

**BAR
STANDARDS
BOARD**

REGULATING BARRISTERS

Bar Course Aptitude Test

Handbook 2019

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1. Introduction

1.1 Candidates are required to pass the Bar Course Aptitude Test (BCAT) before they can enrol on the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). The BCAT tests aptitude for critical thinking and reasoning, the core skills required for the BPTC. The aim of the test is to ensure that those undertaking the BPTC have the aptitude to succeed on the course.

1.2 The test was introduced in 2013 in response to recommendations made by the [Bar Vocational Course Review Group](#), chaired by Derek Wood QC. An original pilot of the test took place in 2009-10 with about 200 student volunteers. A second pilot took place in 2011 with over 1,500 students taking part. This resulted in the BCAT's approval by the Legal Services Board in July 2012 and consequent implementation in 2013.

2. Test description

2.1 The BCAT measures critical thinking. We operate in a continually changing workplace, where large volumes of information are rapidly exchanged. An individual's ability to efficiently and effectively evaluate this information and make good decisions sets the foundation for their success. Important competencies, including decision making, problem solving, planning, and strategic thinking, require sound critical thinking skills.

2.2 Critical thinkers do not accept unsubstantiated claims. Rather, they rigorously evaluate the quality of reasoning and evidence that leads to a conclusion. Being "critical" in this sense is not negative - it simply means that you are using certain standards to evaluate a given claim. There are three core areas of critical thinking measured in the BCAT:

a) Recognising Assumptions

Assumptions are statements that are assumed to be true. Identifying them helps to reveal information gaps and enrich perspectives. Being able to assess assumptions for their appropriateness improves the quality of comprehensiveness of critical thinking.

b) Evaluating Arguments

Arguments are assertions that are intended to persuade someone. Analysing arguments helps to determine whether to believe or act accordingly. It includes the ability to evaluate arguments objectively, putting prior beliefs and emotions to one side.

c) Drawing Conclusions

Conclusions can only be drawn effectively if the available evidence supports them by the robust application of logic. It includes evaluating information before drawing a conclusion, judging the likelihood of different conclusions being correct, selecting the most appropriate conclusion, and avoiding generalisation beyond the evidence.

2.3 The test consists of 60 items which must be completed in 55 minutes.

2.4 An explanation of the [types of questions used](#) in the test is available on the BSB website, and a [BCAT practice test](#) is available on the Pearson VUE website.

3. Candidate Survey

3.1 An optional candidate survey will be displayed at the end of the test with a duration of 5 minutes. The candidate survey will cover topics including test experience and user friendly nature of test processes.

3.2 The data and responses from the candidate survey will be used anonymously and confidentially for evaluation and monitoring purposes.

4. Registration and Eligibility

4.1 All BCAT candidates must possess an 8 digit long BPTC application reference number in order to register for the BCAT. (Please see the BCAT FAQ's for help registering.)

4.2 Candidates register and schedule the BCAT on the [Pearson VUE](#) website. (Please see the BCAT FAQ's for help registering.)

4.3 For candidates who want to enrol for the BPTC, the BCAT is an **entry requirement**. Further information regarding the BPTC can be found in the [BPTC Handbook](#).

5. Payment method policy

5.1 The BCAT costs £150 if taken in a test centre in the EU and £170 if taken in a test centre outside the EU.

5.2 Payment at the point of scheduling the test is made via a secure online payment facility on the [Pearson VUE website](#).

5.3 The online payment facility is **not** available in **Cameroon, Ghana, Lebanon, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda**. For these countries candidates will need to contact their preferred test centre to arrange payment and schedule their test. Contact details can be found through the "[locate a test centre](#)" section of the Pearson VUE web site.

6. Cancellation policy

6.1 Candidates may cancel the test at no charge if they contact Pearson VUE a minimum of 24 hours prior to the scheduled test start time (local testing centre time). A full refund will be provided. Candidates who cancel the test less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled test start time will forfeit their fee.

7. Rescheduling policy

7.1 Candidates may reschedule the test at no charge if they contact Pearson VUE a minimum of 24 hours prior to the scheduled test start time (local testing centre time). Candidates who re-schedule the test less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled test start time will forfeit their fee.

8. Re-take policy

8.1 Candidates are allowed three attempts in one calendar year, starting from the date they first take the test. For example, if a candidate takes the test on 18 February 2019, they are allowed two further attempts until 17 January 2020. Candidates must wait 48hrs before re-taking the BCAT.

8.2 The BSB strongly recommends taking the BCAT earlier rather than later in case a re-take is necessary. In previous years the BCAT has been fully booked in the run up to the closing date. If no slots are available, candidates will not be able to take the test and will not be admitted to the BPTC even if they meet all the other requirements.

8.3 Please note that any re-take of the test will incur the same fee of £150 for those taking the test in the EU and £170 for those taking the test outside the EU.

8.4 The BCAT opening and closing dates can be consulted on the [BSB website](#).

9. Test centre policy

9.1 In order to ensure the highest quality standards of the test environment the BSB has agreed that only the test centres that adhere to the most stringent quality controls will offer the BCAT, therefore not all Pearson VUE test centres offer the BCAT.

9.2 Candidates can locate their nearest BCAT test centre by using the [search facility](#) on the Pearson VUE website. Candidates can search using street, town, postcode, ZIP code or other unique location details.

9.3 At present the BCAT is available in the [following countries](#).

10. Identity (ID) requirements

10.1 Candidates must take two valid forms of identity (ID) with them to the test centre:

- (i) a primary government issued ID with name, photo, signature and date of birth, and
- (ii) a secondary ID with two of the following three components in any combination:
 - (1) name, (2) photo and/or (3) signature.

Both IDs must be **original** and **unexpired** (valid) documents.

10.2 Upon arrival at the test centre candidates will be asked to present their primary and secondary form of ID. (The list below is not exhaustive.)

| Primary ID - Government Issued Identification | Secondary ID - School ID, Employee ID, Professional License etc. |
|---|--|
| <i>Must contain name, photo, signature and date of birth.</i> | <i>Must contain two of the following three components in any combination: name, photo and/or signature</i> |
| Government Issued: Driver's License (Provisional or full license) | All Identification listed in Primary list that have at least a name and signature |
| Government Issued: Passport | Employee Identification Card |
| Military ID (Including Spouse & Dependents) | School Identification Card |
| Government Issued Identification Card | Professional License |
| Alien Registration Card (Green Card, Permanent Resident Visa) | Credit Card (if signed according to the primary ID presented) |
| Government Issued Local Language ID (Plastic Card) - only in the country of testing | Voters Registration Card w/3 elements |
| European Union Identity Card | Insurance Cards w/ 3 elements |

10.3 If a candidate has any concern about their ability to present two valid forms of ID they should email BCAT@barstandardsboard.org.uk, **prior to scheduling their test**, enclosing scanned copies of the IDs they intend to use.

10.4 In the event that a candidate does not present the authorised IDs at the test centre, they will not be allowed to take the test and **will forfeit the test fee**.

11. Results policy

11.1 Candidates are told their result as soon as they finish the test. The test centre will produce a score report to confirm the result. Candidates should ensure they collect their score report before leaving the test centre.

11.2 Candidates should retain their score report as they will be required to present it to their BPTC provider. Pearson VUE will charge you £25 to provide a replacement.

11.3 The BCAT result is presented in four categories: Pass (strong) / Pass / Pass (marginal) / Fail. The likely correlation between the BCAT score and a candidate's performance on the BPTC for each score category is given. The BSB recommends that candidates consider these implications carefully before proceeding with their BPTC.

| Score Category | Score Range | Implications |
|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Fail | 20-44 | Those in this category are likely to struggle greatly with the type of complex analysis and decision making required on the Bar Professional Training Course. In comparison with others that have completed the test, they will tend to apply faulty logic or reasoning when analysing information. |
| Pass (marginal) | 45-49 | Those in this category are likely to find the type of complex analysis and decision making required on the Bar Professional Training Course challenging and may need to invest more time and effort in the course than most to meet the required standard. Available data on outcomes on the BPTC for candidates in this score range indicates that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.7% have achieved a grade of ‘Outstanding’ • 25.4% have achieved a grade of ‘Very Competent’ • 26.1% have achieved a grade of ‘Competent’ • 47.8% have failed or not yet completed the course |
| Pass | 50-60 | Individuals scoring in this band are likely to be able to demonstrate the level of critical thinking necessary for effective analysis and decision making on the Bar Professional Training Course. Available data on outcomes on the BPTC for candidates in this score range indicates that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9.4% have achieved a grade of ‘Outstanding’ • 55.5% have achieved a grade of ‘Very Competent’ • 15.6% have achieved a grade of ‘Competent’ • 19.5% have failed or not yet completed the course |
| Pass (strong) | 61-80 | Individuals scoring in this band are likely to demonstrate or exceed the level of critical thinking necessary for effective analysis and decision making on the Bar Professional Training Course. Available data on outcomes on the BPTC for candidates in this score range indicates that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34.4% have achieved a grade of ‘Outstanding’ • 56.9% have achieved a grade of ‘Very Competent’ • 5.6% have achieved a grade of ‘Competent’ • 3.1% have failed or not yet completed the course |

11.4 Upon successful completion of the BCAT, a candidate’s BPTC Provider will need to know the Registration No. and Validation No. printed at the top and bottom of the score report. The Provider will use these numbers to authenticate the result on the Pearson VUE website.

12. Reasonable adjustments

12.1 The Bar Standards Board (BSB) is committed to making reasonable adjustments in order to remove or reduce substantial disadvantage for disabled people undertaking the BCAT. This policy applies to all candidates who are applying to take the BCAT.

12.2 Reasonable adjustments are reasonable steps taken to prevent a disabled person suffering a disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled. This applies to any disadvantage caused by a provision, criterion or practice or any physical feature of premises. Reasonable adjustments can be made through the provision of equipment, auxiliary aids or changing processes or procedures to meet the needs of disabled candidates.

12.3 Candidates who are entitled to request Reasonable Adjustments

12.3.1 The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This means that, in general:

- a) the person must have an impairment that is either physical or mental;
- b) the impairment must have adverse effects which are substantial; i.e. more than minor or trivial;
- c) the substantial adverse effects must be long-term i.e. 12 months or more.

12.3.2 Candidates requesting reasonable adjustments will need to submit relevant documentary evidence to the BSB to confirm that they have a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

12.3.3 Candidates who require reasonable adjustments should contact the BSB at least **six weeks** before the date they intend to take the BCAT.

12.4 Reasonable Adjustments Policy and Request Form

12.4.1 The Reasonable Adjustments policy can be consulted on the [BSB website](#).

12.4.2 The Reasonable Adjustments Request Form can be downloaded from the [BSB website](#).

13. Extenuating Circumstances

13.1 The extenuating circumstances policy is intended for any candidate who schedules to take the BCAT which is an entry requirement for the BPTC. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that relevant candidates who have demonstrated extenuating circumstances are not disadvantaged by any circumstances defined in 13.2.1.

13.2 Definition of 'Extenuating Circumstances'

13.2.1 Circumstances normally exceptional and outside of the control of the candidate, which have prevented them from completing or registering for the BCAT, which is an entry requirement for the BPTC.

13.2.2 The Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedures can be consulted on the [BSB website](#).

13.3 Reporting extenuating circumstances

13.3.1 It is the sole responsibility of the candidate affected to ensure that the BSB is notified, preferably in advance, if they are unable to attend the BCAT on the day of their scheduled test due to extenuating circumstances. A candidate must complete and submit the BCAT Extenuating Circumstances Form as soon as possible, but no later than **five working days** after any scheduled test taking that may have been affected by extenuating circumstances in accordance with the definition above.

14. Complaints

14.1 Principles and Scope

14.1.1 The BSB has established processes to deal with queries, concerns and matters of complaint raised by candidates, initially at an informal level and then at a formal level. This is part of a commitment to ensure a high quality experience for all candidates. It is the intention of the BSB to address concerns or complaints in a positive spirit and to ensure issues are resolved quickly and informally.

14.1.2 The aim of the Complaints Procedures is to resolve all queries, concerns and complaints as they arise, avoiding recourse to the formal stages of the procedures unless the matter cannot be resolved informally.

14.2. Issues covered by this Policy

Under this Policy candidates/BPTC applicants may raise queries, concerns or complaints relating to the following areas (the list not exhaustive):

- a) Issues with any aspect of scheduling / taking the test at a Pearson VUE Test Centre
- b) Issues with the confirmation of the BCAT results
- c) Issues with the way BSB have dealt with a candidate's BCAT test

This Policy **does not** cover:

- a) Complaints raised about the design of the BCAT or the academic judgement in relation to the questions in the BCAT or the result of the BCAT
- b) Complaints raised by one candidate about another candidate
- c) Complaints raised about a Provider

14.3 Procedures for resolving related concerns or complaints from candidates

- a) Informal Procedure, Stage 1
- b) Formal Procedure, Stage 2
- c) Review of the Stage 2 decision, Stage 3

14.3.1 The process should begin with the **Informal Procedure** and only when the **Informal Procedure** has been concluded and the candidate remains dissatisfied with the outcome should the issue move to the **Formal Procedure**.

14.4 The BCAT Complaints Policy can be accessed on the [BSB website](#).

14.4.1 Each case will be considered on its own merits and in accordance with the evidence and circumstances presented. The BSB has absolute discretion to determine which stage of the procedure, if any, will be applied in any particular case taking into account the matters under consideration.

15. Disclosure and Confidentiality

15.1 Candidates information given in relation to the BCAT will be used to inform the BSB Equality Strategy and may be used to inform the evaluation of the test.

15.2 The BSB will record and evaluate all candidate requests, outcomes and feedback to ensure consistency.

15.3 The BSB will keep in confidence all correspondence and documentation received from a candidate in accordance with the [BSB Data Protection Policy](#).