

<b>BAR STANDARDS BOARD</b>
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REGULATING BARRISTERS

**Bar Professional Training Course  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Report of Visit held on 23 January 2014**

Name of Institution	Date of Visit/Meeting
Manchester Metropolitan University Law School	23 January 2014

Title of Course/award	Nature/status of the course
Bar Professional Training Course	Full-time BPTC

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
Approved for:  108 FT and 48 PT in 2013  64 FT (0 PT) at time of visit	September 2013 to July 2014

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Dr Simon Thornton Wood (Chair)	Head of Education and Training, BSB
Paras Gorasia	Barrister, Kings Chambers; BSB External Examiner
David Rees	Law Lecturer; BSB External Examiner
Joan Whieldon	Head of Academic Development, Liverpool John Moores University; BSB External Examiner
Paras Junejo	Education Officer (BPTC), BSB

Provider Team	Role and area of primary responsibility
Miceál Bardon	Head of Law School
Joanne Lewthwaite	Programme Director, BPTC
Patrick Ryan	Associate Programme Director, BPTC
Geraldine O'Donnell	Senior Lecturer (Civil Litigation, ReDOC, Personal Injury and Family)
June Meadowcroft	Senior Lecturer (Advocacy, Opinion Writing, ReDOC and Family)
Phil Rouse	Senior Lecturer (Conference Skills)
Raymond Henley	Senior Lecturer (Civil Litigation)

Steve Johnson	Senior Lecturer (Advocacy, Criminal Advocacy, Conference Skills, Professional Ethics, Criminal Litigation)
Monika Krawczyck	Senior Lecturer (Criminal Litigation and Sentencing)
Fiona McNeil	Associate Lecturer (Advocacy and Professional Ethics)

### 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 University's most recent Annual Reflective Review, 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

Manchester Metropolitan was granted University status in 1992. The Law School ran the Bar Vocational Course from 1997 to 2010 within a suite of related law programmes delivered by the University. Manchester Metropolitan University was approved in May 2009 to deliver the new Bar Professional Training Course which replaced the BVC from September 2010. Approval was granted for the Masters Degree in Legal Practice (LLM) in 2009-10. Students holding a BVC/BPTC qualification are eligible to apply for the course which commenced in September 2010.

Manchester Law School offers every stage of legal education.

The Law School plans to offer a part-time course in 2014/15, having suspended that mode of study in 2013/14.

### 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

Details of staff-student liaison committee meetings were included in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2012/13; two meetings are held per academic year.

The Panel heard that some English language issues were a concern among the student cohort; the University states that English language interviews are conducted for students from overseas who are offered a place to study the BPTC at MLS.

### 3. Staffing and staff development

The Panel were impressed by evidence of part-time practitioner experience amongst the teaching staff, but were concerned at the lack of awareness of this amongst students. The staff also have links with the Northern Circuit for continuing professional development.

The staff were satisfied with the university's support in keeping staff up to date with training, particularly following the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). More generally, all members of staff have had the opportunity to undertake teacher training and academic writing courses. The criminal litigation course is being rewritten in light of LASPO.

The management team informed the Panel that they conduct fairly regular peer observations and teaching teams meet to discuss teaching methods. The Peer Support for Teaching scheme also allows for external tutors to observe teaching.

### 4. Curriculum content and structure

The Panel noted concerns expressed about the accuracy of course materials. All students were generally satisfied with the design of the advocacy exercises.

### 5. Admissions and student profile

Student numbers had fallen this year as compared with the previous academic year of 2012/13, attributed in part to the impact of the BCAT. The introduction of the BPTC at BPP Manchester has increased competition for admissions.

The part-time course was not run for this academic year of 2013/14, due to insufficient numbers applying in the previous academic year.

Two students had left the course due to English language problems in October/November 2013, a matter that the Panel heard had been dealt with promptly. Early drop-out from the course had led to two tutor groups have been required to merge in the first few weeks, albeit without significant impact on quality overall.

There was no indication that further language issues had been identified. However, students expressed some concern about a small number of their peers who struggled with the course for other reasons.

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

Members of the Panel observed Advocacy (both Civil and Criminal) and Criminal Litigation classes, and the quality of teaching and learning that was observed was very good. The students were well prepared in their classes, and tutor support and feedback was provided to an adequate degree. Some Advocacy sessions included peer feedback from the students, which was found to be helpful and beneficial to the students.

The Panel heard evidence of some concerns about consistency in teaching of certain modules and quality of feedback to students. However, there was equally evidence of a significant one-on-one time commitment by staff and the opportunity for cross-comparison of work.

All students provided very positive feedback about advocacy training in particular, and appreciated the additional compulsory opportunities to practise advocacy in the form of evening classes (the Additional Advocacy Programme).

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

The Panel identified generally good standards delivered by the course.

Staff and students expressed a desire for the introduction of computers for certain assessments, particularly Opinion Writing.

There was evidence of specific measures being put in place to prepare students for the centralised assessments, though the Panel noted concerns about the tension generated between teaching for these assessments and preparing students for practice.

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

The Panel had the opportunity of meeting a group of six students, all of whom were full-time (there is no part-time course running at MMU this academic year). None of the students present were from overseas. One student had already secured pupillage at a common law set of chambers in London prior to starting the course. The students seemed content with the course and the general support that they had received from the university.

There had been a lower intake on the course for this academic year, and some students had dropped out in the first few weeks leading to some initial instability in the organisation of groups, which had been addressed in consultation with the students.

The Panel heard evidence that the careers service lacked more specific advice on the Bar. However, links were highlighted with the Northern Circuit by way of practitioners and judges attending to give lectures on a weekly basis as part of the Additional Practitioners Programme.

### **9. Learning resources (Library and IT)**

The Panel were impressed with the learning resources at MMU. BPTC students have their own floor which houses their "chambers" rooms. MMU had recently invested in new recording equipment for advocacy and conference skills in their "chambers" rooms. There were nine rooms, with two spare for this academic year 2013/14 due to a lower intake of students. Each tutor group has their own room in which there are lockers and copies of some core texts and practitioners' books; each room has the new recording equipment.

The Panel reviewed the library facilities; hard copies of all prescribed text and practitioners' books were available, as well as online resources. The students are given access to Lexis Nexis and Westlaw, and could also access podcasts via the university's Virtual Learning Environment.

*Manchester Metropolitan University, 23 January 2014*

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## 10. Equality and diversity

There were no concerns identified about equality and diversity.

### Good practice, distinguishing features

The Panel wished to commend the following:

- The Annual Reflective Review indicated a sound approach to self assessment, drawing effectively upon available evidence to inform priorities, which inspired confidence;
- The Panel commended the evidence of a commitment to professional training as an integral part of the University;
- A strong sense of purpose in developing a quality training proposition for the bar was evident;
- The university's investment in resources to support the course is commendable;
- Advocacy training is a strength.

### Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval

Continuing approval for MMU (with recommendations) for the period September 2014 to July 2015.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations must be addressed:

Recommendation 1	Clarify the practice experience of staff for the benefit of students, to strengthen the latter's understanding of this context in teaching and support
Recommendation 2	Review the development of professional networking opportunities for students.
Recommendation 3	Review the careers advice services within the School, to ensure effective support for prospective careers at the Bar.
Recommendation 4	Review quality assurance and content development processes for BPTC course materials.

**Response by the Provider (maximum one page)**

The Programme team are very pleased that the panel noted and commended a number of aspects of our provision and recognised the significant investment made by the University in developing our resources for the benefit of our students.

We find the process of reflecting upon and reviewing our delivery of the BPTC an essential aspect of our practice. The programme team are committed to improving the student experience at Manchester Law School and to ensuring that we are delivering high quality training to prepare our graduates for the Bar.

The practice and academic experience of the team is regularly noted as a great strength of the course at Manchester Law School and we understand the importance of ensuring that our students are fully aware of that. We have recently produced a bespoke brochure for the BPTC profiling some members of the team – we are a small team yet have in excess of 180 years call between us. We will work as a team to consider how we might best assist our current students in understanding the benefits of that experience on their training.

We have redesigned our Additional Professional Programme to be delivered on Saturdays. This allows us to provide a day of activities and professional networking opportunities, which is also more accessible to our part time students.

We continue to be supported by and work closely with the Northern Circuit hosting the Circuit's Vulnerable Witness Training and Rape Training, which our students may attend. We also host the Circuit New Practitioner Programme which gives our students an opportunity to attend as witnesses and to see new practitioners being trained in advocacy by some of the most experienced advocates on circuit.

We provide a number of events and talks to provide information on pupillage and future careers. There is a dedicated law careers advisor who is also able to assist students in the preparation for interviews and making pupillage/job applications. All students have personal tutors who are able to provide both general and specific pupillage advice. We will carry out the review suggested of this aspect of our provision to ensure that we are providing the best service we can and also that students are aware of and understand how to access this provision.

The redeployment of existing members of the BPTC teaching team to new subjects at the start of 2014/15 has proved particularly effective in facilitating a fresh look at our materials. The BPTC team continue to work together to improve the overall quality of documents and look to develop our scrutiny processes in accordance with the panel recommendation.

The Programme team are happy with the continued approval of our course and are also pleased to be able to report that since the visit of the panel we have recruited a part time cohort and are thereby providing greater access and diversity to the profession.

