

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION:	The Fire Service College
ADDRESS:	London Road Moreton-in-Marsh Gloucestershire GL56 0RH
HEAD OF INSTITUTION:	Mr Darren Bance
ACCREDITATION STATUS:	Accredited
DATE OF INSPECTION:	5 June 2019
ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:	Continued accreditation 26 September 2019

1. Background to the institution

The Fire Service College (FSC/the Institution) was established in 1974 and operated within the Department for Communities and Local Government until 28 February 2013, when it became a limited company owned by Capita PLC. It offers a wide range of courses, specialising in fire and emergency response training. The Institution is located on a large site in Moreton-in-Marsh, in the Cotswolds.

FSC's vision is to build the world's best resilience training organisation. It aims to deliver and ensure common and consistent standards of leadership, command and technical training to the United Kingdom (UK) Fire and Rescue Service, emergency services and other safety critical organisations worldwide.

The FSC receives strategic support and direction from its parent company Capita. Capita provides oversight of aspects such as the financial and human resources operations. The Institution's senior leadership team consists of a Managing Director, who is supported by four directors. These are the Finance Director, Operations Director, Business Development Director and the Product and Quality Director. In addition, the Incident Ground and Facilities Manager, Financial Accountant, Senior Training Delivery Manager, Head of Customer Services, Shared Services Manager and the Head of Marketing provide support to the senior team. Capita has provided and continues to provide major reinvestment in the facilities at the Institution.

The FSC also works with a broad range of partners and awarding bodies so that its training reflects and supports current and developing operational guidance. The FSC is represented on a number of national forums under the guidance of the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC). These forums include the National Operational Effectiveness Working Group and the Command and Control Working Group.

Since the last inspection, there have been some staff changes including the recruitment of a new Business Development Director and the creation of a new role of Product and Quality Director. The Institution is undertaking a greater amount of private work, including for the military and police. Due to some international political challenges, for example in Africa, some work contracts have been lost and work is ongoing to rekindle and develop these relationships.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Institution offers a wide range of courses with a focus on fire and emergency response training. It delivers training provision for clients in both the commercial and public sectors. Some of the courses are also customised to meet specific client requirements.

FSC's courses cover areas ranging from Firefighter Foundation Development, Fire Service Operations, Incident Command, Hazardous Materials, Prevention and Protection, Industrial and Workplace Safety and other learning and development courses, with many being accredited by awarding bodies, such as Skills for Justice, Industry Qualifications (IQ), Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) and International Organisation for Industrial Emergency Response and Fire Hazard Management (JOIFF). Courses range from level 3 to level 7 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework. Some of the FSC's main courses include Instructor programmes such as Breathing Apparatus Instructor, Fire Behaviour Training Instructor, Hazardous Materials Instructor, Road Traffic Instructor and Tactical Ventilation Instructor. The provision for international students includes bespoke courses of up to two years' duration. These are delivered mainly to clients from the Middle East.

Incident Command courses range from the intermediate to strategic level, as well as multi-agency and national inter-agency liaison courses. Hazardous Material courses include first responder and advisor courses and fire safety courses cover subjects such as engineering principles, fire risk assessment and sprinklers.

The new Operational Firefighter Level 3 Apprenticeship is a two-year programme that is directly linked to the Operational Firefighter Apprentice Standard technical knowledge, skills and behaviours. It also includes the FSC's Firefighter Foundation Development Programme.

On the day of the inspection, there were 108 full-time students onsite at the Institution. The majority of students were from the UK. Other countries represented include Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Nigeria. All the students are over the age of 18. Students are booked on courses on a continuous enrolment basis throughout the year.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over one day. Meetings were held with a number of staff, including the four directors, the Training Delivery Manager, the Training Quality Assurance Manager, the Learning and Development Manager, the Head of Marketing, the Senior Marketing Executive, the Head of Customer Services and the Quality Assurance officer. A briefing session relating to one of the training programmes taking place on-site was observed. Meetings also took place with a group of students and trainers. Various documentation was scrutinised. All the staff co-operated very well with the inspector.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	30-31 March 2009
Interim	16 June 2010
Re-accreditation	8-9 October 2013
Interim	17 June 2015
Re-accreditation	13-14 March 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

There have been some changes to the senior staff since the last inspection. The previous Business Development and Marketing Director has left and been replaced by a new director in the same role. The previous head of Learning and Development has been promoted to a newly established Product and Quality Director role with a position on the Institution's board. These appointments have resulted in an increased focus on the Institution's future growth. This includes working more closely with other Capita owned companies to leverage their products and take part in wider divisional bids for work, developing the product portfolio to include a blended approach to training delivery and expanding into other sectors, such as the military and energy and utilities.

With regard to the provision, the Institution is introducing apprenticeship programmes for fire fighters, as a result of which it will be able to access government levies to help with funding this development. An example of this is the new two-year Operational Firefighter Level 3 Apprenticeship that has been developed in collaboration with another Capita company.

Increased delivery of training is taking place off-site particularly in-company training internationally. The Institution is considering the introduction of blended learning approaches to its programmes making greater use of simulation software. In addition, a new learning management system is under development.

Capita has recently signed a large fire and rescue service contract with the Ministry of Defence to modernise and support improvement to the operational effectiveness of the Ministry of Defence's fire and rescue service. The contract will involve training provision and will lead to an increasing investment in the Institution's facilities and premises with the building of new incident ground rigs, a new fire station and a new student accommodation block.

2. Response to actions points in last report

There were no action points in the last report.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The Institution should consider including a section, which sets out any pre-course skills requirements, in the course planning template.

The Training Design Brief Specification is a template that sets out the key elements of any new course development. It includes learning objectives, development stages and how the materials and assessments are quality assured as well as a section on the course entry requirements that includes physical and academic requirements. As a result, the design and planning of any course takes into account any prerequisites to ensure that the content aligns appropriately with these.

The Institution should establish appropriate formal procedures for ensuring the integrity of the assessment, which is undertaken by students at their workplace.

The assessments undertaken in the workplace are based on assignments. Students are required to sign a declaration stating that their assignments are their own work. The assessors, who normally mark assignments for the students for the entirety of a course, also check this and should be able to identify any lack of integrity. The FCS has also introduced appropriate plagiarism software and this is in the process of being rolled out for all the courses. Weaknesses in referencing have been picked up as a result of the use of this software and this information is passed to the assessors so that appropriate action can be taken. As a result, an improvement in referencing has been noted.

It is recommended that the Institution strengthens the external verification of student assessment for the non-accredited course provision.

There is appropriate external input into the assessments for the non-accredited courses to ensure their integrity and appropriateness. Where these courses are offered to specific clients, quarterly reviews, that include the assessments, are undertaken with the customer. Other external input is obtained from stakeholders such as the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the Institution of Fire Engineers for whom the FSC is a recommended training provider. These bodies visit the Institution regularly and check the assessment processes. In addition, the assessments are subject to external standardisation through a number of means, including the use of associate trainers and the audits carried out by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). These methods of external verification are not specifically set out in the policy on assessments and qualifications to ensure their systematic use.

The Institution should review the detail of the arrangements to record students' achievements in meeting learning outcomes.

Details of the students' achievement of learning outcomes and successful completion of their course is recorded in the Learner Performance Report (LPR). The LPR also includes the results of any pre-course assessment, an overall performance review for the learner as well as any future training and development recommendations and how the learner can achieve these.

The Institution should add an international section to its website, to facilitate a greater awareness of the Institution environment and the specific arrangements made for international students.

The website includes a section with specific information for overseas students and how their needs will be met including cultural, religious and dietary requirements. The section is available to view in Arabic. There is also a specifically tailored prospectus for international students. Additional relevant information about living in the UK is provided to international students, as required, including through the students' employers where the course is booked through them.

The Institution should provide information about BAC's complaints procedure in a location more visible to the students such as the learning portal.

There is detailed information about BAC's complaints procedure on the Institution's website, which is suitably visible to students. This includes a link to up-to-date contact information for BAC. The address shown at the bottom of the complaints information is out of date. The procedure is not specifically communicated to the students as part of their induction to ensure that they are fully aware of its existence.

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

There are good channels of communication between the management and the staff. These include Monday morning briefings, all staff meetings and regular communications through which the senior management team informs all staff about staff changes, new business developments, financial information, operational matters and progress against strategic goals. As a result, the staff are well informed about the Institution's priorities and progress against these.

The Institution has established a set of strategic objectives for 2019 and these have been refined and adapted in line with the progress made against them. The objectives have been used to set individual goals for staff as part of their performance appraisals. In addition to the formal appraisal meetings, staff have regular one-to-one meetings with their line managers. The results of the robust appraisal process are captured electronically in a

useful database that includes personal objectives and accountabilities, key performance indicators, judgments on performance against objectives, jobholders' comments about their performance and an overall performance score against specific criteria. The records also include a development plan that is agreed between the staff member and their manager. The process is currently being rolled out to all the staff. Staff say that they find the experience motivational and that they have had access to appropriate training to further develop their skills and knowledge. Inspection findings confirm this view.

The promotional material, including the website, provides an accurate picture of the Institution and its facilities and services. With regard to the website, there are expiry dates for some information and information that needs to be updated is highlighted automatically. In addition, staff will let the marketing team know of any required changes. Sign-off procedures are in place to ensure continuing accuracy and alignment between different elements of the material.

Action planning is effective. Useful feedback is obtained from the staff through a survey that includes comments regarding recognition for the work they have done and the extent to which they feel inspired, motivated and valued. The results of the survey are communicated to the staff through the regular staff briefings. The briefing includes areas identified for improvement and future actions. It also includes information about what has been done to respond to the feedback. The quality management system includes a quality management review process of the previous year's activity. This leads to actions with clear timescales and allocated responsibilities to ensure effective follow up.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

The courses are well planned and designed to meet the students' needs very well. From May 2017, FSC has introduced the use of simulation software that enables the students to see a building on fire and to comment and assess the appropriate action to take as the fire progresses. As a result, the students can see the impact of their decisions and capture the evidence of their learning and relate it to the real situations they face in their work and, therefore, make good progress.

There is a robust approach to the recruitment and upskilling of the tutors. Many tutors have worked in a fire service role before they join the Institution. The recruitment process includes an interview and rigorous security checks. Successful candidates undergo a thorough onboarding process, including a detailed health and safety induction. New tutors start by working closely with an experienced tutor and have access to additional training as required, some of which is financially supported by the Institution.

Tutors are asked to audit their skills against a skills matrix and to identify any training gaps. Additional training and any Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that is undertaken is logged on the matrix. Logs of CPD include comments on its impact on the quality of the tutor's work. This positive approach to CPD is underpinned by a clear policy and represents good practice. As a result, the tutors are well trained and qualified to carry out their roles effectively and to ensure that their knowledge and skills are up-to date and relevant. Associate tutors are subject to a robust process for completing and logging their continuing professional development. Tutors are regularly observed against specific criteria and receive useful feedback on their performance.

Lessons are well planned and follow detailed lesson plans with clear learning outcomes. As part of the lessons, the tutors check the students' previous learning by means of briefing sessions and effective questioning strategies. The tutors provide good reinforcement of what has been previously covered. Relationships between the tutors and the students are highly positive. The students are asked to declare if they have any special learning needs and reasonable adjustments are made accordingly. The students say that the training sessions are informative, well-structured and realistic and that they learn a lot in a short time. They say that the trainers are friendly and knowledgeable. Inspection findings confirm this view.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The students receive appropriate pastoral support to meet their needs. The reception staff are normally the first point of contact for the students, who are referred to the delegate support team for anything that the reception staff cannot deal with. They also have access to trained counsellors if required. Students receive appropriate information before arrival, including joining instructions that are clear and ensure that the students know what to expect when they arrive at the Institution.

There are effective arrangements in place to protect students from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. There is a clear policy relating to preventing radicalisation and extremism. Appropriate staff have been trained and a detailed risk assessment has been carried out.

There is an appropriate code of conduct for all learners. The code includes a formal staged process for dealing with any inappropriate behaviour. The students interviewed were aware of the code of conduct. In addition, the students receive a weekly performance record that includes information about their punctuality, conduct and teamwork as well as their practical and technical ability. Consequently, the students are aware of what is expected of them whilst at the Institution and what they need to do to improve.

International students receive tailored information, appropriate to their needs, both before and on arrival. The welcome pack that international students receive prior to arrival includes what to expect when studying and staying at the FSC, information about the local area and what to bring with them to the UK. It also includes what to expect on arriving in the UK and useful visa information. There is also an informative and helpful presentation on cultural awareness.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Institution is based on a large site that has good facilities to ensure the effective delivery of the courses, including the practical elements. The office space and meeting rooms are also fit for purpose. Toilet facilities are appropriate and maintained in a clean state and the building is appropriately heated and ventilated.

Health and safety have a high profile at the Institution. Information regarding health and safety is made available to staff and students through induction. New staff have a half-day workshop and are given a tour of the site. Regular updates, including on any incidents or near misses, are provided, including through staff meetings, and there are refresher courses on reporting any incidents. There is a checklist, that is completed by the tutors, to ensure that safety is maintained during training exercises.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

There is a strong emphasis on continuing improvement and growth with a focus on securing the successful future of the Institution.

There are highly effective and robust systems, including relating to staff recruitment, staff performance management and access to CPD to support the high quality of the staff.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

High Medium Low

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

FCS is recommended to expand the policy on assessments and qualifications so that it supports and strengthens the systems in place for the external verification of student assessment methods.

The Institution should up-date BAC's address shown at the bottom of the complaints information on the website and ensure that the complaints procedure is specifically communicated to all students at the start of their course.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE