

# BAR STANDARDS BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

## Bar Professional Training Course Manchester Law School, Manchester Metropolitan University Report of Visit held on 11 April 2017

Name of Institution	Date of Visit
Manchester Law School, Manchester Metropolitan University	11 April 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 108 (63 enrolled) Part-time 48 (9 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)
Mr Oliver Hanmer	Director of Regulatory Assurance, BSB
Ms Hayley Langan	Senior Training Supervision Officer, BSB
Ms Samantha Pullin	Barrister

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 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
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 Wendy Nilsen	Senior Lecturer (PT): Criminal Advocacy, Criminal Litigation and Advanced Criminal Practice.
Mr Patrick Ryan	Senior Lecturer , subject leader Civil Advocacy and Ethics, 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

### **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, course team and students. The report reflects the findings of the panel and is informed by both documentation and visit.

### **Context: The Provider**

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.

### **1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards**

In 2016, the BPTC won an award from the Manchester Metropolitan Student Union for Course of the Year. The award is voted on by students and then ultimately awarded by a panel. In addition to this, the BPTC Assistant Programme Director won the Outstanding Feedback award.

## 2. Quality management systems

Students can raise issues with staff on an informal, ad hoc basis, or they can use the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). The students whom the panel met said that they found that the SSLC was a useful exercise and that staff seem to be receptive to most issues raised. However, students said the majority of issues are raised directly with staff, and students feel comfortable in approaching tutors if they have any problems. Students are also surveyed each term; at the time of the visit, these surveys had shown 100% satisfaction.

## 3. Staffing and staff development

Since the last visit to Manchester Law School, link support managers have been introduced so staff now have a manager with whom they can meet regularly to catch up and discuss any issues. Teaching staff said that they feel supported and respected. Wellbeing is a part of the departmental and wider university strategy; the university runs wellbeing programmes which staff can access, including things like fitness classes, organised at lunchtimes and in the evening. There are also activities which focus on mental wellbeing; at the time of the visit a talk on Imposter Syndrome was due to take place in the coming weeks.

There have historically been some problems with the allocation of hours, which has meant that staff have on occasion done work which they have not received credit for. There is due to be a wholesale revision of how hours are allocated to ensure parity across different subjects and programmes.

The panel invited the management team to talk about the faculty's strategy for research, as this had not been mentioned in detail in materials provided before the visit. A new Professor of Research has recently been appointed to drive research. The panel heard that staff generally have a lack of time for research due to the intensity of the course, though at least one tutor has proposed to do research as part of a Masters course next year and the Programme Director has applied to do a PhD supported by the Law School. An external speaker has come in to talk to teaching staff about how to get work published in professional journals, and regular research groups take place, but the research strategy is still in development. An issue is that professional practice is not currently recognised towards research; this is being looked at across the wider university. In addition, re-designing course programmes for the changing legal education landscape will take up a significant amount of time for tutors which will further reduce the amount of time tutors can commit to research initiatives; teaching staff are regularly consulted on future plans under the BSB's Future Bar Training and the SRA's Training for Tomorrow programmes. The panel **recommends** that the team seeks out opportunities for research that will enrich the course and its future developments (**Recommendation 1**).

## 4. Curriculum content and structure

The panel heard that the management team is trying to increase the amount of staff contact time for Civil Litigation to address weaker performance from students in that subject. There have also been a number of other strategies identified at staff away days, such as having Criminal and Civil "czars" to ensure that knowledge subjects are embedded within skills. The team is keen that every aspect of the course is embedded in skills to ensure that knowledge subjects are not learned in a vacuum.

## **5. Admissions and student profile**

The management team reported that there is a higher proportion of students who have done the Graduate Diploma in Law than those who did an undergraduate law degree. A large number of the international students on the course come from Malaysia, many of whom have done a year of their undergraduate study at a university in the UK, often locally.

The part-time year one cohort consists of only seven students this year, as two students dropped out after enrolment. The panel heard that this is common as part-time students usually have additional responsibilities, but that it is likely that these students will return next year. The management team said that while the cohort is small, the team is keen to continue with the part-time mode as it attracts students who otherwise would not be able to do the BPTC, such as those who have caring responsibilities. The team has worked hard to ensure that students on the part-time course have a good learning experience, including offering a full range of Options subjects which are taught alongside full-time students.

The management team acknowledge the value of alumni in promoting the course and in maintaining strong links with the Bar; they are working on creating more formal links with alumni to this end. An event took place in 2016 which was a success – students were very positive about their time at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Marketing tends to have an undergraduate focus across the university but there is a dedicated member of staff for marketing in the faculty; this year, the team is trying to focus more on marketing the part-time mode of the course and marketing materials are being revamped. The panel heard that staff are very open to talking to prospective students individually and they can arrange for personalised tours for those who want to find out more about the course, and Skype meetings for those based overseas.

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

Students were very positive about the quality of the teaching at Manchester Law School. They like that tutors have experience in practice and students enjoy being in a relatively small cohort which means tutors can get to know students individually and give them individual attention where necessary.

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

The panel heard the teaching team is looking forward to some more stability in the curriculum for centralised assessments as many changes have taken place in the last couple of years, which has had an effect on how the centrally assessed subjects have been taught. Several changes have been made to all the subjects, with Ethics in particular being made more interactive. Teaching staff are currently working on subject handbooks based on feedback from students that they would find it useful to have them.

## 8. Student support and quality of student experience

The students whom the panel gave a range of reasons for choosing to study the BPTC at Manchester Law School. Some had studied the GDL at Manchester Law School and therefore got a 20% alumni discount in the course fees; others wanted to study in Manchester because it is close to family and cheaper than in London. Several of the students said that the welcoming attitude of the staff whom they had met before the course was the ultimate deciding factor; they liked the friendly and collegiate atmosphere and the fact that staff seem to be invested in students' progression. Students like the fact that the cohort is small.

The personal tutor process was amended at the beginning of the academic year; the management team explained that they wanted to make personal tutor meetings more focused and to give students something specific to reflect on prior to the meetings. One of the tutors looked at personal tutor schemes across the school and looked at feedback from students to see what changes should be made. A review of the effectiveness of the scheme is ongoing as part of the wider Law School strategy; staff want to focus on reviewing students' progress and what can be done to support them individually. Students were positive about their experiences with the personal tutor system; the panel heard that it can be more difficult for part-time student to meet with their personal tutor in person but that they are very responsive via email, even over evenings and weekends. Personal tutors also advise on pupillage interviews; within the team there is a variety of expertise based on tutors' past experiences in practice so students can be referred to other tutors if their interview is at a chambers which specialises in a different area of practice to their personal tutor or they require extra support such as additional Advocacy training. Personal tutors can also refer students to wider university services for pastoral and wellbeing issues.

All tutors have clinic hours which students who need additional academic support can attend, but tutors generally have an open door policy so students feel comfortable approaching them with any issues they have. In addition, tutors also try to be proactive in inviting students who they think might be struggling to come and see them. There are also resources available in the wider university such as academic support for time management and language support. As with wellbeing issues, tutors can refer students on for more specialised support where necessary. In addition, tutors are frequently updated with how they can ensure accessibility for students with disabilities.

There is a dedicated international student officer who helps offer support to the high proportion of the BPTC cohort who are international students. There is also strong support for international students across the wider university including an international student department, but the BPTC team wants to promote cohesion and provide support locally too. A focus group is being organised to find out what specific areas of support international students require, and ideas such as buddying and mentoring have been discussed.

A number of the teaching team are still in practice, including some in local chambers. Those who are not in practice maintain contact with former colleagues. The New Practitioner Programme is also hosted at the Law School so there are opportunities for students to attend new practitioner lectures, participate in training sessions as witnesses, and network with junior members of the local Bar. Students are also invited to talks organised by chambers, and practitioners have come into the Law School to give additional Advocacy and Professional Ethics training. Past students and current pupils have also come in to give talks to students. Students were positive about these talks and the

additional training, saying that hearing from those currently in practice helped to bring Professional Ethics alive.

There are a variety of pro bono opportunities available to students, many of which were advertised at a pro bono fair. There is a full-time pro bono co-ordinator who sends out monthly updates on what is available to students. The students whom the panel met had been involved in a range of things including the Personal Support Unit and volunteering at Manchester Law Centre. The panel heard that around half of the cohort were involved in pro bono activities, though it was difficult to balance pro bono work with the demands of the course. Students are also encouraged to take part in other extra-curricular activities such as external mooted competitions

Students were less positive about the support offered to them by the school's careers service; many students said that the advice is not specific enough to Bar students and pupillage interview advice tends to be outdated, though they conceded that knowledge of specific chambers' pupillage techniques is reliant upon students giving feedback. Students tend to prefer to approach their tutors rather than the careers service. The panel **recommends** that the management team ensures the extensive practical experience of the teaching staff is shared with the careers service (**Recommendation 2**).

Students reported that it is expensive for them to attend Inns qualifying sessions in London. Some students said that because they had not been able to get a place on a residential weekend or get to London for the required number of sessions due to financial and time constraints they may have to delay being called to the Bar. Students can get reimbursed up to £60 by the university for attendance at Inns sessions, but only once.

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

Neither students nor staff reported any concerns with learning resources, including IT provision. On occasion, Advocacy performances are not properly recorded, which can be frustrating for both staff and students, though the panel heard that this could be down to human error rather than a failure in IT.

#### 10. Equality and diversity

The panel observed no issues of concern relating to equality and diversity on the day of the visit.

#### Additional comments

n/a

#### Good practice, distinguishing features

- We commend the teaching team for their proactive approach to identifying students who require additional support.
- We commend the commitment to continual improvement to personal tutor arrangements, and we welcome the intention to assess the impact of these changes in due course.
- We commend the open-minded approach to responding positively to training reform, the involvement of all staff in this process and the allocation of specific time for staff to contribute.
- We commend staff and student engagement with wider university services.
- We commend university measures to enhance the wellbeing of staff and students.

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

Continuing approval with recommendations.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations must be addressed:

Recommendation 1	Seek out opportunities for research that will enrich the course and its future developments.
Recommendation 2	Ensure the extensive practical experience of the teaching staff is shared with the careers service.

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

It is pleasing to note that a number of areas were commended by the Monitoring Panel where we have made enhancements to the quality of our provision.

The BPTC team are looking forward to the further developments and enhancements to our Programme that will be possible through Future Bar Training.

The Team are grateful for the helpful recommendations made by the Monitoring Panel. In relation to research this will be specifically addressed at an individual level through the PDR scheme. The BPTC team are able to access a wide range of research events and support by virtue of our location within Manchester Law School. We will continue to identify particular areas of research which will enhance our practice and the quality of the Programme for our students.

We will continue to work with the Careers Service to ensure that there is the best support available for our students and that the expertise of the BPTC is shared.