

BAR STANDARDS BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

Bar Professional Training Course BPP Leeds Law School Report of Visit held on 28 January 2016

Name of Institution	Date of Visit
BPP Leeds Law School	28 January 2016

Title of Course/award	Nature/status of course
Bar Professional Training Course	Accredited BPTC

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
Approved for: FT: 48 places (43 enrolled 2015-16) PT: 48 places (12 enrolled 2015-16)	September 2015 to July 2016

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Dr Victoria Stec (Chair)	Head of Training Supervision, BSB
Ms Hayley Gault	Senior Training Supervision Officer, BSB
Ms Frances Lawley	Barrister
Mr Richard Davies	Lay
Ms Delyth James	Practice Manager of Bar Professional Training Course (Full Time), University of the West of England

Provider Team	Role and area of primary responsibility
Mr James Welsh	(Joint) Director of BPTC Programmes, BPP Law School
Ms Carla Rawlinson	BPTC Tutor and Acting Programme Leader
Ms Joanna Preston-Taylor	Managing Director, BPP Leeds
Ms Nicola Stephens	Careers Advisor
Ms Jane Buddle	Librarian
Ms Rebecca Pickering	Lecturer
Ms Julia Harrow	Lecturer
Mr Ben Smith	Lecturer

Rationale for the visit

The visit was held as part of the Bar Standards Board's annual programme of visits to providers of the Bar Professional Training Course to monitor the quality and standards of the course and to determine whether the course is being delivered in accordance with the requirements of the BSB's Bar Professional Training Course Handbook.

The panel was provided in advance with key documentation, including the provider's Annual Reflective Review 2014-15, copies of External Examiner reports for the relevant year, the most recent BSB visit report and other relevant information.

During the visit the panel had the opportunity to tour the premises and to meet, separately, with management, course team and students. Members of the panel also observed a class in Criminal Litigation. The report reflects the findings of the panel informed by both documentation and visit.

Context: the Provider

BPP was established in 1976 and was acquired by Apollo Global Education in 2009. It was granted degree awarding powers in 2007 and full University title in 2013. BPP Law School is one of four schools that make up BPP University. The Bar Professional Training Course is run on four sites: in London, Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester. Each site is approved separately by the Bar Standards Board to deliver the BPTC. BPP Leeds has offered the Bar Course since 2006, along with a range of other law and professional programmes.

1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards

The panel found that the Bar Professional Training Course at BPP Leeds was being delivered in accordance with the stated aims, philosophy and standards of the course.

The documentation provided to the panel included an action plan which seemed to be focused on all BPP sites rather than on the Leeds centre individually. As such it was not clear what particular actions had taken place at Leeds specifically in the past year nor what was planned for the future. The panel **recommends** that management are more specific about actions for Leeds on future action plans and more specific about outcomes and ongoing planning for future years, in such matters as CPD, pupillage, Ethics, reasonable adjustments and pass rates (**Recommendation 1**).

2. Quality management systems

The documentation provided to the panel included the annual reflective review for the academic year 2014-15. This included a response to the recommendations made by the panel on their visit to BPP Leeds in 2015. This year's panel was satisfied that the recommendations given in 2015 had been addressed.

The teaching staff whom the panel met said that they had been sent the BSB's Key Statistics document, but that they had not had provided any feedback. In addition, while both teaching and

support staff said that they are asked for feedback on overall changes to the BPTC, they had limited input into reflective documents such as the annual reflective review. The panel therefore **recommends** that the management team ensures teaching and support staff have opportunities to reflect on statistics published by the BSB and to contribute to the annual reflective review and future action plans specifically in relation to Leeds (**Recommendation 2**).

3. Staffing and staff development

The teaching staff whom the panel met like the fact that their team is small as they are able to frequently catch up with one another and discuss classes and teaching tips. They also feel very much supported by module leaders and other teaching staff nationally. Newer tutors praised the induction process and again emphasised the amount of support offered by colleagues locally and nationally. Teaching staff can complete audit forms after teaching sessions to record how the sessions went and whether they have any suggestions or amendments, such as needed extra time on a certain topic. They also have weekly meetings to discuss how sessions each week went and they all have the opportunity to write assessments or update course materials. In addition to this, they are in frequent communication via telephone and email to colleagues teaching the same course at other sites.

Careers staff also share information as a national team and often do pilot schemes at Leeds, such as an employability award which encourages students to proactively log and develop their employability skills. They felt they are able to be flexible and try new things to try to create a better experience for students.

Staff undergo a yearly appraisal where they meet with their line manager to outline objectives for the year ahead and identify any training needs. Tutors are encouraged to peer observe their colleagues on the BPTC and other programmes and to share and adopt best practice. Tutors are also encouraged to obtain teaching qualifications such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Education (PGCPE). One tutor remains in practice part-time whilst others are recently out of practice, but they are encouraged to take 'back to practice' days as 'professionals teaching professionals' is a guiding principle at BPP.

4. Curriculum content and structure

Some of the students whom the panel met said that they were particularly anxious about Professional Ethics. They stated that they had had two sessions at the beginning of the year but no dedicated Ethics sessions since. It was understood that the logic of front-loading the Ethics component of the course was that it could appear pervasively at any point of the course in other subjects. The students stated that Ethics podcasts are available online but because they are not compulsory often these will get overlooked as they have so much else to do. Some of the students appreciate this approach, stating that as Ethics permeates all of their subjects it was useful to be taught the fundamental information at the beginning of the year so they can keep ethical considerations in mind throughout the course, and the podcasts help keep this alive. The students generally felt that Ethics was not codified except through the Bar Handbook but this was difficult to learn. Students conceded that the challenging nature of Ethics was probably reflective of life in practice. They also stated that they were due to have more revision sessions and a formative assessment which they anticipated might bring their learning together. However, some students felt that while having ethics permeating all their subjects is useful for practice it is less helpful for preparing for the assessment. Students felt that

when ethical issues are brought up in class they are not expanded upon; they would prefer it if tutors did more to signpost ethical issues and go into more detail about them. Some students expressed a desire for additional dedicated Ethics sessions.

The panel **recommends** reflection upon the effectiveness of the strategy for teaching Professional Ethics, including the potential provision of additional resources, or the better use of existing resources. It further recommends that issues of Professional Ethics are not only signposted but that tutors facilitate a fuller discussion when those issues arise. (**Recommendation 3**).

5. Admissions and student profile

The panel asked management about the decreasing number of part-time students and challenges this might bring. The reduction in numbers of part-time students might be due to the fact that during times of recession people are worried about job security and possibly compromising performance at work by combining work and study. The management team said that the cohort is of an adequate size for part-time students to have an enjoyable and useful experience and that this year's cohort in particular is of an exceptional calibre, with a very strong work ethic. More generally the reduction in student numbers was not yet at a level that was seen to be a problem. A cohort of 48 full-time students was small enough to ensure that no one could fall under the radar and all students would be personally well known to staff.

The panel heard that international students whose first language is not English require an IELTS score of 7.5 which is demonstrated through either taking IELTS or having a Skype interview. Once a student is on the course they have scheduled meetings with their personal tutor during which the tutor can monitor language proficiency. No students have been asked to leave the course this year due to English language ability issues.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

The teaching observed by the panel was thought to be of a high standard. The tutor was engaging and students were well-prepared for the session. The teaching staff explained that students are usually given preparation work to do in advance and then there are a variety of ways sessions might be taught – through group work, individual work and class discussions. Tutors explained that having this mix allows students to benefit from working in small groups but they can then share ideas and discuss issues with the wider class. Working in this way means contributing in class is less intimidating and it helps to avoid one or two students dominating the conversation.

Students praised the way practical skills are taught; they like the fact that a fictional world called Gladbury had been created for them to learn in and liked feeling as if they were doing skills “for real”. They feel that they get a lot out of practical sessions where they are treated as though they are performing the skills in real life.

Students told the panel that they enjoyed the fact that tutors use a variety of different methods to get information across in teaching sessions, including quizzes, role playing and live demonstrations. Several students said that these more live and interactive elements helped them to remember the information learned in these sessions better.

Students reported being given feedback using the Hampel method during Advocacy sessions. Advocacy sessions are held with groups of four students, the make-up of which changes every half term for full-time students; part-time students remain in the same classes throughout but tutors rotate. In a recent Student Staff Liaison meeting, students requested even more mixing of groups in Advocacy to give them the maximum exposure to different styles.

Students found feedback given by tutors to be useful and constructive, but it can be tough, particularly for formative assessments. They said that tutors make it clear if they consider a student's performance to be under par, or if a student is not sufficiently prepared. Students appreciated this approach as they would rather be told where they were going wrong.

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

Students told the panel that they find managing their time very tough, particularly when studying for centrally-set examinations. They reported finding the prospect of these examinations very intimidating. They were anxious about the level of depth and detail required for the Civil and Criminal assessments and reported feeling unsure how their papers would be marked, despite being given guidance on what they needed to learn. Students said that they understand the assessment criteria for skills subjects, but find it difficult not having a mark scheme or past papers for centrally assessed subjects. They found peer marking in writing skills sessions useful to develop their own skills.

8. Student support and quality of student experience

Students praised the good relationships they have with everyone on the course, particularly the tutors. They like the fact that everyone knows each other as the cohort size is small, and that everyone gets on very well. Students feel they can ask colleagues for support.

Students described tutors as "outstanding"; they said that tutors are very approachable and down-to-earth. They appreciate teaching sessions that include real-world, practice-based advice and anecdotes as well as examination learning and preparation.

The group of students whom the panel met were complimentary about the provision of careers support. They find the careers service very useful when making applications for pupillage and like the fact that they have access to the service before starting the course; several students found pre-course mock interviews for Inns scholarships to be particularly useful. Students who defer the start of their course may also access the full range of careers service support. Students also like being able to send queries via email so they can fit it in around their schedule. However, the majority of careers events are held midweek so it may be more difficult for part-time students to attend these, though events are recorded. Part-time students are able to organise careers appointments or meet with library staff on weekends and evenings as well as over lunch breaks, and support can also be offered via Skype. Teaching and careers staff emphasised that they make a conscious effort to ensure that part-time and full-time students have a comparable experience. Though the part-time students tend to have limited interaction with full-time BPTC students on their weekend teach sessions, staff said that the centre is often busy at the weekends with students on other courses so there is always a good atmosphere. The only issue with having a small cohort of part-time students is that some Options subjects may not have enough interest to run; however, the panel learned that students are

invited to join sessions with full-time students or attend sessions at other sites if their preferred options are not available at BPP Leeds.

The students also praised the number of opportunities to meet with members of the local Bar, which include a mentoring scheme and various competitions sponsored by local chambers. They have also been involved with events for the North East circuit such as acting as witnesses at training events. They enjoyed the opportunity to network and be cross-examined by practising barristers to help develop their own Advocacy skills.

The member of staff responsible for supporting international students across all BPP sites is based in Leeds; she gives an induction at the beginning of the year which covers a wide range of subjects to help international students settle in. BPP also produces an advice leaflet for international students. The panel heard that in future they plan to put together a pack for international students with more information on employment and improving written English skills.

Personal tutors are given a copy of their tutee's CVs so they are aware of students' academic background and can discuss with students what they want from their experience on the BPTC. They can also talk with students who are struggling or who might be quiet or reticent in class. Subject tutors are also approachable should a student want to come to them with a query or issue, and they try to go out of their way to offer any support they can. Tutors described the range of developmental and pro bono opportunities available at BPP to help students offset any lower prior academic attainment. The careers service can also help with circumstances which may have led to a student achieving a lower grade in the past.

Several students reported having problems with BPP's finance department, including receiving requests for payments that had already been made. However, these issues had since been resolved. As such concerns had been raised at BPP sites in the previous round of monitoring visits, it was agreed that the BSB visiting panel at BPP Manchester would have the opportunity to meet with the Finance team which is based there.

9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

Students liked being provided with digital copies of course texts as they were far more portable and useful when commuting than hard copy texts. Several students said that they liked that many large-group session lectures were delivered online because some felt they learned better using that format than in live lectures, and were better able to manage their time. Students appreciated having a variety of formats to suit their individual learning styles; one comment about the online lecture resources was that it was unfortunate that there was no fast forward option.

10. Equality and diversity

BPP has a general Equality & Diversity policy as well as specific policies for disability disclosure, learning support, reasonable adjustments in examinations, mental health and responding to disclosure of mental health.

The panel heard that the Head of Inclusion for BPP has run sessions for staff on issues of equality and diversity and that is focused on making staff aware of these issues. Staff have also requested

sessions on particular topics and can ask specific questions about issues directly relevant to their area of work.

Teaching staff described a variety of adjustments that they had made to support a student with a disability; though there had been some initial problems with organising the adjustments centrally, BPP Leeds staff had been proactive in offering assistance to the student to ensure they could participate in the course.

Additional comments

n/a

Good practice, distinguishing features

The panel would like to commend:

1. The strength, commitment and enthusiasm of the teaching team and very positive student feedback.
2. The support available to students in the broadest sense, including careers and library.
3. Strong links with the local Bar.

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval

The panel recommends continuing approval with recommendations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations must be addressed:

Recommendation 1	Be more specific about actions for Leeds on future action plans and more specific about outcomes and ongoing planning for future years, in such matters as CPD, pupillage, Ethics, reasonable adjustments and pass rates
Recommendation 2	Encourage management to ensure teaching and support staff have opportunities to reflect on statistics published by the BSB and to contribute to the annual reflective review and future action plans specifically in relation to Leeds.
Recommendation 3	To reflect upon the effectiveness of the strategy for teaching Professional Ethics, including the potential provision of additional resources, or the better use of existing resources. In addition, to ensure that issues of Professional Ethics are not only signposted but that tutors facilitate a fuller discussion when those issues arise.

Response by the Provider (maximum one page)

We are grateful to the panel for their careful review and recognition of good practice.

We are delighted to hear the positive feedback given by our students; they are the focus of everything we do here and we are committed to maintaining and improving this in the future.

Going forward, we will ensure that teaching staff are more engaged in quality assurance processes, in particular by giving them the opportunity to reflect on statistics published by the BSB and to contribute to the annual reflective review and action plans.

We are reflecting on how we teach Ethics as a national team and will consider ways in which we can provide even more support to students studying this module.