

BAR STANDARDS BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

**Bar Professional Training Course
University of Law London
Report of Monitoring visit, 14 January 2014**

Name of Institution	Date of Visit/Meeting
University of Law London	14 January 2014

Title of Course/award	Nature/status of the course
Bar Professional Training Course	Monitoring visit

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
Validated for: 240 FT in 2013 (135 at time of visit) 48 PT in 2013 (32 at time of visit)	September 2013 to July 2014

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Mr David Fleming	Legal Academic, Member of Education and Training Committee
Ms Samantha Pullin	Employed Barrister, Member of BPTC Sub Committee
Mr Per Laleng	Law Lecturer, University of Kent and BSB External Examiner
Dr Simon Thornton-Wood	Head of Education and Training, BSB
Mrs Claire Hogg	Education Administrator, BSB

Provider Team	Role and area of primary responsibility
Jacqueline Cheltenham	Head of BPTC
Carol Wadsworth-Jones	Director of Programmes
Lesley Hill	Centre Director
Stephen Illingworth	Operations Manager
Lindsey Rose	Operations Manager
Joanna Wagstaffe	Academic Registrar

Rationale for the visit
<p>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").</p>

The University of Law, 14 January 2014

The panel was provided in advance with key documentation including the College's most recent Annual Monitoring Report, copies of the last two years' 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

The College of Law was established in the 1960s and has degree awarding powers. It offers the Bar Professional Training Course at sites in London and Birmingham. The Birmingham site is visited and reported on separately. The College of Law London ran the Bar Vocational Course from 1997 to 2009 and was approved to run the new BPTC from September 2010.

In 2012, the Provider was granted full university title and changed name from The College of Law to The University of Law.

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

The College's internal quality assurance systems were detailed in the documentation provided to the panel and appeared satisfactory.

3. Staffing and staff development

Teaching staff informed the Panel that, on an annual basis, all tutors participate in at least 10 days' professional development where they must demonstrate they have had contact with practice. Staff may conduct marshalling with judges, shadow practitioners or return to practice.

The University also conducts management teaching observations of all tutors throughout each academic year which may result in the identification of training needs or matters requiring attention.

The staff wished to express their disappointment at the loss of the Pro Bono Unit. The Pro Bono Unit had been considered a great asset to the Provider, students and local community.

4. Curriculum content and structure

The tutors informed the Panel that they have built in additional Criminal and Civil teaching sessions to cover the syllabus effectively. In addition, students are required to engage in a large amount of reading outside of the classroom.

The Annual Reflective Review process had drawn attention to concerns regarding the close timing of the course assessment period and the CEB assessments, placing additional burden on students at

that time. The management team are currently considering bringing forward the Drafting and/or REDOC assessments to allow students a greater amount of time for private study of the knowledge area subjects.

5. Admissions and student profile

The analysis of student recruitment profiles and student performance provide a valuable assessment with no clear concern regarding the key characteristics of the student cohort.

The management team reported a concerning drop in pass rates for students in 2012-2013 cohort. This principally occurred in the centralised assessments. Immediate action was reported to have been taken, including the development of a Criminal and Civil syllabus guide, additional revision sessions and post-mock follow-up lectures.

Each BPTC tutor was reported to have a class of personal tutees, and taught that group for the first 7 weeks of the academic year. This allows the tutors to assess how each student is coping with the initial demands of the course.

Students are understood to be encouraged to complete personal reflective journals. This process allows students to evaluate their own progress. The journals are used as a review tool during the interim progress reports with personal tutors.

There is also a system of peer feedback sessions where students are encouraged to offer constructive feedback to their fellow students. This works particularly well when assessing witness handling techniques.

Tutors reported that there had been cases where students had not met an appropriate English language standard. The personal tutor system that is in place has allowed for the issue to be identified and addressed early in the course. In some cases, students have been asked to prove they have met the stated IELTS admission requirements.

In light of these concerns, the management team reported on the development of plans to review admissions criteria. It is proposed that an English language test should be sat by all applicants for whom English is not their first language, as part of their admissions process, so long as the legal requirements can be met with such a scheme.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

The Panel heard evidence that suggested teaching and learning were of good quality.

Criminal and Civil advocacy classes were observed by members of the Monitoring Panel. The students had prepared beforehand and all advocacy performances were recorded for the students to view after the class. Following each advocacy performance the tutor provided feedback and the student had the opportunity to consider their own performance. The Panel noted that, in each case, the tutor's feedback included advice in relation to examination and practice techniques.

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

Additional teaching and revision sessions have been developed to address the Civil and Criminal Litigation syllabi.

The Provider will be reviewing their assessment timetable to address workload planning issues for students.

The Panel noted that the overall feedback from External Examiners has been positive with reports of high quality assessment papers and assignment marking.

8. Student support and quality of student experience

The Panel met with a small group of BPTC students. The students reported a high standard of tutor teaching and praised the good session plans and class materials. The students commented that the course was expensive, albeit accepting the cost implications of a London location.

There are a number of extracurricular activities available for students such as mooting, negotiation and "Plea in Mitigation" competitions as well as guest lectures. The students reported that on some occasions they had not attended extracurricular activities taking place in the evening as their workload was too heavy and they could not afford to lose the study time. Concerns were also raised that the extracurricular activities usually took place during the week which led to part-time students experiencing difficulty in attending. The students would welcome an opportunity to network with barristers after the events have taken place.

The students expressed concern about the impact of the range of capability in the cohort, and especially in English language ability.

The careers service offered good facilities and organised a number of events specifically for BPTC students. The Panel were particularly impressed that all those who had attended a pupillage interview workshop aimed at part-time students had gained a pupillage.

9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

Library space on the 5th floor is assigned for BPTC use and contains a dedicated Chambers library. All BPTC students undertake two library sessions at the beginning of the course to show them the library facilities available to them and to develop their legal research skills. The library also offers Westlaw facilities for BPTC students. There are a number of IT work-stations available in the library and the student basement area.

10. Equality and diversity

The equality and diversity data was reviewed by the Panel and raised no significant concern.

Good practice, distinguishing features

The panel wished to commend the University on the following:

- Tutors tying experience to practice when giving feedback to students
- Tutors of Criminal and Civil sessions cross referencing to discuss students' progress.
- The use of webinar facilities.
- The quality of the careers service and the success of pupillage interview workshops.

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval
Continuing approval (with recommendations) for the period September 2014 to July 2015.

Recommendations and Observations	
The following recommendations were made:	
Recommendation 1	Consider the impact on equality and diversity when designing more stringent admissions requirements.
Recommendation 2	Give further consideration to the requirements of part time students in planning extracurricular activities.
Recommendation 3	The panel would like to encourage further use of the personal reflective journals as a review tool.
Recommendation 4	The Provider should give further consideration to skills based assessments.
Recommendation 5	Consider adopting the use of career destinations information to inform further development of the course

Response by the Provider (maximum one page)

The University is pleased to note the good practice and distinguishing features outlined above. The University's responses to the recommendations are outlined below:

Recommendation 1 – This University agree that this is very important and will continue to monitor all its admissions criteria to ensure that none impact negatively on equality and diversity.

Recommendation 2 – The University currently ensures that all competitions are open to part time students and recommends in which year of the course the part time students might benefit most from taking part. Further, competitions are scheduled so that some of the face to face events occur on the Friday evening before a teaching weekend to enable a greater number of part time students to participate. This has led to part time students taking part and achieving well in competitions. The University will continue to review ways in which part time students can continue fully to participate in all extra-curricular activities.

Recommendation 3 – The teaching and design teams will ensure that the importance of this is highlighted to students and that they are continually encouraged to utilise it.

Recommendation 4 - In so far as the above recommendation concerns the division between Teaching and Design, the University has recently recruited additional BPTC tutors to the dedicated Design team, who will also teach on the course to a fractional degree. This will enable the design of the course to be fully integrated with the teaching.

Recommendation 5 – This is an excellent idea and will be implemented going forwards.