

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION:	The Gemmological Association of Great Britain
ADDRESS:	21 Ely Place London EC1N 6TD
HEAD OF INSTITUTION:	Mr Alan Hart
ACCREDITATION STATUS:	Accredited
DATE OF INSPECTION:	18 December 2019
ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:	Continued accreditation 26 March 2020

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

The Gemmological Association of Great Britain (Gem-A/the Institution) is a private limited company and a registered charity. The Institution offers accredited courses tailored towards both gemmology enthusiasts from the general public and those working in the jewellery industry.

The Institution's head office is located in a six-storey building close to Hatton Garden, which is the jewellery quarter, in central London. The building houses Gem-A's education department, teaching and laboratory facilities, a library, the membership arm which arranges conferences and events, senior management, finance and Gem-A Instruments.

The Institution's objectives are to advance the art and science of gemmology education and training. The Institution aims to establish and maintain appropriate standards of education and experience for those engaged in the profession of gemmology or studying gemmology and allied subjects. It also aims to undertake, supervise or encourage the education and training in all matters relevant to the advancement of gemmology.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is supported by the Head of Education and a Chief Operating Officer, both of whom have been appointed since the previous inspection. Governance is provided by a Board of Trustees. Academic oversight is provided by a Board of Examiners.

Established in 1908, Gem-A is the longest established provider of gemmology education in the world. Since the previous inspection, the Institution has taken the decision to no longer offer the Coloured Stone Grading Award at Level 3.

2. Brief description of the current provision

Gem-A offers a range of part-time courses from foundation level to level 6. The Office of Qualifications and Examinations (Ofqual) regulates four qualifications. These are the Level 2 Gem Basics Award, the Level 4 Foundation Certificate in Gemmology, the Level 5 Diamond Diploma and the Level 6 Gemmology Diploma. Courses focus on the properties of coloured gems and diamonds and each course includes both theory and practical elements.

One short online course allow students to learn the basics of gemmology at their own pace and there is an onsite laboratory class for students who want to improve their practical skills, for example in identifying and grading diamonds. The Gem Basics Award is currently only offered through open and distance learning. The Level 4 Foundation Certificate, Level 5 Diamond Diploma and Level 6 Gemmology Diploma courses are offered through onsite, face-to-face delivery at the London head office or through open and distance learning. The three to five-day laboratory classes, along with one day workshops, are held at the Institution in London.

There were 254 part-time students enrolled on courses at the time of the inspection. There were 59 students on Gem Basics Award, 94 students on the Foundation in Gemmology Certificate, 31 students on the Diamond Diploma and 70 students on the Diploma in Gemmology.

All students are aged 18 or over. The majority of students are female. The majority of students are from the United Kingdom (UK) and the remaining students come from countries in the European Union (EU), Asia, Africa as well as the United States of America.

Students enrolling for onsite foundation and diploma courses in London are recruited for September and February intakes each year. Recruitment for open and distance learning courses is at various published times throughout the year and it is printed in their annual prospectuses, as well as the website. Students can enrol on short laboratory courses on a range of published dates throughout the year.

Students are enrolled in line with published entry requirements for foundation and diploma courses. There are no entry requirements for the Gem Basics Award and enrolment is on demand at any time.

3. Inspection process

The inspection took place over one day, conducted by one inspector. Meetings were held with the CEO, the Head of Education and education administrators. Interviews were held with tutors and students and a class observation was carried out. A tour of the premises was undertaken. The Institution's online learning platform and a range of documentation were scrutinised. The Institution co-operated well with the whole inspection process.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	1-2 October 2009
Interim	14 December 2010
Re-accreditation	11-12 November 2013
Interim	9 December 2015
Re-accreditation	26-27 September 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

Since the previous inspection, a Chief Operating Officer has been recruited to support the CEO and provide oversight of key financial, compliance and operational matters. A new Head of Education was recruited to replace the outgoing manager in 2018. Both senior managers are highly experienced and appropriately qualified, strengthening the existing senior leadership team. Two new vocationally experienced and well-qualified tutors have been recruited to replace outgoing staff, since the last inspection.

The Gem-A Level 3 Coloured Stone Grading Award has now passed its planned regulated operational end date and is no longer being delivered. Senior leaders have recently carried out a systematic review of all qualifications to ensure the content and structure remain fit for purpose and fully meet the needs of students and the industry. Leaders and managers have planned an appropriately phased implementation of the review outcomes, including an update of all qualifications and learning materials, over the next two years, but this has not yet been completed.

2. Response to actions points in last report

20.3 Students must be advised of BAC's complaints procedure.

Managers have reviewed and updated the Institution's complaints policy which now includes clear reference to BAC's complaints procedure. A copy of the BAC procedure is also available to students through the online Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that Gem-A considers introducing a more formalised mechanism to feedback to students on the action taken as a result of their feedback. A possible method might be the introduction of information about this on notice boards.

Managers have introduced effective mechanisms to ensure that students are updated on the actions taken as a result of their feedback. For example, all students now have access to a clear summary announcement, posted on the Institution's VLE page, that provides details of the actions taken as a result of their feedback. Additional feedback response summaries are also posted on noticeboards in the London head office.

The Institution should consider a more consolidated approach to course annual monitoring and reporting, with the implementation of clear action plans.

Leaders and managers now undertake a more frequent and formal, analysis of key course and programme data to monitor performance over time. For example, the Head of Education carries out a trend analysis of examination performance and course registration data over the previous three years. Headline data is presented to senior leaders and the Board of Trustees with an oral update on key outcomes. Senior leaders recognise the need for further consolidation and clearer, more formal reporting and action planning to inform ongoing monitoring.

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's management structure is clearly defined. The CEO is well supported by an experienced senior leadership team, the members of which provide effective strategic and operational oversight. Trustees have considerable experience and expertise across the education and gemmology sectors. They provide effective support and challenge to senior leaders to ensure that ongoing business developments are effectively implemented and the standard and quality of education is maintained.

Publicity material is clear and up to date. The Institution's website and prospectus provide accurate information on entry requirements and course structure and content that helps prospective students to make informed choices about their studies.

Senior leaders frequently review key policies and procedures and ensure they are fit for purpose. The policy on student attendance is effectively implemented and well understood. Student attendance and punctuality is effectively recorded and monitored, and action taken where necessary to address any ongoing absences.

Managers use a variety of formal and informal systems to obtain feedback from key stakeholders. They review and act on feedback where necessary, to improve the quality of provision and the student experience. For example, managers have responded to student feedback by improving the clarity of information relating to student enquiries and key staff contacts.

Senior leaders analyse key course and programme data and use this information effectively in business planning. Leaders rightly recognise that a more consolidated, formal reporting and monitoring process would be useful to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken and inform ongoing quality improvement planning.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Academic management is effective. Students benefit from experienced vocational tutors who have extensive knowledge of the gemmology sector and good links with industry. Tutors use their experience to plan and deliver classes which effectively develop students' knowledge, skills and understanding of gemmology and the techniques and treatments used in the gem trade.

The Institution provides a broad range of opportunities for staff to engage in ongoing, subject-specific professional development. An impressive programme of events, including guest lecturers from industry experts, ensures that tutors remain up to date with sector developments. More senior staff act in useful mentoring and coaching roles for staff recruited more recently to the organisation, ensuring the new staff are confident and effective in their roles.

A broad range of academic resources support the development of students' applied practical skills. For example, students learn how to use a range of technical gem testing equipment which enable them to test and identify gem materials. Students also benefit from access to clear and well organised online learning materials through the Institution's VLE. Students make good use of online quizzes and tests to check their knowledge and understanding and to help prepare them to undertake formal examinations.

Students have access to detailed and informative course specifications for each qualification which help them to understand the requirements and content of their studies. There are appropriate procedures in place for the administration of theory examinations, as well as practical and project-based assessments. Examination guidance documents provide students with clear and detailed guidance on the process and conduct of assessments, grade boundaries and indicative marking schemes. Examination dates are published well in advance to all students. The Examination Board meets regularly to ensure assessment processes are valid and reliable.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Students have access to appropriate pastoral support where required. Senior leaders have put in place satisfactory arrangements to ensure that an appropriate level of support for students is maintained. However, the previous Student Welfare Support Officer recently left the organisation and managers are currently recruiting for their replacement.

The Institution has implemented a safeguarding policy which reflects the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. However, senior leaders recognise that ongoing staff training in this area is needed to ensure that staff and students remain up to date on current risks and how to keep themselves safe. Managers have not carried out a specific risk assessment in relation to radicalisation and extremism.

Students have appropriate access to recently updated, clear and relevant policies relating to appeals, malpractice and plagiarism.

Students benefit from access to a range of additional enrichment events in the area of gemmology to further develop their skills and knowledge of the sector. For example, monthly information evenings offer students the chance to meet with gem and mineral enthusiasts, and members of the jewellery trade, to learn more about new synthetic or treated stones on the market.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Students benefit from clean, well maintained and well-equipped premises which provide a comfortable environment for study.

Specialised teaching areas provide students with good access to practical testing equipment and resources they need to develop their applied gemmology skills. There are three teaching rooms for in-house training and to act as a hub for distance learning students worldwide.

The onsite library provides an impressive collection of gemmology texts which supports students' research skills and project work.

Staff have access to appropriate office and administration areas.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The Board of Trustees use their extensive and varied experience to provide effective support and challenge to the senior leadership team.

Students benefit from supportive tutors with extensive vocational expertise in the gemmology sector. They use their expertise to develop students’ gemmology knowledge and applied skills.

Tutors engage in a wide range of continual professional development activities to ensure they remain up to date with the latest developments in gemmology.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

The Institution must carry out a risk assessment which assesses where and how students or staff may be at risk of being drawn into terrorism and carry out appropriate staff training.

High Medium Low

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

Leaders and managers should fully implement the outcomes of the course review to ensure that course content and learning materials remain current and fit for purpose.

It is recommended that arrangements for annual course monitoring and review should be further enhanced and formalised to better evaluate the effectiveness of improvement actions undertaken and to inform ongoing action planning.

The replacement Student Welfare Support Officer should be recruited to ensure continuing levels of support for students and their welfare and pastoral needs.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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