
Bar Standards Board

Review of BPP systems and processes to deliver the BPTC: Executive summary

David Timms Consulting Ltd

14 November 2014

(revised 18 December 2014)

Executive summary

This is a report of a review requested by the Bar Standards Board for the purpose of investigating BPP University's systems and processes for the management of its Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC), in the context of a series of 'Issues' including compliance with aspects of the BPTC Handbook, matters arising from routine monitoring, and deficiencies in reports and record keeping. Since the individual 'issues' have been investigated separately, this review focuses on generic rather than specific matters, and considers whether there is any source of the series of faults in BPP systems or their operation of them.

The review was made by Prof David Timms, on the basis of regulatory documents of BPP and BSB, BSB monitoring and QAA reports, working documents of BPP, and interviews with staff and students at BPP's three locations. The review covers the management of the 'candidate journey' (roughly what QAA calls 'the student learning experience') and the quality assurance of the course, particularly in relation to policies and procedures for the quality assurance of teaching and assessment, and for annual programme monitoring.

The review found that the programme is effectively managed, and that students valued highly the teaching they experienced. There appeared to be sufficient experienced staff to deal with the administrative needs of the programme. BPP seems to have in place the necessary staffing resource to manage the data and reporting requirements of the BPTC. However, the University has been dilatory in its approach to the introduction of a comprehensive single student records system.

In relation to the systems for the quality assurance of the programme, I found that the higher-level structures and policies are commendable as structures, but have only limited practical impact on the quality assurance of the programme. However, very thorough, even commendable practices in the day-to-day quality management of the programme operate effectively, despite not being formally recognised in the documented quality assurance system. Programme staff are well managed, cohesive as a group and highly committed to the programme and their students. External examiners are satisfied with standards, and positive about the quality of teaching.

I conclude that there is no systemic failure behind the individual lapses that have given rise to past concerns, though my findings and recommendations suggest that some aspects of the way in which the BPP BPTC is regulated, both by BPP itself and by BSB, might be rethought in order to recognise the importance of the undocumented quality assurance procedures in place.

Recommendations

1. The BPP Dean and Programme Directors should keep the arrangement for joint responsibility under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.
2. BPP should take steps to ensure that the information and the rationale for the attendance rules are fully explained when students are recruited, at such events as open days. (Paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.**)
3. BPP should treat the implementation of a fully functioning student records system as an urgent priority.
4. Any development or elaboration of the quality assurance system for the programme as a whole at BPP should pay due regard to the practical importance of the system of SGS Quality Audit Forums.
5. BPP Programme Directors should develop a more strategic approach to staff development, negotiated with and published to the staff themselves, whilst leaving room for individual needs.
6. The BPTC Programme team should analyse and use student feedback for whole programme improvement whether or not it is required by BSB.
7. The BPP BPTC team should take more steps to persuade students of the usefulness of contributing to student feedback by publicising to each year's cohort what was done in respect of the previous year's comments.
8. The BPP BPTC team should consider more explicit use of detailed comparative data between centres and between providers in the quality assurance of the programme.
9. BPP should consider its practices as regards the attendance of external examiners at BPTC examination boards, with a view to determining whether the interests of student and standards would be better served by expecting attendance in person by external examiners.
10. BPP should take steps to inform and engage teaching staff and students in the consideration of and responses to external examiner reports.
11. BSB should review the purpose and contents of the ARR in the management and oversight of the programme.

David Timms

14 November 2014

Appendix 1: Issues and Terms of reference

REVIEW OF BPP SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES TO DELIVER THE BPTC

ISSUES

1. Very recent past issues of compliance with BPTC Handbook requirements for group size, English language requirements, and more.
2. Evidence from Triggered Visit (January 2014) that QA systems and processes are not well coordinated across Centres (London, Manchester, Leeds).
3. Significant incident in July 2014: a number of students permitted additional examination resits, beyond the term permitted by the regulations.
4. Significant incident May–June 2014 concerning reports and record keeping that led to students receiving incorrect examination results (specifically for the Bar Transfer Test).

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Assess robustness and resilience of structures, systems and processes that manage and coordinate the 'candidate journey', from admission to qualification.
2. Assess the extent to which quality assurance systems are embedded within and between Centres, to underpin delivery of the Course and related assessments.

The following matters lie outside the scope of the Review:

1. Assessment of the quality of teaching

Appendix 2: List of meetings

SCHEDULE FOR PROFESSOR TIMMS' VISIT TO BPP NOVEMBER 2014

MONDAY 3 NOVEMBER – LONDON

12:00 – 1:00	Peter Crisp (Dean and CEO) and Andrew Chadwick (Deputy Dean and Deputy CEO)
1:15 – 2:15	Chris Maguire (Dean of Academic Affairs) and Boryana Peevska-Cutting (Director of Quality and Academic Policy)
2:30 – 3.30	Anna Banfield and James Welsh (Joint Directors of BPTC Programmes)
3:45 – 4:45	Andrew Allen (Domestic Admissions) and Khayrul Alam (International Admissions), Nada Atwan (Student Records)

TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER – LEEDS

10:00	Arrive and building tour
10:15 – 11:15	Helen Slater (Programme Leader Leeds)
11:30 – 12:30	Meeting with students
12:30 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 – 2:00	Meeting with staff

WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER – MANCHESTER

9.30	Arrive and building tour
9:45 – 10:45	Mark Keith (Programme Leader Manchester)
11:00 – 12:00	Meeting with students
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch
12:30 – 1:30	Meeting with staff

FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER – LONDON

12:00 – 12:30	Alex Linsdell (BPTC Examinations Officer) and Jane Rudd (Deputy Registrar)
12:45 – 1:45	Meeting with staff
2:00 – 3:00	Meeting with students
3:15 – 4:15	Charlotte Wanendeya (FT Programme Leader), Lucy Corrin (Assistant FT Programme Leader) and Andrew Maryniak (PT Programme Leader)

Appendix 3: Abbreviations

APM	(BPP) Annual Programme Monitoring (procedure)
APM	(BPP) Annual Programme Monitoring Report
ARR	(BSB) Annual Reflective Review (both procedure and report)
Blue Book	BSB Bar Professional Training Course Course specification requirements and guidance September 2014
BPP	BPP University
BPTC	Bar Professional Training Course
BSB	Bar Standards Board
BTT	Bar Transfer Test
BVC	Bar Vocational Course
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DPD	Definitive Programme Document
ETC	(BPP) Education and Training Committee (subcommittee of Academic Council)
FT	Full Time
GAR	(BPP) General Academic Regulations
HE	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
MoPP	(BPP) Manual of Policies and Procedures
PMC	Programme Management Committee
PT	Part Time
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	(UK) Quality Assurance Agency (for Higher Education)
SGS	Small Group Session
SSLC	(BPP) Staff Student Liaison Committee
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment