

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION: Lavender International NDT Consultancy Services Ltd

ADDRESS: Unit 7
Penistone Station
Penistone
Sheffield
S36 6HP

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Mr Tim Armitt

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 25 June 2019

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation 26 September 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Lavender International NDT Consultancy Services Limited (Lavender International/the Institution) is an employee-owned business. It is a Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) training provider, offering specialist accredited courses and examination services for engineering-related industries. Its clients include major aerospace companies, oil and gas suppliers, the nuclear industry and engineering companies, based in the United Kingdom (UK) and overseas.

The Institution's headquarters and main training centre are located in Penistone, near Barnsley, South Yorkshire and a second centre is based in the Technology Centre at the Advanced Manufacturing Park in Rotherham, South Yorkshire.

Lavender International aims to make the world safer, through accredited NDT training and examinations that are ethically delivered.

The Institution was founded as a partnership in 1976. It has been set up as a limited company since 1984. In April 2015, the Institution became employee-owned, while retaining its limited company status. An employee-ownership trust (EOT) was established to look after the long-term benefits of all employees. A Board of Trustees, with employee and independent members, provides strategic direction for the institution. The Board of Directors manages the company through a management team. Since the last inspection, two directors have retired, and two new directors have been appointed in their place. The directors are supported by six departmental managers covering the technical and non-technical areas of the business.

The training centres are approved by the British Institute for Non-Destructive Testing (BINDT). The centres are also recognised by BINDT as Personnel Certification in Non-Destructive Testing (PCN) examination centres. In addition, the Institution is a BINDT Approved Outside Agency and is recognised by the UK National Aerospace NDT Board as a provider of training and examinations for aerospace companies operating in-house qualification and certification systems.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Institution offers a full programme of courses and re-certification examinations in various NDT disciplines throughout the year. There is an extensive range of some 50 short courses at three different levels, each between three and 15 days long.

Subjects offered include Magnetic Testing, Penetrant Testing, Radiography Testing, Radiation Safety, Eddy Current Testing, Ultrasonic Testing, Phased Array and Time of Flight Diffraction. The NDT Operator Apprenticeship is a Level 2 apprenticeship, typically achieved in 18 months. The NDT Engineering Technician Apprenticeship is a Level 3 apprenticeship, which is offered over 36 months. All short courses run on a regular basis and are delivered on a face-to-face basis using both classroom and practical tuition. Should employers require it, additional courses can be run at short notice if there is sufficient demand.

The Institution works closely with Skills Training UK to deliver two types of NDT apprenticeships. These have been developed by BINDT in co-operation with several employers in the NDT industry, in order to encourage engineering companies to take on new staff and to encourage school-leavers to embark on a career in NDT. A safeguarding policy has been developed to protect the very small minority of under 18 students.

With the exception of some apprentices, all students are over the age of 18 and the very large majority are male. All apprentices who attend for training are aged 16 or over. At the time of the inspection 30 students were present. The majority of students are from the UK. Other European Union countries represented include the Republic of Ireland.

The Institution supports, and has representation on, several BINDT committees including the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group, Certification Committee and various NDT working groups.

The Institution offers additional NDT training and examination services in Houston, Texas and has interests in Canada, Greece and South Africa. However, the British Accreditation Council (BAC) only accredits the UK provision.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over one day at the Institution's Penistone premises. Meetings took place with the Operations Director, Quality Manager, Director of Consultancy Services, two tutors and six students. One classroom teaching session was observed and there was a short tour of the buildings and teaching facilities. The Institution co-operated fully, was flexible and provided documentation as requested, either on paper or online. The Quality Manager was available at all times to answer questions and provide operational support for the inspection.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	19-20 May 2009
Interim	16 June 2010
Re-accreditation	22-23 April 2013
Interim	17 July 2015
Re-accreditation	30-31 May 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

Two directors have retired and two new directors have been appointed. The new directors are internal appointments providing continuity of management experience within the Institution.

Lavender International NDT Consultancy Services Ltd became an EOT shortly prior to the previous Inspection. The Institution has now fully developed the operation of an EOT ensuring all staff are aware of, and engaged in, the Institution and its operation.

The relationship with Barnsley College has ended, the apprenticeships are now being offered via Skills Training UK. Some 70 apprentices per year undertake NDT training with the Institution.

The Institution has closed its Australian branch, however this was not accredited by the BAC.

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

It is recommended that the College takes steps to ensure that all employees fully understand the roles and responsibilities of the employee ownership trust (EOT).

The Institution has developed a Guide to Employee Ownership which is given to all employees. This is supported by an Employee Council with employee representatives, a monthly newsletter, an annual Employee Ownership Day and quarterly staff meetings. Staff confirmed they felt well informed and fully understood the EOT structure of the Institution and how it operates.

The College should consider the appointment of an independent director, from outside the organisation, to the board of trustees.

The former Operations Director, now retired, has been appointed to the Board of Trustees to provide continuity. The Institution does not have an independent trustee from outside the Institution but is currently considering this.

The plans to introduce more formal employer questionnaires, in order to improve the quality of feedback from sponsoring organisations, should be fully implemented.

The Institution has now implemented an appropriate employer questionnaire to obtain feedback from the sponsoring employers. This is in addition to the feedback form used by students at the end of their course. The data collected is input to a management system to provide long term analyses. The Business Development team actively monitors all feedback as it arrives with a view to resolving any immediate issues. The results are also used at the Annual Management Review and in other forms to inform decision making.

It is recommended that the College introduces a peer observation scheme to facilitate the sharing of good practice across all the programmes and between the two training sites.

All teaching staff have a regular observation of their teaching by the Group Training Co-ordinator which forms part of their annual appraisal. There are no peer observations taking place due to lack of resources currently. However, the small size of the Institution, the close working relationship and communication channels between staff and the

annual appraisal observation ensure good practice is effectively shared. A formal peer observation scheme would, however, provide an opportunity for enhanced sharing of good practice.

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 Institution is effectively managed, the operation of the EOT being well understood by all employees. There is a clear management structure that is understood by all staff supported by suitable organisational structure diagrams.

Much of the day to day communications between staff takes place informally and is augmented by emails and a monthly newsletter. There are also quarterly staff meetings which are used as an opportunity to share information, review progress and discuss issues. An annual Management Review meeting where longer term strategies, actions and issues are discussed, is fully minuted and available to staff. These processes work well, all staff feeling well informed and engaged in the EOT processes within the Institution.

The Institution has a well-defined business services function, covering the administrative functions of quality, business development, administration and accounts. These provide effective support for the Institution and are understood by staff.

All staff are suitably qualified, those involved in teaching must meet the exacting regulations of, and be approved by, BINDT, the relevant regulatory body for the industry. All staff have an annual appraisal which is effective in reviewing of their performance and identifies development needs

The business services department manages the Institution's website and social media channels. These are constantly reviewed, kept up to date and amended as appropriate.

The Institute uses the BINDT application form for all applications. The Bookings Department uses these to assess the application. In case of doubt an application is referred to technical staff for scrutiny. This is a robust and suitable system. In practice the majority of students are sent to Lavender International by their employers who ensure they are suitably qualified to attend the training. The nature of the highly regulated NDT industry largely leads to students attending as part of a larger programme to enable them to work at a specific level within the industry. Attendance is formally monitored during both morning and afternoon sessions any absence being investigated and resolved.

Feedback is formally obtained from students at the end of each course as well as informally at the end of each day. Feedback from employers is obtained by a recently implemented employer feedback form. BINDT audits the Institution, the summary and outcomes for each audit providing a further feedback mechanism. Overall, stakeholders' feedback is suitably obtained and acted on.

The Institution's annual Management Review is used effectively to review its performance and to ensure it remains compliant with BINDT and other requirements.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

Academic management is effective, with a clear structure and clear lines of responsibility. The small size of the Institution, allied with annual teaching observation, leads to a consistent learning experience. The Institution does not have a peer teaching observation scheme which would provide enhancement and allow sharing of good practice between the tutors.

Courses are clearly structured to meet the qualification learning and skills outcomes.

All tutors are well qualified and have been approved by BINDT. Teaching strategies are varied and effective providing a stimulating environment for the students. Tutors use a suitable mixture of formal teaching, problem solving and individual tuition. Printed notes are issued along with any necessary regulatory documents and are effective in supporting student learning; this is appropriate. The Institution has a large selection of samples and NDT test equipment to ensure effective practical workshop teaching meet BINDT requirements.

Formative feedback is provided to the students continuously during each day, with the small group sizes allow this interactive approach to be effective. This also provides feedback to the tutor on the student's progress. This approach to formative feedback is effective and supports the student in achieving the necessary knowledge and skills to take the certification theory and practical examinations at the end of the course. Many students have previously studied at the institution and return for further study. This indicates a high level of student satisfaction with the teaching.

Administration of assessments is thorough, effective and is compliant with BINDT requirements.

Whilst there are no formal arrangements to provide careers advice, staff will use their experience to discuss opportunities. This is a suitable arrangement given the nature of the students.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Students indicate that they are well supported and informed prior to arrival at the Institution's premises, travel information being available on the institutions website. Whilst the Institution does not provide or recommend accommodation it provides access to a list of suitable local provision. All students receive an induction on arrival.

There is a designated student welfare officer plus online documents to support a diverse range of students and specific needs. All teaching staff have had mental health awareness training and are clear who to refer any issues to. These ensure student welfare issues can effectively be identified and managed. Students were clear on who to contact if they had concerns or issues. This provision is effective in meeting the needs of all students.

The development of apprenticeships in collaboration with Skills Training UK has led to the development of a comprehensive safeguarding policy for under 18s and other vulnerable adults. Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Apprentices are clear who to contact at the Institution if they do not feel safe and they would also feel comfortable contacting Skills Training UK who lead on the training. This is an effective approach.

The Institution has appropriate policies to ensure a non-threatening environment, compliance with Prevent and prevention of any form of abuse. An appropriate complaints procedure is available via the institution's website.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The premises are based in the former railway station buildings in Penistone. These have been appropriately adapted to provide clean and bright teaching, workshop, office and administrative areas.

There is a reception in the main building adjacent to the main entrance with a signing in book and appropriate health and safety notices. The receptionist is in an adjacent office opening onto the reception area. This layout ensures the receptionist can see all entrants to the building. Administrative functions are housed in well maintained and decorated offices in this building.

The teaching rooms are suitably sized, containing formal teaching facilities as well as demonstration equipment, test pieces and other reference material. All are well labelled with health and safety notices.

The workshops contain the necessary range of NDT equipment for use by students. These have health and safety warning notices appropriate to the nature of the particular workshop. Students indicated they were entirely happy with the premises and other arrangements. Students are required to sign a Provision of Safety document; specific workshop safety issues being covered during practical teaching. All visitors are provided with suitable health and safety advice upon arrival and are accompanied during their visit.

Examinations are taken in either in the classroom for theory, or in the workshops for practically based elements of examinations. The rooms are suitable for these purposes.

All staff have adequate office space for preparation of teaching materials and administrative purposes. In some cases, the offices are in other buildings immediately adjacent to the main building.

No catering or canteen facilities for staff or students are on site, it is judged there are adequate external facilities nearby. No storage facilities or social spaces are provided for students. These have not been found to be appropriate or necessary, this was confirmed by students.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The Institution has highly satisfied students as a result of effective and engaging teaching.

The Institution’s EOT structure is appropriate and helps engage highly committed staff.

Teaching is engaging and effective as evidenced by most students have previously studied at the Institution.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

High

Medium

Low

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

The Institution should consider the appointment of an independent director, from outside the organisation, to the board of trustees. This would ensure that the Institution has an alternative and wider view of its context and operations.

It is recommended that, when resources permit, the Institution introduces a peer observation scheme to further enhance the sharing of good practice across all the programmes and between the two training sites.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE