



## **BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT**

### **INTERIM INSPECTION (Independent Higher Education)**

<b>INSTITUTION:</b>	The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Ltd
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	ADvTECH House, Building 3 Inanda Greens 54 Wierda Road West Wierda Valley Sandton 2196 South Africa
<b>HEAD OF INSTITUTION:</b>	Ms Shevon Lurie
<b>ACCREDITATION STATUS:</b>	Accredited
<b>DATE OF INSPECTION:</b>	14–15 May 2024
<b>ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:</b>	Continued accreditation, 29 August 2024

## **PART A – INTRODUCTION**

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### **1. Background to the institution**

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The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Limited (The IIE/the Institution) is a private provider of higher education and training. It was established in 2005 and offers a wide variety of programmes ranging from short courses to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in a broad range of subjects. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of ADvTECH Ltd, which is a publicly listed company in South Africa.

The IIE is made up of the IIE Central Academic Team (IIE CAT) and its four primary education brands of IIE Varsity College, IIE Rosebank College, IIE Vega School, and IIE MSA and the School of Hospitality and Services Management (IIEHSM), which is linked to Rosebank College. IIE CAT is based in Sandton in northern Johannesburg, South Africa. The provision is managed and delivered by the brands across South Africa on 24 campuses.

The Institution's mission is to widen access to higher education with as few barriers as possible. It aims to be a leading higher education institution through providing high-quality, career-focused higher education programmes in South Africa. In anticipation of changes to the Higher Education Act in South Africa, the Institution is working towards becoming one of the first private universities in South Africa and has developed its postgraduate provision to offer enhanced and articulated pathways for students. The Institution aims to closely align its strategy with national imperatives outlined in the South African National Development Plan 2030, including development of its research provision and community engagement activities.

In accordance with South African legislation and regulations, The IIE is registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to provide accredited higher education qualifications in South Africa under the Higher Education Act 1997. IIE qualifications are accredited by the Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council of Higher Education (CHE). All IIE qualifications are registered on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub Framework (HEQSF) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Qualifications offered range from Level 5 higher education certificates to a Level 10 doctorate.

The IIE operates a federal academic model. Its key institution-wide strategy, policies, procedures and quality assurance processes are developed by IIE CAT in collaboration with the academic and operational teams on brand campuses. They are disseminated to its campuses by IIE CAT and the brand national offices. In addition, IIE CAT is responsible for the audit of policy and procedure implementation and all regulatory matters.

ADvTECH has a Management Board, which has strategic oversight of The IIE and comprises ADVTECH Directors, the Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO), external members and the IIE Director.

The IIE senior management committee is made up of senior managers, including the IIE Director, General Manager, Registrar, Head of Academic Schools, Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies, Dean of Academic Development and Support, Dean of Accreditation and Quality, Head of Education Technology and Innovation, and Head of Human Resources. The IIE also has a separate academic governance structure with limited shared membership with the management committee, with the Senate being the most senior academic committee.

A new Managing Director of Rosebank College was appointed in February 2023. Since the previous inspection, the range of programmes offered has been reviewed and updated.

### **2. Brief description of the current provision**

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The IIE offers 135 accredited qualifications. The education brands have different sector specialisms. IIE Vega delivers programmes in brand management, business and design. IIE Varsity College and IIE Rosebank College deliver programmes in the disciplines of law, commerce, education, humanities, information and communications technology and social sciences, and IIE MSA delivers programmes in commerce, engineering, accounting, communication science, information technology, human and health sciences, law, and political, social and development studies at a single campus in Johannesburg.

All the brands and programmes are supported by IIE CAT, including in developing modules and assessments and in administration.

The IIE has seven faculties through which its academic provision is organised, these being the faculties of Commerce, Humanities and Social Sciences, Information and Communications Technology, Education, Law, Engineering, Science and Health, and Finance and Accounting. A number of modules are shared across qualifications, where appropriate.

Academic undergraduate degrees are normally undertaken over three years of full-time study, with some professional degrees being studied over four years in line with professional body requirements. Honours degrees and postgraduate diplomas are one-year degrees that are offered as an articulation route after the completion of a bachelor's degree or advanced diploma. Higher Certificates are offered in a range of subjects as one-year qualifications with progression options to degree study. Postgraduate programmes and a doctorate qualification provide a clear progression route for further study.

The large majority of qualifications are delivered in person, although students may choose to study through distance or online learning. The distance learning provision is managed by an online study team, and students have access to synchronous online learning sessions. At the time of the inspection, about 10 per cent of students were studying via distance learning.

At the time of the inspection, the Institution had 54,796 students enrolled, of whom the majority are female. A large majority are full-time students. Most students are from South Africa, with 2,108 students being drawn from other countries, including Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Congo, Namibia, Mozambique and Swaziland. Only a very small minority of students are aged under 18 years in their first term of study.

Enrolment takes place twice a year in January and July, with the large majority of students commencing their studies in January. There are specified entry criteria for all programmes, including English language proficiency requirements.

### **3. Inspection process**

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The interim inspection was conducted onsite by a single inspector over two days. Meetings were held with the Director, senior managers, programme managers, lecturers, administrators, support staff and students. Visits were made to the head office in Sandton and to the Rosebank College and Varsity College campuses in Pretoria. Lesson observations were also completed. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised and the Institution co-operated very positively with the inspection process.

### **4. Inspection history**

<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>Date</b>
Full Accreditation	10–15 March 2014
Interim	17–18 March 2016
Re-accreditation	19–26 May 2017
Interim	2–3 April 2019
Re-accreditation	22–25 & 28 March 2022

## **PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

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*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**

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Several changes of senior staff have been made since the previous inspection in 2022. New appointments include a new Managing Director for Rosebank College and a new Head of Faculty for Education. In addition, new posts have been agreed and recruited to, with the appointment of a Dean for Accreditation and Quality Assurance to support oversight of quality management, and an additional post of Head of Educational Technology and Innovation.

A number of programmes have been discontinued, including eight Higher Certificates, the Advanced Certificate in Web Development, the Diploma in Marketing Management and the Postgraduate Diploma in Investment Banking. Twelve new qualifications have been approved by the CHE. Site extensions allowing qualifications to be offered across other campuses have been approved for 20 accredited qualifications.

A new delivery site in Nelspruit has been developed and is awaiting final approval by the DHET to be included in The IIE registration certificate. It was not fully up and running at the time of the inspection.

### **2. Response to action points in last report**

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*15.7 The BAC complaints policy must be made known to students.*

The action point has now been met. The BAC complaints procedure has been added to the updated safety, student conduct and disciplinary procedure and approved by the Senate. The BAC complaints procedure has also been added to the student handbooks for each brand, along with clear links to the BAC website, ensuring that all students have access to the procedure as required.

### **3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report**

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*The Institution should introduce additional formal mechanisms for systematically updating students on the Institution's response to students' module feedback.*

The recommendation has not been met. In 2023, The IIE introduced the Faculty Academic Forum (FAF) with the objective of bringing together student representatives from all sites and modes of study. At FAF meetings, students are able to raise matters affecting their learning experiences with academic managers from IIE CAT, and The IIE is able to provide information to student representatives on actions taken in response to their feedback.

However, there is a lack of regular feedback, including through published updates, on actions taken in response to the feedback received so that all students are aware of this and are encouraged to take part in the various feedback mechanisms.

*Managers should implement plans to formally analyse and report on student progression rates to further study or employment for every course.*

The recommendation has not been met. New destination surveys have been recently developed to link with the new Student Management Information System (SIMS), which has been introduced across all sites and programmes. The Institution plans to provide the survey to all students in their final year of study and now has the facility to collate the data and to produce reports through SIMS. As a result, work on this recommendation is ongoing.

### **4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements**

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#### 4.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

The Senate is the most senior academic body and it maintains clear oversight of academic management and standards. The relationships between governance and management are clearly articulated and disseminated across the Institution in handbooks and as part of staff and student induction, supporting a clear understanding of authority and responsibility.

The IIE has clear and explicit policies and action plans for managing risk assessments, which are kept under regular review by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). This ensures that the impact of risks is closely managed and communicated.

A clear and achievable strategy has been developed, along with appropriate implementation plans and designated responsibilities, including for financial management. The strategy is clearly communicated to stakeholders through the website and publications.

The strategy has been informed by consultations with a range of internal and external stakeholders to ensure it supports the ongoing development of the Institution. Performance measures linked to the strategic objectives of The IIE have been developed and are aligned to meet the requirements of the national regulator, including meeting national skills and knowledge requirements within local and regional economies.

Financial management is robust, with budgets set and monitored in accordance with national regulatory requirements and externally audited to ensure both probity and transparency.

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#### 4.2 General and Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

The clear management and committee structure and the key responsibilities of central teams, faculties and brands are clearly documented and communicated to all stakeholders. All programmes are developed centrally by IIE CAT, with programme delivery responsibilities managed by the brands at campus level. Their programme delivery responsibilities are included in the role of the heads of the seven faculties, campus managers and programme leaders, with oversight by the General Manager.

All roles are well understood by faculty and campus staff and by students. Current and accurate programme information is provided to students via handbooks and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which supports their understanding of course content and requirements.

Administration is centrally managed in line with common policies and procedures. The administrative functions are clear and robust and support the effective management of services and provision. The size of the administrative team is sufficient to support the effective management of the Institution.

Administrative duties are clearly documented and understood at brand and campus level. Administrative policies and procedures are clear, regularly reviewed and available to all staff across the Institution. Staff and student records are well maintained and securely stored.

Appropriate mechanisms ensure that students' work is assessed internally and externally and that student transcripts are made available in a timely manner. This supports students effectively to monitor their own progress and to receive support as needed. Students confirmed that they can access their transcripts through secure personal logins. Students also confirmed that they have access to and understand the clear

fee and refunds policy, which they are made aware of as part of enrolment. Inspection findings confirm this to be the case.

Staff recruitment procedures are robust. Suitably qualified and experienced staff are recruited to administrative and teaching roles. Staff confirmed that they were clear about their duties and responsibilities, as set out in detailed job descriptions, and that they were also provided with a mentor to help them become familiar with the Institution and with its key policies and procedures, including the staff appraisal system.

Staff also confirmed that they have access to a wide range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to help them in their roles and to meet their goals. However, no formal tracking of staff CPD activities is currently undertaken so that useful records are maintained to support the ongoing professional and career development of all staff and to evaluate the impact of the CPD.

All staff have security checks before appointment, which ensures the safety of students and staff effectively.

All qualifications are designed by IIE CAT, which has effective and well-developed procedures for programme design and validation. These reflect the mission of the Institution. Materials are centrally commissioned, and appropriate budgets are allocated in line with central guidelines that support consistency across the provision effectively.

All learning outcomes are clearly articulated and available in the module handbooks on the VLE. Students confirmed that module handbooks help them understand the learning content of their programme.

Students confirmed that they are able to provide feedback formally and informally on their learning experiences and to indicate where they may need additional support or resources. Feedback is reviewed and actioned at faculty level. As a result, academic management is appropriate and ensures that programmes are supported effectively and meet students' needs.

The entry requirements for all provision are clear and made available to prospective students through online programme descriptors, including the English language proficiency requirements. All students receive very prompt responses to enquiries, and all prospective students are invited to meet with student advisers, who provide additional information and guidance to support their choice of programme.

All student applications are fully assessed, including through interviews, to ensure that prospective students have both the interest and the capability to engage with their chosen programme. Recognition of prior learning is brought to the attention of students and is used to support student credit transfers where appropriate. Students confirmed that they had received clear advice and guidance, which helped them to make their programme choices.

Academic staff are actively encouraged to engage with research, and all academics have research targets. Staff are encouraged to link their activities with support for the quality of teaching and learning and to contribute papers to the annual IIE Teaching and Learning Conference. Staff are encouraged to work together on multidisciplinary research and to share their research activities at monthly online forums and via online portals. Less experienced staff are encouraged to work with someone more experienced on a research topic and to publish articles jointly, which builds their confidence.

Staff are also encouraged to publish externally and to attend conferences and present papers where appropriate. The institutional support for academic staff to undertake and share their research with a focus on teaching and learning is effective in supporting the enhancement of the student learning experience and represents good practice.

All published materials provide accurate information about both the programmes and the nature of facilities offered. Information is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it provides clear and accessible information to all stakeholders, including on all associated costs.

#### 4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met  Partially Met  Not Met

##### Comments

All staff are well qualified for the modules that they teach, as evidenced through end-of-module surveys and teaching observations. Lessons are clearly planned to cover the intended learning outcomes and support the development of students' knowledge and understanding effectively to meet assessment requirements.

The high pass rates confirm that students' learning is effectively supported, including through class-based activities and group activities that support independent learning skills. A wide range of resources is available through the VLE, which supports students effectively in preparing for their assessments. Inspection findings confirm this to be the case.

Clear assessment schedules are made available to students through the VLE at the start of modules, including details of assignments, revision periods, and examination and submission dates. All assessments have clear tasks that link with the module grading criteria. However, some assessment briefs could provide students with clearer links between the assessments and the learning outcomes.

Students receive clear written and verbal feedback on their work so that they know what they do well and what they need to improve. Students report that the feedback on assessed work is not always provided within the timeframe set out in the assessment policy, so that they know when to expect the feedback. Inspection findings support this view

Students receive robust guidance on plagiarism and how to avoid academic malpractice, along with the penalties that apply. Students are provided with workshops and activities that support their understanding of plagiarism, ethics and good academic practice and promote a sound understanding of good and poor practices, which enables them to avoid such issues.

Students receive clear guidance on mitigating circumstances and how to appeal their marks should the need arise. This ensures that they are well informed about marking and assessment practices.

Course materials are of good quality and designed to meet the stated levels of study. A wide range of resources is available through the VLE, which support students' learning aims and objectives effectively. All materials are regularly reviewed, which ensures that they remain current and fit for purpose.

Lecturers use a range of appropriate teaching aids and study materials to support students' learning. Students confirm that they have access to appropriate resources through the VLE and that these resources support their learning and meet their assessment requirements.

#### 4.4 Student Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met  Partially Met  Not Met

##### Comments

Appropriately trained IIE staff provide students with welfare and pastoral support, including through advice and guidance. This support is accessible to students across all campuses, including by booking a session using a mobile telephone application.

Appropriate explanation and information on how to access support are also included as part of the well-structured student induction and in the student handbook to ensure students know whom to contact

should they need support. Students confirmed that they are happy with the support available to them, including study guidance and Information Technology (IT) provision.

Students have access to policies and procedures for dealing with abusive behaviour and know how to report any incidents. Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place to keep all students safe, including a clear policy and procedures for dealing with the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and background checks on staff.

All staff undertake appropriate training to assure student safety, and appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. These arrangements are actively monitored by senior managers. As a result, students feel well informed and well supported about the guidance and help available to them.

All students have good access to academic staff outside teaching times, including via bookable appointments and e-mail correspondence. Students confirmed that their lecturers are very approachable and responsive and work with them to review their academic progress. Reviews of student progress also identify where they may need more support, which is provided as required to enable students to remain engaged with their studies.

Where students have special or additional educational needs, appropriate measures are put in place to ensure that learning is made accessible. Clear careers advice and guidance, along with employer events, ensure that students are supported in their post-study job search.

A clear IIE complaints procedure and BAC's complaints procedure are available to all students through their handbook and the VLE. Students confirm that they are aware of the complaints procedures.

Students who may need to change their pattern or programme of study have access to advice and guidance, which facilitates any changes needed.

The advice and guidance provided to international students are clear and appropriate, including guidance on travel and accommodation. All international students take part in The IIE student induction, as well as additional activities that familiarise them with the locality and help them integrate into the Institution.

Cultural considerations are taken into account, and students confirmed that they were happy with their induction and the support that continues to be available to them, including through speakers of their first language, as appropriate.

The Institution's attendance policy is clear and appropriate. Attendance records are well maintained and monitored. Student absences are followed up to support ongoing student engagement.

Only one IIE MSA campus offers residential accommodation, which is of an appropriate standard and inspected by local authorities to ensure it is safe and secure and meets students' needs. Although most students live locally, for the other campuses, information for students on obtaining private accommodation is available.

A wide range of social activities, including sports, clubs and social events, are organised for students and advertised on the VLE and through multimedia channels. All programmes are responsive to student preferences, and costs are kept low to make them affordable.

Where appropriate, trained members of staff support events, and students confirmed that events are well managed. Students from different campuses are able to interact via social media channels to exchange views and engage in a variety of forums, which allows students studying online to interact with their peers.

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#### 4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

The Institution has secure tenure on all premises, which are approved for the delivery of higher education. Where needed, additional premises of an appropriate standard are hired.

Access to all premises is restricted and secure. All staff and students have identity cards, which provide them with coded access to the facilities.

The premises and facilities are clean and well maintained, with appropriate ventilation and temperature controls to provide a comfortable environment. Health and safety notices are appropriately displayed, and all students, staff and visitors are made aware of fire exits and any special practices to ensure their safety.

Signage on premises is clear internally and externally, and good circulation space is provided for staff, students and visitors, including refreshment areas. As a result, the campuses provide a safe and comfortable learning and working environment.

Classrooms are well appointed, and appropriate technology is in place to facilitate teaching, including in studios and other specialist workshops, ensuring comfortable and appropriate learning environments. Several suitable areas are available for conducting examinations.

The facilities provided are appropriate for staff and students to undertake their work and studies effectively. Students have access to appropriate spaces for individual study or group work in library areas and other study facilities. Students confirmed that these meet their needs. Staff have access to appropriate office space to undertake their academic or administrative duties, and suitable rooms are available for holding meetings.

Students and staff are advised to keep their belongings with them for safety reasons, unless in areas where lockers are provided.

Library space on the campuses provides access to both hardcopy and online materials via desktop computers and wireless connectivity. The layout provides good-quality study space. Appropriately qualified library staff are available and provide advice and guidance to students on locating learning materials. Students confirmed that this assists them with their assessments.

Library stock is regularly reviewed to ensure its currency and sufficiency in meeting students' study needs, taking into account student feedback and module updates. A clear lending policy and opening hours also facilitate students' access to resources.

IT meets students' needs, with good levels of connectivity, including remote access to VLE resources that support students in studying on campus or from home. Software is kept updated, and hardware updates are planned to ensure students have good access to online resources.

IT technicians are available on campus to support staff and students as required, and students and staff confirmed that they receive prompt and helpful support in resolving any issues. In addition, training is provided to staff and students as needed to support their understanding of how to access resources, which enables them to undertake their study or work roles.

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4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

Stakeholder views are canvassed and analysed to identify areas for improvement. This includes end-of-module surveys and feedback from student representatives, who attend a range of committee meetings.

The Institution has formal feedback mechanisms, including Town Hall events at which feedback is provided to all stakeholders.

Appropriate quality assurance policies and procedures with clear quality requirements are in place and are made available to staff and students both electronically and through handbooks. The quality assurance procedures are embedded throughout the management of provision, and quality reports allow The IIE to monitor its operations effectively against its performance indicators for student retention, progression and achievement. These are regularly reviewed by senior managers and committees.

The reports compiled include action plans and records of the impact of actions, with a focus on the quality of the student learning experience. The reporting and monitoring of actions reflect The IIE's commitment to providing good-quality qualifications that are appropriately managed.

Performance reports generated at programme level are reviewed at Faculty Board meetings. The IIE management committee reviews year-on-year performance data, and, as needed, action plans for improvement are developed and kept under review. Senior management closely monitors and puts in place processes to manage significant variations, including in terms of student satisfaction and achievement rates, staff performance and research activity, and resource issues.

All programme performance reviews involve external moderators, who comment on assessment management and academic standards, and the outcomes are incorporated in reports for consideration by senior committees. This ensures that quality improvement is effectively tracked and actioned and its impact is evaluated.

Post-qualification reviews are used to track student progression data. However, to date, this information is not routinely collected and analysed for all qualifications.

Good practice is identified and disseminated across the organisation. This includes through the work of Communities of Practice (CoPs), which meet to identify and discuss good practice in teaching and learning, and through weekly two-hour CPD sessions at which academics interact and share effective practice and challenges to develop their pedagogical skills and strategies for engaging students. The ongoing sharing of pedagogical experiences and strategies represents good practice.

Programme reports identify areas for ongoing development as well as improvements. Action plans are kept under regular review through the teaching and learning committee, at faculty meetings and in the broader committee structure to support overarching enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning.

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#### 4.7 Online, Distance and Blended Learning (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met    Partially Met    Not Met    NA

**Comments**

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Teaching staff receive appropriate support to develop their understanding of the demands and best practice associated with online and distance learning. This includes three levels of certificated training, which supports academic staff to understand and employ effective practices and mechanisms to support ongoing student engagement.

Observations are used to monitor the quality of online and distance teaching and learning. Student feedback confirms that students feel they are appropriately supported and are able to engage with course materials through the VLE.

Students are made aware of the level of digital literacy required to engage successfully with online learning. Appropriate guidance, materials and tutorials are provided to assist students in understanding how to learn effectively using the online mode of study.

Staff are able to share their experiences of delivering online learning through the CoPs and weekly CPD sessions. This provides an effective forum to support the overall standard and quality of online delivery and enables any issues to be quickly and effectively addressed.

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#### 4.8 Compliance Declaration

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**Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.**

Yes  No

**PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS**

**STRENGTHS**

Institutional support for academic staff to undertake and share their research, with a focus on teaching and learning, is effective in supporting enhancement of the student learning experience and represents good practice.

Robust student workshops and activities promote students’ understanding of plagiarism and appropriate academic practices.

Weekly CPD sessions at which staff interact and share good practice effectively support the development of pedagogical practices and strategies for promoting student engagement.

The three levels of certificated training effectively support academic staff to develop their understanding of effective online delivery practices and so support ongoing student engagement.

**ACTIONS REQUIRED**

None

High  Medium  Low

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

The Institution should introduce visible formal mechanisms for systematically updating students on the Institution’s response to their feedback.

Managers should continue to develop and implement plans to formally analyse and report on student progression rates to further study or employment for every course.

The Institution should consider formally tracking the broad range of staff CPD activities.

The IIE should ensure that all the assessment briefs have clear links between the assessments and the learning outcomes.

The Institution should ensure that all feedback on assessed work be provided within the timeframe set out in the assessment policy.

**COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE**

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**THE INSPECTION WAS CARRIED OUT BY:**

Miranda Hobart

Lead Inspector