BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

Online, Distance and Blended Learning (ODBL) Full Inspection

NAME OF PROVIDER: Further Learning Group

ADDRESS: 54 Merrion Square South
Dublin 2
Ireland

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Mr Myles O'Reilly

DATE OF INSPECTION: 26 October & 5-7 November 2019

ACCREDITATION STATUS AT INSPECTION: Unaccredited

DECISION ON ACCREDITATION:

☒ Accreditation awarded for the full four-year period

☐ Probation accreditation

☐ Decision on accreditation deferred

☐ Award of accreditation refused

DATE: 30 January 2020

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

The Further Learning Group (the Provider) is a privately owned organisation, established in 2004 by its current director to offer distance learning courses in Interior Design. Since its establishment, the provision has been expanded to include Fashion Design, Photography, Garden Design, and Digital Marketing. All courses are now offered online or through blended learning.

The Provider's Head Office is in Dublin, in the Republic of Ireland, and there are also administrative offices in London, Portugal and Australia. Face-to-face elements of the courses are delivered at various university premises such as University of Westminster and University College Dublin. The Director, who is the Chief Executive Officer, is based in Portugal, along with the Financial Director, full time online tutors, and some student services staff. Other senior management team members include the Chief Academic Officer and Chief Operations Officer, who are based in Dublin, and a country manager based in Australia.

The Provider aims to give learners high quality distance learning courses that give them the technical knowledge and practical skills they need to develop or change their careers. In recent years it has focused on the development of its own proprietary online learning system to manage and deliver online and blended learning courses to learners around the world.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Provider offers part time courses in Interior Design, Fashion Design, Photography, Garden Design and Digital Marketing in four countries, namely the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland, Australia and the United States of America (USA). Each subject area is marketed in each country under its own name, for example the British Academy of Interior Design, the Fashion Design Academy of Ireland, the Australian Academy of Photography, and the American Academy of Digital Marketing The curriculum is the same for each academy, and the same online tutors and administrative team support learners regardless of location.

Courses offered include a Level 2 certificate, Level 3 diploma and Level 4 postgraduate diploma in Interior Design, Fashion Design, Photography, Garden Design and Digital Marketing accredited by the International Approval and Registration Centre (IARC), Level 4 Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Level 5 Higher National Diploma (HND) in in Interior Design, Fashion Design, and Photography accredited by Pearson. The Provider also offers a Level 2 certificate, Level 3 diploma and Level 4 postgraduate diploma in Digital Marketing accredited by IARC and the Continuing Professional Development Standards Office (CPD Standards Office).

Learners who study online only can enrol at any time of the year, while those who opt to study through blended learning join one of three intakes in February, May or September. The blended learning courses include a series of evening or weekend classes at each teaching venue. Learners on diploma programmes attend ten Saturday classes or 20 weekday evening classes, while those on postgraduate diploma and HNC courses attend 15 Saturday classes or 30 weekday evening classes. HND learners attend 30 Saturday classes or 60 evening classes over a period of 2 years.

At the time of inspection, a total of 9,374 learners were enrolled on courses across all locations in all countries. Of these, 787 were registered on blended learning courses and 8,587 were studying online only. All learners are over the age of 18 and the majority are female. The majority of learners are from the UK, with 20 per cent from Ireland, and 10 per cent from Australia, the USA and elsewhere.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over four days. Interviews were conducted with the Director, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Academic Operations Manager, Finance Director, Australia Country Manager and the Student Services Manager. There were further discussions with administration and support staff, tutors, and learners. Blended learning lessons were observed at the University of Westminster, University College Dublin, and the Head Office in Dublin, and documentation was scrutinised. The Provider cooperated well throughout the inspection process, and information was readily available.

PART B - JUDGMENT AND EVIDENCE

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

INSPECTION AREA - MANAGEMENT, STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

1.   The provider is effectively managed

1.1	The management structure is clearly defined, documented and understood, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, trustees or governing body.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.2	Senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.3	Senior managers have an understanding of the special requirements of online, distance and blended learning.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.4	There are clear channels of communication between the management and staff, especially those working remotely.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Directors provide a clear strategic direction, and the senior management team is highly qualified and experienced. The academic directors and senior tutors have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the particular requirements of online, distance and blended learning. This knowledge and understanding are widely disseminated amongst all members of staff.

There is excellent communication between managers, senior tutors and other staff, especially those working remotely and in overseas locations. This enables all staff and learners to be supported to a consistent standard.

2.   The administration of online, distance and blended learning is effective

2.1	Administrators are suitably qualified or experienced and understand their specific responsibilities and duties.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.2	The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the provision.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.3	Offices are adequate in size and resources for the effective administration of the provider.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.4	The administrative support available to the management and learners is clearly defined, documented and understood.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.5	Policies, procedures and systems are well documented and effectively disseminated.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.6	Data collection and collation systems are effective including the logging of tutor and learner submissions	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.7	Learner and tutor records are sufficient, accurately maintained and up-to-date.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.8	The provider has a robust security system and policies in place for protecting the data of its learners and tutors.	☒ Yes	☐ No
2.9	Satisfactory procedures are in place for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment.	☒ Yes	☐ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

The administration of online, distance and blended learning programmes through the online learning centre, learner records, the timetable master file, and other Information Technology (IT) based systems is thorough, well-organised, and highly effective.

The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the provision and the administration offices are adequate to ensure the effective administration of the Provider.

Policies, procedures and systems are well documented, and consistently implemented throughout the organisation.

The assessment procedures are clear and well-understood, ensuring all learners receive equally good levels of support.

3. The provider employs appropriate managerial and administrative staff

3.1	There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced administrative staff.	☒ Yes	☐ No
3.2	Experience and qualifications claimed are verified before employment.	☒ Yes	☐ No
3.3	There is an effective system for regularly reviewing the performance of staff.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the recruitment and employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff. Staff retention is good. All contracts of employment and job descriptions are up to date and reflect current roles and responsibilities.

Experience and qualifications claimed are verified before employment.

Both full-time and part-time staff have a formal annual performance review with a member of the senior management team. The review process results in a personal development plan and suitable opportunities for additional professional training.

4. Publicity material gives a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the online, distance and blended learning offered

4.1	The website and other publicity material give an accurate description of the online, distance and blended learning courses offered.	☒ Yes	☐ No
4.2	All advertising materials and images provide an accurate description of any training offered.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Publicity material comprises an up to date and informative website and a series of brochures, which provide a useful overview of the courses available in the five main subject areas. These are tailored to the four main countries in the UK, Ireland, Australia and USA which the Provider operates, and together they offer a helpful introduction to the Provider's courses, options for study, costs, premises used, and teaching and assessment.

Open days are held in Dublin, London, Manchester and Australia, providing prospective learners with the chance to meet tutors, other staff, and past learners. As a result, prospective learners can make suitable informed choices about which programme best meets their needs.

INSPECTION AREA - TEACHING, LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT

5. Management of the programme is effective

5.1	There is a suitably qualified manager with experience in online, distance and blended learning who has responsibility for teaching, learning and achievement and management of the tutor body.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.2	The provider has a sufficient number of qualified tutors to give individualised instructional service to each learner.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.3	The provider has a robust tutor recruitment system which is designed to ensure the safety of the learners. The recruitment process for tutors working remotely includes a face-to-face interview using a suitable online communication platform.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.4	The allocation of tutors to courses provides for a consistent learning experience and delivery is monitored to ensure consistency.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.5	Realistic deadlines are set and communicated well in advance to learners.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.6	Delivery methods are sufficient to attain the stated programme objectives and intended learning outcomes - suitable supplementary study aids have been considered where appropriate, whether via investment in technology, additional tutor support, issuing extra study materials or offering face-to-face learning sessions.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.7	The programme reflects current knowledge and practice. Internal programme reviews are conducted on a periodic basis.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.8	The programme is sufficiently comprehensive for learners to achieve the stated programme objectives and its content is supported by sound research and practice.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.9	Commissioning of course materials is managed effectively and materials are checked to ensure standardisation and consistency across the provision.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.10	Learner assessment is guided by published grading policies and a marking system that includes prompt return of accurately, fairly, and consistently graded assessments.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.11	The provider uses assessment strategies which demonstrate the achievement of defined learning outcomes.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.12	The provider takes appropriate steps to identify and discourage cheating and plagiarism and penalise offenders.	☒ Yes	☐ No
5.13	Learners have appropriate access to tutors for learning support.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

A highly qualified and experienced chief academic officer, supported by a highly experienced academic operations manager, have overall responsibility for the management and development of all online and blended learning courses.

There are robust procedures for the recruitment, monitoring and allocation of tutors, including the recent appointment of a central panel of senior tutors that is well managed, ensuring a consistent learning experience for learners on both online and blended learning courses.

Programme managers and content writers have close and regular contact with the awarding organisations, and all programmes reflect syllabus requirements and current commercial knowledge and practice.

The writing and updating of course materials are very effective and a great emphasis is placed on ensuring that assessment practice and learning support is consistent across all programmes.

Learner assessment is guided by clear published grading policies and a marking system that includes the prompt return of assessments. Assessment strategies are used which demonstrate the achievement of defined learning outcomes.

Learners have good access to tutors for learning support. Learners on all programmes have constant access by e-mail with personal tutors, and learners on blended learning courses have an additional opportunity for learning support from the tutors who deliver the face to face workshops.

6. Tutors have an acceptable level of subject knowledge and pedagogic skill

6.1	Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced.	☒ Yes	☐ No
6.2	Tutors have an understanding of the special challenges and demands of online, distance and blended learning.	☒ Yes	☐ No
6.3	Tutors have a level of subject knowledge, pedagogic and communicative skill which allows them to deliver the content of programmes effectively.	☒ Yes	☐ No
6.4	The appraisal procedures for tutors incorporate regular monitoring of tutor feedback.	☒ Yes	☐ No
6.5	Tutors are properly and continuously trained with respect to provider policies, learner needs, instructional approaches and techniques, and the use of appropriate instructional technology.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

All tutors have a good subject knowledge and are appropriately qualified and experienced.

Tutors have a good understanding of the special challenges and demands of online, distance and blended learning and provide good support to learners.

Tutors on blended learning programmes have good teaching skills and relevant professional experience, allowing them to challenge learners and develop learners' theoretical and practical skills during classroom-based lessons. Tutors receive training in the use of IT and other media to meet learner needs and provision of appropriate support to enable learners to achieve their aims.

Monitoring of tutor feedback is thorough and systematic. Academic managers monitor formal feedback on assignments given to learners by the senior tutor panel. However, senior tutors monitor feedback given to all learners online informally.

7. Tutors respond to the individual learning needs of learners

7.1	The academic backgrounds and particular needs of learners are taken into account in the delivery of the programmes which build on former learning or experience.	☒ Yes	☐ No
7.2	Learners are encouraged and enabled to develop independent learning skills.	☒ Yes	☐ No
7.3	Tutors respond to different learning needs of learners where appropriate, taking various learning styles into account in their planning and delivery of courses.	☒ Yes	☐ No
7.4	Tutors employ effective strategies to check learners' understanding of concepts and programme content.	☒ Yes	☐ No
7.5	Learners are made aware of the necessary level of digital literacy required to follow the stated programmes.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Tutors provide a high standard of support to all learners and take into account their backgrounds and learning needs well. For those learners who are studying on blended learning courses, tutors who deliver the evening and weekend classes ensure that workshop materials and practical activities reflect the learners' preferred learning styles.

Course content is well-structured and easy to follow and learners are encouraged to develop their independent study skills when researching material for their assignments. Tutors on all programmes employ effective strategies, such as directed questioning and online discussion forums, to check learners' understanding of concepts and programme content.

Learners are made aware of the particular demands of online learning and the need for a sufficient level of IT skills to ensure successful completion of their programme of study.

8. Learners receive appropriate assessment and feedback on their performance and progress, which are effectively monitored

8.1	Programmes are planned to include a schedule of assessments, the procedures and criteria for which are available in writing and in advance to learners and tutors.	☒ Yes	☐ No ☐ NA
8.2	Assessment outcomes are monitored to enable the identification of learners who are not making satisfactory progress and prompt intervention where appropriate.	☒ Yes	☐ No ☐ NA
8.3	Learners are made aware of how their progress relates to their target level of achievement.	☒ Yes	☐ No ☐ NA
8.4	Additional support or advice on alternative programmes is provided to learners who are judged not to be making sufficient progress to succeed.	☒ Yes	☐ No ☐ NA
8.5	Feedback is given to individual learners on a regular basis, tailored to meet their specific needs and constructive in its nature and delivery.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Assignments are well designed and learners receive detailed and constructive feedback from tutors, including helpful references to good practice and areas for further development.

Marking schemes are clearly set out and learners are made aware of how their progress relates to their target level of achievement. Learners who fail to reach the required standard on particular assignments are required to resubmit them before they proceed to the next one.

Additional support or advice on alternative programmes is provided to learners who are judged by tutors not to be making sufficient progress to succeed with their course.

Helpful and constructive feedback is given to individual learners on a regular basis and is tailored to their specific needs.

9. Assessments are designed to support and encourage the learning process, as well as to monitor and establish the level of ability acquired by the learner

9.1	Assignments and assessments maintain an appropriate focus on any assessment objectives or statement of learning outcomes established by the awarding body.	☒ Yes	☐ No ☐ NA
9.2	Formative assessments appropriately reflect the nature and standards of summative examinations.	☐ Yes	☐ No ☒ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

Assignments and assessments fully reflect the assessment objectives and planned learning outcomes identified by the awarding bodies. For example, Pearson maintains close oversight of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) provision across all subjects and countries of operation.

Assessment on all programmes is by assignments and no formal summative examinations are undertaken.

INSPECTION AREA – LEARNER SUPPORT

10.   The enrolment process is comprehensive, transparent and supportive to applicants

10.1	Applicants are provided with enough information to enable them to make a judgement on their suitability for the course and the delivery methods and can discuss any concerns before enrolment.	☒ Yes ☐ No
10.2	Enrolment and application documentation is easily accessible and simple to complete and submit.	☒ Yes ☐ No
10.3	Learners are given advance information about course requirements and equipment for succeeding in the programme. The provider takes reasonable steps to ensure that learners accepted for enrolment meet these requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.	☒ Yes ☐ No
10.4	Learners are enrolled on programmes under fair and transparent contractual terms and conditions. If only limited information can be made available, suitably extended refund arrangements should be in place.	☒ Yes ☐ No
10.5	The provider makes it clear to applicants that they are responsible for checking that they have the skills and knowledge required to study on the chosen course.	☒ Yes ☐ No
10.6	After enrolment, the applicant has the benefit of a stated cooling off period during which they can cancel the enrolment.	☒ Yes ☐ No
10.7	Learners are made aware of the language proficiency needed to study on and complete the programmes.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Information, advice and guidance at the enrolment stage are comprehensive, transparent and supportive. Prospective learners on online courses receive helpful information via the Provider's website, and senior tutors answer specific queries by e-mail and online. Open days are held prior to each new blended learning course, where new applicants can meet course advisers, tutors and graduates.

Enrolment forms are available online and are easy to complete. Course content and terms and conditions are clearly indicated. There is a fair 14-day refund policy.

For BTEC courses, learners for whom English is not their first language must have an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 5.5 or more or an equivalent qualification. There are similar requirements for applications enrolling on the IARC and CPD Standards Office accredited courses.

11. Services provided meet the reasonable needs of learners

11.1	Instructions and suggestions on how to study and how to use the tutorial materials are made available to assist learners to learn effectively and efficiently.	☒ Yes	☐ No
11.2	Staff are available to assist learners to resolve issues of a general and/or technological nature. All enquiries from learners are handled promptly and sympathetically.	☒ Yes	☐ No
11.3	The provider ensures that learners understand any system requirements and have access to appropriate technical advice to assist with technological problems which are the provider's responsibility.	☒ Yes	☐ No
11.4	The provider supports and encourages peer-interaction through a variety of communication channels including social media.	☒ Yes	☐ No
11.5	Learners who are unable to make satisfactory progress through the programme are encouraged to continue and supported to achieve a satisfactory outcome wherever possible or offered an alternative programme.	☒ Yes	☐ No
11.6	Learners have access to a fair complaints procedure of which they are informed in writing at the start of the programme.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

A comprehensive student guide and accompanying video provide effective guidance on how to use online materials.

A dedicated IT team is available to provide ongoing advice and support. Enquiries are handled promptly and sympathetically.

Peer interaction is encouraged through online forums and other dedicated social media groups. Learners who cannot complete their programmes can apply for certification of their completed units or receive accreditation at a lower level, thereby ensuring recognition for completed work.

Learners have access to a clear and fair written complaints procedure about which they are informed at the start of their programme.

12. Course materials are appropriate to the medium of delivery and are effective

12.1	Course materials are designed for a specific and clearly stated level of study and include appropriate support when necessary.	☒ Yes	☐ No
12.2	Course materials are appropriately presented and sufficiently comprehensive to enable learners to achieve the programme objectives.	☒ Yes	☐ No
12.3	Course materials are accurate and reflect current knowledge and practice and are regularly reviewed and revised.	☒ Yes	☐ No
12.4	Programme designers make effective use of appropriate teaching aids and learning resources.	☒ Yes	☐ No
12.5	The provider makes effective provisions for learners to access conventional and online resources.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Course materials are accurate and comprehensive and reflect current commercial knowledge and business practice.

Course materials are managed by a content manager, who is responsible for ensuring that all materials reflect current knowledge and professional practice.

Course materials are standardised across all programme areas. Course content on BTEC programmes closely follows Pearson's syllabus requirements.

The development and review of new materials are carried out by content writers and there is a good range of online resources.

Programme designers make effective use of appropriate teaching aids and learning resources. For example, classes on blended learning courses include practical exercises and presentations from industry specialists.

13.   The technology used to deliver the programmes is fit for purpose and effective

13.1	The provider uses appropriate and readily accessible technology to optimise interaction between the provider and the learner and enhance instructional and educational services.	☒ Yes	☐ No
13.2	The provider has access to the services of an experienced Information Technology (IT) technician who can ensure that systems are operative at all times and provide support to learners, tutors and staff working remotely.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

The Provider uses readily accessible and up-to-date technology to ensure optimum interaction with learners.

The delivery of online, distance and blended learning programmes through the online learning centre is coordinated by an experienced IT team, led by a senior IT technician. This ensures that systems operate appropriately at all times and provide a high and consistent standard of support to learners, tutors and staff across all programmes and centres.

INSPECTION AREA – MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

14.   The provider has effective systems to monitor its own standards and assess its own performance with a view to continuing improvement

14.1	There are effective systems for monitoring and periodically reviewing all aspects of the provider's performance.	☒ Yes	☐ No	
14.2	Reports are compiled at least annually which present the results of the provider's reviews and incorporate action plans.	☒ Yes	☐ No	
14.3	Reports include analysis of year-on-year results on learner satisfaction, retention, achievement, examination results and completion rates.	☒ Yes	☐ No	☐ NA
14.4	Action plans are implemented and regularly reviewed, with outcomes reported to the management.	☒ Yes	☐ No	

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

There are rigorous and effective systems for monitoring and reviewing performance, for example through a student management system, quarterly and annual reports to awarding organisations, and course reviews and action plans.

Action plans are reviewed twice a year and are used by the senior management team to inform future developments. The process to improve the online experience is effective for learners and staff.

At programme level, specialist managers hold monthly design and development meetings. Senior staff produce regular reports for the external awarding organisations. These include an analysis of learner retention and achievement, and learner satisfaction.

15. **Learner progress is effectively monitored and the monitoring is linked to procedures to allow for prompt intervention where appropriate**

15.1	Prompt action is taken when learners miss deadlines, when set, or work submitted is not of a satisfactory standard.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met ☐ NA

Comments

The progress of most learners is effectively monitored and prompt action is taken when they miss deadlines or do not submit work of a satisfactory standard. However, some learners find it difficult to balance work, study and family commitments, and as a result make slow progress through their assignment schedule and miss deadlines. Intervention to help these learners is not always sufficiently prompt.

16. **The provider has a means of accessing and monitoring the views of learners and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary**

16.1	The provider has effective mechanisms for obtaining feedback from learners and other stakeholders (such as staff, partner providers and employers) on all aspects of the provider's provision.	☒ Yes ☐ No
16.2	The feedback is regularly reviewed by management and action is taken where necessary.	☒ Yes ☐ No
16.3	There is a mechanism for ensuring learners know what action has been taken as a result of their feedback.	☒ Yes ☐ No
16.4	Opinions of learners are systematically sought as one basis for evaluating and improving tutorial materials, the delivery of instructions and educational services.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

Feedback is regularly obtained from learners and staff through student surveys. External organisations also provide regular feedback on graduates that have taken up work placements with them.

The student services team obtains feedback on areas of good practice and areas for improvement and reports to senior management on any issues arising, for example, regarding online services, including tutorial support or classroom resources for those learners on blended learning courses. This information is discussed on a regular basis at management team meetings and action is taken where necessary.

The opinions of learners are obtained informally during courses and through formal questionnaires at the end of their courses. This information is used systematically to review and improve all aspects of the provision. Any actions which have been taken are communicated to learners via their tutors or through online forums.

17. **There is a clear rationale for courses leading to unaccredited or internal awards**

17.1	There is a clear statement of the level claimed relative to the RQF where applicable and evidence that learners who receive the award meet the stated requirements for that level.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
17.2	There is evidence of the extent to which the awards are accepted for the purposes of employment or further study.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
17.3	External moderators are involved in the assessment process if appropriate to the level or programme being studied.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met ☒ NA

Comments

18. **There are satisfactory procedures for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment**

18.1	Evidence is provided that the requirements of the relevant awarding bodies in terms of examination security and administration are complied with.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA
18.2	For internal awards, there are effective systems in place for examination security and administration, and clear procedures for learners to appeal against their marks.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA
18.3	The provider has processes through which the provider verifies that the learner who registers in the programme is the same learner who participates in and completes and receives the credit.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met ☐ NA

Comments

The Provider uses continuous assessment through assignments as a means of assessment and no examinations are held.
The student management system holds information which verifies that a learner who registers on a particular programme is the same learner who completes the programme and receives the appropriate accreditation.

INSPECTION AREA - FACE-TO-FACE COMPONENT (if applicable)

19. **The provider has secure possession of and access to its premises**

19.1	The provider has secure tenure on its premises.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
19.2	Where required, the provider has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

The Provider has signed three-year leases for all its office premises. A number of venues in Dublin, the UK, Australia and the USA are used on a regular basis for blended learning classes. These are booked at least one month prior to the classes being held.
All venues are audited on a regular basis to ensure they are suitable for the delivery of the Provider's academic programmes.

20. **The premises provide a safe, secure and clean environment for learners and staff**

20.1	Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.	☒ Yes ☐ No
20.2	The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.	☒ Yes ☐ No
20.3	There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories), made readily available to learners, staff and visitors.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA

20.4	General guidance on health and safety is made available to learners, staff and visitors.	☒ Yes ☐ No
20.5	There is adequate signage inside and outside of the premises and notice boards for the display of general information.	☒ Yes ☐ No
20.6	There is adequate circulation space for the number of learners and staff accommodated, and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.	☒ Yes ☐ No
20.7	There are toilet facilities of an appropriate number and level of cleanliness.	☒ Yes ☐ No
20.8	There is adequate heating and ventilation in all rooms.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

Access to premises is via keys and swipe cards and is appropriately restricted to the relevant learners and staff.

All premises are maintained to a high standard of repair, decoration and cleanliness.

All classes are held on licensed education premises, and appropriate health and safety guidance is made available to all learners, staff and visitors.

Signage, circulation space, and toilet facilities are adequate and appropriate for the number of learners and staff present.

21.   Training rooms and other learning areas are appropriate for the programmes offered

21.1	Training rooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes allocated to them.	☒ Yes ☐ No
21.2	Training rooms and/or any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, workshops and studios) are equipped to a level which allows for the effective delivery of each programme.	☒ Yes ☐ No
21.3	There are facilities suitable for conducting the assessments required on each programme.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

Training rooms are well equipped and provide a conducive learning environment.

Room capacity is matched to the number of learners registered on each blended learning programme.

Rooms have appropriate facilities for completing individual and group tasks, although all formal assessments are completed and submitted online.

22.   There is an appropriate policy on learner attendance and effective procedures and systems to enforce it

22.1	There is an appropriate, clear and published policy on learner attendance and punctuality.	☒ Yes ☐ No
22.2	Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality at each session are kept for all learners, collated centrally and reviewed at least weekly.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
22.3	Learner absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action taken.	☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met   ☒ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met ☐ NA

Comments

There is a clear policy requiring all learners on blended learning programmes to attend 80 per cent of classes.

Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality are kept centrally and reviewed on a weekly basis.

Learner absences are followed up by senior tutors or the student services team.

22.3 However, efforts to enforce the attendance policy are not always effective and attendance levels tend to drop towards the end of some programmes.

---

23.   There are appropriate additional facilities for learners and staff

23.1	Learners have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private study, including library and IT resources.	☒ Yes	☐ No
23.2	Tutors have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work and relaxation.	☒ Yes	☐ No
23.3	There are individual offices or rooms in which academic staff and senior management can hold private meetings and a room of sufficient size to hold staff meetings.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

Learners have little or no requirement for space or facilities for private study. The premises where the blended learning lessons were observed has wireless connectivity so that learners can access internet resources as required.

Tutors are contracted to work from home. If they need to do any work at the training premises, they can work in the training rooms allocated for the delivery of the classes.

Office space for senior managers and full-time staff is appropriate.

---

24.   Learners attending face-to-face components receive appropriate support

24.1	There is at least one named staff member responsible for learner welfare who is suitably trained, accessible to all learners and available to provide advice and counselling.	☒ Yes	☐ No	
24.2	Learners receive appropriate advice before arrival.	☒ Yes	☐ No	
24.3	Learners receive an appropriate induction and relevant information upon arrival.	☒ Yes	☐ No	
24.4	Learners are issued with a contact number for out-of-hours and emergency support.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☒ NA
24.5	The provider has policies in place to avoid discrimination and a published procedure for dealing with any abusive behaviour.	☒ Yes	☐ No	
24.6	Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place for participants under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults, which are regularly reviewed.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☒ NA
24.7	A suitable policy and effective arrangements are in place to protect participants from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.	☒ Yes	☐ No	

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

The student services team and wider academic team are appropriately qualified and trained to support learners effectively.

All learners on blended learning programmes receive a good standard of support before, during and after their arrival at the courses.

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, including on discrimination and abusive behaviour.

A policy on radicalisation and extremism has been completed recently. This incorporates a risk assessment, a clear and visible policy covering all staff and learners, and a programme of staff training to ensure all members of staff, including part-time staff, are aware of the risks of radicalisation.

25.   International learners are provided with specific advice and assistance

25.1	International learners receive appropriate advice before their arrival on travelling to and living in the UK.	☐ Yes	☐ No
25.2	International learners receive an appropriate induction upon arrival covering issues specific to the local area.	☐ Yes	☐ No
25.3	Information and advice specific to international learners continues to be available throughout the programme of study.	☐ Yes	☐ No
25.4	Provision of support takes into account cultural and religious considerations.	☐ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☒ NA

Comments

26.   Where residential accommodation is offered, it is fit for purpose, well maintained and appropriately supervised

26.1	Any residential accommodation is clean, safe and of a standard which is adequate to the needs of learners.	☐ Yes	☐ No	
26.2	Any residential accommodation is open to inspection by the appropriate authorities, including Ofsted where learners under 18 are accommodated.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ NA
26.3	A level of supervision is provided appropriate to the needs of learners.	☐ Yes	☐ No	
26.4	Appropriate measures are in place to ensure the separation between participants under the age of 18 and those over the age of 18 when in the accommodation.	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☒ NA

Comments

27.   Where home-stay accommodation is organised, the welfare of learners is ensured and the provider's relationship with hosts is properly managed

27.1	Due care is taken in selecting home-stay accommodation which both provides a safe and comfortable living environment for learners and is appropriately located for travel to the provider and back.	☐ Yes	☐ No
27.2	Any home-stay accommodation is inspected before learners are placed and is subject to regular re-inspection by a responsible representative or agent of the provider.	☐ Yes	☐ No

27.3	The provider has appropriate contracts in place with any hosts, clearly setting out the rules, terms and conditions of the provision.	☐ Yes ☐ No
27.4	Appropriate advice and support is given to both hosts and learners before and during the placement.	☐ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☒ NA

Comments

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated   ☒ Yes   ☐ No

PART C - SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Numbering of action points aligns with that of the minimum standards

MANAGEMENT, STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

Provider's Strengths

Academic directors and senior tutors have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the specific requirements of online, distance and blended learning.
The administration of online and blended learning programmes is thorough, well organised and highly effective.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
None	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT

Provider's Strengths

Tutors on blended learning programmes have an excellent subject knowledge and professional background, and they run challenging and informative sessions which develop learners' theoretical and practical skills.
Assignments are well designed, and learners receive detailed and constructive feedback from tutors, with helpful references to good practice and areas for further improvement.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
None	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

LEARNER SUPPORT

Provider's Strengths

Information, advice and guidance on all online and blended learning programmes are informative, transparent and supportive.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
None	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Provider's Strengths

There are rigorous and effective systems for monitoring and reviewing performance across all programmes.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
None	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

FACE-TO-FACE COMPONENT (if applicable)

Provider's Strengths

Learners on all programmes receive a good standard of support before, during and after their enrolment.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
22.3 The Provider must follow up learner absences from blended learning classes more promptly to ensure learners complete assignment programmes on time	☐ High ☒ Medium ☐ Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

To be reviewed at the next inspection

The Provider should consider introducing a more formal process for tutors to reflect and report on what works well, or what could be improved, in teaching and learning practice. The Provider must provide more rapid support to those learners who are making slow progress through their programme of assignments.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS