

BAR STANDARDS BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

Bar Professional Training Course University of Law, Leeds Annual Monitoring Visit held on 27 February 2017

Name of Institution	Date of Visit
University of Law, Leeds	27 February 2017

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

Numbers/modes approved	Dates of course
36 full-time (22 enrolled)	September 2016 to July 2017

Panel Members	Role and area of primary responsibility
Dr Victoria Stec	Head of Training Supervision and Examinations, BSB
Ms Clíodhna Judge	Head of Supervision and Authorisation, BSB
Ms Hayley Langan	Senior Training Supervision Officer, BSB
Ms Ann Thanaraj	Principal Lecturer in Law Programme Leader for LLM Int. Business Law University of Cumbria
Mr Deveral Capps	Dean of Leeds Law School

Provider Team attending the event	Role and area of primary responsibility
Ms Jacqueline Cheltenham	National Programme and Student Affairs Director, BPTC
Mr Tom Macdonald	Centre Director, University of Law, Leeds
Mr Niall Carlin	BPTC Tutor
Ms Beverly Dawes	BPTC Tutor

Rationale for the visit
<p>On 15 April 2015 the University of Law was accredited to deliver the Bar Professional Training Course at its Leeds centre. Approval was granted for 36 full-time places. As there was insufficient time to recruit a cohort to commence in September 2015, the University decided to commence delivery from September 2016. The purpose of the BSB visit in March 2016 was to follow up the</p>

issues that had been raised during the accreditation visit, check how far conditions and recommendations had been acted upon, and to view any alterations that had been made to the premises. The present visit was therefore the first formal Annual Monitoring visit since the commencement of delivery.

The University of Law also has approval for delivery of the course at its sites in London and Birmingham. Each site is accredited separately by the BSB. On visiting the site at Leeds, the panel met with management and teaching staff and a group of BPTC students. The University of Law provided the BSB with an update document in advance of the visit. The panel's conclusions were informed by the documentation and by the visit.

Context: The Provider

The College of Law was established in 1962 as an independent provider of legal education. In 2006 it was the first independent institution to be granted degree awarding powers by the Privy Council; in 2012 it was granted University title and became the University of Law. It delivered the Bar Vocational Course (BVC) in London from 1997 to 2009 and was approved to run the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) from 2010. It also has a site in Birmingham, which opened in 2001. The Birmingham centre delivered the BVC from 2007 to 2009, and thereafter the BPTC. The University of Law opened the Leeds centre in September 2014. This was as a result of a strategic decision to relocate all University of Law operations at the site it had previously occupied in York to Leeds. The site was accredited to deliver the BPTC in 2015 and began delivering the course in September 2016

1. Adherence to course aims, philosophy and standards

The panel noted that the action plan provided in documentation prior to the visit focused more on operational issues and that there was a lack of information about more strategic plans for the site. It is planned that a course review and a centre review will take place at the end of the year and this will continue annually, as at other sites. The outcome of these meetings will feed into the action plan. The panel **recommends** that the team ensures that the BPTC action plan reflects more strategic direction as well as more immediate operational issues (**Recommendation 1**).

2. Quality management systems

Both of the tutors who teach on the BPTC at Leeds are former practitioners who are new to teaching. Each tutor has two mentors based at the University of Law's London centre, and they are frequently in communication with colleagues across other sites, for example in module meetings via conference call or at markers' meetings in London. Tutors can give feedback on course materials to inform course design.

There are a number of ways that staff get feedback from students on how the course is going. Students complete a teaching quality evaluation form, which can be done anonymously. There are course and group representatives for the cohort, and a centre representative in the Student Association. Students can also approach staff on an ad hoc basis. The panel heard that there is a Student Staff Liaison Committee, which is the primary formal way for students to bring up issues with the course. However, at the time of the visit, there had not yet been a formal meeting of the committee as it was felt that all issues had been raised informally. The panel **recommends** that the

team implements the existing staff-student liaison committee governance structure to ensure that the student voice is heard, and responses are recorded and acted upon (**Recommendation 2**).

3. Staffing and staff development

The panel invited the new teaching team to talk about their induction at the beginning of the year. Both tutors went to London for a week of training prior to the start of the course and were given mentors, whom they have been in constant touch with. They met with colleagues at both the London and Birmingham centres and had training in things like assessment moderation and classroom issues, all of which they had found useful. They observed colleagues teaching and have since been observed by the National Programme and Student Affairs Director. Tutors also underwent Advocacy training with the Inns of Court College of Advocacy. Both tutors told the panel that the transition into teaching had been smooth, and that there had been and continues to be plenty of support. Both tutors said that they felt the year has gone very well so far, and feedback from students has been positive. Teaching staff will have a personal development review in the future but they have ongoing one-to-one feedback with line managers.

The entirety of the core subjects of the course is currently taught by the two main BPTC tutors. The panel asked what impact there would be if one of the tutors was unable to teach, for example due to illness. The tutors explained that there had been a brief and unavoidable period of absence, and that classes had been re-scheduled so there had minimal impact to students. If a longer period of absence were to occur, there are several other experienced tutors based at the Leeds centre who teach on other programmes who could teach classes, including the Centre Director.

Currently neither tutor at the Leeds site is involved in course design but they hope to be able to contribute more in the future. They have done some work such as proof-reading and writing quiz questions which has been useful as they are new to the course and therefore offer a fresh perspective. The panel heard that neither tutor is in practice at the moment as they are concentrating on teaching for now, but they both hope to keep involved with practice in some way as they have a good relationship with their former chambers – one tutor will return to practice for a week over the summer.

Teaching staff are able to do masters and PhDs in relevant areas, which are funded by the University of Law. A Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education has also recently been launched which will be a requirement for teaching staff in future.

4. Curriculum content and structure

The course is currently completely taught by two tutors, with each tutor responsible for either the Criminal or Civil subjects according to their area of expertise. Professional Ethics is taught by both tutors, via a large group session during induction week and then through workshop groups of no more than 12 students.

The panel asked whether tutors' workload was manageable given that only two of them are teaching all of the core subjects. The management team explained that tutors at Leeds have the same workload as teaching staff do elsewhere due to the small cohort; the tutors themselves also said that they felt their workload was manageable, including the additional responsibilities of being a personal

tutor. Tutors do have an average of 12 contact hours a week teaching, with the rest of their time taken up with administrative tasks, marking, and personal tutor responsibilities.

There are five full-time equivalent staff who are available for the course, all of whom are fully trained, but the management team explained that they wanted students to have the continuity of having only two teachers. The team said that there is a benefit for the tutors too as they get to know the entire course and become familiar with all the materials. Should the size of the cohort increase for next year a further full-time member of staff will teach on the BPTC, and the other two members of staff are on hand if necessary. The panel **recommends** that the team maximises the benefits to be gained from the wider BPTC team in enabling new tutors to develop their teaching technique (**Recommendation 3**).

At the time the panel met the students that had not yet heard which Options subjects they were able to do, though they had been informed at the start of the year that there may be a limit on the number of Options able to run due to the small size of the cohort. Students were aware that they could go to one of the University of Law's other sites in London or Birmingham for their Options if they are not available at Leeds. Some students were unsure how practical this would be in reality as most students are based locally, but others had chosen Options subjects relating to their pupillage and said they would be willing to travel if necessary. Staff explained that only one Option, Chancery, would not be running as only one student had chosen it, and the minimum viable number for a class would be four to six depending on the subject. At the time of the visit, the intention was for Options to be taught by both the core BPTC team and, where necessary, experienced visiting lecturers.

5. Admissions and student profile

Students can attend selection events at any of the University of Law centres offering the BPTC, no matter where they wish to study. Candidates are discouraged from talking about their BarSAS application or which centre they wish to study at and efforts are made to remove opportunities for unconscious bias on the part of the staff doing the selection. Academic achievement is looked at separately to selection day performance. The selection process includes a written exercise and an advocacy exercise, both of which they prepare for on the day. Students are also interviewed and asked a variety of questions including why they want to be a barrister, and a mixture of law-based and current affairs questions.

The current cohort comprises a mix of ages, genders, and academic backgrounds. The panel heard that more offers will be made to students for the next academic year which could result in a slightly bigger cohort, including potentially more international students.

6. Teaching and Learning (knowledge and skills areas)

Both of the staff who teach on the course are new to teaching and there only two of them to cover all of the core modules. While some students may come into contact with other staff through pro bono work or at the end of the year during their Options subjects, the panel **recommends** that the team gives thought to how best to enable students to have more exposure to a range of teaching styles and the breadth and depth of experience that the full BPTC team offers (**Recommendation 4**).

The panel heard that students are generally well-prepared for class and that attendance is good at teaching sessions; students said that this was partly because they are conscious of the minimum attendance rule. Some students reported that they have found it frustrating to be marked absent if they are only slightly late, due to unexpected transport delays having travelled from several miles away. Some students have had to miss sessions to attend other things such as Inns events, and they have usually been able to attend an alternative class. Some of the students whom the panel spoke to said the minimum attendance requirement seems harsh and they worry that they will be penalised should they fall ill; other students felt the minimum requirement is fair as it ensures everyone is able to keep up to date with what is being taught and no one can fall too far behind. Student must fill in a form if they miss a session and show to the relevant tutor that they have been able to make up the work they missed.

For Professional Ethics workshops, students are given reading and questions to answer before class, then in the teaching session there are additional questions, or a case is given out and discussed using the Inns of Court manual and Code of Conduct. There will also be an Ethics practitioner event prior to the exam, as well as the Civil and Criminal Litigation practitioner events held earlier on in the year. As well as the workshops, there have been ethics-based questions in Civil and Criminal Litigation sessions. Students were worried about the new format of the Professional Ethics assessment. Short answer questions (SAQs) have been discussed in class with the tutor but students would have liked to receive model answers; several students whom the panel spoke to said that they wanted more guidance on how to structure SAQs.

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

The students whom the panel spoke with said that they enjoy how advocacy is taught but they would like to be given indicative marks for their work prior to their mock exam so they have an idea of where they stand. Students do get recordings of their advocacy performances via email with feedback included, but they would like to know roughly where in a grade boundary they fall so they know how much extra work they need to do. Teaching staff explained that students are given indications of their banding, but it depends on the piece of work; they tend to get fewer indications towards the start of the course to ease them into it. The panel **recommends** that the team enables students to understand where they sit within grade boundaries throughout the programme, especially in advocacy (**Recommendation 5**).

8. Student support and quality of student experience

The students whom the panel spoke to had chosen to study the BPTC at the University of Law's Leeds centre for a number of reasons. Several liked the fact that they had to go through a selection process to be accepted as they felt it meant all their colleagues would be of a high calibre. Some wanted to practise in Leeds or generally on the North East Circuit, and others liked the centre when they attended their selection interview there. A few students had done their GDL at the centre and wanted to continue their studies there. Several students said that financial assistance offered by the University of Law had been the deciding factor for them.

Students like being in a smaller cohort; they like knowing everyone on the course and they get support and encouragement from each other as well as learning from each other as future professional colleagues. There have been several student-arranged social events and tutors

attended the first session to get to know the cohort. Students like the amount of contact time they have with their tutors and they feel having face-to-face contact in small groups pushes them more than if they were more anonymous in a big lecture hall.

Students have a lot of exposure to the local Bar, through events such as marshalling, mini-pupillages and a mock trial. There are also many pro bono opportunities on offer; opportunities are emailed to students on an ad hoc basis by a member of staff responsible for pro bono as soon as they become available. A pro bono fair was held in October which students found useful. Doing pro bono work has given some of the BPTC students an opportunity to meet with those on other courses such as the LPC and the GDL but there is otherwise little interaction between the different cohorts. A ball was organised earlier in the year for all students but as there was an exam the morning after, BPTC students were unable to attend. A northern pupillage event was also held in December with 14 sets of chambers in attendance, which was a further opportunity for students to network with the local Bar.

The students whom the panel spoke to knew little about the Future Pupil Programme available to them. Management staff explained that the Programme brings together all of the employability offerings that the University of Law has, such as chambers events, mentoring, and pupillage application workshops, so most students have experienced aspects of the programme even if they are not aware of it by that name. Students have access to the careers service from the moment they accept their place at the centre and can continue to use the services on offer until five years after they graduate.

The panel heard that while students feel comfortable raising any issues they have with the course or the centre with their tutors directly; there have yet to be any more formal meetings where students can discuss concerns. Students had one mandatory meeting with their personal tutor but those whom the panel spoke to said they would feel comfortable to approach their tutor throughout the year should they need to do so. The panel heard that tutors are also good at noticing if students have an issue and will approach them to offer support.

9. Learning resources (Library, IT and classroom facilities)

The students whom the panel met said that there was a lack of space in the centre to practise oral advocacy in groups as there is no BPTC-specific study area. There is sufficient space in the library but it is not appropriate for group work. The management team said that students are in fact able to use classrooms to practise, including the courtroom, and that they have priority for using it when it is not being used for teaching.

Some students also reported that there are minimal copies of certain texts available in the library, though other students said that everything is available online so this shouldn't be a problem.

10. Equality and diversity

The University of Law has equality and diversity policies with which all its sites comply. The panel did not observe any issues relating to equality and diversity during the visit. Students whom the panel spoke to said that the process of arranging reasonable for assessments was very easy; there is a dedicated member of staff that students can have meetings with and they get regular emails throughout the course.

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Additional comments
N/A

Good practice, distinguishing features
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The panel commends the extent and range of extra-curricular opportunities such as the Northern pupillage fair.• The panel commends the dedication and approachability of the staff.

Conclusions: recommendation on accreditation/approval/continuing approval	
The panel recommends continuing approval with recommendations.	
Recommendations	
The following recommendations must be addressed:	
Recommendation 1	Ensure that the BPTC action plan reflects more strategic direction as well as more immediate operational issues
Recommendation 2	Implement the existing staff-student liaison committee governance structure to ensure that the student voice is heard, and responses are recorded and acted upon.
Recommendation 3	Maximise the benefits to be gained from the wider BPTC team in enabling new tutors to develop their teaching technique.
Recommendation 4	Give thought to how best to enable students to have more exposure to a range of teaching styles and the breadth and depth of experience that the full BPTC team offers.
Recommendation 5	Enable students to understand where they sit within grade boundaries throughout the programme, especially in advocacy.

Response by the Provider (maximum one page)

The University of Law welcomes the comments of the BSB panel and notes with pleasure both the good practice and distinguishing features listed.

In relation to the recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The University will ensure that the action plan will include both strategic and operational matters.

Recommendation 2

The Staff Student liaison committee meetings will take place as they should.

Recommendations 3 and 4

These recommendations are linked. For 2017-18 there will be 4 BPTC tutors teaching across 3 classes. One of them is a very experienced ULaw tutor who was part of the wider team for teaching the BPTC but not called upon in 2016-17. The greater mix of tutors and the range of experience, coupled with continuing support from the other centres, will meet these recommendations.

Recommendation 5

Following this recommendation, indications of grades will be given in other suitable advocacy sessions in both the Civil and Criminal courses from 2017-18.