory quality³⁸, and has free trade agreements in force with the United States and China and concluded negotiations with the European Union in March 2026, a combination that, among second-tier legal centres, only Singapore can match.

What success looks like

Succeeding requires an understanding of what success looks like. Ambition is important, but so too is a sense of achievement. If arbitration caseload were the measure of success, overtaking Singapore as the Asia-Pacific's biggest arbitration hub would be unrealistic. Three success criteria are identified.

Success metric	What this looks like	Baseline
More businesses, both domestic and international, nominate NSW as the jurisdiction of choice for contract disputes	> NSW is identified as the jurisdiction of choice for dispute resolution in contract clauses > Domestic businesses name ACICA as the default arbitral institution, and Sydney as the seat, in their dispute resolution clauses > ACICA increases the number of arbitrations it administers > Sydney moves into the global top ten preferred arbitration seats	14 new ACICA arbitrations in 2025; Sydney the seat in 50% of them; outside the QMUL top 15 preferred seats ^{39,40}
An increased presence of sector-specific legal specialisation, aligned with Australia's priority industries	> More law firms specialise in sectors of emerging national strength > More in-house general counsel of multinationals or major domestic corporates establish a presence in Sydney	23 of the 100 largest firms, and 5 of the top 10, present in Sydney ⁴¹
Public and private stakeholders are aligned, with clear messaging	> Sydney's capabilities are clearly articulated, and messaging is targeted to the right channels, from in-house general counsel to trade commissioners	24 of 67 international sources cite Sydney as a significant legal centre ⁴²



What it requires, and who

A constellation of attributes and an articulated ambition will not, alone, establish Sydney as a global centre of law. Success requires action by a range of stakeholders.



The business community

And specifically its general counsel – to understand the benefits of identifying NSW as the jurisdiction for dispute resolution, and nominate Sydney as the seat of arbitration and the ACICA Arbitration Rules as the applicable institutional rules in contracts. While increasing international disputes heard in Sydney should be an explicit objective, becoming the default location for domestic dispute resolution should come first.



The NSW Government

To recognise and promote the State's capabilities and advantages globally through its trade commissioner networks, and reflect the importance of a strong domestic legal capability in statewide innovation, industry and investment strategies.



The legal sector

To understand the growth ambitions and legal hurdles likely to face the industries at the forefront of state and national economic priorities – those that will enable Australia to play a key global economic role in the decades ahead.



The judicial system and arbitration institutions

To be equipped with the right infrastructure and systems to increase their capacity to take on more cases as Sydney's global status grows.

Successfully prosecuting the case for Sydney

Sydney's transformation into a global centre of law brings both direct and indirect benefits to Sydney and NSW. As with many industry attraction strategies, it is often the indirect benefits that create the potential for broader economic diversification of the state.

Direct

- > More domestic and international arbitration cases bring additional direct expenditure into the NSW economy through travel, accommodation and local spend.
- > Sydney's attraction for global talent gives early- to mid-career lawyers more reason to stay in Sydney rather than head overseas, and expat talent more incentive to return home.

Indirect

- > A more prominent role as a global centre of law makes Sydney more attractive for multinational firms to establish or expand their regional footprint – increasing demand for commercial floorspace and well-paid jobs.
- > Greater internationally focused capacity in Sydney's legal sector provides more support for export-focused sectors of emerging strength.

Case study

Paying the dividend: the story of Singapore's economic benefit

Singapore is a clear example of a region building on attributes and ambition through strategic action. Over the past twenty years, Singapore has undertaken a strategy to position itself as a global legal hub, with a view to leveraging legal services to drive broader economic investment into the city-state.

In 2008 the Ministry of Law liberalised the legal sector, introducing the Qualifying Foreign Law Practice scheme, enhancing the Joint Law Venture and Foreign Lawyer schemes, and allowing foreign practices to provide Singapore-law services in international commercial arbitration.⁴³

Over the decade that followed, the nominal value added of the legal industry rose more than 40% – from S\$1.5bn in 2008 to S\$2.1bn in 2017 – an annualised rate of about 4%, contributing roughly 0.5% of GDP and around S\$0.9bn in legal-services exports.⁴⁴

The lift has continued. Ministry of Law figures show legal-services value added rising a further 25%, from S\$2.36bn in 2018 to S\$2.98bn in 2023, with exports up nearly 35% to S\$1.40bn – growth attributed to international demand in arbitration, intellectual property and cross-border M&A.⁴⁵ SIAC's caseload nearly tripled over the same period, from 271 new cases in 2015 to more than 700 in 2025.⁴⁶ The hub strategy has translated into a sustained, measurable rise in sectoral output, not just caseload.

+40%

Legal industry value added, 2008–2017

+35%

Legal services exports, 2018–2023

6

Six ideas to build Sydney's case >

Setting Sydney up for success

To position Sydney as a global legal hub doesn't require a major structural change. Sydney's shortfall is not about legal quality or judicial capability. It is one of promotion and institutional resourcing. Elevating Sydney to a global centre of law requires a concerted focus on the stories we tell, who we tell them to, how we prioritise investment and, ultimately, how we attract talent and business. How Sydney and NSW achieve this falls into two distinct frames: coherence and communication, and capacity and capability.

Approach 1

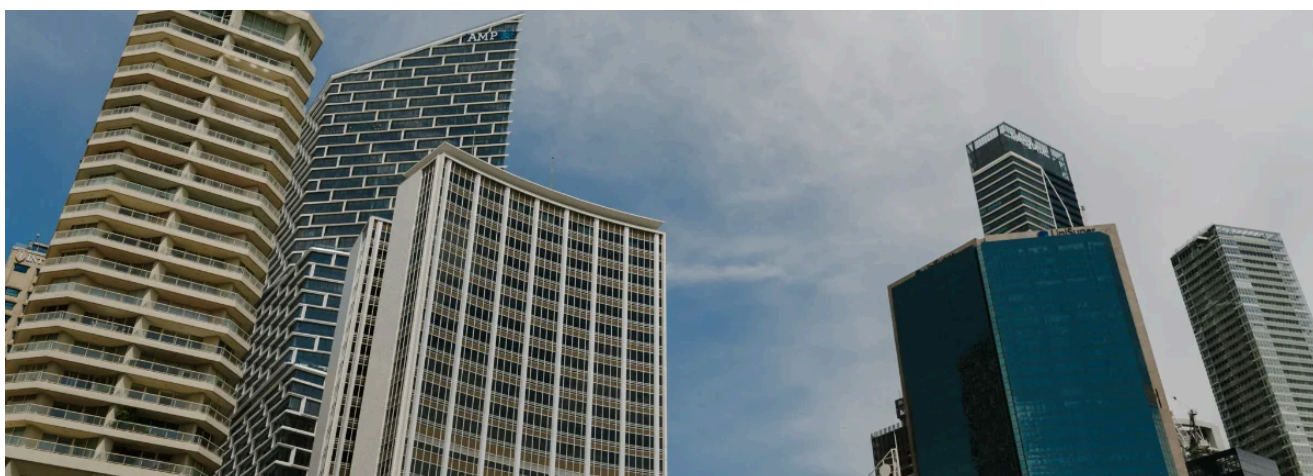
Coherence and communication

- | | |
|------------|--|
| IDEA ONE | Put NSW front of mind, at home and abroad |
| IDEA TWO | Build the sector relationships that turn the case into contracts |
| IDEA THREE | Build the coalition to tell Sydney's story |

Approach 2

Capacity and capability

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| IDEA FOUR | Back ACICA to compete |
| IDEA FIVE | Connect the courts to international parties and to arbitration |
| IDEA SIX | Compete for legal functions and legal talent |



Credit: Breeana Dunbar

Idea 1: Put NSW front of mind, at home and abroad

The governing law for dispute resolution is chosen at the drafting stage of a contract, long before any dispute arises. Sydney and NSW are not on the radar of the general counsel drafting these contracts when this happens.

Abroad, in-house counsel and international firms do not frequently consider NSW law or Australian arbitration institutions such as ACICA, because nobody has given them a reason to. Even at home, Australian companies often default to other seats in the region such as Singapore or Hong Kong, and nominate other institutional rules – such as those of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) or the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – for dispute resolution.

The Australian legal market's orientation toward regulatory and labour work, and away from the transactional and IP categories more closely associated with international legal hubs, underscores the challenge. If Australian businesses do not choose Australian jurisdictions and cities like Sydney, it is much harder to persuade an overseas-based general counsel to seat a dispute here.

Opportunities

- **Promote the single overarching case for why NSW and why Sydney, covering:**
 - NSW's common law status
 - The depth, breadth and capacity of Sydney's legal sector
 - Our judicial system's integrity, efficiency and complementarity with arbitration

- Australia's geopolitical neutrality, and its value to firms looking for an independent seat
- The cost advantage of seating arbitrations in Sydney compared with higher-cost seats such as Singapore and Hong Kong, and higher-fee institutions such as the ICC
- **Prosecute the case – NSW as the jurisdiction, Sydney as the seat and the ACICA Arbitration Rules as the institutional rules – via domestic businesses, including by:**
 - Encouraging the general counsel of target firms to include NSW-specific dispute clauses at the drafting stage
 - Briefing Investment NSW, Austrade and NSW trade commissioners to promote the case, as they are already in front of investors
 - Engaging, through trade and investment networks, with companies approaching market to make them aware of NSW and ACICA before contracts are drafted
- **Increase global awareness of Sydney and NSW's legal and arbitration capabilities:**
 - Target Asia-Pacific in-house counsel and the international firms advising on regional transactions – particularly in the Pacific and Indonesia, where Australia has strong political and trade relations
 - Engage and activate the more than 2,300 solicitors holding NSW practising certificates who work overseas as advocates for NSW
 - Use international arbitration and law-related business events to raise awareness of Sydney's strengths
 - Bring a major international legal or arbitration event to Sydney to showcase the city's sectoral strengths

Idea 2: Build sector relationships

Sydney has a number of established industrial specialisations that it is known for nationally and, increasingly, internationally, from established strengths such as financial services to more recent strengths across fintech, software, biomedical and quantum technologies. Sydney is the number one startup ecosystem in the southern hemisphere, produces 80% of Australia's medical instrument and diagnostic device exports, and hosts 60% of the nation's fintech companies. Sydney has more legaltech firms of scale than Singapore, though its ecosystem value is a fraction of London's (see Figure 5). This gives Sydney a base from which to grow legal technology exports and specialist services.⁴⁷ But this is not a story we have been good at telling the world.

What has also been missing from these stories is how vital the broader services ecosystem is to nurturing these growing industries. If Sydney – and Australia – are to increase their visibility and relevance on the global industrial and innovation stage, wraparound sectors such as legal services must be better integrated.

Other global hubs such as Toronto, Boston and Dublin did not start with inherently better legal systems. They attached legal capability to the industries they wanted to grow. And while the NSW Government has recently invested in identifying priority industries, the importance of supporting sectors such as law has not been recognised.

Time is of the essence. Where a sector is mature, the dominant commercial party usually dictates the dispute resolution venue and the default is

already set. Where a sector is emerging, that default has not yet formed. Sydney's advantage lies in the industries it leads that are still young enough for the question to be open.

Opportunities

- > **Engage the right representatives from key sectors to understand their legal needs.** Peak bodies, anchor research institutions, venture capital firms and lead companies understand their own contractual pressure points better than anyone; engaging them will help the profession understand which services best support their development.
- > **Encourage sector-standard term sheets and model clauses naming NSW law as governing law, Sydney as seat and the ACICA Arbitration Rules as institutional rules, for use by startups and university spinouts at formation.** A founder signing a first term sheet is making a jurisdictional choice likely to persist through every subsequent financing round – usually on advice from an incubator or investor rather than a law firm.
- > **Map practitioners in NSW firms with expertise in each priority sector, so sector capability can be demonstrated to a peak body rather than asserted to it.**
- > **Embed legal specialisation within NSW Government industry and innovation policy, so the legal proposition is built into sector strategies rather than added afterwards.**

Idea 3: Build the coalition to tell Sydney's story

Cohesive, coordinated storytelling is essential if Sydney is to elevate itself as a global centre of law. Sydney is already promoted internationally through many channels: trade commissioners, universities and other institutions, industry bodies and businesses themselves all speak to international audiences, and each has a reach the others do not. While this diversity is an asset, each channel currently carries its own version of the story, or no version at all. To bring Ideas 1 and 2 to life, the narrative of Sydney's strengths needs to be cross-sectoral.

The parties with most to gain from Sydney developing a reputation as a global centre of law are not primarily lawyers. Businesses benefit directly from reliable governing law, specialist legal advice and dispute resolution services that support international trade and investment. It's vital then that those advocating for investment in and support for Sydney's legal sector extend beyond those practising the law.

Opportunities

- **Promote a coherent, sector- and market-relevant narrative** that clearly articulates the case for NSW, used consistently by everyone who speaks for Sydney abroad.

- **Ensure each channel uses material** fit for its own audience but consistent in substance. Give participating organisations a shared evidence base and key messages that they can adapt for different international audiences.
- **Work with retired NSW Supreme Court and Federal Court of Australia judges** who now sit on international courts or work as international arbitrators to become advocates for NSW's legal capabilities.

Case study

A British and Irish precedent

Ireland for Law shows what a single coordinated voice looks like: the profession, the judiciary, four government departments and IDA Ireland behind one campaign and one implementation group.

In England, TheCityUK has aligned banking, insurance, law, accounting and consulting behind one message for over a decade, and works precisely because it is not a law body. London International Disputes Week gives that message an annual international stage.

Case study

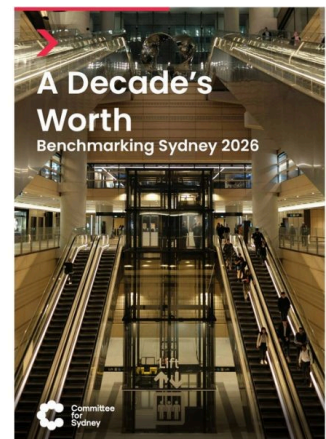
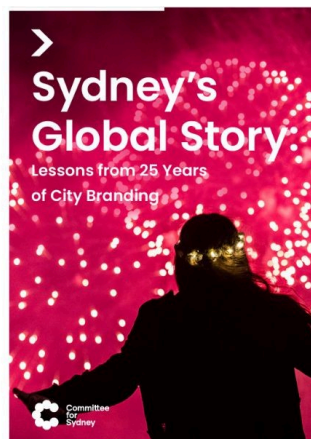
Sydney Global

Sydney Global is a strategic initiative led by the Committee for Sydney to strengthen how Sydney is positioned and understood globally. It responds to a longstanding challenge: Sydney is one of the world's most recognisable cities, but its international reputation is disproportionately shaped by tourism and lifestyle, while its strengths in business, innovation, education, culture and global connectivity are less well understood.

This brand gap means Sydney fundamentally outperforms global perceptions, limiting the city's ability to convert its true strengths into opportunity. Sydney Global is developing a more cohesive and compelling story – one that reflects the city's full value proposition in the global competition for talent, investment and ideas.

A defining feature is its cross-sector coalition of partners from government, business, education, tourism, culture, innovation and other city-shaping sectors. No single institution owns Sydney's global reputation. A shared coalition creates the opportunity to align around a stronger common narrative while still allowing each sector to tell its own story.

The coalition matters because city reputation is built through experience as much as communication. Bringing the people, institutions, policies, infrastructure, industries and cultural assets together ensures the narrative is grounded in Sydney's real strengths and championed consistently across channels and markets.



Credit: Committee for Sydney

Idea 4: Back ACICA to compete

The Australian Centre for International Commercial Arbitration (ACICA), headquartered in Sydney, is Australia's premier arbitral institution. Institutions such as ACICA are central to any city or region establishing itself as a global legal hub – SIAC in Singapore and HKIAC in Hong Kong are prime examples. ACICA is therefore central to Sydney's aspirations to develop as a global centre of law.

As it stands, ACICA's annual caseload is dwarfed by major hubs like Singapore. What is clear from successful cities overseas is that government priority, in the form of funding and investment, is key to success.

ACICA is currently self-funded through membership, case administration fees and event ticketing. Investing in capacity building and promotion at home and abroad requires time and effort that is currently focused on revenue generation. Investing in ACICA's growth requires diversifying its funding streams.

A\$5.4bn

Value of matters under ACICA's administration in 2025 – on a self-funded model.

Opportunities

- > **Enhance government and sector-body funding of ACICA's operations**, including national and international roadshows, to raise awareness of its role and encourage nomination in contract dispute clauses.
- > **Facilitate sectoral advocacy for, and collaboration with, ACICA** to promote the business case for Sydney's arbitration capabilities.
- > **Equip ACICA with a dedicated space to hold arbitrations and events**. While it need not be as formal as Singapore's Maxwell Chambers, a dedicated space in a high-profile location in Sydney's legal heart, at no cost to ACICA, would give it significant prominence and additional revenue – for example through hiring hearing rooms for arbitrations or mediations.

Idea 5: Connect the courts to international parties and to arbitration

NSW courts are the fastest in Australia and were among the country's earliest adopters of court technology. They already conduct preliminary matters remotely as a matter of routine, which has neutralised much of the traditional concern about geographic distance. The opportunity is to make these capabilities more visible, consistent and accessible to international parties, while simplifying interaction between NSW courts and private arbitration.

Case study

Briefcase: Sydney's legal technology frontier

Briefcase is a Sydney-founded legal case-management platform that emerged from the Techstars Sydney 2025 cohort. Founded by Kirk Simmons, former Head of Legal at Canva, it replaces paper-based case files and disconnected email systems with an end-to-end digital workspace for courts, tribunals, arbitrators and insurers.

The platform uses narrow AI to extract facts, format orders and detect hallucinations, while keeping human decision-makers in control. Simmons describes the objective: "Justice should be a system of action."⁴⁸ Briefcase is in pilot with private and public sector customers, with plans to extend to arbitration and court modernisation in Australia and internationally.

Briefcase illustrates a broader point: Sydney already has practitioners and entrepreneurs working at the intersection of legal expertise and technology. Sydney could do more to support this capability and make it visible to international clients.

Opportunities

- > **Present the courts as an integral part of Sydney's arbitration offer**, so parties choosing a seat understand what judicial support is available and how quickly they can expect it.
- > **Establish and publicise service standards for arbitration-adjacent matters**, so an international party can see the applicable timeframe before choosing a seat rather than after.
- > **Continue building digital access** so an international party can file, appear and give evidence without travelling for procedural steps: e-filing as the default for commercial matters, video link as standard, remote evidence access and digital case files.

Idea 6: Compete for legal functions and legal talent

Companies often choose governing law where their in-house counsel sit. This means the competition for legal work is settled upstream of any dispute, in a decision about where a company bases its regional legal function. Asia-Pacific in-house teams concentrate in Singapore, and the contracts those teams draft name Singapore law and a Singapore seat as a matter of course. If Sydney is to grow as a global centre of law, it must grow the number of companies choosing Sydney as the base for their in-house functions.

Building organisational legal depth requires attracting and retaining legal talent. NSW universities produce around 2,900 law graduates a year, substantially more than Hong Kong or Singapore.⁴⁹ While Sydney is home to two top-20 global law schools, the size of the domestic market means ambitious Australians build their careers in London and New York, where exposure to significant matters is greater.

Attracting international talent to come to Australia also proves challenging. Beyond the caseload diversity and complexity, regulation and recognition impede the ability of many qualified lawyers to practise here.

The result is a thinning of the mid-career cohort that is essential to the legal sector's continued growth.

Opportunities

- > **Engage companies already running Asia-Pacific legal teams** from Sydney to understand what brought them and what constrains them, and develop them as proof points.
- > **Develop a targeted in-house counsel attraction program** positioning Sydney as the Asia-Pacific in-house base of choice on rule-of-law certainty, court speed, cost position, lifestyle and legal technology depth.
- > **Expand who is considered an "experienced practitioner" for a foreign lawyer** seeking conditional admission in NSW – from 7+ years' experience to 5+ years (inclusive of any training contract).
- > **Shift from qualification-based to experience-based recognition**, with specific frameworks in place for common law jurisdictions.

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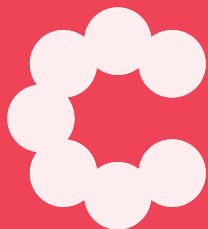
Thank you >

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for
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