



Co-ordination of post-qualification training at the Bar

Comments from the Bar Association for Commerce Finance and Industry (“BACFI”) on the Proposal for Consultation by Jonathan Hirst QC

1. As an SBA and a provider of training events we support the conclusions set out in the paper. Education and training is a key aspect of BACFI’s strategy and one of the principal benefits we can offer our members. Our specific comments follow.
2. We agree that the hire costs for the Inns are unreasonable for SBAs and other not for profit organisations. Unlike some of the other SBAs, BACFI receives no subsidy from the Bar Council and therefore cannot afford the hire costs charged by the Inns unless we make a significant charge for attendance which we would be reluctant to do. We seek sponsorship for our flagship event, the Denning lecture, but in the current financial climate sponsorship can not always be found. It is not just the basic costs which are a problem but the extras (e.g. Gray’s Inn charges for microphones and commissionaire); and the hidden conditions, e.g. minimum spend on food (Inner). It is extremely difficult to compare one with the other, especially as some rates seem to be open to negotiation. The table on p 10 does not give all the details and the prices have now increased at all the Inns. Also the price of refreshments is high and varies considerably.

In fact BACFI will be seeking venues other than the Inns as we need to keep our costs down in order to offer free training to members. We do make a small charge (£10) for non- members but this is to deter people from booking and then not turning up rather than to make a profit.

We should mention that Gray’s has been helpful in letting us use their training rooms although the capacity is rather limited and refreshments are only available at the normal catering prices.

3. We would welcome a central database of events. As noted in the paper the BSB database is difficult to find and to search. We would also support a separate section on “Counsel” for Inns, Circuits and SBAs provided there was no charge for advertising. We do currently advertise our events in the Bar News section of “Counsel”.

We also support better co-ordination of dates particularly for our key event, the Denning Lecture, which usually takes place in November or December and which involves booking one of the Inns a year ahead.

We like to publish our calendar of events at the beginning of the year so dates to avoid would be helpful.

4. The process for accreditation of events by the BSB needs improvement. Para 16 implies that SBAs are authorised as providers. In fact BACFI has had to apply for a waiver from the £400 charge applied to commercial providers as we make a small charge for our seminars. Each event has to be separately accredited and the same form is used for a large commercial conference as for a one hour evening seminar. Several organisations have ceased to apply for accreditation because of the bureaucracy surrounding the process, thus depriving barristers of accredited CPD points. These are issues we shall raise as part of the review of the CPD process which is to take place in 2009.
5. One small point: the footnote on p.2 refers to barristers in “independent practice”. All barristers whether self-employed or employed are independent. In support of the “One Bar” concept, barristers in chambers are now known as self-employed barristers.

BACFI
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