

## Student Perception of Course Survey (Extracts)

The Student Perception of Course ('SPOC') satisfaction survey was first carried out as part of the Wood review (see Annex 5 of the Wood report) and intermittently thereafter.

Below are selected quotes made by Bar Course Students during surveys in June 2010 and June 2011, in the free text section, as relating to the skills and weaknesses of fellow students.

### 2010

- Many of the foreign students English language was exceedingly poor, incomprehensible and as a result prejudiced students who were assessed with them in certain examinations: i.e. negotiation (including mock assessments and SGS's preparation), advocacy (including mock assessments and SGS's preparation), and conference (including SGS's preparations. The demands of the course are difficult enough without having to try and understand what your opponent is saying because their grammar is of an extremely low standard. - In addition some of the foreign student's English language was certainly not compliant with an ILETS score of 7.5 or above, as contracted that it should be.
- Whilst the staff were clearly committed to doing the best they could, I frankly expected more from the course. I realise that the needs of part time students are more demanding since we are not always able to make law school the top priority but I felt that staff all too often let demonstrably slower and less able students take advantage of this to excuse themselves from making a real effort.
- There were also far too many people on the course. I have already secured a pupillage, but, as you will be aware, about 70% of my colleagues on the course have not. Those who were good at advocacy etc in September are still good, those who were awful are still awful
- Selection of students undertaking the BVC should more strict, in particular a better grasp of written and spoken English should be tested in advance rather than making it obvious that international students were being propped up by British national students.
- [The] course is not set to a sufficiently high standard of competence for a prospective pupil.
- Students' ability to develop beyond the minimum basic standard was hampered by the poor attendance of other students and the low standard of spoken English set by the entry requirements of the course.
- The aptitude test should screen for knowledge of the law and legal principles as well as a minimum standard of spoken english.
- The pace is too slow which disincentivises brighter students. Classes are slowed down by those who do not speak fluent English.
- The general standard of students on the BVC is poor. The problem rarely lies with language barriers, but with motivation and academic standard.
- Weak students bring down the quality of the teaching. When some students are unable to confidently speak in public or articulate thoughts in a clear and logical way, it is not possible for other students to move beyond basic advocacy and raise their standards to a higher level since much time needs to be devoted to the weaker ones.
- The main problems with the course in my view are that: it is taught at the lowest common denominator, and that is a very low standard generally
- The course fails to engage many able students due to the general low standard both of the intellectual abilities of the general student population at [Provider], but also of their ability to speak and use English correctly.

## 2011

- very little or no effective supervision provided by some tutors/supervisors  
absences/effort provided by a number of students in tutorials poor which hindered the learning/development process. Some foreign students command of the English language was difficult to comprehend
- I would say that there seemed to be a number of students on the course who were either not bright enough to fully grasp what we were doing, or their level of English was not high enough (which also caused misunderstandings on occasion).
- The factor that has made this year incredibly frustrating is the number of students who cannot speak English well enough to be able to participate properly in class. The result is that every time we had role-play exercises for conference, advocacy classes involving witness handling, or any form of class discussion, it was slowed down and held back by the poor level of English of up to 50% of the students in the class. When the class involved the evaluation of written work, each student's work would be put on the overhead projector. Often therefore a large section of the class was wasted by 12 of us looking at a piece of writing that simply did not make any sense at all, let alone come close to an attempt at drafting or opinion writing. This is clearly not the foreign students' fault at all, and this is not meant as an unpleasant comment, but when you are spending over £15,000, it is enormously infuriating to be held back to such a degree. Witness handling and conference sessions ended up being akin to a tennis match played against an amputee, as you never got an answer back which you could build on. Either classes should be streamed according to ability or there should be an international course that is separate. It must be just as frustrating for the teachers as well.
- It would seem more appropriate to have a 5-minute interview, even if conducted over the phone, to ascertain a person's ability to discuss legal arguments, present themselves and their intellectual ability and ultimately their English language ability.
- I also feel that I was unfairly hampered by the language difficulties of some of the other members of the course. My group of 6 featured 2 students who struggled with English; both were on the opposite side to my '3'; consequently I was against these individuals in advocacy exercises, on average, 2 times out of 3. I did not, therefore, get the most out of these sessions.
- I was in a good class, but many of the people on the course (who are all perfectly pleasant) are manifestly unsuitable for pupillage. These people are not only deluding themselves, but provide a learning environment in which insufficient attention is paid to more detailed skills, because more time is spent getting these people past the most basic skills.
- As the course was designed in a way that required you to have previous knowledge of advocacy or opinion writing or drafting for example, those who did not have some knowledge of these skills before were at a loss.
- The emphasis of the course seemed to be placed on getting people to the level of competency, rather than enabling those who had done the work, to gain the types of skills which would really enable them to flourish once they commence pupillage.
- Students who have not done adequate preparation or reading cause delays in class, are unable to contribute and most importantly suffer no consequences as a result.

- The only major issue I had was that some students do not have a good enough grasp of the English language. Getting a specific IELTS score is not enough if individuals are nonetheless unable to communicate orally. Unlike a university degree course, the BPTC should not be an opportunity for people to come to Britain to learn the language. They drag everyone else down if they are unable to participate in group discussions effectively.
- [Provider named] has wayyyyyy [sic] too many foreign students who can't speak English to save their lives, but still manage to get VC's in advocacy subjects!
- The absence of streaming means that students randomly find themselves assigned to good, average, and sink classes. ... Many students speak poor English or have a poor understanding of English law.
- It is very frustrating to turn up for class fully prepared only to find that I am on occasions the only one, or one of the few fully prepared for the class. -There are times when I am the only person in class to participate in discussions with the tutor while my other classmates are busy making notes of my discussion without contributing any. -Some students turn up for class without having looked at the brief! Re: Advocacy -There really is no point turning up for class when there is nothing for me to learn from my fellow classmates especially where the majority of my classmates are foreign students (me included) and struggle to string together a coherent and comprehensible sentence. -I cannot understand how for Option groups there are classes where the whole class consist of students from the jurisdiction (English or Welsh) whereas some classes consist purely of foreign students.
- More should be done to ensure that foreign students embarking on the BPTC are vetted for their ability to speak, write, understand and communicate in English
- Definitely held back by poor quality of most of the other students on the course who were not up to the course intellectually and/or linguistically. In my small group of 10, there were only 5 native English speakers.
- It is a joke that I had to sit a language test, when there are people on the course who did not sit a test but their English is so poor they can hardly follow.
- Some students in my small groups have only elementary knowledge of English, and ultimately slowed down the teaching level.
- With regard to fellow students it is clear there needs to be a much stricter English language test as this often slowed down advocacy classes.
- The Law school has made the mistake of letting too many international students who can't speak English in. These students made representations that they speak English as a first language when it is clear on first speaking to them that this is untrue. It is hard to work in small groups with them. The Law School tried to deal with the issue by giving us an English test at the start of the course but this was in my opinion ineffective. The standards of the test was too low and student who clearly could not achieve a 7.5 on their IELTS were allowed on to the course.
- I often didn't get the feedback I wanted in Conference or Advocacy because members of my groups could either barely speak English or were simply unable to speak in public, which held others back.