

**BAR
STANDARDS
BOARD**

REGULATING BARRISTERS

**Bar Professional Training Course
BPP Manchester
Report of Visit held on 1 March 2017**

Name of Institution	Date of Visit
BPP Manchester	1 March 2017

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

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
Approved for: Full-time 48 (51 enrolled)	September 2016 to July 2017

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Dr Victoria Stec	Head of Training Supervision and Examinations, BSB (Chair)
Ms Hayley Gault	Senior Training Supervision Officer, BSB
Prof. Maria Tighe	Professor Emerita and Consultant
Ms Julia Witting	Supervision Manager, BSB

Provider Team attending the event	Role and area of primary responsibility
Anna Banfield	Director of Programmes (Joint)
Mark Keith	Programme Leader
Rebecca Yates	Head of Law School, Manchester and Liverpool
Eleanor Hutchinson	Tutor
Peter Wolfenden	Tutor
Suzanne Rivers	Tutor

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 2015-16, 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 meet, separately, with management, the course team and students. Members of the panel also observed a class in Criminal Litigation. The report reflects the findings of the panel and is informed by both the documentation and visit.

The visit was made in the context of over-recruitment by BPP at three of its sites, by a global total of 13. At Manchester, three students above maximum validated numbers had been recruited. The BSB's visits to all BPP sites therefore specifically considered any potential adverse impact on students of the over-recruitment.

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 status 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. From September 2017, the course will also be available at BPP's centre. Each site is approved separately by the Bar Standards Board to deliver the BPTC. BPP Manchester has offered the Bar Course since 2013, along with a range of other law and professional programmes.

1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards

All BPP sites deliver the course on the same principles and using the same teaching materials, so the approach to the BPTC at Manchester is identical to that in Leeds, London and Birmingham.

BPP made an application to the BSB to increase the number of validated full-time places across all their sites in order to avoid over-recruiting students in future years. The panels on visits to all BPP sites considered the impact an increase in student numbers would have on accommodation, resources, staff workload and students' learning experience at each site. Having visited all sites, the panels considered that there would be no significant negative impact of an increase in numbers and therefore approved BPP's application. The new validated number of places at Manchester from September 2017 is 70, with a target recruitment number of 64.

2. Quality management systems

Teaching staff meet in the summer to review what happened over the academic year. They also met with the BPP Leeds team in 2016 to share knowledge and good practice, and there is an upcoming meeting with the BPP London team.

In 2016, the Manchester team discussed how to promote professionalism among students and decided to incorporate the BSB's Professional Statement, Threshold Standard and Competences into the personal tutor system to achieve this. The idea was that tutors would in effect act in a similar way to pupil supervisors, and students would identify areas for their own professional development in relation to the Professional Statement. The panel heard that students have bought into the new process well; it gives students an opportunity to be reflective and to set their own learning objectives for the year. This is the first year that the initiative has taken place and it is currently only happening in Manchester. The panel **recommends** that BPP consider ways to disseminate areas of good practice, including the embedding of the professional statement, to other sites (**Recommendation 1**).

Tutors observe classes taught by colleagues on different courses such as the LPC, which tutors find useful. Tutors are also observed by their colleagues.

There is a student representative for each group on the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). SSLC meetings take place at least once a term and the minutes of the meetings are put on the virtual learning environment (VLE). The students whom the panel met said they find this useful but that they also feel comfortable approaching staff directly if they have any issues.

3. Staffing and staff development

The panel heard that tutors feel that they have a good workload, with adequate time for preparation and for personal tutor responsibilities. Teaching hours vary throughout the term depending on what subjects a tutor teaches.

All new BPP teaching staff are obliged to study towards a PGCPHE which is run by BPP. New staff also attended a "new tutor day" at BPP's Birmingham site before they started teaching which was run by BPP's Head of Learning and Development. The panel heard that this was a useful opportunity for new staff to share fears and experiences with other new tutors. There is good communication across sites and tutors feel well-supported both locally and nationally.

Some staff are door tenants in chambers so are able to remain in contact with practice and they can also go back to practice over the summer when they are not teaching.

4. Curriculum content and structure

Most students were able to study their first and second choice of Options subjects, though some subjects such as Chancery were not available due to a lack of interest from students. The panel heard that while students' range of options may be more limited than at the London site, the range available was still good. Students were also given the opportunity to go to Leeds to do certain modules if they could not be run at Manchester.

5. Admissions and student profile

The panel heard that the demographic profile of the cohort has remained fairly similar across the last three years. There is a mix of UK and international students, and a mixture of academic backgrounds amongst the UK students.

The Programme Leader reads through all applications for the course individually and tries to choose those who have a good chance of doing well on the course, based on their degree, experience and interest in the Bar. International students are interviewed via Skype. The panel did not consider that it was best practice for recruitment to be the responsibility of the Programme Leader alone and advised BPP to consider this as part of the approval for the increased number of student places.

BPP staff have been to a legal practitioners' event at Liverpool John Moores University and the Law School generally and BPTC staff specifically have been to local schools and colleges to promote legal training and give talks about the legal profession to reach out to students who might wish to study law in the future.

There are several scholarships available to students; some are managed locally in Manchester and there are regional scholarships for outstanding academic ability, commitment to the Northern circuit and contribution to the court in Manchester. Student make a pitch to a panel on these criteria and then do a competency-based interview, similar in style to a mock pupillage interview. There are also discretionary bursaries that are controlled more centrally in London by the Directors of Programme.

The students whom the panel met felt that it had been a competitive process to get into BPP Manchester and that they knew many people who had wanted to go to Manchester who had not got in. Students liked that they had been selected based on their prospect of being able to do well on the course rather than just passing minimum requirements.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

The panel was able to observe a class in Criminal Litigation. The teaching was overall felt to be of a high standard, with students engaged with and well-prepared for the session. The students whom the panel met said that their colleagues were generally very well-prepared and that teaching staff had made it clear that a lack of preparation was unacceptable.

As mentioned above, the Manchester team decided to incorporate the Professional Statement into personal tutor meetings in order to embed it as much as possible with the students. They considered incorporating it via normal teaching sessions but felt it would be of most value in personal tutor sessions as it would encourage students to be self-reflective and prepare them for pupillage and practice. These meetings are now referred to as professional development meetings. Students are introduced to the Professional Statement very early on in the year and they are encouraged to identify key competences and skills they will learn on the course. These are then discussed in meetings with their personal tutor. The process is likely to be refined for next year and adapted for those who already have pupillage and for international students.

The teaching materials for all small group sessions include some more complex points which can be used to challenge more able students. The panel heard that students work well in their groups and learn from each other and support one another. Groups are mixed up for advocacy and tutors swap at least once across groups so that students are able to experience a range of styles.

The students whom the panel met said that they had been very impressed with the standard of teaching at BPP Manchester; they said that they really feel that teaching sessions add value and that tutors are knowledgeable and go out of their way to try and help students understand concepts.

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

BPP introduced more small group sessions for Professional Ethics this year across all their sites. The first round of sessions allows students to become familiar with materials, and the second round focuses on exam technique, with podcasts available between the two rounds. Students reported that they had found these podcasts useful in allowing them to apply ethical dilemmas to practical situations.

A big part of the sessions focusing on exam technique was answering short answer questions (SAQs). Students felt that because the format of the assessment had been changed for this academic year there was an element of speculation about the exam. Students were concerned that ethical issues are often subjective but that the BSB's mark scheme could be prescriptive, so that an answer could be technically correct but would be marked as wrong because it didn't follow a strict interpretation of the mark scheme. The BSB noted this and stated that now that the marking was being handled centrally, there was actually less chance of the marking scheme being excessively prescriptive as internal communication across the whole marking team would now be possible.

8. Student support and quality of student experience

The students whom the panel met gave a range of reasons for why they had chosen to study the BPTC at BPP Manchester. Some students were from the area and liked the fact that they would have a relatively easy commute and a lower cost relative to the London centres. Some had done the Graduate Diploma in Law at the centre and enjoyed their experience, particularly the professional environment. Many students said that they liked the fact that they would be in a small cohort and they had been impressed with BPP's open days. Students said that they got the impression that tutors would go out of their way to ensure that students would get the best results.

The students like being part of small cohort; they enjoy the collegiate atmosphere and the fact that tutors know them all personally. There is a friendly atmosphere amongst the cohort and students like that they are able to share skills and experiences. The panel heard that students find support from their colleagues invaluable.

BPP held compulsory talks for the first six weeks of term on various topics such as the Northern Circuit and advice on dealing with different aspects of the Bar. Students feel they have good exposure to the local Bar through events such as a plea in mitigation competition which was judged by local practitioners. Students are able to go to both the careers service and to their tutors for support and careers advice, and tutors work with the careers service for things like mock pupillage interviews. Students said that they feel the two sources of support are complementary and that they are both always willing to help.

The panel heard that some international students were disappointed at how difficult it is to get pupillage in England and Wales if you are an international student. They suggested that providers, universities in students' home jurisdictions and the BSB need to be clearer about employment prospects for international students. Over half of students at Inns events are international. BPP has tried to organise interviews with law firms in Malaysia, for example, but more could be done.

Students must do a minimum of five hours of pro bono work at BPP and they have a wide range of pro bono opportunities available to them. Students are also able to organise their own opportunities. Students feel that pro bono work is useful to them and enriches their CV but also allows them more opportunity to forge connections with the local Bar.

The students whom the panel spoke to were positive about the personal tutor system, including the focus on the Professional Statement. They liked that the process is bespoke and has a professional focus. Students said that it is constantly emphasised to them to think about practice and how they will apply their knowledge during pupillage and beyond.

Students will have the opportunity to participate in a Day in the Life exercise at the end of the year which will give them a chance to interact with real former judges, clerks and solicitors so that they get a sense of what practice is really like. A similar exercise had been very successful last year.

9. Learning resources (Library and IT)

Students said that on occasion space in the main library can be tight but that there is always adequate space in the room allocated specifically for BPTC students.

The panel heard that the VLE generally works well; there have been some minor issues with materials being unavailable but these are normally rectified quickly once tutors have been notified of the problem.

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. All sites are wheelchair accessible. The panel did not note any issues relating to equality and diversity during the visit. The panel heard from some students with disabilities that they had been very well-supported while at BPP Manchester.

Additional comments

n/a

Good practice, distinguishing features

The panel wished to commend:

- The uncompromising continued commitment to the quality of the student experience.
- The initiative to embed the professional statement into the student learning experience.
- The responsiveness to the recommendations from last year's annual monitoring visit, including the increased cross-fertilisation between teaching team and careers staff.

- Students' positive feedback on the collegiate and professional atmosphere and the approachability and responsiveness of staff.

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval

Continuing approval with recommendations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations must be addressed:

Recommendation 1	Consider ways to disseminate areas of good practice, including the embedding of the professional statement, to other sites.
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Response by the Provider (maximum one page)

We are grateful to the panel for their careful review and recognition of good practice, in particular, the uncompromising continued commitment to the quality of the student experience, the initiative to embed the professional statement into the student learning experience and the responsiveness to the recommendations from last year's annual monitoring visit, including the increased cross-fertilisation between teaching team and careers staff.

We have acted on this year's recommendation and have shared our experience of embedding the professional statement with the other centres.

The programme at BPP Manchester has gone from strength to strength. This has been achieved by a focus on achieving the very best outcomes for those students who choose to study their BPTC with BPP Manchester. This commitment has resulted in a high pass rate in the Centralised Assessments and the course as a whole. BPP Manchester students have also been very successful in obtaining pupillage as can be demonstrated by the BSB's Key Statistics for 2017."

We are committed at BPP Manchester to the best outcomes for our students and aim to enable as many students from as wide and diverse background as possible to commence a career at the Bar. This is reflected in the fact that well over 60% of our students are first generation students in Higher Education and 70% of our students identify as female (compared to 36.5% at the Bar as a whole). We continue to work with Pathways to Law as well as taking other initiatives to assist the Bar to better reflect society.