

Confirmed

BAR
STANDARDS
BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

**Bar Professional Training Course
Nottingham Law School
Report of Monitoring Visit, 25 February 2013**

Name of Institution	Date of Visit/Meeting
Nottingham Law School	25 February 2013

Title of Course/award	Nature/status of the course
Bar Professional Training Course	Second year of the Bar Professional Training Course

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
120 full time	Start date: September 2012 - July 2013

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Dr. John Carrier (Chair)	Lay (Legal Academic)
Emily Windsor	Barrister, Chair of BPTC Sub-committee and Vice Chair of the Education and Training Committee
Dr. Simon Thornton-Wood	Head of Education and Training, BSB
Janet Pugh	Education Manager, BSB
Tiffany Searle	Education Officer, BSB

HEI Team	Role and area of primary responsibility
Ms Jenny Holloway	Associate Dean
Ms Helen Hudson	Head of Vocational Courses
Mr Ian Fox	Programme Leader
Robert Manning	Criminal and Advanced Criminal Tutor
Zuri Djan	Criminal and Employment Tutor
Ian Taylor	Criminal and Immigration Tutor
Adrian Savage	Senior Lecturer
Kathryn Taylor	Senior Lecturer

Context: The HEI/Provider
<p>Nottingham Trent was granted University status in 1992. Nottingham Law School ran the Bar Vocational course from 1997 and was validated to run the BPTC from 2010.</p> <p>Additionally, Nottingham Law School was validated to run the BPTC in collaboration with Kaplan Law School (but as different Providers) from September 2010. A separate visit to Kaplan will take place later in the academic year, however it is important to investigate what, if any, effect has been had on each Provider because of the new arrangement.</p> <p>The visit took place over one day. The timetable included a meeting with management and separate meeting</p>

Nottingham Law School, 25 February 2013

Confirmed

with staff, as well as a meeting with students, classroom observation and a tour of the Chaucer building.

1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards

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

2. Quality management systems

This year NTU's Programme Committee took over from the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) and three meetings were held. The Programme Committee minutes are forwarded to the Law School Executive, thereby strengthening communication and decision making. Students from each programme in the school will be invited to a 'Dean's Forum' ensuring transparency. Students confirmed that issues that were raised were dealt with quickly.

The panel were advised that external examiner reports receive an immediate written response from the programme leader; the external examiner then debriefs the report with the programme leader. The Annual Monitoring Report addressed the issues that have been raised throughout the year by external examiners but the panel commented that action taken needs to be clearer.

The panel **recommend** that there needs to be a Quality Assurance strategy put in place for dealing with and actioning: a. Student feedback b. External Examiner feedback.

3. Staffing and staff development

For the academic year of 2010-11 NTU had a staff student ratio of 1:9.4 which is within the ratio set by the Bar Standards Board. The staff did comment that they are feeling the pressure with their workload especially in light of members of the team being on maternity leave and taking retirement.

Feedback from the students indicated that some staff members had been teaching outside their specialism due to staff absence. The panel drew the attention of the management team to this and **recommend** unless exceptional circumstances demand, staff must not teach outside their specialism.

There is evidence presented in the Annual Monitoring Report of some staff development activity, but only for a few tutors. In light of this, it is **recommended** that attention should be given to a staff development programme, CPD, time for thinking and course development.

The panel **recommend** that staff resource should be reviewed as there is evidence of a strain on the staff this year.

The panel enquired about the relevance of the staff's professional practice. There seemed to be no system in place to monitor this. The panel **recommend** that professional practice for staff needs to be relevant to enhance the BPTC programme and should be regularly monitored.

4. Curriculum content and structure

There is an induction programme for students at the beginning of the programme with mandatory sessions aimed at familiarising the students with the different services available to them (Careers, pro bono etc.). Due to feedback regarding the scheduling of induction week the management team confirmed that they will look to enrol students a week earlier, allowing them to ease into the beginning of the programme.

The students confirmed that they had chosen their options before Christmas and most had been allocated the

Confirmed

options they wanted.

The panel **recommend** that students should be given access to course materials prior to classes which are aligned with teaching preparation.

5. Admissions and student profile

The majority of the 2011-12 intake had achieved a 2:1 in their first degree. NTU continue to recruit nationally although the percentage of home students drawn from outside the East Midlands decreased compared to previous years. NTU's 11-12 intake was diverse with a total of 64 home students, 4 EU students and 20 international students.

The management team stated that no students were identified with having English language difficulties within the academic year, although this was highlighted as a problem in an external examiner report. The management staff have noted during the monitoring visit that no students raised the issue with the Programme Leaders.

It is **recommended** that the issue of English language is reviewed and comments made by External Examiners are assessed before the next intake of students.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

Panel members had the opportunity to observe some classes during the monitoring visit. The panel were impressed with the standard of teaching delivered. It was evident the lessons were carefully constructed and clear learning aims provided. On the whole the students seem prepared for the lessons that were observed.

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

The students commented that the mock exams were scheduled too early and they could have been spread out more. The students also remarked that the mock exam feedback lecture was not very effective and individual feedback would be preferred.

The panel **recommend** that NTU need to establish sufficient preparation and feedback for mock exams. The scheduling of mock exams should also be considered carefully in light of student workload.

8. Student support and quality of student experience

Students have the opportunity to raise issues through their student representatives. These can then be raised in the Programme Committee meetings, which it is compulsory for all subject coordinators to attend.

NTU provide a careers programme every year which includes sessions on how to apply for pupillage, interviews and graduate careers. NTU's student questionnaire 2010-11 reported a high level of student satisfaction when questioned about the careers programme offered.

Mooting and Advocacy competitions were organised by No.1 High Pavement and Ropewalk Chambers. The Legal Advice Clinic continued to provide a range of Probono opportunities as well as students being involved in other pro bono activities such as Free Representation Unit (FRU) advisors at Employment Tribunals and the Innocence Project. The students gave positive feedback about the number of pro bono opportunities they are offered throughout the year.

The students that were interviewed on the monitoring visit said they would recommend NTU as a BPTC

Confirmed

Provider as it is less expensive, has a friendly atmosphere and has a good standard of teaching.

9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

The panel were given a tour of the facilities available in the Chaucer building. This is where the BPTC students are based and they share the building with students from other degree disciplines. This is now the second year that the BPTC students have been based here. The panel admired the facilities in the Chaucer building but expressed concern that changes had not been notified appropriately. The students remarked that the building is never crowded and they can always get a computer or area to work in.

Some students mentioned that they haven't had the chance to have their advocacy classes in the mock court room. The management team are aware that the timetable and room allocation does need to be reviewed for next year to allow all students the opportunity to practice advocacy in the court rooms.

The panel **recommend** for validation purposes it is important that any material change must be notified in writing to the BSB in a timely manner. A full resource statement is required.

The panel **recommend** that timetabling should be considered more carefully to protect the integrity and ethos of the course.

It is **recommended** that the mock court room should be protected as a resource for BPTC students. A full analysis of how best to use the court room for Advocacy training is needed.

10. Equality and diversity

The panel had nothing to add to the University's annual report.

Good practice, distinguishing features

The panel wished to commend:

1. Exceptional feedback was received from the students about the teaching on the BPTC programme.
2. Students are very happy with the high level of support they receive from their tutors.

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval

Continuing approval (with recommendations)
For the period: 2013-2015

Recommendations

Where recommendations are additionally made, please detail below:

Recommendation 1	For validation purposes it is important that any material change must be notified in writing to the BSB in a timely manner. A full resource statement is required.
Recommendation 2	The mock court room should be protected as a resource for BPTC students. A full analysis of how best to use the court room for Advocacy training is needed.
Recommendation 3	Timetabling should be considered more carefully to protect the integrity and ethos of the course.

Confirmed

Recommendation 4	Staff resource should be reviewed as there has been a strain on the staff this year which needs to be addressed.
Recommendation 5	Unless exceptional circumstances, staff must not teach outside their specialism.
Recommendation 6	In light of the above recommendation, attention must be given to a staff development programme, CPD and time for thinking and course development.
Recommendation 7	Professional practice for staff needs to be relevant to enhance the BPTC programme and should be regularly monitored.
Recommendation 8	There needs to be a Quality Assurance strategy put in place for dealing with and actioning: a. Student feedback b. External Examiner feedback
Recommendation 9	Students should be given access to course materials prior to classes which are aligned with teaching preparation.
Recommendation 10	NTU need to establish sufficient preparation and feedback for mock exams. The scheduling of mock exams should also be carefully considered in regards to student workload.
Recommendation 11	The issue of English language should be reviewed and comments made by External Examiners should be assessed before the next intake of students.

Response by the Provider (maximum one page)

We note the Panel's comments and are particularly pleased that, once again, the teaching on the Course has been commended. We are pleased that students are happy with the high level of support they receive from tutors and note the acknowledgement that lessons are carefully constructed and clear learning aims provided. We are proud of the number of pro bono opportunities we offer and the positive endorsement given by students.

We have some concern that the delay between the Panel's visit and the publication of this Report may have allowed some errors to creep in and some of the context to be lost. For example, we think that the reference to "*the relevance of professional practice*" in Section 3 was meant to refer, not to BPTC tutors (all of whom have significant practice experience) but to the Professional Practice Lecture Series (run in conjunction with the Legal Practice Course), which was discussed during the Panel's meeting with the management team. The Panel will recall that students expressed displeasure that they were required to attend guest lectures, some of which they thought were more relevant to practice as a solicitor. The Panel may wish to note that, for 2013-14, the lecture programme has been reviewed and that, in 2012-13, BPTC students also had their own programme of guest lectures and workshops, which will continue.

We also note that, although Recommendation 8 suggests the need for a Quality Assurance Strategy to deal with student feedback, Section 2 states: "*Students confirmed that issues that were raised were dealt with quickly.*"

In respect of other comments and Recommendations we would wish the Panel to note the following:

Recommendation 1

Resource statements have been provided in our last 2 AMRs; we will provide a fuller resource statement as required.

Recommendations 2 and 3

The BPTC already has priority in respect of use of the courtrooms. For 2013-14 we propose to swap groups/rooms over at the end of Term 1, to ensure that all BPTC students experience advocacy in the courtrooms.

Recommendations 4 – 6

We believe that 2012-13 presented us with exceptional circumstances: we enrolled approximately 100 students in circumstances where, as the Panel notes, we were presented with staff absences including sickness absence. We recruited an additional full-time, permanent staff member and, thereafter, 2 hourly paid lecturers. We note the students' perception that some tutors were teaching outside their area of specialism. However, all were experienced, full-time tutors who were provided with detailed lesson plans and who were teaching what, in the main, were transferable skills e.g. advocacy; in addition all were given 200 staff development hours. We do not believe the student learning experience was affected; however, in light of the students' perception we undertake to abide by the Panel's recommendation.

Recommendation 9

We are uncertain of the context of this recommendation, since all students did have access to course materials prior to classes which were aligned with teaching preparation. We have noted, above, the Panel's own comment: "*It was evident the lessons were carefully constructed and clear learning aims provided.*"

Recommendation 10

Students receive individual feedback for all skills subjects. For 2013-14 students will receive mocks in the Centralised Assessments in examination conditions.

Recommendation 11

We continue to require that all students for whom English or Welsh is not their first language take the IELTS test (or equivalent) and achieve a minimum of 7.5 in each section. Where a student declares that English/Welsh is their first language and we have concerns about their language ability, we will require them to take the IELTS test.