



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM VISIT (Short Course Provider)

ORGANISATION: The Oxford Princeton Programme Ltd

ADDRESS: 1st Floor
59 St Aldates
Oxford
OX1 1ST

HEAD OF ORGANISATION: Clara Lippert Glenn President & CEO (Domiciled in the US)

Accreditation status: Accredited

Date of inspection: 19 April 2016

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: 14 July 2016

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the organisation (modified from the reaccreditation inspection report of 2014)

The Oxford Princeton Programme (TOPP) was formed in July 2000 by the merger of two existing organisations: the Oxford-based College of Petroleum and Energy Studies, established in 1982 and which began teaching in 1983, and the Princeton Energy Programme in the US.

Under a management buyout, TOPP came under the ownership of the current American President and CEO. TOPP describes itself as 'the world's leading provider of education and training to the energy industry and markets' and provides training courses in North America, Europe and Asia. The US parent company, The Oxford Princeton Programme Inc, has its headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey, USA. In addition, there are offices in Singapore and Oxford, UK, each managed by a vice-president who oversees regional courses as well as having global areas of responsibility.

The Oxford office is the hub for training courses in Europe, the Middle East and parts of South America and is overseen by the Vice-President, Global Operations and Product Management, who has a world-wide remit for course operations. All courses run from the Oxford office, including UK courses, come under the UK-based company, The Oxford Princeton Programme Ltd.

The Oxford office is located in the city centre and occupies a spacious and well maintained first floor area at 59 St Aldates.

2. Brief description of the current provision

TOPP offers a wide and ever growing range of training modules, which have been developed in line with the needs of the commercial marketplace and of the individual delegates. More than 130 instructor-led courses are on offer in a number of major cities around the world; Oxford and London are the principal locations in the UK.

Bespoke customised training programmes also form part of the portfolio and are designed for various levels of expertise. The courses cover the area of oil, natural gas, power, renewables, trading, hedging, risk management, derivatives and an array of finance products associated with the industry.

Alongside these courses TOPP provides self-paced web-based training. This facility is also used in certain instances as a pre-course reading medium with interactive tests to reinforce knowledge and a glossary to help understanding of technical terms. TOPP continues to develop and enhance this part of the training function in line with demand, offering greater flexibility in learning and as a means of overcoming time constraints. In addition, there are web-based sessions that serve as standalone modules but can also be used to complement the other courses.

TOPP offers three types of residential course. Longer courses, of up to five days' duration, provide a depth and breadth of knowledge in a classroom situation and are taught by experienced subject matter experts. Shorter courses run mostly over two days and have been developed to offer an overview of certain energy topics.

Bespoke courses are also arranged for company personnel on site.

Many of the courses should be seen as continuing professional development programmes or for personnel in the sector who require an overview of certain energy topics.

Currently there are in excess of 130 courses and, as the industry moves forward, further courses are developed. Courses are regularly reviewed to ensure that the programmes do not become dated, a systematic approach which is both necessary and impressive.

The instructors are drawn from a range of relevant industries, are well qualified academically and bring a wealth of practical commercial experience.

In the calendar year 2015 a total of 396 delegates took TOPP courses in the UK, excluding internet courses. There were 321 delegates who attended scheduled courses held in Oxford or London, the remainder 75 delegates took part in courses arranged for companies on site. 51 per cent of delegates were from the UK, the remainder coming from overseas.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken by the Lead Inspector, accompanied by a senior inspector in a monitoring capacity, over the course of half a day at the Oxford office. They met with the Vice-President, Global Operations and Product Management and the Regional Sales Manager Europe, Middle East, Africa and South America, and were introduced to other administrative staff. They toured the premises and examined documents requested or provided.

The focus of this inspection was the scheduled and bespoke courses offered in the UK, to which the BAC accreditation relates. This inspection therefore excludes all standalone Internet-based courses.

4. Inspection history

Full Accreditation	11 and 14 January 2010
Interim	1 March 2011
Re-accreditation	8 and 9 April 2014

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the provider

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

All parts of the overall company, including the UK company, have been affected by the global downturn in the oil and gas sector. The number of scheduled and onsite courses and delegates and turnover have declined, while online courses have increased. Consideration is being given to reducing the duration of residential courses, and increasing the online component.

The provider is currently going through a staffing restructure. After this is complete there will be the Vice-President, Global Operations and Product Management, three full-time posts with responsibilities for accounts, sales, online training, and a part-time post for information technology.

It is planned to sublet the current offices and acquire smaller premises. Staff will also have the option of working from home.

2. Response to actions points in last report

15.3 - TOPP should give serious consideration to appointing an external moderator in order to enhance the standing of their internal diploma.

As enrolment on the internal diploma has declined, consideration of the appointment of an external moderator has not been a priority.

18.1 - The information given to international delegates should be reviewed and enhanced where necessary so as to avoid possible areas of confusion.

The information given to delegates prior to and after arrival has been considerably enhanced. Information is provided on diets, availability of a prayer room, travel, course locations and local attractions.

19.3 - The BAC complaints policy must be added to future delegate information packs.

This is now included in full in the delegate handbook.

Recommended areas for quality improvement

TOPP could consider adding an introductory letter from the CEO to the courses catalogue.

This has not been done. The Inspector considered that providing a welcome of this kind would be a beneficial addition to a content-heavy document, and the recommendation stands.

The delegates should formally sign in at their first attendance.

Delegates now sign in on the first day of their course. Thereafter the instructor completes attendance for morning and afternoon sessions.

TOPP should investigate whether some delegates might need a degree of extra support and whether the opportunity of additional tutorials, pre-course reading or web-based pre-course packages could be increased.

Optional online pre-study training (one hour) has been introduced for shorter courses. Completion of a pre-course questionnaire is required for certain courses and for particular prospective delegates when it is necessary to establish that they have the prerequisite background. A two-hour online course is also offered to delegates on longer courses who would benefit from such preparation.

Many delegates attend courses under company sponsorship, and the company liaises with TOPP on the level required. The Regional Sales Manager scrutinises applications from individual delegates. Considerable interaction between TOPP and prospective delegates take place before applications are received to ensure suitability.

Instructors respond flexibly to any academic needs of individual delegates that arise during a course.

In view of the technical nature of the course and up-to-date delivery techniques, there may be considerable benefit in using a smart board and working to some extent from a desk-top tablet.

It was reported that the hotels used as training venues in the UK do not routinely provide smartboards, and so course presentations have not been adjusted to use this technology.

It is recommended that TOPP keeps the situation under review as the availability of smartboards increases.

3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

3.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p>Comments</p> <p>Information on current course offerings is displayed online and is no longer produced in print. However, the format is essentially similar to that used when it was produced in print. It is recommended that course offerings should be reviewed and presented in a format more appropriate to the online medium.</p> <p>The registration process appears to be comprehensive and thorough, with, in some cases, much interaction between the Regional Sales Manager and the staff training office of the company or the individual delegate. The Regional Sales Manager brings considerable experience and detailed knowledge to his work, and follows established, but undocumented, procedures.</p> <p>With the reduction in the size of the work force in all three offices internationally, non-specialists may need to provide cover for specialist colleagues at times, including for colleagues in other offices. It is recommended to document established procedures, for instance in registration, to codify best practice and ensure consistency of procedures whether or not the specialist is in post.</p> <p>Delegate feedback at the end of courses is comprehensive and is analysed very soon after receipt. Instructors are provided with the feedback sheets from individual delegates as well as the analysis. Feedback is widely disseminated so that any appropriate action can be taken.</p>				

3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be		✓		
<p>Comments</p> <p>The CEO, who has considerable breadth of experience in the range of fields taught, takes overall responsibility for course oversight, with course directors and instructors involved in course reviews for their respective areas. The Vice-President, Global Operations and Product Management has responsibility for course scheduling and calendars and for performance.</p> <p>TOPP must give serious consideration to appointing an external moderator in order to enhance the standing of their internal diploma.</p>				

3.3 Participant Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p>Comments</p> <p>Delegates on UK courses are provided with phone numbers of the UK-based Vice-President and the CEO for emergency contact. They then liaise with people on site, including the course director or instructor, as</p>				

necessary. The hotels used for courses also provide a measure of support in emergency situations.

A number of staff have input to welfare issues, including the CEO, the two vice-presidents and global sales managers. However, no specified person has overall responsibility for delegate welfare. It is considered that this would be beneficial and TOPP is recommended to consider such a designation.

Some of the information provided in the handbook, on arrival, for instance on diets and religious observance, could be better provided before arrival.

The information provided on medical treatment options available in the UK and on the need for personal medical insurance could be extended and provided well in advance.

3.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
TOPPS continues to use well-appointed hotels or other venues for its courses. As mentioned above, the headquarters for the UK operations will in due course move to smaller premises providing central storage of materials and equipment and work space for staff choosing to be office-based.				

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Institution's strengths
<p>Short specialist courses are provided in well-appointed venues with instructors who have considerable relevant experience and expertise.</p> <p>Management of the organisation is strong.</p>

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
15.3 - TOPP must appoint an external moderator in order to enhance the standing of their internal diploma, if there are enrolled students.	M

Recommendations
Review the course offerings materials and present information in a format more appropriate to the online medium.
Document established procedures, for instance in registration, to codify best practice and ensure consistency of procedures whether or not the specialist is in post.
Designate a person within the overall organisation with specific responsibility for delegate welfare.
Review the information provided in the handbook on arrival, and consider providing some of this (for instance on diets and religious observance) before arrival.
Strengthen information on medical treatment options available in the UK and on the need for personal medical insurance and provide this well in advance of arrival.
TOPP may wish to shorten the reference to the BAC complaints policy in the handbook, providing the web address for the full BAC complaints procedure. It may also wish to include reference to the BAC complaints policy in other general information, as this provides reassurance to prospective delegates.
Consider adding an introductory letter from the CEO to the courses catalogue.
Keep under review the possible use of smartboards during residential courses.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	
TOPP should formally notify BAC when they move premises.	