

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: Boston City Campus and Business College

ADDRESS: Western Cape Orange Grove
247 Louis Botha Avenue
Orchards
Gauteng
Johannesburg

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dr Hendrik Botha

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 8-10 April 2019

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 16 July 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Boston City Campus and Business College (BCC/ the Institution) is a private institution, established in 1991. BCC is accredited by the South African Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and is registered as a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI). In 2009 BCC gained approval from the CHE to deliver Higher Education (HE) programmes in the distance mode and began delivering these programmes in 2013. BCC offers programmes in the distance mode in vocational and higher education qualifications.

There are two registered head offices, one in Johannesburg the other in Stellenbosch. BCC has a network of 46 Student Support Centres (SSCs), also referred to as branches, distributed across South Africa. Forty-five of these support higher education students.

BCC's vision is to strive to enhance, uplift and continuously improve the quality of education and training in South Africa through a commitment to education for life. It aims to provide quality learning and teaching opportunities to students by providing market relevant accredited programmes.

BCC has a Board of Directors (BOD). Four of the five directors are also shareholders. The head of the Institution is a director and shareholder. Directors take an active role in the governance and management of the Institution with each director assigned to a specific role, including Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director, Executive Director and Head of Institution. A number of functions are shared between BCC and its sister company, Boston Media House, which is a separate legal entity and the focus of a separate inspection.

There have been some changes in governance and organisational structure over the last year at the level of the shared functions and services. These include the establishment of the Academic Programme Development Unit (APDU), the Research Committee (RC) and the development of the Academic Board (AB).

2. Brief description of the current provision

BCC offers programmes in a range of subject areas such as business, management, human resources, accounting and finance, marketing, public relations and hospitality. There are three categories of provision. These are programmes delivered through distance education, blended learning programmes and face-to-face programmes. The face-to-face and blended learning programmes are occupationally focused and include short courses, Learnerships, Internships and Graduate Internships designed to provide work experience for graduates. The HE education programmes are all offered through distance learning. BCC offers three undergraduate degree programmes in Commerce and Marketing Management, Accounting and Law. It also offers eight diploma programmes in business management, financial accounting, event management, human resource management, commerce in public relations, marketing management, network systems and systems development as well as 12 higher certificates covering areas such as business, management, commerce, marketing and accounting and commerce.

BCC is accredited by a number of professional and statutory bodies under the auspices of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), including the South Africa Board of People Practices (SABPP), the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB), the Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SSETA) and The Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA). BCC is also a certified member of the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa (NADEOSA).

At the time of the inspection, there were 16,246 students registered for all BCC programmes of whom 11,366 were registered on the HE programmes for the first semester 2019. All students are over the age of 18. A very large majority of students are South African with a very small minority are from other countries in Africa.

Enrolment takes place twice a year at the beginning of each semester. The entry requirements are in line with South African legislation.

3. Inspection process

The interim inspection was carried out by one inspector over three days. The visit included the Stellenbosch Head Office and the study support centres in Port Elizabeth and Durban. The inspector met with directors, senior managers, administrators, academic staff, student support advisers and groups of students. BCC provided appropriate information in advance and supplementary information as requested during the inspection. Staff were very helpful and responded fully and openly in discussions.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	7-10 March 2018

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The removal of student tuition fees for public higher education in South Africa has led to some policy changes at BCC. In the short term these changes include the capping of fees, a review of cost structures and a temporary halt to the introduction of new programmes in order to stabilise the Institution. Early indications from the slight rise in student numbers that has taken place show that the strategy is effective.

BCC has initiated a process of fundamental review of a number of processes and structures. These include a policy review, changes in governance to focus more on academic endeavour than previously, the development of a revised approach to quality management, the introduction of a management information system, the development of a strategy for quality advancement and a more explicit approach to the institutional teaching and learning philosophy.

At the time of the inspection, BCC was also reflecting on its mission and vision and whether it was appropriate to review and revise this to reflect better the developing context and needs within South Africa.

2. Responses to action points in last report

10.2 Contracts of academic staff must include the requirement to undertake one or more of the following: research, scholarship and professional practice, to ensure that the provision fully meets the expected standards.

10.4 BCC must publish the process and criteria for gaining support for research and scholarly activity, to ensure full transparency.

BCC has recently established the RC to take forward the development of the research agenda to ensure it meets the needs of higher education. This is particularly important as the Institution plans to develop postgraduate provision. BCC is taking a holistic and integrated approach to research development. Senior management have discussed the inclusion of a requirement for research and scholarship in academic staff contracts and conclude that this will be possible for new staff but not for existing staff because of the legal implications. There are appropriate options for alternative means to ensure that existing staff do undertake research or scholarly activity where it cannot be made a contractual obligation.

The RC is tasked with clarifying research, scholarship and professional practice with the aim of ensuring that contractual obligations are appropriate for each staff member's higher education role. It is also tasked with ensuring that the process and criteria for gaining support for research and scholarly activity are clarified and published.

The BCC Improvement Action Plan (IAP) includes these two action points with a target completion date of 2020. This is appropriate and realistic. Staff continue to engage in research and to receive good support, including financial, from the institution.

28.3 BCC must further develop a mechanism to ensure that stakeholders are informed of action taken on their feedback.

BCC has developed a formal stakeholder engagement framework which clearly identifies the Institution's stakeholder groups from whom feedback is obtained. BCC has concluded a contract for an electronic survey platform which enables the collection of feedback through a survey tool, the analysis of that feedback and a mechanism to provide stakeholders with BCC's response to that feedback.

29.2 BCC must include enhancement in the revised annual appraisal scheme, to ensure opportunities are not lost to enhance the provision.

BCC has further elaborated the staff appraisal scheme which makes explicit reference to improvement and to the skills development of staff. This scheme is focused on managerial and administrative staff across the network. In parallel, the APDU has initiated a new approach to staff development and appraisal for academic staff. The initial focus of this is on aspects of pedagogy within BCC's framework of Quality Advancement. This framework clearly sets out the Institution's strategic approach to quality enhancement.

29.3 BCC must make explicit reference to enhancement in annual reports, to maximise the value of annual reporting.

BCC has acknowledged the benefit of making enhancement an explicit element of quality processes in the Quality Advancement Strategy. The annual programme review, which is part of the strategy, brings together a wide range of data which is designed to identify enhancements as well as to quality assure. The revised approach is scheduled for implementation in the second half of 2019.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

BCC is encouraged to implement the new staff appraisal system in a way that ensures it appropriately reflects the needs and profiles of managerial, administrative and academic staff.

BCC is taking a two-track approach to staff appraisal. One track focuses on managerial and administrative staff, the other on academic staff. The academic scheme is set within BCC's clearly articulated approach to pedagogy. The design of these two schemes caters appropriately for the different needs and profiles of the two groups of staff.

BCC is encouraged to reflect on the difference between research, scholarship and professional practice and to articulate this so that developmental activity is clearly aligned to the profile and specialism of the academic staff member.

BCC has responded positively to this and included the task of articulating what is meant by research, scholarship and professional practice at BCC within the remit of the newly established RC.

The Institution is encouraged to provide consistent and clear information about the bursary scheme, the criteria attached to it and the application process to ensure all students are fully aware of the opportunity they offer and when they can apply.

There is evidence of discussion of the principles of the bursary scheme as well as of where and how best to provide information for students. At the time of the visit, there was no final decision on the most appropriate way forward.

BCC is recommended to achieve a more consistent approach to social programmes across the SSCs.

It is clear that the students' interest in participating in a social programmes varies greatly from one centre to another and to some extent between one cohort and another. However, this recommendation is included in the IAP as an area for action.

BCC should consider how to help students navigate more effectively through the library to access the most up-to-date materials.

BCC has recently produced two guides for the library that are designed to help staff and students to navigate more easily through the library resources. The library is an electronic library and there are no physical library resources.

BCC is recommended to continue to develop the process of collecting and collating of feedback to ensure that no opportunities are lost to enhance the provision.

The development of the stakeholder engagement framework as well as the purchase and roll out of a survey platform provide a very strong basis for the collection and collation of feedback. The commitment to collecting feedback and enhancing the provision are clearly articulated in the Quality Advancement strategy and relevant actions are included in the IAP.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The membership of the Board of Directors (BoD) is stable. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The directors are alert to changes in the South African context and respond effectively to them, for example, the steps taken in the light of the abolition of fees for public higher education in South Africa.

The BoD has increased externality in the AB and supported the development of the Academic Programme Development Unit and the new strategy for quality.

The institutional strategy is well articulated and links directly with developments and initiatives in all areas.

There is centralised budget setting and all expenditure is closely monitored. Financial processes are sound and well-understood.

4.2 Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The flat management structure is understood by staff. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and their reporting lines. The BoD communicates effectively with senior managers in the head offices and senior managers communicate well with each other and are up to date with developments and changes in delivery, policies, new systems and processes. Dissemination of information about developments and changes across the network of SSCs is less effective.

Committees have appropriate terms of reference and the meetings are recorded. This supports transparency and consistency.

There is a new management information system which is being rolled out in phases. This system replaces previous systems with one integrated system. Management has responded to the views of centres by delaying the introduction of the second phase to avoid it coinciding with a period of particularly heavy administration. All staff received a briefing on the overall plans for the system at the annual staff conference. Relevant staff attended training in advance of the introduction of the first phase which enabled them to use the system effectively. This careful approach to the introduction and roll out of the system enables any teething problems to be addressed and avoids disruption to students and their learning experience.

The Institution ensures that all staff are and remain well-qualified for their role. Good staff development opportunities are offered. There is a recent emphasis on skills development, fiscal accountability for management staff and an administrative training programme. There is also a recently finalised participation agreement which offers all staff the opportunity to undertake higher education study through BCC. The

take up of this opportunity has exceeded management expectations which is a positive endorsement of the shared value of professional development in the Institution.

The annual staff conference is the main avenue for communicating changes within BCC to the student study centre managers and to the administrators. The conference is clearly valued by staff and is a useful and informative event. There is, however, only limited time at the conference to enable peer groups of staff to exchange practice. There is opportunity within the highly developed technology base of BCC to provide additional communication channels to promote the sharing of practice across the network between peer groups of staff.

4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

BCC has articulated a revised approach to its pedagogy. The primary aim is to enhance the skills of graduates for employment. The revised approach is clearly linked to the articulation of a set of BCC graduate attributes. These link back to the Institutional mission and reflect the priorities on education for employment in South Africa

The revised approach was presented to academic staff in workshops which ensured a shared understanding of the rationale underpinning the pedagogy and provided training on how to design appropriate learning activities and assessment.

Assessment schedules are published at the start of all courses and students are clear about the timing and nature of all assessments. Examinations are moderated by an external moderator. The moderation templates have been revised so that they align with the revised pedagogic approach and are appropriate.

Staff are encouraged to undertake research and are supported. Support includes covering the costs of conference attendance, financial reward for publications and funding for further study, including master's degrees and doctorates. Staff are clear about the importance of research and scholarly activity and confident that requests for support to undertake research will receive a positive response from managers. BCC does not include the requirement to undertake research and scholarly activity as part of the staff appraisal scheme.

10.2 10.4 The two actions in the BCC Improvement Action Plan (IAP) regarding the need for staff contracts to include the requirement to undertake one or more of research, scholarship and professional practice and regarding the need for BCC to publish the process and criteria for gaining financial support for research and scholarly activity have not yet been fully implemented.

BCC is planning its first research conference which is being organised by the RC. This is a good indication of the Institution's commitment to developing its research agenda and profile to meet the needs of a higher education institution.

4.4 Student Recruitment, Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

Students are well informed about the nature of the provision at BCC and value the flexibility that the BCC model of distance learning offers. They fully confirm the accuracy of information which is provided online and through open days at the SSC and meetings with student advisers. BCC's states, in its advertising, that it provides a vibrant student life. It is not clear if this is focused on the educational experience or on social interaction.

Support to students is good. Student engagement and progress are closely monitored by the student advisers. Where students fail to engage with learning activities or do not submit assignments, they are contacted by e-mail or telephone. This dual approach ensures that communication is effective. BCC is currently enhancing its academic support for at risk students and the action on this is included in the IAP. BCC is providing greater clarity on articulation opportunities for students to enable them to progress to other BCC programmes. BCC is also expanding the work-integrated learning programme and has recently introduced a graduate internship programme. Both of these initiatives are designed to support students to gain employment. BCC has made a commitment to help graduates find employment and, where this does not happen, the graduate will receive a sum of money which they can use to help them start their own business. This is very good practice. Students confirmed that they had been fully informed of this opportunity.

4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Both the Port Elizabeth and Durban study support centres conform to the standards set by BCC. They provide a modern office environment and are appropriate for the study mode. The Durban centre is being upgraded and new lifts have recently been installed. At the time of the visit the toilet facilities were being upgraded. These upgrades ensure that the premises continue to meet BCC's requirements.

There is a BCC on-line HE library about which students are informed at induction. The on-line library is updated regularly.

Centres operate a booking system for computer sessions. Whilst there are peak times, there is sufficient provision overall for student needs. Both centres had a small, limited number of computers with internet access which enables students to research resources beyond those of the on-line library.

4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

BCC has undertaken a well-founded and integrated review of its quality management system. This ensures that management, assurance and enhancement of quality are transparently and consistently linked. The Quality Advancement Strategy effectively sets out the Institution's approach to quality and quality enhancement and provides a sound philosophy and framework.

The collection and analysis of feedback have been strengthened by the use of the new survey platform. This provides a systematic and effective basis for enhancing the provision

The APDU has developed the IAP as a tool to record actions and monitor progress. BCC views the development of the IAP as an iterative process. It is proving to be an effective tool for recording and monitoring actions for the senior management team. It has good potential for supporting SSC managers across the network by providing systematic data which will help in marketing and monitoring.

4.7 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated. Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

BCC’s holistic approach to strategic development which ensures that approach, structure and organisation are integrated across the institution.

The new Academic Planning Development Unit and the Research Committee, together with the development of the academic board and the advisory board, strengthens the academic focus of the Institution.

The many opportunities and support offered to staff for their development which enhance the skills of staff.

The initiatives designed to strengthen the employability of graduates and to support them in securing employment.

ACTIONS REQUIRED:

10.2 10.4 The two actions in the BCC Improvement Action Plan (IAP) regarding the need for staff contracts to include the requirement to undertake one or more of research, scholarship and professional practice and regarding the need for BCC to publish the process and criteria for gaining financial support for research and scholarly activity must be implemented.

High Medium Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (to be reviewed at the next inspection)

The Institution should decide on the way forward to provide consistent and clear information about the bursary scheme.

BCC is recommended to achieve a more consistent approach to social programmes across the SSCs.

BCC is encouraged to explore how it can best communicate developments, progress and data collection outputs to the benefit of the whole network.

BCC should exploit the benefits of its well-developed technology to facilitate peer group communication for the sharing of practice across study support centres.

BCC could consider how the requirement to undertake research and scholarly activity might be included in the staff appraisal scheme.

BCC should review and clarify the statement that the Institution offers a vibrant student life to ensure student expectations of what is offered are clear.

BCC should keep under review the numbers of computers in SSCs with internet access to ensure that the provision keeps pace with student numbers.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE