

The IAFL Continental Brief: Sunshine, Learning, Laughter with a Little Bit of Rumba — A Look Back at the IAFL European Chapter Conference in Barcelona, 4 – 8 February 2026

I was thrilled to welcome more than 300 Fellows from 43 jurisdictions to the 2026 IAFL European Chapter Conference in Barcelona last week - a gathering that managed to combine rigorous learning, spectacular scenery, genuine camaraderie, competitive sports, gastronomic experiences, and enough dancing to make Friday morning a triumph of professionalism over fatigue.



From the outset, the city gave us its best. Gaudí around one corner, Gothic architecture around another, and world-class food almost everywhere in between. During our time there, Barcelona was fortunately spared the wrath of not less than 2 named storms 'Leonardo' and 'Marta', and we were able to enjoy the pleasure of at least some winter sun and blue skies - a welcome contrast to the conditions many of us left behind at home.

At our Welcome Dinner we celebrated the breadth and strength of our Academy, including the arrival of 18 new Fellows, joining a community that balances intellectual excellence with warmth and long-lasting friendship. I truly hoped their lived experience of their first conference lived up to that expectation.

We paused to celebrate Mia's 80th birthday - a joyful moment honouring a Fellow of over 30 years, a former European Chapter President, and a former Global President. Mia received her birthday cake with her trademark grace and elegance. She is such an inspiration to us all.



This conference was an opportunity to recognise the Academy's connectivity and collaboration with other European Institutions, work that many fellows work tirelessly to promote. A milestone achievement being granted participatory status with the [Council of](#)

[Europe](#) as an international NGO. This accomplishment, along with our new International Mediation Initiative with the [European Lawyers' Union](#) (UAE) and ongoing work with the [European Judicial Network](#) (EJN) and attendance at the European Presidents Conference (KPK), underscores how powerfully our collective expertise now resonates on the international stage.

In particular grateful thanks to [Alice Meier-Bourdeau](#) (France), [Sandra Verburgt](#) (the Netherlands), [Soma Kölcseyi](#) (Hungary), [Alexandre Boiché](#) (France), [Johan Sarvik](#) (Sweden) and [Rachael Kelsey](#) (Scotland), whose ambassadorial work has helped secure this progress.

The Educational Programme: Law, Self-reflection and Laughter

Under the leadership of the indefatigable [Karen O'Leary](#) (Ireland and Northern Ireland) and her committee – [Arnaud Gillard](#) (Belgium), [Esther Susin-Carrasco](#) (Spain) and [Suzanne Kingston](#) (England) - the educational programme offered a balanced blend of black-letter law, behavioural insight, global perspectives and plenty of interaction. The level of audience engagement was superb, and we were thrilled that attendance remained strong across all three days. Thank you to all those that contributed with such enthusiasm.



We began with the work psychology consultant, [Dr Carolann Edwards OBE](#), who invited us to look deeply at ourselves and consider how others see us. Carolann's session set the atmosphere for two days of engagement and genuine self-reflection. It came as no surprise to learn who found themselves in the 'high dominance' quadrant! For those who did not have the opportunity to obtain a DISC report but are interested in following up please contact Carolann to discuss.

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After coffee, in the financial stream [William Tyzack](#) (England) chaired a panel with [Alphonse Provinziano](#) (California, USA) and [Marie Baronin von Maydell](#) (Germany) comparing how their different jurisdictions tackle modern and unusual assets. A challenge practitioners increasingly face given the pace of innovation. An interesting discussion on disclosure, valuation and enforcement, which could have gone on much longer than the

time permitted, but it was reassuring to gain some insight into the tools available in California, where many of the cryptocurrency platforms are headquartered.

In the children panel, the panel explored acquiring parenthood across borders. Chaired by Arnaud Gillard, Juliet Nyambura Gachanja (Kenya) it was a thought-provoking discussion between [Michael Gration KC](#) (England), [Valentine Darmois](#) (France) and [Lavanya Regunathan Fischer](#) (India)

We were proud that all panels deliberately featured a number of new voices and their contributions enriched the programme and reflected the depth of emerging expertise within our membership. Thanks to all for giving up their time and sharing their expertise. The effort that goes into preparing for these sessions is not something to be taken for granted.

One of the standout moments was the interactive NCDR workshops. These showcased international mediation in action chaired effortlessly by the experienced Suzanne Kingston and [Patricia Mundia](#) (Kenya). These were a rare education session in which the volume of laughter rivalled the volume of legal analysis. Thanks to all the mediators who unwittingly 'volunteered' – you were amazingly game!



Our Succession-themed case studies teased out some important legal issues for us to grapple with. There is nothing quite like analysing the Roy family to remind you that even the most complex client families are, in fact, perfectly manageable when you have international expertise of this Academy to call on.

Friday morning proved miracles do happen. The education programme followed a packed club night, generously hosted by The Bridge, a Spanish International Family Law Network. It was wonderful to see so many Fellows on the dancefloor... enthusiasm overwhelming, if not always rhythmically aligned.

We started with a thought-provoking discussion, chaired by Esther on relocation of children and the impact of Brussels II Ter, with regard to choice of jurisdiction clauses. [Cristina González Beilfuss](#) (Spain) shared a fount of information on the various rules and regulations to be deployed. Insightful practical experience was also shared by [Michael Wells-Greco](#) (Switzerland), [Julie Losson](#) (France) and [Sandra van Staden](#) (South Africa).

Later sessions took on a theme increasingly central to cases across all jurisdictions - coercion and controlling behaviour chaired by Arnaud with [Lucy Loizou](#) (England), [Manuela Tirini](#) (Italy) and [Anne Heide-Jørgensen](#) (Denmark). This was followed by a dynamic, insightful session from [Professor Doyin Atewologun](#) on systemic opportunity barriers. As Doyin reminded us, talent is rarely the issue; systems are. She has given us much to take back to our practices.



Despite the temptations of sunshine and sangria, Fellows turned out in force for the Saturday morning technology sessions - no doubt drawn by the most topical of issues... the opportunity and threat of technology. A highlight for many of the educational programme and what a brilliantly interactive and informative sessions they both were. Well worth getting out of bed for.

Karen with [Peter Burgess](#) (England), [David Sanchez](#) (New York) and [Richard Abbey](#) (EY Forensic & Integrity Service Leader) helpfully identified the opportunity and risks but left us wanting more. We all continue to grapple with billing, training and cyber threats but at least we know we are on that journey together and will share ideas and solutions as the profession reshapes. A conversation that will doubtlessly be picked up in upcoming conferences.

Kudos to [Michael Gouriet](#) (England), [Dipali Maldonado](#) (UAE), [Mert Yalcin](#) (Turkey) and Nimrita Dadlani, Pivot for their fascinating insight and brilliant pre-recorded demonstrations. As a result I'm sure many of us will start utilising AI more expansively in our practices.



As many of you will know, at many recent conferences we have taken the opportunity to support a local charity and this conference was no exception. Thanks to [Mònica Bardaji Pujadas](#) (Spain) for identifying [Pulseras Candela](#), a charity that has been making a difference since 2014. Pulseras Candela is dedicated to raising funds to provide research in child cancer at St Joan de Deu Hospital. Through selling their bracelets they raised €3,300 from attendance during our education programme.

Club 25

It was my great pleasure to present a 25-year Fellowship Award to [Johan Sarvik](#) (Sweden) who has given an extraordinary level of service to the IAFL. Johan became a Fellow in 2001, and ever since he has contributed to the Academy with remarkable dedication. His roles have been many and influential and from 2025, Johan serves as Vice President of the European Chapter. Johan has also been a key member of our CLE teams (2012 and 2015). Across every role, Johan has given his time, expertise and leadership with generosity and integrity. He is one of the steady hands and trusted voices who make this Academy what it is.



Unfortunately, [Daniela Kriedler-Pleus](#) (Germany) was unable to be with us to accept her Club 25 award, so we will present to her on another occasion. Daniela, thank you for all you have contributed for the past quarter-century. Your presence was greatly missed.

The Social Programme: Barcelona in All Its Glory

Barcelona offered an exceptional backdrop for a social programme as rich and varied as the city itself.



For those keen golfers amongst us the proceedings kicked off early on Tuesday. The sun shone on the Americans team who prevailed of the inaugural IAFL 'Ryder Cup' in testing conditions (notwithstanding some Fellows had flown in overnight – bravo!).

Congratulations to top scoring player [Jason Naimi](#) who took home the cup. The challenge will be resumed in Dublin when the Europeans will obviously be looking to recover the trophy.

On Wednesday numbers quickly swelled throughout the morning. Fellows enjoyed a choice of orientation activities on arrival, whether a leisurely neighbourhood walk from the Majestic Hotel through the grand Modernist avenues of Passeig de Gràcia and into the bohemian heart of Gràcia, or (one of my highlights) a relaxed cycling tour through the elegant grid of the Eixample and down to the lively beachfront of Barceloneta.

The excursions continued on Thursday with the atmospheric journey to Montserrat, travelling up by funicular into the mountains to visit the famed monastery and its Black Madonna. The tour began in a cloud so thick it could have been theatrical staging. Then, in perfect cinematic timing, the mist lifted to reveal breathtaking panoramic views. Others opted for the Footsteps of Gaudí tours, taking in two of his iconic works - an opportunity to experience the genius of Barcelona's most celebrated architect. The Sagrada Familia with its intricate exterior and its luminous, awe-inspiring interior left many Fellows speechless.

Evenings were just as memorable. Welcome drinks and happy hours for all and Barcelona's gastronomic reputation was thoroughly upheld during our dine-around evenings: They provided the perfect stage for new connections, renewed friendships, and lively discussion. For first-timers and committee members, a more intimate welcome dinner at Alba Granados provided the perfect setting to forge new connections.



On Thursday night, our Spanish colleagues at The Bridge hosted a wonderfully exuberant disco evening at the Hyde Club - retro, lively, and conveniently close to the hotel, with a dancefloor that proved exceptionally well-used.



Friday brought further excursions: cava tasting at Codorniu's modernist wine cellars, more Gaudí exploration, and the option of another dine-around or just a quiet night to make private arrangements.

Saturday's options catered to every inclination: the spirited Padel Tournament, the old city food and wine walk, or the art-infused tour of El Born and the Picasso Museum.

The highly anticipated Padel Tournament did not disappoint. Organised in an 'Americano' format we were able to play in dynamic pairings, regularly rotating around all 16 players. Regardless of levels of experience (many had never played) it was hugely enjoyed by all. There were competitive rallies, some bold line-calls, and some heroic dives or sprints. Victory ultimately went to Michael Gouriet & [Gonzalo Gross](#) (Uruguay). A formidable final pairing and very deserving champions.



The conference concluded in style with the President's Party at the Sea Garden, a stunning private venue overlooking Marina Port Vell. Welcomed by a live entertainment from 'Rumba Catalana', the party atmosphere engulfed the room. It was impressive to see [Maria Mercedes Lacasa Valls](#), [Elena Zarraluqui](#) and [Inmaculada Ruz](#), (all from Spain of course) and [Caroline Counsel](#) (Australia) showing us how rumba *should* look. Others attempted to follow (myself only under duress). With cocktails, canapés, and a terrific DJ there was dancing until late. It was the perfect finale to an unforgettable Barcelona meeting.



So, to final thankyou's. I must again express my sincere gratitude to all of our 16 sponsors. Their contributions enable us to create events that are truly international in spirit and first-class in substance. In particular, to EY, our principal sponsor at this conference.

Thank you also to the Judy Lane team who work tirelessly, over many months if not years, to bring these conferences to life. This has been a special conference being the home town for Marc Pursals and Esther Meneses but also thanks to Annie Dunster, Ele Dexter,

Michele Williams, Dawn O'Hanrahan and last but not never least, Lisa Moliterno from Stewarts.



We now look ahead to our upcoming conferences in [Kuala Lumpur](#), [Dublin](#) and [Fort Lauderdale](#), where we will pick up our conversations. Barcelona gave us sunshine, learning and unforgettable memories. I hope you found it to be a conference that delivered on both reflection and connection.

It was a timely reminder that, if anything, the past twelve months have demonstrated just how vital this Academy is as a united professional home in a volatile and divided world.

Thank you for your support. Emma x

