

The publication by the Bar Council of their favoured model for training Barristers is a welcome addition to the debate on legal education. The first half of their model, comprising the acquisition of knowledge subjects will be unregulated so that those who can afford the expense will attend formal training, but those who cannot will be able to find alternative ways of learning. The second half (which will only be eligible to those who have passed centralised assessments in part 1) will be focused on the acquisition of skills, in particular advocacy. The model, proposed by the Council of the Inns of Court, aims to address the problems of oversubscription of Bar students by ensuring that only those who are capable of passing the challenging centralised assessments (a stumbling block for many) bear the financial burden of the more intense skills based course.

This model will be discussed, alongside three others as part of the 'Future Training for the Bar' consultation being undertaken by the Bar Standards Board. The consultation aims to identify a model of training which ensures that the brightest and best are able to succeed at the Bar regardless of their wealth or personal circumstances. Although these aims are universally agreed upon the ways in which they are achieved are not. Undoubtedly the more skills training that an individual receives, the better able they are to perform that skill at the end of the training which is beneficial to the public, but skills training is also resource intensive and that increases the cost to the student, which in turn may deter those from non-traditional backgrounds. Reducing the number of students taking the course increases the chances of a student who completes the course finding pupillage but also increases the risk that good students will be lost to the profession at an early stage. Whatever changes are imposed must preserve the attractiveness of the training overseas – the large number of international students who choose to be called to the Bar in London help to cement the reputation of this jurisdiction's court system as means of resolving disputes which makes the country attractive to overseas investors.

It is important that anyone with expertise in this area contributes to the debate and makes their views known; if the BSB decides to move away from the current model it will be a very difficult decision to reverse. It is imperative that the public are assured that those who defend the rule of law in our courts are the most able, and trained to the highest standards. Any new model of training must strive to protect the rule of law by ensuring that its future advocates have access to the same quality of training and are measured by the same standards. Whilst there must be scope for flexibility to ensure that those from different backgrounds are accommodated, there should be enough structure to ensure consistency can be assessed between providers. These are difficult demands to meet and practitioners educators and regulators must work together to ensure a profession which serves public to the highest standards.