BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

END OF PROBATION REVIEW
(International Centre)

INSTITUTION: Transnational Academic Group

ADDRESS: P O Box CT 9823
Cantonments
Accra
Ghana

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Professor Malcolm McIver

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Probation

DATE OF INSPECTION: 23 March 2021

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Re-accreditation, 19 July 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1.   Background to the institution

Transnational Academic Group (TAG/the Institution) is a privately owned institution that is part of Transnational Education Group, a company based in Dubai. TAG offers a one-year foundation programme, with three pathways, including in law and science and technology. The Institution is based in Accra, Ghana, and is located alongside the Lancaster University (LU) Ghana, in a modern building, close to the city centre.

TAG's aim is to prepare learners for direct entry onto LU's undergraduate (UG) degree courses.

The Institution was established in 2013. It is a private limited company with three main shareholders. The relationship between TAG and LU is set out in a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), in which the responsibilities of both partners are specified.

Responsibility for the management of the partnership rests with the Board of Directors, which includes the shareholders. The Board meets quarterly and is chaired by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Provost leads on the day-to-day management of the Institution. At LU United Kingdom (UK), management responsibility for the relationship with TAG rests with the Partnership Management Group, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (International). LU UK has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the foundation programme.

TAG relocated to its current premises in 2018, with the aim of integrating foundation learners with LU's undergraduates, and having more space in higher quality premises.

In January 2021, a new CEO of LU Ghana was appointed with responsibility for oversight of both the TAG and LU programmes. A new Foundation Programme Co-ordinator oversees all matters related to the foundation courses.

2.   Brief description of the current provision

The Institution offers a one-year university foundation programme with pathways in Law, Business and Social Science, or Science and Technology. It is usually delivered face to face, but is currently being delivered as a blended learning course, consisting of one day face to face and the remaining four days online. The full-time foundation course allows learners to gain entry to undergraduate programmes at LU Ghana or LU UK.

At the time of the inspection, there were 48 learners enrolled on the different foundation course pathways. The total capacity is 200. The majority of learners are from Ghana. Other countries represented include Nigeria, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire. Learners' ages range from 17 to 37 years. A small minority are under the age of 18 years. There are approximately equal numbers of male and female learners.

Learners can start courses on a specified date in either October or January. Entry requirements differ for learners from different countries. They are set out clearly in the course information. Courses run for three terms, but learners have the option of completing a fourth term, if sufficient progress has not been made.

3.   Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken remotely by one inspector over one day. The inspector scrutinised documentation in advance and had video meetings with the Provost, managers, tutors and learners. A live video tour of the premises was conducted, and a lesson observation took place. The staff co-operated fully with the inspector throughout the inspection.

4.   Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	19–20 August 2015

Interim	31 August 2016
Re-accreditation	31 July and 1 August 2019
Mid-way Probation	13 May 2020

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

A new CEO of LU Ghana has recently been appointed. He has oversight of ongoing business expansion and leads on the relationship with TAG, as well as maintaining oversight of the foundation course delivered by TAG. A new foundation programme co-ordinator has been appointed with oversight of the programme. She reports to management on all aspects of the course.

TAG has made increased use of technology in the delivery of the curriculum. All teaching has been delivered online over the last year. Recently delivery has moved to four days a week of online teaching and one day of in-person delivery.

2.   Response to action points in last report

2.4 Policies must be made known to both staff and learners and must be reviewed for relevance.

Policies are made known to staff and learners on the university online portal. Learners are made aware of the policies and how to access them as part of their orientation and also in the learner handbook. Policies are reviewed annually by the relevant staff. Policies relating to academic issues are suitably reviewed by the Provost and Heads of Department.

7.1 The system for obtaining learner feedback must be reviewed so that it is effective in terms of the level of response, and the feedback questionnaire administered centrally must be changed to be able to identify the views of foundation learners.

The number of responses gained has increased significantly as a result of feedback being conducted individually using the feedback questionnaire. This questionnaire has been successfully modified to separate the views of foundation learners from those of other learners in LU. This allows for a clear understanding of which views are those of the foundation learners studying at TAG.

7.2 Feedback must be recorded and analysed systematically in order to gain a full understanding of learners' views.

Feedback is recorded and analysed systematically to gain an understanding of learners' views. This information is presented in detail in a report to management and faculty heads in other parts of the Institution, so that appropriate action can be taken if necessary.

7.4 A mechanism must be devised to report to the learners on the response made to their feedback.

The foundation course steering group decide what actions to take in response to the feedback. These decisions are conveyed to tutors in a report. At the beginning of the following term, tutors let learners know what actions have been taken in response to their feedback. Learners are suitably informed of this process in the learner handbook.

8.1 The recently created performance review document must be simplified so that it is easy to use and provides an effective process for monitoring and reviewing institutional performance.

The Foundation Programme Annual Performance Report has been simplified and made shorter. It has become easier to follow and is effective in supporting the monitoring and review of institutional performance.

8.2 8.3 The Institution must use the full range of information available on its performance to produce an annual report that informs the development of an annual action plan.

The Foundation Programme Annual Performance Report successfully records a variety of information relating to the Institution's performance. However, the absence of any formal action-planning reduces opportunities for management to keep track of actions to support consistent quality developments in the provision.

11.3 The lesson observation template must include a section for the tutor to complete and a section identifying which areas to work on to further support improvements. Observation outcomes must be incorporated into the appraisal process.

The lesson observation template has been modified to include a section for the tutor to complete and a section identifying areas to work on to further support improvements. These are helpful to both the observer and the tutor being observed. Observation outcomes are not incorporated into the tutor performance review process to maximise improvement in individual development.

20.2 The complaints policy must be simplified so that it can be easily understood.

The complaints policy has been simplified and put into a useful diagrammatic form. However, the policy does not clearly indicate when complainants should take specific action, nor to whom complaints should be addressed so that this is clearly understood.

20.3 Information provided on BAC's complaints procedure must be simplified so that it can be easily understood.

The explanation of the BAC complaints procedure has not been simplified so that it can be easily understood.

25.4 Guidance on health and safety must be routinely available to visitors.

There is no clear guidance provided to inform visitors of what they should do in an emergency or other aspects of health and safety.

27.1 The social space for learners, separate from the library and computer laboratory, must be completed in time for the learners' return to the university.

Learners have a suitable social space at the top of the building. This is sufficient for current purposes.

3.   Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The Institution should consider including the complaints procedure in the staff handbook.

The grievance procedure is available in the employee handbook and on the LU portal. The complaints procedure is accessible in the learner handbook. Staff are informed of the complaints procedure at their induction.

The Institution is recommended to make better use of the notice boards, so that different aspects of the provision are more clearly communicated to learners.

Notice boards display information relevant to learners. In addition, six large screens on the premises effectively communicates information on different aspects of the provision.

It is suggested that the Institution has fire alarm tests and evacuations more regularly than every three months so that learners know what to do in case of an emergency evacuation.

A sufficient number of fire alarm tests and evacuations currently takes place.

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 management structure is clearly defined and documented, so allowing for easy understanding.

The Provost and senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced and carry out their duties effectively, resulting in a well-run operation.

Channels of communication between management and staff are frequent and highly effective. Meetings are held remotely, and more recently, some are taking place on campus. These meetings have been supplemented by different teams forming groups on social media to further support communications. This is effective in that it results in a shared understanding of developments and supports staff in taking relevant actions in a timely manner.

Appropriate policies are made available on the university portal or in staff and learner handbooks. They are reviewed annually for their relevance. Where appropriate, they are also disseminated in meetings, e-mails, by the student representative council and on social media applications. Consequently, staff and learners are well informed.

Course entry requirements are made known to applicants in the course information. If school examination results or English language levels for those who speak English as an additional language do not meet the required standard, a special course prior to the start of the foundation course is on offer. In these ways, learners are supported to meet the required standards.

Attendance registers are currently maintained manually. The system regarding returning registers is inconsistent and does not make it clear when registers should be handed in. Consequently, managers do not have access to centralised and up-to-date information about attendance.

The system for gaining, recording, collating and analysing learner feedback has been improved and is now appropriate to support performance reviews. However, the feedback questionnaire is inconsistent in relation to the number of criteria used in the rating scales for the questions. This limits TAG's ability to collect, collate and analyse meaningful data.

The Institution monitors its performance through regular reviews of the provision. Reports are compiled and suitably discussed at foundation programme steering committee meetings.

8.2 8.3 An absence of action plans results in opportunities lost for monitoring and driving improvement.

4.2	Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

Academic managers are suitably experienced, and are effective in offering appropriate guidance and support to the tutors, who are subject specialists.

Class timetabling is appropriate and makes use of a specialist system to ensure effectiveness. The process in place for the acquisition of resources and consumables ensures that needs are met.

Assessments are scheduled in advance and link appropriately to the learning outcomes. This effectively supports achievement.

Reviewing recorded lessons contributes to promoting independent learning skills, as do study groups where knowledge and ideas generally are shared. Insufficient use is made of the study groups to ensure that they fully enable learners to work collaboratively on coursework. This is a missed opportunity for learning.

High levels of learning support are offered, particularly in relation to essay-writing. The support is appropriately targeted to meet individual learning needs. This support is offered both online and face to face. As a result, learners are well supported.

Tutors have good subject knowledge, allowing them to deliver courses that support high levels of progression to undergraduate courses.

11.3 Appraisal procedures for teaching staff do not incorporate regular classroom observation.

Tutors have been provided with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activity in relation to teaching online. This has not only allowed them to understand how to use an online platform, but has also given them an informed understanding of how to modify their teaching techniques to better suit online teaching.

Assignments are completed on the university learning platform. Learners receive feedback, which allows them to know their progress and targeted level of achievement.

Additional advice is given to learners who are judged to be making insufficient progress, to help support positive outcomes.

The policy on administering internal examinations is suitable and is made clear to tutors, learners and invigilators to ensure its effective implementation.

4.3	Learner Welfare (spot check)

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

Comments

The Provost, as well as other staff members, are able to offer advice when necessary. The university has a counselling service that can be accessed by learners on the foundation programme, if required. Consequently, learners are adequately supported.

Learners receive appropriate information before arrival, including information about accommodation.

On arrival, learners receive a suitable induction, which gives them information to help them settle into the university and their course quickly. They are given an emergency contact number in case they need to access emergency support. Appropriate additional information is given to international learners to help them integrate.

Policies and procedures to deal with abusive behaviour are suitably identified in the learner handbook.

Learners are enrolled on courses under fair and transparent contractual terms and conditions, which are detailed in the learner handbook.

20.2 20.3 The complaints policy and information on BAC's complaints procedure is complicated, so preventing easy understanding of the process and what action to take.

The university has organised a significant number of social events in the last year to cater for different learner interests. Ideas for these events often come from learners. A majority of events, including political debates and a film night, have been held remotely, and were well attended. Events are appropriately supervised by a member of staff.

4.4	Premises and Facilities (spot check)

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

Comments

The use of the premises has not significantly changed since the last inspection when the premises were fully inspected.

Compliance is based on the outcomes of the previous inspection, as well as a short video tour of the stairways and passages and the roof area to view the social space for learners.

No contrary indicators to findings in the last inspection were noted during the current inspection.

25.4 Guidance on health and safety is not routinely available to visitors.

4.5	Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated. ☒ Yes ☐ No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

Good communication between managers, tutors and learners ensures that everyone is up to date.

Staff are flexible and supportive.

The transition to online learning has allowed good continuity in the delivery of the curriculum.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

8.2 8.3. Formal action plans connected to year-on-year institutional performance reports must be developed.	☒ High	☐ Medium	☐ Low
11.3 Observation outcomes must be incorporated into the tutor performance review process.	☒ High	☐ Medium	☐ Low
20.2 The complaints policy must be amended to ensure a clear understanding of the process and how complainants can take appropriate action.	☒ High	☐ Medium	☐ Low
20.3 Information provided on BAC's complaints procedure must be simplified.	☒ High	☐ Medium	☐ Low
25.4 Guidance on health and safety must be routinely available to visitors.	☒ High	☐ Medium	☐ Low
The attendance register system must be reviewed to ensure that all registers are returned promptly to the central registry.	☐ High	☒ Medium	☐ Low

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

The Institution should consider modifying the feedback questionnaire to ensure a consistent approach to the number of criteria used in the rating scales of questions.

It is recommended that the remit of learner study groups is extended.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE