

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER: International School of Communication

ADDRESS: 13 Grosvenor Place
London
SW1X 7HH

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Ms Jennifer Hardie

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 11 October 2018

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation 31 January 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

The International School of Communication (ISOC/the Provider) provides short courses in management and communications skills, including public speaking, media training and public relations. ISOC is the trading name of Pinnacle Public Relations (Pinnacle PR) Limited, established in 2003 as a specialist international public relations training organisation. Pinnacle PR is a private limited company whose two directors are joint shareholders. One director is based at the ISOC school in Dubai, whilst the other director, who acts as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) splits her time between the Dubai and London offices. The CEO has direct responsibility for the London office and spends one to two weeks a month working there. She is supported by an administrator.

ISOC, in London, is run by the CEO, who is supported by a team of training administrators. This team works flexibly to organise the courses between the two locations according to the number of participants applying for the course and the levels of expertise required. BAC accreditation applies only to the London site and courses run in London.

ISOC aims to provide individuals with the skills and training that can be applied directly to tasks in the workplace, as well as to directly help employers raise team performance. As well as running short courses ISOC also supports companies with a range of advisory, consulting and facilitation services in areas beyond training where it states it can add value in raising capacity and effectiveness. These services are not accredited by BAC.

2. Brief description of the current provision

ISOC runs over 50 open courses for public relations (PR) and communication professionals. Its range of short open courses are aimed at anyone in these areas whose work requires excellent communication skills. ISOC also offers short bespoke courses tailored for specific clients, one-to-one consultancy for senior executives and Pearson Edexcel Level 4 qualifications in Public Relations to specific clients if requested. The courses include Communications and Public Relations Strategy, Communication and PR Management, Media Relations, Event Management, Writing Skills, Social Media Communications and PR, Specialised Disciplines for PR Professionals, Government and Public Affairs and Crisis Communication. ISOC has also recently begun to develop more blended and online learning resources in subjects such as communications, public relations and digital marketing.

The delivery time for all short courses is between one and 10 days, although participants attend only the part of a course that they feel is relevant to them. Most attend for one or two days. Open courses are run in blocks that repeat every six to eight weeks. Participants on all courses are aged 18 or above, mostly above 30, and equally female and male.

In 2018 to date, ISOC registered 251 participants over a total of 691 training days in London. The total number of courses run to date in 2018 is 125 out of 173 scheduled. This compares to a similar number in 2017. Professionals from the United Kingdom (UK), number about a fifth of the total registered. Overseas participants include a declining number from Saudi Arabia and Africa and increasing numbers from various European countries, amounting to almost a third of total registrations. The total capacity of participants in London is about 400 per year.

The short course running at the time of the interim inspection was Creating Video for Corporate Communications and the Web, with one delegate attending on the day.

There are no specified educational pre-requisites for the courses.

Planned courses before spring 2019 include Public Speaking and Presentation Skills, Personal and Professional Development Skills, Workplace Communication Skills and Executive and Management Communication.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was conducted by one inspector over one day. Meetings were held with the Head of Training, the trainer and a participant. The inspector observed the training session. A tour of the premises was carried out and the inspector scrutinised various documentation. Requested documentation was readily available and the level of co-operation was excellent.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	15-16 September 2008
Supplementary	16 February 2010
Interim	1 March 2010
Re-accreditation	26-27 February 2013
Interim	19 November 2014
Re-accreditation	8-9 August 2016

PART B – JUDGMENTS 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

Since the last BAC inspection, there has been a significant change in administration and management staffing. The previous Head of Training has left and ISOC's directors are currently restructuring the London office to create a new team more responsive to their clients' requirements.

Since 2016 there has been a change in training demographics, with the numbers from the Middle East and Africa declining and most participants now coming from Europe to London for training. The reduction in the number of participants from outside Europe is mainly due to the introduction of stricter visa regulations. As a result, participants who traditionally came to London for training are now attending training in ISOC's Dubai centre.

The number of participants undertaking short courses at ISOC overall in London has increased since the last inspection.

2. Response to action points in last report

17.5 The Provider must develop and publish a suitable policy for dealing with abusive behaviour.

A new policy for dealing with abusive behaviour, including harassment and bullying, has been circulated to participants and is contained in the staff and participant handbooks. It covers a range of relevant situations and is fit for purpose.

19.2 The Provider must develop an appropriate complaints procedure for participants and disseminate it effectively to raise awareness.

A complaints policy and procedure has been written and is contained within material sent to participants and staff and participant handbooks. It is comprehensive, includes a clear stepped process and is fit for purpose.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

Include a staff disciplinary and grievance policy and procedure in the staff manual.

This has now been included and is in a suitable form to cover a variety of potential circumstances.

Implement a system to obtain written course feedback from the trainers as part of the provider's quality assurance mechanisms.

Feedback is now obtained after each programme through discussion between the director and the trainer. This results in a useful evaluation to aid future programme planning. The quality of the feedback varies according to the course and the CEO is currently working to standardise procedures. The course reports cover the suitability of the materials and their currency, the attendance of participants and timekeeping and future possible course requirements and suggestions.

Establish an appropriate system to ensure that participants are informed of any action taken as a result of their feedback.

Appropriate steps have been taken to provide more information to participants on what is done in response to their feedback, for example, proposals that were provided to participants on further course options in response to feedback received.

Put in place a formal self-evaluation process across the whole provision, making appropriate use of data from participants' feedback to judge performance and include written action plans.

The Provider has made considerable progress in developing its self-evaluation processes through providing a brief annual audit report which covers participant and trainer feedback, course developments and changes and any issues faced. Further appropriate changes to formalise and streamline the existing process will be implemented after proposed forthcoming management changes have been made. A management programme to update training administrators on the processes will be held in Dubai, in January 2019.

Develop a range of case studies, which are less focused on specific geographical areas and are more general, to ensure they are relevant for all the participants.

With the help of its trainers, the CEO has produced a range of relevant global case studies that can be used for all courses not related to specific geographical areas.

Consider offering, as appropriate, courses of longer duration so that there is more time for delegates to assimilate the information provided.

ISOC has acted promptly in response to participant feedback, for example, to provide additional course time if material on a particular course is too extensive to properly assimilate in the time available.

Edexcel accredited courses are no longer being taught in London and are being phased out; the Provider should review its website and course publicity material to ensure that this is reflected.

The website and printed course materials are constantly being updated to reflect the current situation and ensure course information is both topical and relevant.

Fully implement formal recorded training observations and include specific questions in the template to check that participants are engaged and acquiring new skills and knowledge.

Changes are being planned to the observation template to include the quality of interaction with participants.

Develop written detailed guidelines on health and safety and place these in all training rooms to ensure trainers deliver the briefing systematically.

An attractively presented guidance sheet on health and safety has been produced and is effectively communicated. It is fit for purpose.

The Provider has access to trained fire marshals and first aiders employed by the main lessor. However, the Provider should also have internal staff trained.

The recently-appointed administrator has just obtained a first aid qualification and is booked on fire marshal training at the end of October 2018.

Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) has been carried out by the main lessor but it is not up-to-date. This should be completed.

PAT testing has been carried out in 2017 and 2018.

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

Although accreditation only applies to ISOC's London office, management and administration are closely connected between the two offices in London and Dubai. ISOC recently appointed a full-time graphic designer in Dubai who effectively oversees website developments in both centres. Administrators in London and Dubai flexibly share course duties.

Communication is excellent and the new administrator is very well supported by the owners.

The size of the administrative team in London is being increased to facilitate further course expansion. The changes in staffing are clearly having a positive impact on the London centre's operational efficiency and cost effectiveness

Policies have been reviewed and new harassment and complaints policies, including the BAC's complaints policy, have been effectively introduced. Administrative and training staff do not sign to confirm they have read and understood the employees' handbook and other material after their induction to help ensure full compliance with ISOC's policies.

Data collection is increasingly being streamlined so that course administration, management and evaluation are moving to a totally online platform and this has resulted in better efficiency overall.

Publicity material, including the website and leaflets are constantly updated, assisted by the recent appointment of a full-time graphic designer based in Dubai. This has increased the quality, functionality and appearance of the website.

Mechanisms to obtain feedback from participants and course trainers have been streamlined since the last inspection and are excellent. Feedback is now shared in more detail with participants. The CEO now discusses each course after completion with trainers, followed up by e-mails. Each course is reviewed every six months and all permanent staff have formal performance reviews increasing their motivation.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

Courses are planned in thematic blocks. The blocks are repeated every few weeks, allowing participants to be flexible about their course choices, related to the time they have available and their job and career needs.

A suitable pre-course questionnaire is sent to students to obtain useful information. However, the resulting information is not fully utilised by trainers to tailor their delivery to meet the participants' needs.

There is a robust process for recruiting trainers. This includes a mock training delivery and feedback provided to the prospective trainer. There is a guidance manual provided for the trainers to ensure

consistency in the delivery of courses. As a result, trainers are very experienced and suitable for the courses they are delivering.

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The participant on the current course expressed a high level of satisfaction with the arrangements that were made for him. He received good information prior to arrival to help him settle quickly into his course.

Participants' information has been updated to include the recently-introduced policies. Evidence of the flexible accommodation of disabled participants on courses was provided indicating the positive impact of flexible planning.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The accommodation and facilities are excellent and have been improved following participant feedback, for example, new black and white backdrops have been installed for camera shoots.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

Courses are very well planned, managed and administered. The directors, training administrators and trainers work closely together which helps courses run smoothly and facilitates future participant enrolment.

Training is of high quality and delivered by experienced experts, with an excellent impact on participants' course outcomes and satisfaction.

ICOS staff provide very good support for participants in a very convenient location in London.

Training materials and course information are of a high quality, and constantly updated.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low
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RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

It is recommended that the lesson observation template includes the quality of interaction with participants.

ISOC is recommended to consider incorporating a copy of the pre-course questionnaire for participants in course workbooks so that participants have an opportunity to recall, discuss and modify their original objectives and the results can be fully utilised by the trainers to tailor their courses appropriately.

It is recommended that administrative and training staff sign to confirm they have read and understood the employee handbook and other material after their induction to help ensure full compliance with ISOC policies.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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