

External Examiner report for Higher Education programmes

Includes Higher Nationals and NQF 4-7 Short Courses

Administrative and programme details

Centre name

Centre number

Business to Business

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External Examiner name

AA no.

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Date of visit

Duration of visit

05/07/2010

7

hrs

For each programme covered by this report please give:

Title (give details of individual units if full programme not covered).	BTEC programme number:	Sector code:	Certification	
			Decision Y/N	Comments
PREPARING TO TEACH IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING SECTOR - LEVEL 3	EL4BPA	265	Y	Short Course
TEACHING IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE - CERTIFICATE LEVEL 4	EL4BPC	265	Y	Short Course
TEACHING IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE - DIPLOMA LEVEL 5	EL5BPD	265	Y	Short Course

Programmes run on a collaborative basis in other institutions

Title (or units covered). Give name of collaborative partner beneath the title of each programme.	BTEC programme number:	Sector code:	Certification	
			Decision Y/N	Comments

Authorisation (use email address):

Date:

07/07/2010

Summary

Areas of good practice

Identify any areas of good practice mentioned in other sections of this report, or from any other visits made this session.	Ref:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An excellent centre providing a very high standard for students in a very flexible way that models exemplary practice in support, assessment and management of PTTLS, CTLLS and DTLLS in a way that meets the needs of very different target groups on a 'rolling-programme'. Very high levels of student support provided by tutors/assessors with varied sources of support including email, on-line, telephone, observation and feedback and 1x1 tutorials as well as detailed feedback on assignments. Excellent learner-focus with very flexible approaches designed to meet the needs of each individual student throughout - identifying needs, supporting needs, forms of assessment and submission of completed work. Exemplary practice demonstrated through the development of ICT/website provision to support e-learning. Excellent continued support provided for students even after completion of qualifications through the provision of professional up-dating courses provided in-house and with the potential to record and make available as part of the Adobe Connect Pro provision. 	

Action points

Comment on progress made in relation to action points given in previous reports, indicating any that remain to be addressed. What procedures does the centre adopt for recording and responding to action points?	Ref:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent progress has been made on developing PTTLS, CTLLS and DTLLS with improvement of assessment activities, supporting learners and tracking/ logging paperwork. Especially commendable is the development that has been made of the flexible learning approach using Adobe Connect Pro - making extensive use of ICT for teaching and learning. The recommendation to become a part of a CETT has been followed through and this provides the opportunity to share good practice with a wider audience - especially increasing awareness of the more flexible and learner-centred approaches with the support of e-learning. 			
List any action points.	Ref:	Where appropriate, state who is responsible for carrying out actions.	Where appropriate, give dates by which action should be taken.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop the Adobe Connect Pro to provide a similar e-learning model to support the already extensive structure and support provided by tutors/assessors on the course 		Derek Allford	On-going

Recommendations

State any recommendations for comment which pertain to points/actions mentioned in other sections of this report, or from other visits made this session	Ref:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through contributions to the CETT there are opportunities to share this excellent practice with other organisations where the more flexible approach to more work-based learning is appropriate. Also through the CETT, or in association with Edexcel CPD/training provision or independently, to consider opportunities for share experiences in developing the e-learning in supporting flexible/blended learning. 	

Other comments

Mention any points you may wish to make that would not otherwise be covered in the report, including comments on administration, communication between centre and external examiner, access to material needed to carry out the job of external examiner and comments about how the centre appears to be meeting the expectations of the QAA Code of Practice and addressing the Academic Infrastructure. The programme specification expectation, in particular, should be addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication with the centre continues to be excellent and all possible resources required were provided over the duration of the visit with samples of student work, administrative paperwork and both staff and a telephone conference set up with a student. The course manager is particularly proactive in collecting and making available a range of up-to-date resources that reflect the current changes in the requirements for teaching and learning. This is particularly evident in the development of the B2B website - and the developing current version - for the Lifelong Learning Sector which makes it possible to share these resources with students. Using the flexible/distance-learning combined with e-learning approach all students have individual tutorials, telephone tutorials and fast-response email support, in addition to the observations of practice, negotiated around individual work-based practice rather than the previous blended learning which included the DTLLS taught programme. This enables students in diverse locations access the qualification to a timescale that reflects their work commitments e.g. one student is able to continue the course whilst posted abroad. Support is also easily accessible via the telephone or emails to allocated tutors. Whilst flexible and open in terms of accessibility the framework of support is structured, rigorous, responsive and comprehensive. In place of the taught sessions - for the delivery of additional theory and the opportunity for students to discuss issues with peers representing different contexts - the tutor will talk students through alternative approaches and links to theory. This ensures that all students receive information about alternative approaches to teaching and learning through the tutor drawing on their own experiences and those of other students - though not in a formal classroom context. Tutorials also provide opportunities to examine theory and principles with specific reference to the individual context so this can be explored in a meaningful way that relates directly to the student's understanding. By backing this up with the excellent developments to the e-resources the provision is equal to any taught programme but with the advantage of flexibility. This approach is appropriate for the nature of students currently on the course - where they are experienced teachers/trainers.

Detailed comments of External Examiner

1. Academic standards and assessment

State, for each HN programme, whether the design and nature of the assessments permit the aims and learning objectives of the programme to be met and are of a standard appropriate to NQF level 5/FHEQ Intermediate level. (For Level 4-7 Short Courses, consider whether standards are appropriate to the relevant NQF level)

- PTLTs: divided in to 5 'Action Plans' this approach allows students to build portfolio evidence in a very user-friendly and holistic way that also clearly identifies the ways that activities are linked to specific assessment criteria. The holistic approach developed through the activities included in the action plan provides links to practice (all PTLTs students are currently in some form of training delivery). Specific research required covers the Level 4 requirement linked to developing, explaining and justifying practice.
- CTLLs: building on the PTLTs Award the two mandatory units take a more unit-based approach for Planning and Enabling Learning and Principles and Practice of Assessment with students able to select whichever Option Unit they wish to reflect their individual training role. Each unit is broken down into a series of tasks that focus on providing linkages between elements and demonstrating the same holistic approach to that adopted for PTLTs - whilst also clearly identifying the individual assessment criteria dealt with in each activity. The approach provides links between theory and practice and also provides the opportunity to develop understanding through activities that concentrate on the underpinning knowledge before addressing the opportunity to put this in to practice. The Level 4 requirements are clearly met through the amount of written evidence required and generated through the individual activities. This is supported through observations of practice. Each unit is also supported with indicative reading and appropriate websites as well as the B2B web resources.
- DTLLs: adopting the same approach as the CTLLs units these are designed with the aid of a series of tasks to link principles and practice, with assessment criteria identified at every stage. Language used in the tasks is appropriate to the higher level skills required for Levels 4 and 5 - with development of the explanations in to compare and contrast, research, evaluation and reflective practice. Extended writing appropriate to the level is achieved through the requirement for essay-type evidence alongside other varied types of evidence appropriate to specific tasks. All units have been covered to the same high standard and cover the same holistic approach to enable students to incorporate work-based practice, with specific activities to cover areas that might not be covered in practice, with theories and principles and academic levels of research.
- Overall: Assessment is based on a range of appropriate sources of evidence - to include observation, personal statement (reflective journals), professional discussion, questioning, electronic recording, work product, expert testimony, witness statement, APL/APEL and simulation - with the emphasis on observation, work product and personal statement. Although this uses the format for work-based learning it does reflect the range of contexts in which individual students are working and ensures that all potential evidence can be identified and used to support achievement. All sources of evidence are not only assessed but also internally verified so that standards are maintained across the range of evidence.
- A checklist for Personal Language Skills, Numeracy Skills and ICT Skills has been developed to provide a competence list for each of the areas so students have the opportunity to identify the range of skills and examples of where these can be met in their own practice. This provides an excellent model for an area that is not always dealt with well.

2. Academic standards and student performance

State, for each programme, whether sampling shows that students achieve the aims and learning objectives of the programme at the appropriate level.

- A final portfolio checklist clearly demonstrates all evidence that has been included in the portfolio and verified by both learner and assessor as completed, present and checked. This is effective in ensuring the learner takes responsibility for their own evidence production and portfolio building once all the individual assignments and tasks have been completed, assessed and submitted. The end product is highly professional and is an excellent way of encouraging best-practice in the individuals as they progress in their own training/teaching roles.
- The majority of DTLLs students have progressed directly from PTLTs to DTLLs are therefore there have been no issues relating to transition units (as is the case for students who have completed CTLLs before progressing to DTLLs). The evidence tracking clearly shows the unit/level/credit value and date achieved for the mandatory units as well as the individually selected option units. As students have worked on their portfolios independently the option units have been written in a way that allows students to select different units but have an equal amount of guidance in order to generate the same level and quality of evidence and relate this to their individual workplace practice.
- A detailed Evidence Contents list also identifies each piece of evidence included in the portfolio which enables the student to use this as a checklist to ensure that all evidence has been included in the final portfolio, the assessor to identify that all evidence has been included and the external QA to identify that the requirements of the portfolio have been covered. This also demonstrates the range of sources of evidence that have been included and the ways in which it can reflect individual work practices.
- The task-based approach not only helps students to break the work down into more manageable 'chunks' it also ensures that individuals have the opportunity to complete tasks that they would not be able to address through their normal practice e.g. by reflecting on processes that are not covered through their usual teaching role. This helps to inform and develop their practice and ensures learning becomes more meaningful rather than simply an activity to generate portfolio evidence! This also ensures each student produces work that is substantial and achieves the required standards.
- Students are encouraged to self-assess through the discussions and feedback provided by the tutor/assessor and this has the effect of encouraging and developing more reflective practice appropriate at Level 5.
- The range of activities includes a series of reflective journal entries that students use to track their own progress, learning and development throughout. This helps to ensure that learning is taking place as the outcomes of the various activities can then be linked to developments in their own practice. It also allows students to reflect and evaluate their own teaching practice even when not being observed. This also includes things like team or subject meetings where their input has been noted and evaluated. This approach also reinforces the Level 5 approach in a meaningful way.

3. Assessment process

Comment on the internal assessment process, including:

- The fairness and consistency of grading
 - Suitability of schemes showing criteria for grading
 - The quality of feedback to students
 - Evidence of internal quality assurance of assignment briefs
 - Evidence of assessment decisions having been internally reviewed.
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- The assessment approach is extremely rigorous and well documented. By providing all students with the portfolio framework up-front the requirements are very clearly set out so students are aware of the requirements of the whole qualification - whether PTLLS, CTLLS or DTLLS. As all tasks are clearly written students are well aware of the evidence required and able to complete these with very little difficulty - to the required standard and level.
 - As every assessment criteria has been specifically linked to a task students are able to generate the evidence without having to worry too much about the individual criteria. This holistic approach allows students to draw on work-based practice in a meaningful way and use theory to complement and enhance their practice. This means that portfolio building becomes more meaningful and relevant to each student so that the assessment becomes assurance of good practice.
 - Students are able to submit assignments, as completed, electronically and receive feedback very promptly, with assessors also available on-call where there are specific assessment issues. In this way each student is encouraged, and supported, to work through the activities, at their own pace, in order to achieve results. The effect is that students are motivated and are extremely responsible in their approach to portfolio building. By receiving prompt feedback from completed tasks students are able to make any necessary adjustments or undertake additional research in order to complete tasks.
 - Students have included draft assignments as well as the completed work in portfolios so that it is possible to see the feedback on the original tasks, including areas for improvement, as well as the finished work that shows where the development has been achieved. The greater 'control' and involvement in the assessment process gives students greater confidence as they are able to apply their learning more immediately and in a meaningful way and assessment becomes more integral to the learning. Portfolios also include copies of emails that document appropriate discussions.
 - All assignment activities have been developed as a result of use - with each team member having their input on areas that need to be changed/ modified - as well as based on the feedback from individual students. There is also a formal reviewing process as a part of the annual QA cycle where assignment briefs are internally verified using the internal verifier checklist to cover accuracy, clarity, deadlines/timescales, identification and assessment of appropriate assessment criteria, appropriateness of language and fit-for-purpose. The IV provides specific feedback to identify any areas of specific concern or a need for up-dating and the responsibility e.g. individual or to be addressed at the next team meeting for joint discussion.
 - Students receive prompt feedback electronically on all assignment. These comments are detailed and specific - reinforcing areas of good practice as well as identifying areas for possible improvement or aspects that may not have been addressed. This can be followed up with telephone discussions where necessary and students are able then to use the information provide to alter, develop and resubmit. Assignments (with comments) are also held in electronic format so that assessors have a constant check of student progress even though they may not have portfolio evidence until an individual completes the qualification.
 - Individual student work will be internally verified at any stage in the development of the portfolio as the electronic assignments can be referred either formally or informally to other members of the team for verification. Where there are individual queries team members will contact others on the team for suggestions as well as being able to raise issues at the regular team meetings.
 - For PTLLS/CTLLS/DTLLS all use the same pro forma for teaching observations so that standardisation is maintained. This is divided into sections to cover all aspects of resources, preparation and planning, teaching and learning, assessment and monitoring of learners' progress and guidance and support for learning - the pro forma indicates achieved/not achieved as well as including space for more detailed feedback relating to comments and evidence. There is an additional section for a summary of what was particularly good as well as a summary of what could have been better and 'learning' - with a grading - based on the Ofsted Observation of Teaching and Learning: Grading Criteria (a copy of which is provided for the students as a part of the feedback). The opportunity is also provided for the trainer to provide their own comments. The pro forma is rigorous and yet allows for the flexibility where individual assessors are able to write their own comments that reflect individual student-needs and performance. The feedback from the observation is also recorded in considerable detail in order to help identify training and development needs, suggested actions and agreed timescales for monitoring/action. This clearly places the responsibility for the development on the individual learner.
 - A number of observations are undertaken (minimum 5) as a part of DTLLS with additional observations undertaken if required - identified through the personal development plan and action planning that is the outcome.
 - Quality Assurance also includes second observations - where tutors observe each other undertaking teaching observations with students and providing feedback. This ensures further standardisation against the common pro forma.
 - Very clear guidelines are provided for the layout of the completed portfolios making evidence very easy to find along with checklists that also identify where specific evidence is to be found. Not necessary to include the Edexcel Mandatory Unit Guidance in each portfolio. Students need this for their reference but it is not their own work and therefore does not count towards the final portfolio building.

4. Assessment meetings

Comment on the operation of Assessment meetings, including:

- The fairness and consistency of decisions
- The decision making process
- Administrative support for the meetings
- The scope of the minutes of previous meetings
- The organisation and conduct of the meetings.

- Assessment meetings take place on both informal and formal basis. Where issues relate to the standard of an individual student then the tutor involved will communicate concerns by phone or email with other members of the team before 'negotiating' a response with the student. The results of discussions are logged or emails filed appropriately.
- The QA process is extremely rigorous and well managed so that all staff and students are made fully aware of the necessary evidence and standards that are required for each of the qualifications at the appropriate levels. All assessment decisions are made against clearly identified assessment criteria and the evidence can then be recorded on appropriate pro forma. As a result the assessment process has been designed to minimise difficulties.
- Formal assessment meetings are held on a regular basis, with a record of decisions and actions appropriately minuted.
- As a part of the quality assurance process assessment of teaching practice may be shared between team members to provide a broader picture of student performance or may involve double observations - where a second observer will compare their own written observations. This is also used as a part of staff development and informal peer reviews by team members. It is also felt that this increases student confidence in the observation and feedback process.

5. Physical resources

Comment for each programme on whether the teaching accommodation, laboratory, library resources, IT and other relevant resources are adequate to support the attainment of learning objectives.

- Because the course tend to be 'roll-on-roll-off' there are currently no courses delivered on-site - instead students are working on a flexible, distance learning approach. As such it has been felt necessary to develop a substantial support system to enable individuals to work independently but with a solid framework of support and guidance. This has been achieved very well through the development of the Adobe Connect Pro which allows individual students access to a great wealth of resources on-line to support and develop their own learning. These resources are constantly being developed and up-dated and include the opportunity to use documents, DVD/video clips, power-point presentations, discussion forms, 'virtual-classrooms' and a wealth of links that have been developed in the system. This has been used not only to support learning but also to drive learning - currently being used with a PTLLS cohort and after a review of the pilot group the plan is to roll this out for other units across CTLLS and DTLLS. With the flexibility of this system it is possible to up-date resources very quickly and it has obvious advantages over more traditional library resources. It is also available to a group of students who are widely dispersed geographically and enables students to continue to work on their portfolios even when working abroad.
- A range of text books are recommended for those who prefer to work in a more traditional way but these are recommended with the advice that they are just a starting point and that students need to make sure they read around the subjects in order to understand them in order to be able to write effectively about them - following the example set for them by the good practice adopted by the centre.
- The approaches adopted by the centre demonstrate good practice at Level 5 where individuals are encouraged, with initial guidance, to develop and apply their own research skills and make use of resources that they can identify through their own efforts - and therefore more appropriate to their individual workplace.
- Resources have been developed and are provided electronically to cover background theory and principles to a range of topics e.g. Learning Theories, to provide a resource that covers information that students may not have come across in their own training. This helps students form a basic understanding so that they are able to establish the initial links to their own practice and these can then be developed in a more meaningful way.
- Resources are also provided for students to be able to continue their professional development even once they have completed their qualification through on-line resources for up-dating e.g. Educational Change.

6. Comments of students

Summarise the views expressed by students, including favourable comments, and any concerns raised. Key areas to discuss include:

- The assessment process, assessment feedback to students
- The quality of teaching, the expertise and experience of staff
- Physical resources and learning support for the programmes(s)
- Tutorial and pastoral support
- Opportunities for students to give feedback on their programme(s).

- There was the opportunity to 'sit-in' on a telephone tutorial where the tutor/assessor was able to talk through the activities required for an individual student in order to clarify what evidence could be generated in their own specific context to then write the assignment required - this could then be submitted to the assessor promptly and written feedback provided. Very positive feedback was provided that identified the nature of evidence required from the student and the ways the investigation could draw evidence from their own practice. The student was then given the opportunity to develop for themselves the ways they could approach the identified activities, research further and develop the assignment. The translation of the activities, in practice, helped support the student in relation to drawing the evidence from their 'constrained curriculum' where they could relate their specific subject to a broader approach to teaching and learning. The tutor actively supported the learner is appreciating how the specialist nature of their subject could be applied, related and developed in relation to the assessment criteria requirements.

6. Comments of students (cont)

- Feedback is provided to individual students very closely related to their individual practice and this demonstrates a very clear understanding of the variety of practices represented by students and the approach adopted by tutors to 'tailor' and negotiate feedback and support to reflect different needs.
- One student expressed the opinion that the discussions they were able to have with their tutor - by telephone and when required - helped to open their eyes to different approaches to teaching and learning. They felt the support they were given was brilliant - particularly as the flexible approach meant that they were able to continue to work on their portfolio assignments wherever and whenever they had the opportunity.
- Feedback emphasised that students found it easier to provide work electronically than on paper - where they were not used to writing academically but were used to producing reports and similar written work in their workplace. The opportunity to submit work electronically and receive immediate feedback, with suggestions for further research and development, helped build confidence and valuable new skills.
- Electronic and telephone support was developed through opportunities to meet up for 1x1 tutorials. High level of awareness and understanding by the team of the most up-to-date information that can then be provided for students through tutorials. This commitment to continually researching and up-dating information means students are provided with the best possible advice and guidance. This is further supported with students being provided with the information in presentation format and these are then 'talked-through' by the tutor with the student to help them understand the underlying principles and theories - especially where students work in contexts where theory is not 'normal' practice. Goals and timescales are effectively negotiated with individual students allowing them 'control' over their timescales but also keeping them as far as possible to tight/realistic timescales and providing follow-up but ensuring the student did some independent research, submit ideas and follow this with further discussion.
- The student expressed the view that they found the course stimulating and they did not feel that they had missed out on opportunities to discuss different teaching contexts with peers as the tutorial support provided more than sufficient guidance linked to different practices.
- The visit provided the opportunity to observe a tutorial with a DTLLS student where Derek Allford provided a telephone tutorial - taking the time and effort to provide clear guidelines for the activity in question. The discussion was balanced and the student was given time to develop their own ideas in relation to how they could draw from their own practice so that guidance did not take the responsibility from the student but the information was shared - with the tutor providing more input on how the information could be related to broader issues and the student having the opportunity to explore this in relation to their own specific context. The balanced discussion meant the tutor did not take command but encouraged the student to explore their own understanding - in particular to encourage the student to recognise different approaches and that these could work with different learning groups. Very clear, thoughtful and supportive in helping to inform and encourage the student (in particular to appreciate different perspectives and different approaches to the way subjects could be delivered ... from prescriptive to creative).

7. Meetings with staff

Summarise the consultation that has taken place with the programme team(s) and state any agreed action plans. You may wish to record the roles/titles of individual members of staff you met. Key areas to discuss with programme teams include:

- Issues raised by the students and in programme committee meetings
 - Problems and areas of good practice
 - Views of staff on measures to enhance the programme(s)
 - Staff development supporting the programme(s) and currency of teaching
 - Views of staff on how they facilitate progression of students to independent learning within the programme(s).
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- Derek Allford (B2B Senior Partner/Course Manager) and Lynn Allford (B2B Partner/ Quality Manager/IV) and Sophie Vaughan-Warner(Course Tutor, Assessor) provided a comprehensive overview of the progress made since the last visit and demonstrated their continuing commitment to providing a qualification that met the needs of diverse client groups - requiring responsiveness in the delivery of training alongside a flexibility of approach that addressed the assessment criteria in an appropriate manner.
 - The centre has a rigorous annual Self Assessment Review process for the specific programmes so the team are involved in plan for development whilst also remaining responsive to individual student needs throughout.
 - Arising out of the SAR the team are active in identifying opportunities for CPD for staff members to allow for up-dating that is then passed on to the students through sessions or mentoring. This is constant whenever opportunities arise throughout the year and ensures the team remain up-to-date and similarly committed.
 - Team members meet on a regular basis to allow for sharing of delivery and assessment practice and experiences as well as to support opportunities for standardisation - including the practice of peer and double observations.
 - All tutors are employed on the basis of their ability to be accessible and responsive to student needs and the demands of the qualification in keeping with the B2B approach. This is particularly important where the work-based learning approach is used and students rely on their learning to be clearly related to their individual context. All inductions of the present groups have taken place in the individual work place so that there has been the opportunity to relate all evidence to be related to the specific requirements of the work-based learning. All observations of teaching practice (including PTLLS where this is used rather than a micro-teach as all current students are currently in some form of teaching/training role).
 - All appropriate opportunities are identified for staff to undertake CPD - through attending courses, working with other centres through the CETT connection or in-house - including the use of the very flexible on-line provision.