11 December 2017

**Press Release**

**The Council of the Inns of Court welcomes the Bar Standards Board’s call to ensure a level playing field in training for the Bar.**

The Council of the Inns of Court notes the two reports published today by the Bar Standards Board and welcomes their concern to eliminate any possible unfairness in the training of aspiring barristers.

The Council of the Inns of Court director James Wakefield says: “The Inns are unwavering in their belief that the rule of law is best served by attracting the most able to the Bar, whatever their background. We are continually developing ways to help people join the profession but there is no room for complacency. We will study the BSB reports closely to identify areas where we could do more, support the further research that will be needed and do everything necessary to engender confidence that access is fair.”

The Inns are pleased that the BSB reports concluded that “the value of the Inns of Court and the qualifying sessions is clear” as these are designed to ensure that students gain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful barristers. Although the report’s findings of no gender or disability bias against applicants to the Bar either on the Bar course or in obtaining pupillage are very welcome, we recognise that there is work to do in addressing outcomes in relation to ethnic diversity.

The Council points out that the Inns continually invest in outreach and education programmes. Practitioners give many thousands of hours pro bono to encourage people to consider a career at the Bar and to support them throughout their careers. Among a raft of measures already in place, the Inns award over £5 million a year in scholarships, mostly means tested; provide access, support and mentoring schemes and give financial support for more than 40 pupillages at mainly publicly-funded chambers. They also support many university-based events, law fairs, and presentations; provide support for careers advisors, and give substantial financial support for the Bar Council’s outreach work.

The Inns have been concerned about the cost and risk for those undertaking the Bar Professional Training Course. With that in mind they have devised a proposal for a new two-part approach with law school attendance only compulsory for the second half. If approved, they hope this will encourage access and diversity by giving students the choice of another route to the Bar which will reduce both cost and risk.

“The Inns have long recognised the challenges faced by those from non-traditional backgrounds entering the profession. We fully support the BSB’s desire to maintain a strong, independent and diverse profession in the public interest and will continue to work with all concerned to ensure that the best talent has a clear path into the profession,” says Mr Wakefield.

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**Note to editors**

**About The Council of the Inns of Court**

The Council of the Inns of Court exists to advance education in the sound administration of the law, including by promoting high standards of advocacy and enforcing professional standards of conduct. COIC supports the work of the four Inns of Court (Lincoln’s Inn, Inner Temple, Middle Temple and Gray’s Inn).