



YLAL STATEMENT ON THE TREATMENT OF BPTC STUDENTS DUE TO SIT BSB EXAMS IN AUGUST 2020

Young Legal Aid Lawyers (YLAL) is committed to promoting the interests of new entrants to the legal profession and to increasing social mobility and diversity within the legal aid sector.

YLAL is deeply concerned about the experiences of some Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) students who are due to sit the centralised Bar Standards Board (BSB) exams in August 2020.

On 13 May 2020, the BSB announced that those requiring reasonable adjustments would be able to access Pearson VUE test centres to sit the three centralised BSB exams.

On 1 June 2020, Students Against the BSB Exam Regulations ("SABER") wrote to the BSB to highlight concerns about the discriminatory impact of the proposed exam format and proposing a change to an 'open book' format in order to alleviate this impact.¹ YLAL endorsed SABER's recommendations alongside more than 470 other signatories.

On 15 June the BSB stated that they would make all efforts necessary to make reasonable adjustments,² and on 3 July emphasised that 'no student should be asked to waive a reasonable adjustment'.

Despite these assurances, students with reasonable adjustments have been asked to accept inadequate adjustments, with many being allocated exam slots in test centres very early in the morning or far from their homes. Alternatively, they have been given the option to defer exams until December.

These exams have already been deferred from April 2020 to August 2020 and many students will need to begin employment before December, including taking up offers of pupillage, while others have other commitments.

This is continuing to cause stress and anxiety among students, in particular those with disabilities. Students have reported wasting revision time on the phone to Pearson VUE trying to organise their exams and the exacerbation of pre-existing medical conditions due to stress. A number of students have deferred their exams due to the toll of the exam booking process.

The BSB has a statutory regulatory objective to 'encourage an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession'³ in addition to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

¹ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/yzdse9eauu2ozyr/BSB%20Letter%281%29.pdf?dl=0>

² <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/resources/bsb-statement-on-arrangements-for-august-assessments.html>

³ The Legal Services Act 2007

YLAL therefore calls on the BSB and Pearson VUE to properly accommodate students in line with their reasonable adjustments immediately.

If left unresolved, this issue will undermine the promotion of diversity and social mobility at the Bar; a profession in which disabled people are already vastly underrepresented.

YLAL also calls on the BSB to ensure that mitigating circumstances provisions are robust for those requiring adjustments in this cohort.

YLAL calls on Chambers to commit to taking these issues into account when considering candidates for pupillage.

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