

BAR STANDARDS BOARD

REGULATING BARRISTERS

March 2017

Announcement about the future of Bar training

We are writing to inform you that we have decided to authorise a limited number of future training routes for prospective students to qualify as barristers. One of these is likely to be a new training course, which has been proposed by the Council of the Inns of Court (COIC) and the Bar Council. The Board also agreed a Policy Statement [https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media/1825162/032317_fbt -
_policy_statement_version_for_publication.pdf](https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media/1825162/032317_fbt_-_policy_statement_version_for_publication.pdf) setting out our vision for the future of Bar training.

Following our recent Future Bar Training consultation <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases-and-news/bsb-extends-future-bar-training-consultation-to-include-a-new-proposal-from-coic-and-the-bar-council/> we have decided:

- to allow a limited number of alternative training routes for the Bar;
- that the Bar should remain a graduate profession normally requiring at least a 2:2 classification;
- that we should continue to specify the seven foundation subjects which make up a qualifying law degree;
- that there is no need at present to change the need for a barrister to be called to the Bar by one of the Inns of Court;
- that the Bar Course Aptitude Test should be retained; and
- that we should review the way in which Ethics is taught and assessed.

Our consultation generated an unprecedented level of interest and response, with over 1,100 respondents, including an open letter in support of the COIC/Bar Council model signed by over 500 barristers. A key aspect of this proposal is to split vocational training (which is currently undertaken through the Bar Professional Training Course – BPTC) into two parts. The aim of this proposal is to make training for the Bar more affordable and more flexible while maintaining high standards.

The COIC/Bar Council proposal was supported by the great majority of respondents to the consultation. There was also some support for the current BPTC model and

for courses which combine the current academic and vocational assessments into a single course or which might combine vocational learning and assessment with pupillage.

We will prepare and publish an Authorisation Framework in consultation with stakeholders in order to assess all future training routes against the criteria of:

- flexibility (encouraging, for example, the options of part time study, distance learning and integration with paid work);
- accessibility (offering support to students from under-represented groups);
- affordability (improving the value for money of the present system); and
- sustaining high standards (so that consumers can be certain that every barrister who begins practice has met the requirements of the Professional Statement
https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media/1787559/bsb_professional_statement_and_competences_2016.pdf.

The rules and Authorisation Framework are expected to be formally in place from the 2018/19 academic year (ie early autumn 2018), but the timing of new courses being approved is reliant on providers coming forward with plans. Their proposals will all be assessed against the same criteria.

We believe that giving students an element of choice will be consistent with these principles, but agree with the many consultation respondents who argued that too many training options could cause confusion for prospective barristers and training providers, damage diversity and increase regulatory cost. We also repeat our commitment to work with the Solicitors Regulation Authority to ensure that barrister and solicitor training routes retain compatibility. Finally, we have agreed to continue our work to improve the oversight of pupillage and other forms of work-based learning.

Speaking about the decision, our Chair Sir Andrew Burns said:

”I am pleased with the level of engagement that our consultation about the future of Bar training has provoked. We received a record number of responses which the Board and I have considered carefully before reaching our decision. In particular, it has been encouraging to see how passionately barristers want to see the Bar as a profession where the most able candidates can succeed regardless of their means.

“Our role as the regulator is not to design the courses themselves, but to set a robust framework for authorising course providers. We have clear criteria for doing so and we will be developing our Authorisation Framework in

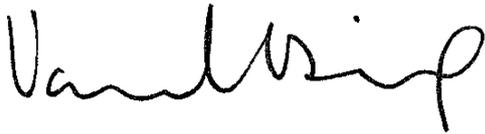
consultation with the Bar, training providers and other groups with an interest in Bar training. We look forward to more flexible, accessible and affordable training courses in future which will maintain the high intellectual and professional standards demanded at the Bar.”

We will now start an engagement programme with the Bar, training providers and others to explain our decision in more detail and to encourage providers to submit applications for authorisation.

You can read our full Policy Statement on our website:

https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media/1825162/032317_fbt_-_policy_statement_version_for_publication.pdf

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vanessa Davies', written in a cursive style.

Dr Vanessa Davies
Director General, Bar Standards Board