



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER: New Beacon Group

ADDRESS: Stafford Education and Enterprise Park
Weston Road
Stafford
ST18 0BF

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Mr Paul Till

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 10 August 2020

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 1 October 2020

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

The New Beacon Group (NBG/the Provider) is a privately owned educational provider that was incorporated in the United Kingdom (UK) in August 2016. It is owned by a consortium of Chinese investors led by a Chairman, who is based in Beijing, China. NBG offer courses for participants who wish to enter UK universities.

NBG has a wide and diverse range of business interests, which include its local and international education and training operations delivered from its 46-acre campus in Stafford in the UK. The campus was purchased from Staffordshire University in November 2016.

The aim of NBG is to work closely with partners to deliver professional learning and development. NBG currently works under a contract with Northern Consortium UK (NCUK) to offer university preparation courses for international participants. NCUK is a consortium of UK universities, which, through successful completion of its qualifications, gives international participants guaranteed access to its programmes of study. Since September 2018, NBG has offered a programme for Chinese participants, who spend three months in the UK and study for NCUK's International Foundation Year (IFY).

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) has overall executive responsibility for operations and staffing. Responsibilities for academic affairs, programme development and quality enhancement are devolved to the Director of Programmes and Operations (DPO).

There is currently a Business Development Group that meets routinely to review the development of the campus. The recommendations made by this group are considered at a monthly NBG Board meeting. An Academic Committee reviews educational and programme developments and reports to the Business Development Group.

Following a recent internal restructure, the Provider has a COO and a DPO. These roles are based in the UK and provide a link between the Provider and the Chairman, the investors and the Chinese market.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Provider offers a range of programmes, on a short-course, credit-bearing basis, to Chinese participants who come to study on face-to-face modules over a three-month block on the campus. These modules include Business Studies, Economics and Mathematics. Participants also study English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to support their academic reading, writing, speaking and listening. Participants are recruited to NBG through a contracted education partner based in China. The courses are delivered under the brand name of NCUK.

In addition, since January 2020, the Provider has been approved to offer the NCUK pre-Masters programme (PMP) and is currently exploring potential delivery partners. The Provider is also an approved Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) centre. Other courses on offer include NBG's own programmes in Business Chinese Mandarin, Doing Business in China and Living and Working in China.

The advantage for participants studying on the IFY course is that, on successful completion, they are guaranteed a place on an appropriate undergraduate programme of study at one of the 16 partner universities of NCUK.

At the time of the inspection, there were 11 Chinese participants enrolled on the NCUK university preparation course, the majority of whom are female. Nearly all participants are aged over 18 years. Participants are enrolled at the start of the academic year and need to meet set entry requirements. However, no participants were present at the Provider during the inspection.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out over one day by one inspector making use of remote online communication methods. The inspector carried out discussions with the DPO and the Provider's Administration Manager. A wide range of electronic documentation was also scrutinised, as were photographs submitted of the premises. The Provider was very well prepared for the inspection and gave full cooperation to the inspector.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Stage 2	19 June 2018
Stage 3	9-10 August 2019

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements 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 changes at a senior management level in the UK since the last inspection. Following a recent internal restructure, the post of Chief Operating Officer (COO) has been created. The role has overall executive responsibility for operations and staffing and aims to provide a direct link between the Provider and the Chairman, the investors and the Chinese market.

With regard to the course provision, the Provider has, since January 2020, been approved to offer the NCUK pre-Masters programme (PMP) and is currently actively exploring potential delivery partners. In addition, since July 2019, NBG has been an approved Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) centre.

A Business Development Group has been formed, which meets routinely to review the development of the campus.

2. Response to actions points in last report

There were no actions points identified in the previous report.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that the website be utilised more effectively to fully promote the courses on offer.

The NBG website is currently being updated following a recent internal restructure. From a participant recruitment and marketing perspective, NCUK courses are promoted through their dedicated partner in China. A message on the education section of its website currently directs all prospective participants to the main NCUK website. However, at the time of the inspection, the current NCUK website still contained limited information and could be utilised more effectively to better promote the courses on offer.

It is recommended that the provider includes the BAC's complaints procedure in a readily accessible location for students.

Participants are advised about the BAC complaints procedure. Along with other key information relating to their programme of study, a web link to BAC's complaints procedure is included on NBG's internal student drive, which is accessible to all participants. It is also referenced in the student induction workshop, where participants are provided with a copy of the complaints procedure. However, it is not referred to in the student handbook or on the Provider's website, which would effectively highlight its availability.

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 Provider has a clear management structure, with well-defined roles and responsibilities that ensure that all members of staff understand their different roles and duties. This structure is appropriate for the size of the Provider and effectively supports the aims and objectives of the business. Communication is good and ensures that staff are aware of any operational issues within the Provider, and able to raise any concerns.

Senior leaders are well qualified and highly experienced, and fully understand their responsibilities. As a result, clear educational direction is provided and appropriate educational standards, financial planning and investment in staff, accommodation and resources are maintained.

Administrative support is good and effectively supports managers and teachers. The administration team is sufficient in number and meets the day-to-day needs of the Provider well. The senior administrator is highly experienced and works very closely with the senior managers to ensure the smooth running of the Provider.

An appropriate range of key performance data is collected and effectively analysed. As a result, the Provider is well managed and a wide range of well-developed policies are in place, regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness and appropriately implemented and disseminated to staff.

An appropriate range of policies and procedures for the recruitment and continued employment of staff is in place and is used effectively to ensure that staff are suitably qualified and experienced for their roles. Staff performance is regularly reviewed.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

Programme management and course development are highly effective. The DPO has extensive management and curriculum experience gained in UK universities and through working in China, and he provides clear and effective oversight of the curriculum. Courses and their delivery are regularly reviewed to ensure that these allow participants to develop the knowledge and skills that will be required to complete their assessments successfully. As a result, the curriculum offer is well planned and provides clear progression opportunities for further study within higher education.

The process for the recruitment of new trainers is well developed and ensures that they are appropriately qualified and experienced for their role. Most have experience of teaching in higher education institutions and some have extensive experience of teaching in the Far East and China. Consequently, trainers have a good understanding of the academic and support needs of the current Chinese participants.

Assessment is well planned and regular and includes a detailed schedule of assessments. Clear and constructive feedback is provided to participants. The monitoring of participants' performance is effective.

The Provider offers the NCUK International Foundation Year Course, which is examined externally by NCUK and is recognised as an international route into UK university study.

All NCUK's requirements regarding the administration and security of examinations and assessments are complied with.

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

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

Comments

The provision for pastoral care is good and effectively meets the needs of the number of participants enrolled at the Provider. The Administration Manager is responsible for the participants' welfare and is suitably trained and experienced. All participants are provided with a contact number for out-of-hours and emergency support, together with a comprehensive student handbook that details all available support. Safeguarding, together with arrangements to protect participants from the risks of radicalisation and extremism, are appropriate. Detailed policies are in place and implemented effectively. All new staff undertaking relevant training.

Detailed information, advice and guidance are provided before the participants leave China for the UK. On their arrival, a comprehensive induction ensures that they are very well prepared for their studies and for life in the local area.

Participants continue to be well supported throughout their stay in the UK, with further information and advice specific to international participants being readily available throughout their course of study. The provision of support is regularly reviewed to ensure that it takes into account current cultural and religious considerations.

An appropriate complaints policy is in place and is communicated to participants at the start of their course. Participants are also advised about the BAC complaints procedure during induction. Contractual conditions are fair and transparent.

Appropriate accommodation, together with a well-developed social programme, are available to participants.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Provider has secure tenure on its premises. The premises are situated on a large site that provides a good range of high-quality teaching facilities to ensure the effective delivery of courses. Security is good, with 24-hour security staff in attendance and barriers at the entrance of the site to prevent any unauthorised access.

The provision for health and safety is good, with appropriate fire-exit and other required signage in place. The premises are well maintained, and in a good state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.

Trainers and administrative staff have good access to an appropriate space to undertake their duties and to meet with participants when required. Appropriate facilities for conducting any required course assessments are available.

Participants have good access to suitable facilities and space for private study, including library and information technology resources. Provision for participants and staff to consume food and drink is good, with a number of areas provided for them to relax.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

A clear vision for the future development of the provision is in place, which is understood and effectively shared by the management and administrative teams.

The management team is supported by an effective administrative team that ensures the smooth running of the Provider for the benefit of participants and staff.

The trainers are highly qualified and experienced in higher education and their fields of expertise.

A comprehensive induction helps participants to settle quickly into their course and to adjust to living and studying in a foreign country.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

High Medium Low

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

It is recommended that the website be utilised more effectively to fully promote the courses on offer.

It is recommended that the Provider includes the BAC's complaints procedure in additional readily accessible locations for participants.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE