

BAR STANDARDS BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

Bar Professional Training Course BPP Law School (London) Report of Visit held on 19 January 2012

Name of Institution	Date of Visit/Meeting
BPP Law School (London)	19 January 2012

Title of Course/award	Previous course
Bar Professional Training Course	Bar Vocational Course

Approved and actual numbers (2009-10)	Term start date
264 Full Time (261 at time of visit) 96 Part Time (89 at time of visit)	12 September 2011 (FT) 16 September 2011 (PT)

Monitoring Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Mr Michael Soole QC	Practising Barrister
Dr Stuart Weinstein	Legal Academic, Vice Chair of Education and Training Committee
Ms Nerys Jefford QC	Practising Barrister, member of the Education and Training Committee
Dr Valerie Shrimplin	Head of Education and Standards, BSB
Ms Janet Pugh	Education Manager, BSB

HEI Team attending the event	Role and area of primary responsibility
Mr Peter Crisp	Dean, Law School
Ms Anna Banfield	Joint Director of Programmes, London and Leeds
Mr James Welsh	Joint Director of Programmes, London and Leeds
Ms Lucy Corrin	FT Lecturer
Mr Andrew Maryniak	FT Lecturer
Ms Boryana Peeuska-Cutting	Deputy Director, Quality
Ms Jane Rudd	Assistant Registrar
Ms Judith Raphaely	Senior Lecturer, Module Leader ReDOC
Ms Isobel Dakyns	FT Lecturer, Module Leader Opinion Writing
Ms Sonia Simms	FT Lecturer, Module Leader Advocacy
Ms Sally Peters	FT Lecturer
Mr Jonathan Bacon	FT Lecturer
Mr Nathan Hawley	FT Lecturer
Mr Ishan Kolhatkar	FT Lecturer
Mr Paul Wetton	Tutor

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Ms Sabeen Obaioullah	Tutor
Ms Rosamund Reay	Student Support administrator
Ms Helen Holmes	FT Lecturer

Rationale for the visit

This visit was held as part of the BSB's annual programme of visits to BPTC Providers to monitor the quality and standards of the course and to determine whether the course is being delivered in accordance with the Course Specification Requirements and Guidance ("the Blue Book").

The panel was provided in advance with key documentation including the law school's most recent Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), copies of the last two year's External Examiner and BSB visit reports, and other information. During the visit the panel had an opportunity to tour the premises and to meet with management, teaching and learning resources staff, and with students. The panel also observed a number of classes. All of the above informed the panel's conclusions contained in this report.

Context: The HEI/Provider

BPP was established in 1976 and attained taught degree awarding powers for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in September 2007 (as granted by the Privy Council and approved by the Quality Assurance Agency). It joined Apollo Global (USA) in 2009, and became the first private sector organisation in the UK to become a University College in July 2010.

The BVC course ran in London from 1997 to 2010 and in Leeds from 2006 to 2010, within a suite of related law programmes delivered by BPP. From September 2010 the BVC was replaced by the BPTC on both sites.

There are currently arrangements in place by which students can 'top up' the BPTC course to an LLM (Professional Legal Practice) by the completion of additional modules.

1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards

Adherence to the aims, philosophy and standards of the Bar Professional Training Course was observed. Comments regarding specific areas for improvement are detailed in the recommendations below.

2. Quality management systems

Staff wanted to reassure the panel that following the less than satisfactory exam board processes in July 2010 BPP are in a transition period and have invested in an enhanced Registry which includes an Assistant Registrar. They aim to have a new timetabling office and the new student management information system, Banner Sungard, will be installed in the institution within the next nine months. This system will support all aspects of management information including student progression. The panel noted that staff training would be needed to support the Banner system.

It was not clear whether all staff had in fact seen, read or contributed to the Annual Monitoring Report produced by BPP for Leeds and London. The panel noted that BPP had introduced induction and training in quality assurance for all part time and freelance staff in line with a recommendation from the previous visit in January 2011.

3. Staffing and staff development

The ratio of full time staff to students had continued to improve and it was noted that any current staff who were on fractional contracts had in fact been full time originally and this was seen to enhance continuity of the teaching. There was a higher turnover with freelance staff, although the benefits of using freelance teaching staff were the good links to direct practice. An initiative which management had recently used was to provide free training for staff that were planning to move to freelance mode. These staff had received training in advocacy and were fully ATC compliant. The management team also provide general training for all staff with a staff conference on Academic Quality in 2011 and a training day in January 2012. BPP aim to support staff to write articles for practice based journals.

The London team maintain the cross site marker's meetings with BPP Leeds in order to make sure the marking is consistent. The management team regularly review the student experience and satisfaction with each module questionnaire and if a lecturer scores below the acceptable threshold for teaching their position is reviewed and discussed carefully.

The management team observed that in the main all staff were well motivated and there was a good atmosphere within the teaching team.

The panel were concerned about the balance of the workloads following the meeting with the teaching team. The course leader advised that they had recently introduced staff being responsible for one module and this had helped considerably with timetabling. The panel enquired how BPP supported staff development in general terms (e.g. time management, stress management).

The teaching team indicated that where possible they were given two non-teaching days which they used to accomplish the administrative tasks needed for each module. Concern was expressed that the management team were due to remove Friday as a day free from teaching next year. Some staff expressed the view that a greater accountability was placed on full time lecturers in that students were more likely to contact full time staff than freelance staff simply because they were more available and at times this increased the workload of the full time staff. The teaching team indicated that they would benefit from having a dedicated administrator for BPTC to coordinate the administrative tasks which need to be undertaken.

Some staff indicated that they could benefit from more training (CPD and IT) with various IT facilities to enhance their teaching, including white boards and the recording facility for revision. It was noted by staff that the Camtasia programme does not always function efficiently. The teaching team commented that there was very little time to embark on research given the high teaching loads. Staff commented that there appeared to be no clear work loading model used to differentiate the numbers of teaching hours with the number of marking hours for staff. This had the effect of preventing transparency between staff in terms of their actual workload and had the potential to cause false comparisons. Some staff may inaccurately perceive they are working harder than others. Similar to comments made by staff in last year's report heavy workloads are not conducive to taking part in scholarly activities. At this point there did not appear to be a workload model to audit staff work.

The panel **recommended** that BPP should review more closely the workload of all staff including the amount and type of marking individual staff have to undertake in order that there is transparency and that staff would be able to schedule in scholarly activities.

4. Curriculum content and structure

Staff reported that much work had been undertaken on the ReDOC Course which at times had been a challenge however the team were satisfied that the result was a much more effective course for the students. The teaching team for ReDOC advised that the assessment for this module should be reviewed by the BSB and that it seemed to be much content was delivered for only 5% of the course. The panel responded to inform staff that a ReDOC working group had been set up with members from the Providers in order to discuss such issues.

BPP staff commented that they had noticed more appeals from students with the change of the BPTC assessment regulations.

The course team expressed some concerns in the first year of the centrally set examinations of having to

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manage student expectations and general concerns in relation to successfully passing the forthcoming exams. They anticipated that the academic rigour of the course would remain and were confident that the BPTC award had integrity.

5. Admissions and student profile

The staff confirmed that the recruitment process had been carefully managed for 2011/12 intake and they had benefitted from employing a statistician to assist them in this process. They confirmed as with last year that no clear pattern had emerged and the profile each year was different. Last year there had been 115 deferrals and so they had managed this process by contacting all students early and refunding deposits for those students who had informed them that they were not wishing to take their deferred place. The course team had also instigated an early deadline for payment of those students who were intending to start in September 2011. Staff anticipated that the market may shrink in the next three to four years.

This year the course leader indicated that care had been taken with the recruitment of international students and the language requirement had been applied rigorously. This had resulted in an excellent cohort of international students.

In relation to comments raised at the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) with regards to the possibility of streaming in various modules, it was the course leader's view that this may lead to the perception of a second class service and staff generally were not in favour of this approach.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

Teaching staff reiterated the view that they had encountered issues with a few students who were unable to engage with critical thinking as much as others in some of the knowledge areas. Some students had suggested (as noted earlier through the SSLC) that BPP should stream students according to ability however the staff in the main were not supportive of this view for several reasons as they saw the streaming of students as a blunt tool which may discourage people from a diverse background to participate fully. Staff indicated that in groups of twelve it was up to the skill of the lecturer to make sure all students contributed equally and that those who did not engage did not impact the learning of others.

A query was raised by some staff as to the way in which some of the Inns are teaching 'examination in chief' in advocacy as it appeared to be contradicting the teaching at BPP. The panel advised that this may be miscommunication by students; however this would be raised at the regular meetings with the Inns' Education Officers. There was further discussion about the Hampel Method and staff were of the view that at the start of the module a more generalised approach should be used so that students are able to benefit from written feedback at an early stage. Members of the teaching team from Opinion Writing and Drafting asked the BSB whether they would consider the use of computers in the assessments of these modules. They felt that the use of computers was more realistic in terms of replicating practice and the time spent marking more than two hundred scripts and deciphering handwriting could be better used.

Generally staff voiced concern about the challenges of teaching to a large syllabus in two of the three knowledge areas (Civil Litigation and Criminal Litigation) with the examinations being centrally set and delivered.

In the classes that the panel observed there was some excellent teaching from tutors with specialist knowledge from current practice who used effective and relevant skills to assist students in their learning. The students were impressive in their professional approach (which included their appearance) and preparedness for the sessions which were observed.

7. Standards and assessment strategy and methods (including progression data)

The panel was pleased to learn from students that assessment feedback was of a high quality. Staff may wish to consider the nature of online lectures and the feedback which students receive during this process so that they feel fully supported. The panel observed that the manuals produced for each module were of a high

standard and clear in terms of what was required by students in order to pass the module.

8. Student support and quality of student experience

The panel met with a group of sixteen students including two part-time and two students who planned to practice overseas. Of this group four students had so far managed to obtain a pupillage. The group were lively and had a wide range of opinions. Some students expressed the view that they thought it was too easy to get on the course and that the degree class of a 2:2 was, in their view, too low. Some students shared their concerns that the level of English amongst their peers on the course was far below what was needed to perform well in the small group sessions such as advocacy. A few students enquired about the possibility of whether classes could be streamed and/or prospective students could be interviewed, so that the more able students were not disadvantaged in any way.

Students expressed their concerns about the centrally set examinations which the BSB were administering in that the design of assessments may have more emphasis on memory than critical reasoning.

Students spoke very positively about the standard of teaching at BPP which provided them with a good knowledge base. They appreciated that the groups were regularly changed so that they were able to receive a wide range of views from the academic staff. Students expressed some concern about the ReDOC module in relation to the teaching of skills which they felt had not fully prepared them for an academic exam. Some students were of the view that the assessments for Opinion Writing and Drafting should be completed on computers as this was more representative of real practice.

All students indicated that they found their tutors approachable and friendly. In terms of feedback on their work students were praiseworthy in general of the type of feedback received from tutors and they singled out good feedback in the areas of Opinion Writing, Advocacy and Conference modules.

In relation to delivery of the part time course it was noted that there were less hours allocated to a SGS for the part time students than the full time students. The part time course is currently run at weekends. The panel **recommended** that BPP London should take steps to review this aspect of their delivery for part time students.

Students were supportive of the Fit to Sit Policy which BPP use and they confirmed that the attendance rule was applied appropriately by all staff.

In terms of the resources on offer at BPP London, students indicated they were of a high quality, although some students mentioned that a few tutors seemed unable to use the interactive white boards correctly. Students were pleased with the amount of study space, they noted that there were hard copies of all relevant texts and easy access to online resources and wireless connections was provided. The library had extra quiet study section which the students found useful. Some students commented that the common room was a little small for the full numbers of students however they were appreciative of the space in general terms.

The student representatives present confirmed that they met termly with BPP staff as part of a Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) and had opportunities to forward student comments by email in advance of the meeting. Some of the representative felt that these meetings could be improved so that in effect there was a real exchange of views, as at times they experienced some defensiveness in terms of the staff or management's response to the comments submitted by students. Minutes are taken of the meetings however students are not always clear of the actions which have followed. The panel **recommended** that BPP London should take steps to review the SSLC process so that the feedback loop is closed and students are aware of the actions taken with respect to comments they raise. Overall students commented that the management of the course has improved and that the course leaders are more focussed.

Students indicated that online lectures had been well received by some students however some students felt there was not enough feedback from this form of lecture delivery. The part time students commented that they were not aware of any check by staff that students had actually engaged with the online lecture or not.

Overall students were least satisfied with some of the materials which they indicated had not been fully proof read and the fact that there were only two lifts in the building in Red Lion street. They were most satisfied with the breadth of options available, the teaching of skills and advocacy and the professional way they were treated at BPP London. All the students thought the course was good value for money and they would definitely recommend this BPTC course to others.

9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

The tour of the library showed an impressive set of resources and it was noted that the concerns from last year's visit had been addressed. Students (as noted in 8) had commented positively on the resources and in particular the areas for quiet study. The IT resources were also found to be functioning appropriately in relation to wireless access and supporting students with online lectures.

10. Equality and diversity

Following on from the encouragement of the panel last year in this area, teaching staff appear to be much more aware of the needs of students who have learning contracts. During the classroom observations staff were clearly aware and very supportive during their teaching of differing student needs. Staff should be commended for this and for encouraging diversity in relation to the students who attain places at BPP.

Observations

Observation 1	The Panel noted that students and staff had asked the BSB whether they would consider the use of computers to complete assessments in Opinion Writing and Drafting.
Observation 2	The BSB will be preparing new contracts from 2013 with each Provider and these will be circulated for comment prior to signing.
Observation 3	The advocacy query which was raised by staff would be discussed with the Inns as well as the use of the Hampel method.

Good practice, distinguishing features

1. Commended on excellent high quality staff and their commitment and approachability.
2. BPP have coped well with the new BPTC, making adjustments where necessary in modes of delivery and assessment in order to be in line with new requirements and there is a positive attitude towards the new course.
3. Commended on excellent high quality students which the panel met and observed. BPP appear to have resolved recruitment issues with much more accurate forecasting. Good use of telephone interviews for international students.
4. Sensitivity to Equality and Diversity issues as demonstrated by handling of complex case regarding the need for reasonable adjustments.
5. Good facilities, e.g. Gladbury (particularly commended by students).
6. Appropriate steps taken to ensure comparability between London and Leeds sites (e.g. cross marking and moderation, peer observation)

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval

Continuing approval for BPP London and Leeds (with recommendations)

For the period: September 2011 to July 2012

Confirmed

Recommendations	
Recommendation 1	BPP should address staffing issues and concerns relating to staff workload, including the development of a workload model that is open transparent and takes into account the full range of staff responsibilities (including marking loads, contact hours and administrative duties such as module leader roles). Additional administrative support should also be considered to free up academic staff time. It is understood that this is being addressed by an internal review of registry.
Recommendation 2	That BPP London should take steps to resolve issues regarding delivery of the knowledge areas to part time students (in terms of equivalence of contact time etc).
Recommendation 3	Reconsider the role of students in the QA process, specifically the operation of staff student liaison committees in order to encourage genuine debate and discussion. This could be aided by increased staff attendance (possibly including members of the management team) and the ways in which agendas are drawn up and action points recorded.
Recommendation 4	Ensure that the analysis of data is robust and feeds into action plans appropriately. Action plans should be kept up to date so that they can demonstrate how, for example, BSB and External Examiner recommendations have been followed through, highlighting key issues. All staff should be engaged with this process and feed in to it.
Recommendation 5	Continue to provide support and training for staff, especially freelance, in order to ensure continuity in delivery especially regarding assessment (1 st and 2 nd marking), adherence to tutor notes and timings.
Recommendation 6	Ensure continued good quality students, with particular attention to language and other skills.

Response by the Provider

BPP is grateful for the constructive and useful visit. We were pleased that the classroom observations conducted by the visitors revealed the excellence in the classroom that we believe is our stock in trade. We are similarly delighted that our students engaged with you and impressed you with their contributions.

The only point of substance on which we would comment here is the equivalence in teaching contact time between the PT and FT programmes. We will review this, but the factual position is that we are extremely close to equivalence as it is, with the majority of all modules being delivered identically. The PT students receive more varied study aids to make up for the very small differences that exist in contact time. With students commuting to our PT course from all around the world, we need to keep the length of the days with us at the weekends manageable.