



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

ADDRESS: Kew Gardens
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 3AB

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Mr Richard Deverell

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATES OF INSPECTION: 26 January and 2 February 2021

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 27 May 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew/the Provider) was established in 1759 and is recognised as one of the world's foremost horticulture, plant science and conservation institutions. It is a non-departmental public body, with exempt charitable status, and it became a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage site in 2003.

Horticultural training has been offered since 1859 and the Provider now offers a range of specialist training courses for botanists, conservationists and staff from partner organisations. The Provider is based in Richmond, Surrey in the United Kingdom (UK).

RBG Kew's overall mission is to unlock the potential of plants and fungi, through the power of scientific discovery and research. The aim is to be the global leader in botanical horticulture education. The mission relating to the provision accredited by BAC is to provide science based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and develop new courses where appropriate. This incorporates working to enhance RBG Kew's scientific reputation by improving the external visibility of its world-class research and resources.

RBG Kew's Director is supported by an Executive Board. For the CPD provision, the Director is supported by the Senior Science Officer for Education and Communication, the Science Administrator – Education, Heads of Departments and Course Managers.

RBG Kew has world-renowned collections of living and preserved plants and fungi, together with an extensive library. The collections are the basis of the Provider's own plant and fungal research and are a research resource for scientists around the world.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The courses offered by the Provider include a two-week course in Seed Conservation Techniques, a two-week course in Tropical Plant Identification and a one-week course in Wood Identification. Normally, these courses are operated on a face-to-face basis, but the Seed Conservation course has now been run once online.

RBG Kew also offers a range of other programmes. It has a structured schools programme and offers CPD opportunities for teachers, and training for student teachers, which together have 90,000 participants a year. Internships are provided for recent graduates or undergraduates. In addition, it offers a one-year master's degree programme in partnership with Queen Mary University, London. RBG Kew also participates in ten doctoral training partnerships in conjunction with UK universities.

The short professional courses, which are the only provision accredited by BAC, are managed within the Science Directorate and are overseen by the Senior Science Officer for Education and Communication.

At the time of the inspection, no participants were enrolled. The Provider can cater for 60 participants over the three courses. There were 21 participants in 2019–2020. Previous participants were all aged over 18 years and already studying or working in plant science or conservation. The majority were male and came from a variety of countries, including Singapore, Namibia, Thailand, Zambia and Peru.

There are set start times for courses, which run once a year and are normally delivered face to face on the Provider's premises. Applications open approximately six months in advance of the start of the course. There are no set entry requirements. It is part of RBG Kew's training remit to share its knowledge and expertise and to support botanists and conservationists at partner organisations. All participants are already working or studying in the field covered by the course that they attend. They will also usually have been recommended by their head of department or one of RBG Kew's partners.

3. Inspection process

One inspector conducted the inspection remotely over two half-days. Meetings were held with the Senior Science Officer, the Science Administrator – Education, Heads of Departments, Course Managers and trainers. The inspector had discussions with previous participants from both face-to-face and online courses. A range of documentation was scrutinised. Premises and facilities were examined via photographs and the website, combined with appropriate questioning. All staff co-operated fully with the inspector throughout the inspection.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	11–12 May 2011
Interim	10 May 2012
Re-accreditation	25–26 May 2016
Interim	24 January 2018
Re-accreditation	20–22 May 2019

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

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

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The Tropical Plant Identification and Wood Identification courses have been postponed and the Seed Conservation course has been run online as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, RBG Kew staff have been furloughed, either completely or part time, since April 2020, which has limited progress in implementing action-planning for improvement.

2. Response to action points in last report

4.2 Publicity materials must provide up-to-date information regarding the dates on which courses will run.

Publicity materials have been revised effectively to provide up-to date information regarding course dates which are advertised on the website. When courses are able to resume, potential applicants will be contacted well in advance to inform them of course dates.

5.1 The appropriate levels of English required to follow all the courses must be determined and made known in course information.

Information regarding the level of English required, based on the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) levels, is communicated to potential applicants to ensure that they are able to understand the course content and learn effectively.

7.2 Feedback must be recorded and analysed systematically in order to gain a full understanding of participants' views.

Feedback has been collated and analysed systematically in order to establish the views of participants. This has reinforced good practice and identified areas for improvement.

7.3 Action must be systematically taken on feedback given, where necessary, so as to improve the provision.

Action has been taken based on feedback. Appropriate changes have been made to improve the provision as a result of the feedback received.

7.4 A mechanism must be devised to report to the participants on the response made to their feedback to demonstrate quality improvement.

Follow-up e-mails have been sent to participants to thank them for their feedback and report on actions taken in response.

8.3 Action plans must be systematically implemented to support ongoing improvement.

Processes are not in place to facilitate the consistent implementation of quality improvement action-planning across the provision. Planned course manager meetings, where the implementation of quality improvement action-planning could be discussed, have been insufficiently regular since the last inspection, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, quality improvement implementation and monitoring are inconsistent.

11.3 Documented lesson observations must be incorporated into the trainers' appraisal process to further support improvement.

There is no formalised process or documentation for lesson observation. Course managers have observed sessions informally to monitor quality, but formal, recorded lesson observations have not been carried out.

There is no procedure or template for conducting lesson observations. Trainers are highly qualified specialists, often at senior levels in the organisation, who may teach for an hour or so once or twice a year. Their input is vital in accomplishing RBG Kew's education mission and enhancing its scientific reputation, by improving the external visibility of world-class research and resources. However, their teaching skills do not form part of their appraisal. As a result, their teaching input is undervalued, and any identified areas for development are not supported.

17.7 The Provider must implement effective arrangements to protect participants from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Arrangements to protect participants from risks associated with radicalisation and extremism include a policy and a risk assessment. The Senior Science Officer has shared the policy, procedures, and risk assessment with Safeguarding Leads across the organisation at RBG. Trainers receive a briefing on how to mitigate risks from radicalisation and extremism and how to report concerns, in order to safeguard participants more effectively. All staff teaching on the short courses are required to read and agree to abide by the policy which details warning signs and mitigating actions.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that course manager meetings are reinstated so that information and best practice can be shared to continually improve the standard of the provision.

Course manager meetings were not scheduled sufficiently regularly to enable the effective sharing of information and best practice. One meeting took place in which there was an excellent level of discussion. The meeting was recorded and the record included action points. Outstanding issues were referred to the next meeting. Unfortunately, other meetings were not scheduled and therefore the full benefits have not yet been realised.

The Provider should consider implementing a system to support trainers in the development of their training skills to maximise participants' learning.

RBG Kew's learning and development team is organising appropriate courses to support staff working with participants, such as a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) course in supervisor training. A Train the Trainers course has been requested for the short-course provision, but this has not yet been delivered.

It is recommended that the question about participant needs is expanded to include barriers to learning and that it is noted on the application form, so that more meaningful information can be gathered at an early stage to benefit participants and inform trainers.

The documentation supporting each course includes a question regarding possible barriers to learning and participant support needs. When courses resume, it is planned to include this in the application form, so that more meaningful information can be gathered consistently at an early stage, to benefit participants and inform trainers.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

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

Comments

Course management is effective. The short-course provision is overseen and managed effectively by the Senior Science Officer for Education and Communication. Each course manager organises and develops their own individual course, which matches the needs of the participants very well.

Timetables are organised efficiently, and specialist members of staff are asked to deliver sessions. Consequently, participants are able to learn from highly experienced experts in the field.

There is a well-qualified and experienced part-time administrator who collates participants' records and supports the course managers. Most other administrative duties are carried out by the course managers.

Although high-quality teaching programmes are delivered that meet the participants' needs, the supporting administrative documentation varies. A lack of standardisation of procedures and systems constrains the consistency of practice across the provision. Each course uses its own documentation, which limits the effectiveness of data analysis to inform evaluation and improvement across the provision.

The Provider employs well-qualified and experienced staff, which supports the maintenance of high standards. Qualifications and experience are verified before employment by the Human Resources Department.

The website is user friendly and provides an accurate picture of the range of resources and facilities on offer. Course information is accurate and up to date. All stakeholders are briefed well on the nature and requirements of the programmes, and suitable participants are enrolled on the courses.

Attendance rates are extremely high. Admission and attendance records are thorough and accurate, and any absence is rare and followed up promptly.

Feedback from participants that is elicited at the end of a course results in improvements in the next course. Opportunities are missed to obtain early participant feedback that can lead to immediate improvements and changes for the benefit of the current participants.

8.3 Action-planning is inconsistent across the provision and is not systematically followed through to maximise continuous quality improvement.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

Course management is devolved to specialist course managers, who are responsible for all aspects of their own course. Classes are timetabled effectively in suitable locations. Course content is excellent and delivered by globally acclaimed experts in their field.

Participants travel from a range of countries to learn at RBG Kew and benefit from the expertise of specialists in the field.

There is a good mixture of lecturing input to give an overview, together with practical, hands-on group work with discussion and exchange of opinions. Regular assessment takes place as part of the practical exercises, with feedback to participants. Quizzes and final tests also enable tutors and course managers to monitor understanding and evaluate learning. Participants have access to trainers outside course time, and they commented on how helpful and supportive this is. As a result, participants are able to develop their knowledge and skills and make excellent progress.

Participants confirmed that they are stretched and challenged and are able to greatly expand their knowledge. The courses are specifically designed for botanists, conservationists and scientists working in specialist fields and are very effective in meeting participants' needs.

11.3 Although course managers observe teaching, formal lesson observations have not been documented. Training staff are specialists from different departments and their teaching input is not recognised in their appraisals.

There is currently no budget to provide CPD for trainers to develop teaching skills and qualifications.

Participants benefit from the huge range of resources available at RBG Kew, including libraries and research facilities, as well as the plant and seed collections. As a result, participants develop the necessary knowledge and skills to perform more effectively in their jobs or research.

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Pre-arrival information is comprehensive and includes information helpful to international participants before they travel and on arrival.

Participants receive an appropriate induction and a welcome brochure with further useful information. As a result, participants know what to expect, and this enables them to settle into their course quickly.

There are fair contractual terms and conditions, including a refund policy. Participants are notified of the complaints procedure and the opportunity to refer complaints to BAC if necessary.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Access to the premises is controlled securely through various measures, which ensure that there is a safe environment for work and study. Premises are maintained to a high standard.

Training rooms and laboratories are very well equipped, and participants have access to specialist facilities and world-class resources. Libraries are well stocked and there are excellent facilities for private study.

Health and safety are of a high priority and well covered during induction to ensure safety and to mitigate risk.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

High-quality teaching programmes, delivered by qualified specialists in the field, enable participants to develop high-level knowledge and skills.

Participants can access high-class resources, such as the Millennium Seed Bank and world-renowned plant collections.

The curriculum is specifically designed to meet the needs of participants.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

8.3 Action plans for improvement must be implemented and regularly reviewed.	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low
11.3 Lesson observations must be documented to identify strengths and areas for development and teaching skills must form part of the annual appraisal system.	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low
There must be consistent policies, procedures and systems that are well documented and implemented across the provision to ensure consistency.	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low
CPD must be provided to enable trainers to develop teaching skills.	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low

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

It is recommended that regular course manager meetings take place to agree and implement action plans for improvement, share best practice and strengthen consistent management across the provision.

The Provider is recommended to organise and deliver the requested Train the Trainers course for the short-course provision.

The Provider should consider eliciting feedback from participants early in the course to allow time for adjustments to be made to further improve the participant experience.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE