

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER:	Social Farms & Gardens
ADDRESS:	The GreenHouse Hereford Street Bristol BS3 4NA
HEAD OF PROVIDER:	Board of Trustees: Michael Chadney, Gemma Hooper, Mark Ian Fry, David John Drury, Michelle Howarth, Caroline Hutton, Malachy Dolan, Maria Hornsby and Sally Partridge
ACCREDITATION STATUS:	Accredited
DATE OF INSPECTION:	21 June & 9 September 2022
ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:	Continued accreditation, 23 March 2023

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

Social Farms & Gardens (the Provider) is a United Kingdom (UK) charity that supports the development of communities to farm, garden and grow together. The Provider was established in 2018 as a result of a merger

between two long-established membership-based charities, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, and Care Farming UK. The Provider offers a range of services, such as advocacy, campaigning, training and consultation to its members and people from community gardens, city farms and care farms.

Social Farms & Gardens has a diverse membership base across the UK, working across both urban and rural settings. The Provider has over 2,500 members, who are part of nature-based organisations, and most training is delivered to participants from these member organisations. Membership is free of charge and most training programmes are also free of charge. Training programmes are also open to non-member participants.

Social Farms & Gardens has a Head Office in Bedminster, Bristol. The Head Office is in a building called The GreenHouse, which is owned by the Provider. It is situated near the centre of Bristol and there are good public transport links and parking facilities for staff and participants. The Head Office premises are also used to deliver in-person training. Member organisations' premises are also used for the delivery of training programmes, depending on the type of training and expertise required.

There are three additional rented satellite office spaces in London, Wales and Belfast. The rented office spaces are used by regional staff as needed, since some of the Provider's staff also work from home.

Social Farms & Gardens' mission is to improve the health and well-being of individuals, communities and the environment through nature-based activities. The Provider aims to design and deliver innovative programmes that empower and enable communities to achieve their full potential, by providing practical support and training to its member organisations.

The voluntary Board of Trustees has nine members, who have overall responsibility for controlling the work, management and administration of the Provider. The Trustees are supported by a full-time Training and Development Manager. The Training and Development Manager manages the training provision for England and is supported by four full- and part-time Regional Managers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Additional part-time roles are a Finance Manager, a Finance Administrator, a Senior Administrator, two regional Administration Managers for Scotland and Wales, and a Marketing and Communications Co-ordinator. The Provider also has ten part-time trainers, all of whom are also project officers and advisers, reporting to the Regional Managers.

Since the previous inspection, some Trustees have left the Board, and therefore there have been some changes to the management structure and role titles and responsibilities of staff within the Provider. The Provider has also recommenced in-person training for some of its programmes.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Provider offers short, non-accredited, nature-based training programmes in the UK. Programmes are delivered in person and online. Online training programmes have been offered since 2020. Examples of in-person training range from short courses for established garden suppliers to longer courses for government initiatives.

Programmes that are longer in duration include the Gardeniser Pro Online training course, the first of which commenced in October 2020 and is ten weeks in duration. This training programme is for key co-ordinators working in community-focused farms and gardens. Once this training is completed, participants can take an optional online assessment to obtain the Gardeniser Pro Licence on the Gardeniser website, which is run by a consortium of partners, one of which is the Provider. Successful completion of the whole Gardeniser Pro training course, inclusive of the online training programme and internship, gains a total of 7.5 points in the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which may be used towards completing European qualifications.

The Provider also delivers short, live, monthly webinars to its members to support the different environments of their industries. These include a range of subjects that allow members to share experiences about the work they are doing. In addition, the Provider has also introduced specific regional training programmes in Wales and Scotland, as well as the Working with People Living with Dementia and the Growing Teachers programmes.

At the time of inspection, 213 participants were enrolled across five part time online courses. One of these courses, the Working with People Living with Dementia online programme was being delivered, 24 male and female participants were enrolled, with the majority of participants being female. All participants were over the age of 18 and from the UK.

Participants are enrolled on a continuous enrolment basis. There are no formal entry requirements for any of the Provider's training programmes. However, the Provider recommends that participants should have acquired English at Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Selected training programmes also require participants to have experience within a certain subject area, for example working in a community garden.

All training programmes are only open to applicants over the age of 18. In-person training programmes are only open to UK applicants and online training programmes are open to UK and European applicants.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was conducted by one inspector over two half-days. One half-day was conducted onsite and the other online. Meetings were held with the Training and Development Manager and feedback was received from participants. Training sessions were observed, and a tour of the Head Office premises was carried out. The inspector scrutinised various electronic documentation. The Provider co-operated well with the inspector throughout the inspection.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	24–25 November 2020

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

Since the previous inspection, some members of the Board of Trustees have left the Board and there are now nine trustees.

The Membership Co-ordinator also left in May 2020 and will not be replaced. This role and its responsibilities are now being undertaken by the Training and Development Manager.

New programmes include specific regional training programmes, for example the online Resilient Green Spaces project in Wales and the online Working with People Living With Dementia and the Growing Teachers programmes.

2. Response to action points in last report

No actions were identified in the previous inspection report.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The Provider is recommended to have a separate organisational structure for the training provision that includes the management and reporting lines.

The Provider has a revised organisational chart in place to reflect recent changes to the management structure. The training provision, management and lines of reporting are clearly stated.

It is recommended that the radicalisation and extremism risk assessment is reviewed and updated.

The radicalisation and extremism risk assessment is scheduled to be reviewed annually. The most recent risk assessment was completed in September 2022.

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

The Provider's staff are experienced in delivering training programmes and have been doing so for over 40 years. As a result, the management, staffing and administration are effective for the type of provider and nature of the provision.

The staff structure is clearly stated in the Provider's organisational chart, and all staff have clear and sufficiently detailed job descriptions that clearly outline their responsibilities.

The Provider has an appropriate number of hard-copy and electronic management and administration systems in place. All required administrative and quality assurance documentation is stored in the systems and can be monitored effectively. As a result, the systems appropriately support the effective management and administration of the provision.

Communications are good. Well-documented, regular meetings and associated activities across all levels of staff ensure there are clear channels of communication between management and staff, including those

working at the Head Office premises and remotely. Consequently, all staff are aware of the Provider's priorities.

Administration is effective for staff and participants, and the Provider's team of managers provides support as needed. Administrative duties are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced staff who understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying these out, ensuring the effective day-to-day and long-term running of the Provider.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff. Most part-time staff have been working with the Provider for several years and are highly reputable practitioners within the industry. The Training and Development Manager verifies the experience and qualifications of staff and trainers prior to issuing employment contracts to ensure a fair recruitment process and to maintain accurate records.

The Provider uses online platforms for publicity purposes. The website is up to date and informative regarding what the Provider aims to do, what it can offer its members and details of its training programmes. The Digital Content Coordinator is responsible for maintaining all online content and works closely with the Training and Development Manager to ensure this is managed effectively.

Participant recruitment is undertaken effectively. The Training and Development Manager and Regional Managers review all applications to ensure that participants are placed on appropriate courses for their age group, and subject and learning needs. This process ensures the recruitment of participants is a high priority.

Participant attendance is recorded daily and at every session. Although unauthorised absences are rare, if these happen, they are promptly followed up by the Senior Administrator. This process is supported by an attendance and punctuation policy to ensure accurate records are maintained.

The Provider's business plan is used as a tool to monitor the Provider's performance for all aspects of the organisation, including staff and participant feedback. The training provision is also regularly reviewed by the Board of Trustees. The Training and Development Manager produces an evaluative report after the delivery of every programme, including an action plan for the next cohort. The report includes participant and trainer feedback and the outcomes of training session observations. Although training observations are clearly scheduled and monitored by the Training and Development Manager, not all observations have a written record of the outcomes.

Additional evaluation reports are also compiled to be sent to funders. As a result, programme evaluative reporting is ongoing. The various reports feed into the annual business plan to aid continuous improvements, and the evaluation reports and the business plan also include action plans.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

Teaching, learning and assessment are highly effective. The Provider is strongly committed to ensuring that participants receive a high quality of training, and participants' feedback about the training is very positive.

The Provider uses ongoing feedback from trainers and participants to ensure training programmes are designed in ways that support all participants and member organisations to succeed.

Planning of all training programmes is of a good standard. All learning resources are internally standardised and external quality assured by the Training and Development Manager and Regional Managers to ensure consistency. A tour of the premises, scrutiny of training resources and observations of training sessions confirmed this to be the case.

Trainers are recruited based on their level of subject knowledge, training experience and communication skills. All training staff are required to update their Curricula Vitae (CV) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records annually. This facilitates the effective allocation of trainers to the programmes.

Trainers are highly enthusiastic regarding maintaining their own CPD. This is achieved through their professional employment in the industry, as well as through updating their own skills and qualifications in their specialist subject areas. Trainers are also supported by the Provider regarding any mandatory training requirements, such as in safeguarding.

Trainers are very responsive to participants' needs and are very aware of being inclusive. They continuously check participants' understanding during and after the training sessions.

The progress goals of participants vary across programmes depending on the programme's duration, which ranges from a few hours to several weeks. Programmes that last several weeks include weekly review sessions and opportunities for the trainers to review any portfolio evidence produced by participants, where applicable.

Feedback is given to individual participants on a regular basis, depending on the duration of the specific training programme and method of delivery. Feedback is developmental and tailored to meet the participants' specific needs.

All participants have access to a course adviser, who is also a trainer, and who provides support outside the scheduled programme delivery times.

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

☒ Met

☐ Partially Met

☐ Not Met

Comments

Participants receive welfare support that is appropriate to their age, background, and circumstances. Once enrolled, participants have regular contact with their trainer, who is also their adviser regarding welfare concerns.

There is a fair and transparent enrolment procedure for all in-person and online training programmes. Participants are provided with clear contractual terms and conditions that are signed and dated, inclusive of an appropriate refund policy.

Participants are provided with appropriate information on opportunities for participation at events and other leisure activities that may be of interest. Although there is no formal social programme in place, the Provider encourages appropriate social activities outside training sessions to sustain good working relationships between staff and participants.

There are effective arrangements in place to protect participants from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. The arrangements are supported by an appropriate policy that is reviewed annually.

Participants have access to a fair complaints' procedure, of which they are informed at induction. The Provider's complaints policy is accessible via its website.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

☒ Met

☐ Partially Met

☐ Not Met

Comments

The Provider has secure tenure of its Head Office premises, known as The GreenHouse. Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.

The GreenHouse is a large and modern building. It is maintained in a good state of repair, decoration and cleanliness. The premises and associated workspaces and teaching areas are clean and appropriate in size for the number of participants and the training programmes offered.

There is good heating and ventilation in all rooms.

Staff and participants have good access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) so that they can carry out private work and study as required. There are also good outdoor facilities for learning and for relaxation and private learning spaces. Consequently, the premises provide a good and creative learning environment.

Administrative offices are adequate in size and are resourced for the effective administration of the Provider.

4.5 Online, Distance and Blended Learning (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met ☐ NA

Comments

The Training and Development Manager has overall responsibility for the management of the online training programmes and is supported by a team of Regional Managers and the Senior Administrator. The same systems and processes are in place for online programmes as are in place for in-person programmes.

The Senior Administrator oversees all programme registrations and liaises with the Training and Development Manager and Project Officers to confirm attendance lists for each online training course and individual training session. Each online training session has a minimum of two trainers. This allows one trainer to engage with the online delivery and the other to contact any absent participants. This also allows one trainer to monitor how the participants are interacting and responding, and to monitor the communication systems, such as the chat facility.

The Provider has a sufficient number of trainers who can be deployed to deliver its online training programmes. All staff involved in training are suitably qualified and experienced within their field of expertise. They have also recently undertaken appropriate training using the Provider's online delivery application. This ensures that the training programmes are delivered to a good standard. Trainers also experienced in pastoral support.

The staff aim for the online courses to mirror in-person delivery as much as possible.

All training programmes have clear delivery plans in place that accurately reflect the course objectives and intended learning outcomes. These are clearly documented and sufficiently detailed. The Training and Development Manager works closely with the trainers to standardise the online programme content. A range of methods ensures that the participants receive a varied and interactive learning experience.

Trainers are experienced in the in-person delivery of the Provider's courses and have received appropriate training in the use of the online applications used for delivery. All staff, including the online trainers, receive an annual appraisal from the Training and Development Manager. This is an appropriate formal and documented process that can also identify any technical support needs.

The participant enrolment process is sufficiently detailed and clearly documented. Initial communications with participants clearly outline the level of digital literacy required for any training programme. In addition, participants are required to test their technical devices prior to the start date of any courses and are appropriately supported by administrative and technical support staff as needed.

The Provider has effective systems in place to ensure participants are well informed and supported regarding the required study methods for its online courses. All participants receive a standardised induction at the start of their programme, and this is supported by a programme handbook. Participants are supported by an administrator, adviser, trainers, and a technician throughout their online courses. This approach ensures that participants are well prepared to undertake their chosen programme.

The Provider is using a reputable online application to deliver its training programmes. The Provider is registered as a business user with the application and the Training and Development Manager leads on the scheduling of the online training sessions. All staff involved in the administration and delivery of the online training courses have sufficient knowledge to provide the necessary technical support to participants. There is also an experienced Information Technology (IT) technician who can be contacted both during and outside the hours of the formal programme delivery.

4.6 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

☒ Yes ☐ No

STRENGTHS

The Provider employs and maintains a team of highly experienced and knowledgeable staff.

The quality of the Provider's staff, and teaching resources, has resulted in high levels of participant satisfaction.

The programmes include well-balanced subject-specialist and practical, work-based experiences.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

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

It is recommended that all observations of training sessions are formally documented.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE
