

## Research Summary

# Vocational Training Providers – Equality and Diversity Policies and Practices



### Research Background

The Bar Standards Board (BSB) has a statutory duty to encourage an independent, strong, diverse, and effective legal profession. As part of its supervisory functions, the BSB is responsible for setting training requirements for becoming a barrister, ensuring that access to training for the Bar is open to all on an equal basis. This includes assessing the ways in which vocational training providers promote equality and diversity on the Bar training courses, undertake recruitment and admission, and support the retention, progression and attainment of students.

The research follows on from [previous BSB research](#) that identified that ethnicity and socio-economic status have a significant impact on students' performance on the vocational Bar training courses and their ability to obtain pupillage. The key aim of the research was to gather evidence on vocational training course providers' approaches to equality and diversity, any institutional variations in Equality and Diversity policies and practices between providers, and to assess their overall approach to compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010.

### Key Findings

The first stage of this research examined the equality and diversity sections of seven vocational training providers' websites with the focus on publicly available Equality and Diversity policies and further equality and diversity related documents and guidance. The aim was to collect information on vocational training providers' written policies, as well as evidence on support initiatives to assess how they implement their Equality and Diversity policies in practice. This included provision of reasonable adjustments; pastoral, career, pupillage and financial support available to students; initiatives aimed at eliminating attainment gaps,<sup>1</sup> increasing access and participation; and initiatives implemented to improve student and staff experience.

The second stage of this research examined nine vocational training providers' applications for authorisation, submitted to the BSB as part of the authorisation process. The focus of the analysis was placed on nine accessibility indicators set out in the BSB's [Authorisation Framework](#).

**E&D Policies and Implementation** - The findings of the research suggest that the vocational training providers have a wide variety of initiatives and approaches in place to promote equality and diversity on their courses, and that despite some similarities in procedures, different universities adopt individual approaches to equality and diversity. For some providers, there may be more they can do to address certain areas, such as explicitly committing to go beyond legal duties, and clarifying or improving the level to which students are involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of Equality and Diversity-related policies and initiatives. Finally, although it was found that the majority of vocational training providers made explicit commitments to investigate all instances of inappropriate behaviour and published their complaints and grievance procedures online, it may be valuable to consider doing more to raise student awareness of behavioural expectations, and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour from students or staff.

**Available Support** - The analysis noted various support initiatives available at each vocational training provider, which most frequently included peer support, pastoral care, personal advice, provision of reasonable adjustments, career support, scholarships and fee reductions. However, the research findings suggested in some cases that more information could be provided on equality and diversity training, reasonable adjustments, and actions taken to promote staff diversity.

**Access and Participation** - The research found that the majority of vocational training providers' websites and Equality and Diversity policies elaborated on the initiatives related to student recruitment and access. On widening recruitment, the analysis distinguished various support and outreach activities ranging from funding opportunities and provision of reasonable adjustments to contextual admissions. Among strategies implemented to improve student access, the analysis identified examples of subject and curriculum development that addressed diversity and inclusion issues, and equal access to career planning support for students.

**Teaching and Assessment** - The research found that all organisations referred to their duties to conduct annual attainment reviews and implement projects aimed at reducing the attainment gap and monitoring student attainment data. Flexible learning strategies was another area covered by all organisations, with some vocational training providers emphasising opportunities for distance learning and self-studying, whereas others highlighted implementation of technology and access to a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). All vocational training providers made a commitment to implement a diverse range of learning and teaching approaches to make the delivery of learning content more tailored and accessible. However, there may be scope for vocational training providers to consider implementing a more holistic approach to address attainment gaps and tackle inequalities. Evidence from the literature review highlighted the key role students from minority ethnic groups play in the co-creation of the attainment gap strategies - some vocational training providers may also want to consider increasing the involvement of students in the development of their approaches to addressing any attainment gaps.

**Monitoring and Evaluation** - The research highlighted robust monitoring and review processes as another example of good practice, in particular moving beyond solely monitoring of equality and diversity data covering the makeup of the student cohort. This included monitoring and reporting of gender pay gaps among staff, centralised recording and monitoring of discrimination and harassment complaints, and monitoring and reporting student attainment gaps. The research suggests that there may be more that some organisations can do to provide information online to clarify their monitoring activities or expand the areas where they implement data monitoring to inform policy development and implementation. More information could also be provided to clarify further aspects of data monitoring, such as monitoring of student satisfaction and progression after the course.

### How will the BSB use these findings?

Equality and Diversity policies and support initiatives are generally set centrally by universities rather than by the department/ law schools running the Bar courses. The BSB sets minimum requirements for the provision of Bar course training in its Authorisation Framework and its regulatory role is limited to ensuring that those requirements have been met. This analysis was used to develop our evidence base around vocational training providers' approaches to equality and diversity and their implementation on the Bar training courses. In addition, the findings of this study were used to inform our [Research and Evaluation Strategy](#) and will be considered as part of our wider work on equality and diversity. Furthermore, we will carry out a thematic review of the admissions arrangements of authorised training providers and how they ensure that standards are maintained once a student is admitted and what systems are in place to ensure that a student develops to their full potential, whatever their starting point.

The findings also fed into the development of a new [Bar Training: who does what](#) webpage and informed our establishment of a student liaison group.

The main report can be found at <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media-centre/research-and-statistics/research-reports/>

<sup>1</sup> This research uses 'attainment gap/differential attainment' to reflect the language used by course providers as part of their policy documents. The BSB itself uses 'differential outcomes' in our own research looking at this issue.