

**BAR
STANDARDS
BOARD**

REGULATING BARRISTERS

**Bar Professional Training Course
Manchester Law School, Manchester Metropolitan University
Report of Visit held on 8 February 2016**

Name of Institution	Date of Visit
Manchester Law School, Manchester Metropolitan University	8 February 2016

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

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
Approved for: Full-time 108 (60 enrolled) Part-time 48 (13 Y1, 7 Y2 enrolled)	September 2015 to July 2016

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Dr Victoria Stec	Head of Training Supervision, BSB (Chair)
Ms Hayley Gault	Senior Training Supervision Officer, BSB
Prof Maria Tighe	Professor Emerita and Consultant
Ms Ann Thanaraj	Barrister (non-practising); Principal Lecturer in Law Programme Leader for LLM Int. Business Law University of Cumbria
Ms Gemma Davies	Senior Lecturer Programme Leader for LLM and BPTC Part-Time Northumbria Law School

Provider Team attending the event	Role and area of primary responsibility
Ms Catherine Little	Head of Manchester Law School
Ms Joanne Lewthwaite	Programme Director, BPTC
Ms Emma Seagreaves	Associate Head, Manchester Law School
Ms Claire Knighton	BPTC Assistant Programme Director and Part-time Leader, subject leader: REDOC
Mr Raymond Henley	Senior Lecturer, subject leader: Civil
Mr Barry Harwood-Gray	Senior Lecturer, subject leader: Ethics

Mr Steve Johnson		Senior Lecturer, Criminal Advocacy; subject leader: Advocacy
Mr Phillip Rouse		Senior Lecturer, subject leader: Conference
Ms Monica Krawczyk		Pastoral Care Director; Senior Lecturer, subject leader: Criminal Litigation and Advanced Criminal Litigation in Practice.
Ms Windy Nilsen		Senior Lecturer (PT): Criminal Advocacy, Criminal Litigation and Advanced Criminal Practice.
Mr Patrick Ryan		Senior Lecturer , subject leader Civil Advocacy, Drafting, Civil Litigation, ReDOC
Ms June Meadowcroft		Senior Lecturer, Advocacy; subject leader: Opinion Writing, ReDOC, Family option
Ms Angela Hogg		ReDOC, Subject leader: Drafting, Advanced Civil Practice and Civil Claims Arising out of Criminal Proceedings
Ms Geraldine O'Donnell		Civil Litigation, ReDOC, Subject leader: Personal Injury and Family
Nick Touati		Careers
Paul Haldron		IT

Rationale for the visit
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>During the visit the panel saw teaching rooms and BPTC spaces, and had the opportunity to meet, separately, with management, course team and students. Members of the panel also observed classes in Opinion Writing, Civil and Criminal Advocacy, Drafting, and Conference Skills. The report reflects the findings of the panel and is informed by both documentation and visit.</p>

Context: The Provider
<p>Manchester Law School is situated within the Faculty of Business and Law at Manchester Metropolitan University. Manchester Law School offers all stages of legal education and training. It has delivered the Bar course since 1997, first as the Bar Vocational Course, and then as the Bar Professional Training Course from 2010.</p>

1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards
<p>The panel found that the Bar Professional Training Course at Manchester Metropolitan University was being delivered in accordance with the stated aims, philosophy and standards of the course. Areas for</p>

improvement or enhancement, and aspects of good practice are identified in the report. The panel found the approach to the Annual Reflective Review to be helpfully frank, honest and analytical in its evaluation of the BPTC at Manchester Law School.

2. Quality management systems

Teaching staff are encouraged to be reflective practitioners and to contribute to the Annual Reflective Review (ARR). Quality assurance processes are developed by the staff themselves in line with the syllabus prescribed to them by the BSB. Staff have team meeting away days where they discuss the development of the course and address any issues. The management team said that good practice is shared with staff teaching on other programmes within the Law School such as the LLB or LPC.

This year's panel was satisfied that the recommendations given in 2015 had been addressed.

3. Staffing and staff development

All new full-time members of staff are required to obtain a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP). This is also open to interested part-time members of staff. All of the tutors whom the panel met had obtained the PGCAP. Staff have also been invited to contribute towards developing research excellence. Other development activities undertaken recently include mediation training and a widening participation programme. One tutor cross-qualified from solicitor to barrister with the support of the university. All of the staff whom the panel met, including the management team, were confident that they have access to support from the wider university.

All of the staff whom the panel met expressed dissatisfaction that the administrator responsible for the BPTC is now based in the central student hub rather than with the rest of the faculty near the BPTC teaching rooms where she was previously based. They disliked having no regular face-to-face contact with her and while they conceded that nothing had proved impossible since her relocation, they found that it was slower and more difficult to interact with her. They raised concerns about the security of examination materials being stored or processed at the central hub rather than within the faculty. Some tutors said they were investing significant time in organising assessments which they did not have to do when the administrator was within the faculty. Staff were also concerned that students no longer have access to her near their teaching spaces and instead have to seek her out at the student hub; the perception was that students are getting a less effective service than they were previously.

The management team explained that the reason for having the administrator in the central student hub was to share her knowledge with other administrators, which should enable others to cover her when required and reduce the risk of there being a single point of failure if all knowledge of administration in the Law School was placed in one individual. The panel recommends that the management team continues to monitor the impact of having the course administrator located outside of the school on service levels for both students and staff (**Recommendation 1**).

4. Curriculum content and structure

All members of the teaching team are involved in the development of the course and in writing course materials. The teaching staff whom the panel met said that there is a degree of autonomy and flexibility involved and that they feel a definite sense of ownership of the course.

5. Admissions and student profile

The teaching staff stated that this year's cohort of full-time students includes around 60% international students. The panel learned that international applicants for the course are obliged to do the IELTS test, unless they have lived in the UK for at least a year and passed a Skype interview. No one this year has been asked to leave the course due to English language issues.

The management team said that they are willing to give applicants with 2:2 degrees the opportunity to do the BPTC if they can demonstrate ambition and a keen awareness of the Bar; they aim to offer places only to people who have a good chance of succeeding on the course and try to strike a balance between managing expectations and stifling ambition. Teaching staff stated that every year there is a somewhat weaker group of students within the cohort but that there is a sense that the whole cohort is generally stronger this year. The team is trying to target recruitment of strong students at local universities in Manchester and Liverpool via roadshows, law fairs and Advocacy taster sessions.

The management team also said that they have made changes to their scholarship model in order to make the course more attractive to prospective students, but they acknowledged that scholarships may not always be enough to encourage students to do the course. Previously the two scholarships on offer equated to 50% of a student's course fees, but suitable candidates tended to secure funding from their Inns of Court which meant that they were ineligible for a university scholarship. As a result of research with students from the 2013-14 cohort, the decision was made to offer 12 scholarships of £1000. Having a scholarship on their CV was considered by students to be more valuable for their progression after the course to than the amount of money offered. Any money earmarked for scholarships which is not taken is rolled over to the following year or put towards prizes for students such as awards for outstanding Advocacy results or individual and group contributions.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

The panel was able to observe teaching sessions in Conference Skills, Drafting, Opinion Writing, and Criminal and Civil Advocacy. The teaching was considered to be of a high quality; students were adequately prepared and contributed well in class and tutors were engaging and knowledgeable.

Students were generally of the view that the teaching materials at MMU are very good and that they receive high quality, constructive feedback. The students said that staff make an effort to produce materials in a number of formats to suit different learning styles, and they appreciate this effort. Students were complimentary about the Additional Advocacy Programme available to them.

Some part-time students whom the panel met had been concerned about their knowledge in Professional Ethics but after receiving support from teaching staff, an additional small group session and a revision book for the topic they now feel reassured.

Teaching staff told the panel that they are mindful of the need to consider what issues may arise from varied educational backgrounds, particularly from students who did their undergraduate degrees overseas as other cultures can have very different teaching and learning styles. The panel learned that focus groups with international students took place last year to learn more from students about their needs and experiences.

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

The management team discussed the BSB's Key Statistics with the panel, noting that MMU was sitting in the mid-range of providers and that in common with others there were concerns about performance on centrally assessed subjects and non-completion rates. The management team pointed out that students tend to perform very well in non-centrally assessed subjects and that the Key Statistics do not show measures such as quality of learning experience or preparedness for pupillage. At MMU students are surveyed five years after completing the course and the most recent survey of the 2009-10 cohort ascertained the destinations of 89 students (from a cohort of 131) of those responding 31% were practising as barristers which compares favourably with the national average. However, the management team stated that improving performance in centrally assessed subjects was an area of priority. They said that they do not believe that course materials are to blame as some students do very well; they think it is important to focus more on weaker students to improve their performance. A personal tutoring project is planned for September 2016 which aims to identify students at risk of having problems at a very early stage of the course. The management team is also encouraging tutors to take collective responsibility for adapting their resources to emphasise support for centrally assessed subjects.

8. Student support and quality of student experience

The panel was pleased to meet a group of 13 students, of whom half were on the part-time BPTC course. Reasons given for choosing MMU included wanting to live close to home, the lower cost of the course and living in Manchester relative to London, the 20% discount offered to alumni of other MMU courses, and the day release set-up of their part-time course. Some students also said that they were very impressed with staff they met prior to applying to the course.

Students commended the professionalism of the environment on the course compared to their undergraduate experiences at other institutions and were very happy about the level of support available to them, describing staff as responsive and supportive of their career aspirations. Students like the fact that most if not all tutors have experience in practice; they feel as if they are being prepared for the real world because they are being taught by people who are currently in practice or recently out of practice.

Students feel that when they raise issues, their concerns are taken on board by staff. They said that they would raise urgent issues directly with the relevant member of staff – for example, a subject leader – or otherwise raise issues through the Student Staff Liaison (SSL) group. Several students

felt that issues were often dealt with more slowly through the SSL process but otherwise staff were responsive and proactive about dealing with concerns.

Students were generally positive about timetabling and reported that any issues tended to be resolved very quickly. However, some part-time students were unhappy that they had teaching days on consecutive Mondays when they had been led to believe that they would be taught fortnightly. Part-time students also said that they found it difficult to attend weekday events and evening sessions which tend to start at 5.30 because many people live and work in cities other than Manchester so travelling to MMU for that time is not feasible.

Some students reported that they found seeking mental health support through pastoral care to be slow; several students did not get a personal care plan in place sufficiently quickly at the start of the course. Students thought support should be more ongoing as mental health issues can occur at any point, and especially given the intensive nature of the course. However, students otherwise praised the pastoral care available to them at MMU. They like that tutors are available to offer guidance and feel that they do whatever they can to help students who might have difficult personal circumstances.

International students are offered the opportunity to have a free taxi journey from the airport to the university campus prior to starting the course. Students thought that the university had been responsive to requests for assistance in, for example, completing forms or seeking accommodation throughout the summer period prior to starting the course. The international students whom the panel met said that they had been made to feel welcome and they found that there were lots of activities available organised by the university which were targeted to them; the International Society is shared between MMU and Manchester University so students have a wide potential social circle. Several of the students said that MMU had been their first choice of provider because of the scholarships available to international students.

There are a variety of staff members who can offer support to international students, including the university's International Support Officer and an Equality and Diversity Champion located within Manchester Law School. The panel heard that staff try to offer support at or prior to induction for all students, including those from overseas. The panel asked management staff about academic support for international students; they said that issues with English language proficiency were no longer a problem with students on the course but that they could direct students with particular language issues to support services. The panel recommends that staff build on the support for international students, which is at present focused on practical needs, so that it more specifically identifies and addresses academic skills needs (**Recommendation 2**).

Students praised the Additional Professional Programme (APP) where barristers come in and give talks on things like Professional Ethics and applying for pupillage. They like these opportunities to network with members of the local Bar. Part-time students were less positive about the APP as they said they often heard about events at the last minute so they were unable to make arrangements to attend, or the timing was inconvenient for those in employment.

Some of the students were disappointed with the provision of pro bono opportunities. They said that pro bono work is co-ordinated by the central careers service whom they feel do not have specialist knowledge of the requirements of BPTC students so students often get sent opportunities for which they are not eligible. Many part-time students feel that pro bono opportunities are all focused on full-time students who can organise free time during weekdays. However, some students feel that there are suitable pro bono opportunities available, students just have to seek them out themselves. The

panel heard similar concerns from students in their visit to MMU in 2015. Therefore, as was recommended in last year's report, the panel recommends more proactive promotion of pro bono and other extracurricular activities (**Recommendation 3**).

Students generally feel that there is little time to do many extracurricular activities due to the demands of the course, though they anticipate that they might be able to do more once the centrally assessed examinations have taken place. The students like that there is a university Law Society and feel that they benefit from being part of a larger academic institution.

Students appreciate that the careers service is open to them for five years after they graduate and they find staff at the careers service generally helpful but they feel that there is only so much that the careers service can do given the competitive nature of the job market. All of the students reported feeling intimidated by the thought of their future career due to the small number of pupillages available nationally.

9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

The panel was fortunate to meet with a member of the IT team during the visit. He explained that students can send in queries to the helpdesk either online or over the telephone. Students stated that IT staff are good at responding to queries quickly and professionally but that they are not always able to resolve problems. Some part-time students had IT issues early on in the course and found it difficult to make calls to IT staff remotely during office hours as they had other commitments.

Students reported that the back-up for recording performances has not been functional since the beginning of the course, so they have to be proactive in ensuring that recordings are happening properly. Some students have lost their performances and had to re-do them when recordings have failed.

Some part-time students reported being somewhat confused when using the Moodle virtual learning environment as they sometimes do not know which area to look at because tutors differ in their use of the system.

IT staff explained that they are currently working on making course materials and lectures more accessible via mobile phones and other devices but they pointed out that they are unable to offer support for personal devices. They try to give advice to students where they can but they are unable to interfere with students' personal equipment. The panel heard that students had access to pop-up IT helpdesks at the beginning of the year but that little guidance was given directly to students. It was suggested that a crib sheet of typical processes could be given to students on enrolment so that they could resolve common minor issues themselves, such as connecting to the university's Wi-Fi. The panel recommends that staff review the pre-enrolment advice given to students regarding IT provision and support (**Recommendation 4**).

10. Equality and diversity

Over half of this year's cohort are international students. This is similar to last year's cohort; the ARR states that 44% of students were from overseas and 60% of students were from ethnic minority

backgrounds. The ARR states that international students tended to do significantly less well than UK/EU students, though there was an improvement from the previous year which the ARR states was down to more robust procedures for recruitment with regards to English Language proficiency.

Additional comments

n/a

Good practice, distinguishing features

The panel wished to commend:

- Outstanding student feedback from both full-time and part-time cohorts on support from teaching staff.
- Strong sense of ownership of the course across the whole course team.
- Quality of the documentation which is reflective and analytical.

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval

Continuing approval with recommendations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations must be addressed:

Recommendation 1	Continue to monitor the impact of having the course administrator located outside of the school on service levels for both students and staff.
Recommendation 2	Build on the additional support for international students, which is at present focused on practical needs, so that it identifies and addresses academic skills needs.
Recommendation 3	As was recommended in last year's report, more proactive promotion of pro bono and other extracurricular activities.
Recommendation 4	Review pre-enrolment advice to students regarding IT provision and support.

Response by the Provider (maximum one page)

The team are delighted to receive this very positive report and the good practice identified by the panel in particular the feedback that was provided by our students. The team are fully committed to providing the highest quality support for our students and for this to be recognised whilst they are in the middle of what is undoubtedly a challenging programme of study is very pleasing.

Manchester Law School has recently appointed a Pro Bono Director with an overall objective of enhancing pro bono opportunities for all students. It is envisaged that this will assist in identifying the most suitable opportunities for BPTC students having regard to their particular skills and workload associated with the programme.

A number of students have availed themselves of the current opportunities as described. We have also had success in National Competitions, the MMU team recently winning the regional final of the Interviewing Competition,

We are happy to be able to continue to offer a Part Time route to qualification for the Bar and aim to make the mode as learner friendly as possible particularly having regard to the competing demands experienced by part time students. We recognise that there have been a few consecutive Mondays this year for PT students, these have been mainly in the third term and associated with bank holidays, Education Weekends and assessments. We always notify these at the start of the year. We shall endeavour to minimise this in timetabling for next year and continue to ensure that any such occurrences are publicised well in advance. We are fortunate to be able to offer our students a range of extra curricula activities such as our Additional Professional Programme, which takes place on Saturdays. We also have a good relationship with the Circuit and are able to offer students the opportunity to participate in Circuit events, although as these are organised primarily for the benefit of practitioners the dates may not always be wholly accessible to all students.

The team welcome the other helpful recommendations made by the team and will be working together with other relevant departments to consider how best to implement.