

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER: Crown Agents Training and Professional Development

ADDRESS: Blue Fin Building
110 Southwark Street
London
SE1 0SU

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Ms Penny Gruber

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 25 April 2019

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

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

Crown Agents Training and Professional Development (the Provider) provides Continuing Professional Development (CPD) short courses to senior corporate participants. Its headquarters are in central London.

The Provider was founded in 1833 when the British government appointed the first Crown Agents. It became a public limited company, Crown Agents Limited (Ltd), in 1997 and is owned by a non-profit-making foundation, Crown Agents Foundation. The Director of the Provider reports to the Commercial Director of Trading of Crown Agents Ltd.

Crown Agents Training and Professional Development aims to harness individuals' potential to accelerate positive change in their organisations and play a greater role in their nation's progress.

There have been various changes since the last inspection. The Provider has relocated its premises, moving from Sutton in Surrey to modern premises in central London. Also, for the first time, residential courses are being offered. This currently involves one of the leadership courses, where participants spend six nights in a specialist institution in Roffey Park in Sussex. New course titles are added, amended or removed each year. Examples of 2019 new courses include the Agile Manager, Coaching and Mentoring for Success and Statistical Thinking and Data Analysis for Business Improvement. The number of staff has increased to support the expansion of the business overseas and the increase in the variety of courses offered.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Provider offers 75 different short courses in the United Kingdom (UK) and overseas in a range of areas, including leadership, governance, human resources, project management and evaluation, procurement and supply chain. The courses are either customised or standard courses and are targeted at senior corporate participants, mostly from government and multi-national corporations. They are delivered face to face on the premises or, at busy times, in three hotels nearby. On average, courses run for two weeks, although one-week and three-week courses are also delivered. A small minority of courses are externally endorsed or accredited.

BAC accreditation is for the UK provision only.

At the time of the inspection no courses were running. This year, up until the time of the inspection, 18 customised and nine standard courses had been delivered. Two courses are scheduled to start in mid-May. The maximum number of participants on a course is capped at 25.

Participants come from developing and emerging markets, with the vast majority from Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. They are mainly in their forties and on average there are slightly more male than female participants. There were no participants under the age of 18.

Dates for the delivery of the customised courses are agreed with the client. Off-the-shelf courses have published start dates throughout the year.

3. Inspection process

The interim inspection was conducted by one inspector over one day. Meetings were held with senior managers and a range of other staff representing different functions in the Provider. A tour of the premises was carried out. Documentation was scrutinised. All documentation requested was supplied in a timely manner and was easily accessible. The inspector had the full co-operation of all staff for the inspection.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Stage 2	18 March 2009
Stage 3	21 May 2009
Supplementary	18 May 2010
Interim	22 February 2011
Re-accreditation	16-17 May 2013
Interim	22 September 2015
Re-accreditation	7-8 March 2017
Supplementary	17 October 2017

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

The Provider has moved premises to a modern office block in central London, which is more convenient for participants.

A residential leadership course in Sussex is now offered, adding variety to the range of courses offered.

A pre-course activity has been introduced for each course. In addition to the pre-attendance task(s) set, delegates are surveyed to ascertain their learner profile, both generally and specific to the course learning objectives and content scope. The delegate responses provide the lead and other trainers with information to help them adapt the programme around session interest and relevance on current and targeted knowledge and skills.

New staff members, including a marketing executive and a bid executive, have been appointed to support the expanding business.

2. Response to actions points in last report

6.1 An appropriate policy on attendance and punctuality must be included in the Participant's Handbook.

Attendance and punctuality requirements are clearly included in the Participants' Handbook, so all participants know what is expected of them.

7.4 A page must be created on the website to report on the Provider's responses to participants' feedback.

The Provider has considered this action point and has decided that creating a page on the website would not be the most effective mechanism to report on responses to participants' feedback. This is because the vast majority of business communications are through account relationship managers and feedback and responses to the feedback are provided face-to-face to key clients. This is an effective mechanism to ensure that information about the Provider's responses to feedback are communicated to relevant stakeholders. Social media tools are not used to enhance this practice so that the responses are made more widely available.

11.5 The lesson plan must include information about the different learning needs of participants as well as appropriate timings for each stage of the lesson.

The lesson plan does not yet include information about the different learning needs of participants. Timings for each stage of the lesson are not yet provided consistently, so reducing the trainers' understanding of the lengths of the different stages and their suitability.

24.4 General guidance on health and safety and emergency information, for example, first-aiders and fire exits, must be made available to all participants in the Participants' Handbook, which could be added to the tablet computer participants are given at induction.

Information on health and safety is included in the Participants' Handbook, at induction and on the tablet given to each participant for the duration of the course, so participants are aware of what to do in an emergency situation.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that clear information about the level of English needed to successfully complete the course should be clearly stated on the website and in course descriptions seen by prospective participants.

A statement about the level of English required to successfully complete courses is now clearly provided in all course information, including the website, course outlines and the prospectus sent to clients. Consequently, participants are aware of the language requirements.

It is recommended that records of attendance should show when participants are late arriving for training sessions.

A system has been devised to indicate those participants who arrive late for sessions. This has not proved effective in identifying late arrival so that appropriate action can be taken. As a result, the system is being changed to ensure easy completion of information to reflect an accurate picture of lateness.

It is recommended that an appropriate policy for the acquisition of teaching and learning resources should be added to the Staff Handbook.

The Provider does not consider this appropriate, because all trainers bring their own resources. This is discussed at the point of commissioning the trainer to run a course. Furthermore, the Staff Handbook supports Crown Agents staff and not external trainers. For Crown Agents staff, learning and development needs are discussed as part of the annual appraisal process. This falls under the responsibility of the human resources department. Related information is in the Handbook and on a shared document system online. In line with company policy, any needs are discussed with line managers. This system works effectively to ensure that the provision of teaching and learning resources is appropriate.

It is recommended that the Provider considers sending the previous course scheme of work to prospective participants with details of the specialist trainers, which may attract more participants.

Schemes of work are not routinely sent to prospective participants as courses are mainly bespoke and change according to need. They are, however, sent to those who request it, so offering them a detailed understanding of a previous course. Profiles of the trainers are provided in the prospectus. This has received very positive feedback from the client relationship managers, who are better able to inform participants about the 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

The management structure is clearly defined and understood by stakeholders. Channels of communication between all staff in London and overseas is highly effective. This results in a shared understanding of the business and allows staff to take relevant actions in a timely manner.

Administrators are experienced and understand their specific roles, allowing them to carry out their duties effectively.

Staff performance is reviewed in an annual appraisal, with a six-monthly review. This supports staff members to achieve their goals. It also effectively supports individuals' development and improvements to the organisation.

The website and the prospectus provide detailed information of a high standard on the courses on offer. The Provider's location and premises are accurately depicted. Consequently, prospective clients and participants are able to make informed decisions.

Records of punctuality are not consistently accurate for all participants, so reducing an understanding of participant punctuality.

The Provider works closely with its overseas International Officers, who lead on the relationships with overseas clients. Staff from London visit them regularly to keep them up to date with developments and to monitor and evaluate their activity. This brings about changes in the provision and supports on-going success in the business.

Quality systems are good. Feedback is gained informally from participants on a daily basis, as well as in a formal end-of-course questionnaire. This data is collated and analysed, with action being taken, as necessary. This is effective and has brought about changes such as redesigning the lunch menu to include Ghanaian food and the move to central London, both of which were based on participant feedback. The measures in place support the continuing improvement of the provision.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

A suitably experienced and knowledgeable academic lead is supported by a Director of Studies for each course area. This is effective in maintaining high standards.

Bespoke courses are designed together with the client in-country, to ensure focused and appropriate participant knowledge and skills development. Standard courses undergo regular review, based on trainer and participant feedback. In this way, the Provider ensures the courses are suitable. A recent innovation in course delivery has been the regular inclusion of guest speakers and case study experts through an online learning platform. This has added variety and a depth to the courses and has enhanced the quality of the programmes.

The 60 trainers available to teach on courses are all established senior practitioners in their field. This is effective in providing quality courses. Consistency in delivery is supported by the sharing of course materials between trainers. The academic lead conducts training session observations of new trainers and guest speakers as part of a QA process, to ensure their suitability.

11.5 Lesson plans do not currently include information about the different learning needs of participants and do not consistently include appropriate timings for each stage of the lesson, so reducing trainers' understanding of the planning and delivery of the lessons

In order to contact trainers outside class time, a special e-mail address has been set up that allows participants to contact trainers at any time.

Courses lead to internal certificates. A minority of courses are endorsed or accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, SQA and the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). In these courses, where assessments are undertaken, course design is tailored to support success in the related assessment.

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

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

Comments

Participants receive detailed relevant information, in the delegate information pack, about the course and aspects of living and travelling in London prior to the start of their course. On arrival, they are given further information at induction, as well as in the delegate handbook. However, insufficient information is provided about the local area, so opportunities are missed to fully brief participants.

In the last year, a system has been established whereby each course has a learning community on social media which allows participants and trainers to communicate easily during and after the course. This has proved very successful.

During the course, participants have access to a programme of visits, with both a social and a professional focus. These include visits to places of interest in London such as the London Eye or the Shard. The Provider has a relationship with Newham Council, whose staff offer specialist visits and talks for the participants. This programme is effective in meeting needs and in supporting the development of the participants' knowledge and understanding in specific areas.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

At certain times, it is necessary for the Provider to rent external premises for training. Three local hotels, which are very close to the main premises, are used. These provide effective accommodation for the high numbers of participants when necessary.

Access to the premises is suitably secured through a security system with reads identity cards. The modern premises are in an excellent state of repair, decoration and cleanliness. Adequate signage allows staff and participants to know what to do in the case of an emergency. The Provider's reception is spacious and provides a suitable area in which to receive visitors. The large number of toilets available display high levels of cleanliness. Standards of ventilation are appropriate. Consequently, the premises provide an extremely comfortable working and learning environment.

A variety of different sized training rooms are available for the effective delivery of courses. The administrative offices are adequate in size and allow for effective administration. Participants and staff have facilities for the preparation and consumption of food, as well as for relaxation. Refreshments and snacks are available throughout the day for participants in this area. These facilities effectively meet the needs of staff and participants.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes

No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

Relationships with clients are successfully maintained by both London and in-country staff to support a quality business.

Courses on offer are highly effective in meeting participant needs.

Trainers are highly experienced and knowledgeable about their area of expertise offering high quality input.

The premises provide an excellent working and learning environment.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

11.5 Lesson plans must include information about the different learning needs of participants and must consistently include appropriate timings for each stage of the lesson to support a clear understanding of the planning and delivery of lessons.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
The Provider must review the system for noting punctuality to make it easier for staff to complete so that a consistently accurate record is maintained.	<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 social media tools are explored as a mechanism to enhance the current practice where client relationship managers provide responses to feedback in order to give participants the confidence that appropriate responses are made.

The Provider should consider reviewing the material that delegates receive at the start of their course to include information about the local area to order to brief participants more appropriately.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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