

**BAR  
STANDARDS  
BOARD**

REGULATING BARRISTERS

**Bar Professional Training Course  
City Law School  
Report of Visit held on 5 March 2013**

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>Date of Visit/Meeting</b>
City Law School	5 March 2013

<b>Title of Course/award</b>	<b>Previous course</b>
Bar Professional Training Course	Bar Vocational Course

<b>Approved and actual numbers (2011-12)</b>	<b>Term dates</b>
420 FT places 60 PT places	September 2012 – July 2013

<b>Monitoring Panel Members</b>	<b>Role and area of primary responsibility</b>
Dr Michael J Powers QC (Chair)	Barrister, member of the BPTC Sub-committee
Professor Mike Molan	Legal Academic, member of the BPTC Sub-committee, Chair of the Centralised Examinations Board (CEB).
Professor David Fleming	Member of BPTC Sub-committee , Legal Academic
Dr Simon Thornton-Wood	Head of Education and Training, BSB
Diana Favier	Exams and Assessment Coordinator, BSB
Tiffany Searle	Education Officer (BPTC), BSB
Sarah Baker	Exams and Assessments Officer (BPTC), BSB

<b>HEI Team attending the event</b>	<b>Role and area of primary responsibility</b>
Professor Stuart Sime	FT Course Director
Marcus Soanes	PT Course Director
Stuart Lindsay	BPTC Tutor
Lisa Laurenti	Deputy Course Director (Staffing)
Gillian Woodworth	Professional Development Coordinator
Peter Hungerford-Welch	Assistant Dean Professional Programmes
Susan Blake	Associate Dean Teaching and Learning
Ffyon Reilly	BPTC Tutor
Julie Browne	Deputy Course Director (Students)
Ronnie Lachkovic	BPTC Tutor
Caitriona Hegarty	BPTC Tutor
Robert McPeake	BPTC Tutor
Nigel Duncan	BPTC Tutor

### 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 (BPTC Handbook).

The panel was provided in advance with key documentation including the Law School's most recent Annual Monitoring Report, a copy of last years' External Examiner and BSB visit reports. During the visit the panel had the 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

City University London was established in 1894 as the Northampton Institute and obtained University status in 1966. City Law School (formerly the Inns of Court School of Law) delivered the Bar Vocational Course from 1989 to 2009, with the course forming part of a suite of related law programmes. The BVC was replaced from 2010 with the Bar Professional Training Course.

### 1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards

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

### 2. Quality management systems

The school holds regular lecture group meetings with student representatives. Issues are taken up with the relevant staff members and reported to the Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC). Actions are taken or a response is issued to the lecture groups. There is a SSLC for both full-time and part-time modes and both were active throughout 2011-12. During the Monitoring Visit the students commended the staff's instant response to issues raised through the SSLCs.

The teaching staff noted that the External Examiners' comments are taken on board throughout the year and acted upon. The External Examiners' reports are summarised and the key points are highlighted to the Programme Leader so that further action can be taken where necessary.

### 3. Staffing and staff development

Overall, the Panel received evidence of effective structures for staffing and staff development.

City reported that they have a workload management process in place for their tutors and they confirmed that they abide by the staff-student ratio set by the BSB. In the last year two tutors have joined the BPTC team but concerns continue to be expressed over workload.

It has been **recommended** by the panel that City should review their resourcing strategy to match students' needs and in particular to provide appropriate support to students where specific needs are identified.

#### 4. Curriculum content and structure

The students noted that their workload seemed to fluctuate from week to week which has been affecting their level of preparation for some classes. Therefore the panel **recommend** that the management team reflect on the student perception of the workload throughout the year.

#### 5. Admissions and student profile

The staff told the panel that the quality of the student intake has improved within the last academic year and this is reflected in the results achieved by the students. This is thought to be the effect of raising the admission requirements to a high 2:2. The management advised that City Law School are planning to raise the BPTC admission requirements gradually to improve the student cohort and this is shown in gradual decrease in students with a 2:2 accepted on the course over the last three years. In academic year 2011-12, 25.51% of the student cohort had a lower second class degree.

Within the past academic year the admission requirements have been raised due to the competition for pupillage. The teaching staff have noticed a change of attitude amongst students with most students working harder to achieve the best results possible.

The English Language requirement was reported to have been enforced, with weaker students being identified at the beginning of the course. These students were offered additional support to ensure they were able to cope with the course and did not affect the learning experience of their peers.

#### 6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

Overall, the panel were presented with evidence of sound teaching and learning.

It was noted from the data provided in City's Annual Monitoring Report, but not reflected in the Provider's analysis, that a large number of Bangladeshi students (27) were 'referred'. The evidence suggests that this particular group of students struggle with the centralised exams because of lower English language skills.

It was **recommended** by the panel that a teaching and learning strategy should be devised that demonstrates responsiveness to evidence of poor performance.

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

The students noted that they would like to be able to type their answer in the Opinion Writing and Drafting exam. They believe this is more realistic and transferrable to practice. The BSB assured the students that options are being explored currently and their comment has been taken on board.

The mock exams this year were optional and students felt they were scheduled too early in the year. This resulted in a lack of attendance at the scheduled time. However the mock exams were available on City's Virtual learning Environment, Moodle indefinitely. The staff recognised that the mock exams didn't go as well as planned. This was regrettable given the mocks' importance in the students' preparation for the centralised exams, as they provided an opportunity for students to become familiar with the exam conditions and most importantly, time management during exams.

It is **recommended** that the management team reflect on how they can make the centralised mock exams more effective and valuable to the students' learning and revision.

#### 8. Student support and quality of student experience

The panel asked the students whether they thought that the BPTC programme was good value for money. The

students expressed concern about the high fees compared with those charged in other regions, and the significantly lower fees charged for similar courses. There was particular concern whether the London Providers had sufficient incentive to compete on price.

Some students were concerned by the difference in attitude between students who had no intention to practise at the Bar in England and Wales and those who did. They felt this could affect the student learning experience as some students under-prepared for classes thus affecting the whole class in interactive and practical sessions. Some students were concerned that the standard of English language of some students had an adverse effect on their own learning. The management gave assurance to the panel that expectations for the BPTC programme were clearly set in all their marketing materials and inductions.

The students mentioned that they would like to be given a reading list over the summer before the programme started, as some students (especially LLB graduates) would like to refresh their knowledge of particular areas of Law which they may have studied a while ago.

The students commended the Staff-Student Liaison feedback process and felt that the staff were very responsive to issues raised. The students would like the workload to be managed better throughout the year, resources to be consistently uploaded on to Moodle, and there to be a closer correlation between exam topics and the syllabus covered in class.

It has been **recommended** by the panel that more attention should be paid to the management of students' expectations, given the diversity of expectations within the BPTC market. Information about what to expect on the City BPTC programme should be clearly placed on the school website and communicated to prospective students before and after enrolment.

It is **recommended** that City reassess the impact of variable English language skills on learning within groups.

## 9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

The panel had the opportunity to tour the facilities at the Grays Inn campus of City Law School. The facilities were noted as good and were specifically designated for LPC and BPTC students. The building has a professional feel which is in line with the course ethos. The main lecture room in the Atkins building, which is used for large group sessions (LGSs), has individual computers in each student space. Although some of the students noted that the computers are slow, this allows students to use the computers in group sessions to assist with their work and interact with the main lecture screen.

There is a large social/break-out area for LPC and BPTC students within the Atkins building. The library is located over 3 floors in Grays Inn Place with silent study areas.

## 10. Equality and diversity

The Panel saw evidence of effective delivery of Equality and Diversity requirements and objectives.

### Observations

Observation 1	Greater continuity is needed between the Annual Monitoring Report data and the learning and teaching strategy. For example the failure of the Bangladeshi students clearly indicated by the data does not appear to have been addressed in the teaching and learning strategy. City should review their current strategies linked to this data.
Observation 2	A learning and teaching strategy is needed for mixed ability students. The need for this is highlighted by the data. The aim of the BPTC course is to prepare the students for practice at the Bar of England and Wales and therefore all students should aim to achieve the Bar's high professional standards regardless of whether they actually intend to practise in England and Wales or not.
Observation 3	The apparent and lack of analysis of the data. Groups of mixed motivations and abilities should have teaching and learning strategies in place to address this issue.

<b>Good practice, distinguishing features</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students commended the staff's instant response to issues that have been raised through the student/staff committees.</li> <li>2. Positive feedback was received about the teaching and BPTC tutors at CLS.</li> </ol>

<b>Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval</b>
<p>Continuing approval (with recommendations) For the period: 2013-2015</p>

<b>Recommendations</b>	
Recommendation 1	The management team need to reflect on how they can improve and make the centralised mock exams more effective and valuable to the students' learning and revision.
Recommendation 2	Students' expectations need to be managed, given the diversity of expectations within the BPTC market. Information about what to expect on the City BPTC programme should be clearly placed on the school website and communicated to prospective students before and after enrolment.
Recommendation 3	Reflection is needed on the student perception of the workload throughout the year.
Recommendation 4	City should keep under review the issue of staffing resource, to assist students that are struggling.
Recommendation 5	A Teaching and Learning Strategy should be devised in response to the data produced in the Annual Monitoring Report. More evidence of how the Law School use the statistical data to inform their teaching and learning strategy is needed.
Recommendation 6	City reassess the impact of variable English language skills on learning within groups.

## Response by the Provider

Applicants are given information about what to expect on the BPTC at the School's Open Days, on the City University website, and in pre-admission letters sent to each student who accepts a place on the programme. Many students are keen to do some relevant pre-reading, and the books suggested by CLS in a letter sent to students in March 2012 were:

*A Practical Approach to Civil Procedure* 14<sup>th</sup> ed, Sime, OUP 2011

*Criminal Procedure and Sentencing* 7<sup>th</sup> ed, Hungerford-Welch, Routledge-Cavendish 2009, plus companion website for updating material

*Modern Law of Evidence* 8<sup>th</sup> ed, Keane, OUP 2010

*The Golden Rules of Advocacy* Keith Evans OUP

All statistical data is carefully analysed each year. The Annual Monitoring Report for 2011-12 contained 6 pages of statistical information, and another 10 pages of analysis of those statistics. This was a "light touch" analysis year. Periodically a more in-depth analysis is undertaken. The Annual Report for 2010-11 contained 21 pages of analysis of the statistics, which included analysis on criteria such as results by gender, age, ethnic background and undergraduate university. The School also from time to time engages an external expert to analyse results for what is now Equality Act 2010 purposes. The most recent report (2008) concluded that none of the social and ethnic background variables had a direct influence on overall BVC (now BPTC) performance.

In 2012-13 the centralised Mocks were 10 weeks before two of the assessments, and, as requested by students in the SSLC, were designated as voluntary activities. Take up was disappointing. Following the Monitoring visit and further consultation with student representatives, the Mocks have been moved to 7 weeks before the assessments in 2013-14, with attendance being encouraged and rigorously monitored.

Student workload is carefully monitored. The main principles applied are that broadly there is a consistent amount of work required on a week-by-week basis, but with expectations increasing as the course progresses, and with occasions when there will be heavier assignments. This reflects practice, and planning and managing individual workloads is one of the intended outcomes from the programme. To assist students, they are given the whole programme for the year when they register, and they are also given guidance by senior staff and class tutors.

At City University there is a range of student support services available. In addition to the personal tutoring system, all teaching staff are available for 2 hours a week on an "office hours" system to give academic and personal support. The City University Student Centre has a vast range of student support services available, both on an individual and group level. Activities in 2012-13 included exam revision and exam technique lectures for BPTC students, as well as School level academic support lectures for particular subjects. Staff training in the summer of 2013 included sessions on the support services available at the University, and on effective teaching of groups of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Like the Bar and the Inns of Court, City Law School has a long tradition in providing high quality training not only for intending practitioners at the Bar of England and Wales, but also for students intending to practice in jurisdictions from around the world. This has been an important contribution to the spread of the rule of law across the world, and has been recognised as such by the profession for more than 100 years. Students from the programme often rise to senior judicial office in their home jurisdictions, with others entering politics and other areas of public life. Continuing to provide support and training from aspiring lawyers from around the world is seen as an important part of the educational purpose of City Law School.