



**EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT INSPECTION OF PRIVATE FURTHER  
EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COLLEGES**

**FUTURES COLLEGE (BIRMINGHAM)**

Full Name of College	<b>Futures College (Birmingham)</b>
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Email Address	sidiqa@futurescollege.org.uk
Principal	Mr George Mathew
Proprietor	Mr Yue Gu
Age Range	18+
Total Number of students	19
Numbers by age and type of study	18+: 19 EFL only: 2 FE only: 17
Inspection dates	<b>27 – 29 November 2012</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the framework for Educational Oversight of private further education colleges and English language colleges. The inspection consists of a three-day team inspection of the college's educational provision.

The ISI is an approved educational oversight body authorised by the UK Border Agency to inspect privately funded further education colleges in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and English language colleges.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Standards for private colleges;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations to colleges outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the quality of colleges, and by placing reports in the public domain, makes this information available to students, Government and the wider community. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success.

The inspection of the college is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on students. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the college, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the college or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the college's compliance with employment law.

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLEGE**

- 1.1 Futures College (Birmingham) is a small institution located in premises in the city centre. The college's aim is to provide British professional qualifications which are accepted both in the UK and in the students' countries of origin.
- 1.2 The proprietors also own the sister college Futures College, Barking. The colleges are set up as one limited company and share a website and some operational systems. The owners act as director and marketing manager. Futures College as it is presently constituted is a relatively new organisation. Originally, the Birmingham campus was part of a larger college which included the campus in Barking. It was decided in 2009 that the two colleges should be separately licensed. Enrolment takes place each term and the Birmingham centre began enrolling students in April 2011.
- 1.3 At the time of inspection there were 19 students on roll, all of whom were over 18. All students are on Tier 4 visas. The majority of students come from Pakistan and China. Two students are enrolled on an English language course, nine on Institute of Administrative Management (IAM) Diploma in Business and Administrative Management level 4, six on the IAM Advanced Diploma in Business and Administrative Management level 5 and two on Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Postgraduate Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership level 7. The level 7 course was not inspected as it was not operating at the time of inspection due to student illness, though course records were inspected. No students were identified with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

## 2. THE SUCCESS OF THE COLLEGE

### 2.(a) Executive Summary

	Section of the Standards	Grade awarded 1-4
3.	The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievement	2 Meets expectations
4.	Students' welfare, including health and safety	2 Meets expectations
5.	The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	2 Meets expectations

- 2.1 Teaching and its impact on learning are good. The college is successful in providing a well-defined range of management, business and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses that meet the needs and aspirations of its students. Provision is well structured to provide a coherent course of study at different levels. Students achieve well in their courses, with success rates above the national average. Assessment information is used effectively by teachers in setting targets in individual learning plans which are regularly reviewed and updated. Additional English language support classes are offered to students free of charge. However, attendance in these support classes is low. Most students satisfactorily complete the course for which they register and results are good.
- 2.2 Arrangements for students' health, safety and welfare are good overall. All necessary measures are taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards. The college provides a safe and comfortable learning environment for its students. Students feel that the learning environment is safe and welcoming and that they are all respected and treated equally. Security of the premises is good and arrangements are effective in ensuring the safety of students. Attendance is satisfactory. Meticulous monitoring and attendance records are kept.
- 2.3 Ownership and oversight of the college meet expectations. Considerable investment has been made by the proprietors to ensure that college premises are comfortable and conducive to learning. Regulatory requirements are understood and implemented effectively. Administration is good. Appropriate recruitment checks are carried out and the owners fulfil their responsibilities for safeguarding, health and safety and welfare. Data is not routinely analysed to inform strategic decision making or effective development planning. Appropriate policies ensure that educational achievement is high, although tracking and monitoring systems are still being developed. Staff demonstrate good teamwork, though self-evaluation processes are under-developed and use of data for quality monitoring purposes is inconsistent.

## 2.(b) Action points

### (i) Compliance with standards for Private Colleges

2.4 At the time of the inspection, the college met all the key requirements of the standards for private further education colleges and quality is good. **The college meets expectations for the quality of education.**

### (ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.5 The college is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure management provides clear ownership of educational direction which results in effective quality improvement.
2. Embed self-evaluation processes which result in robust action planning that is regularly reviewed to measure progress.
3. Enhance students' experience through a greater variety of learner-centred interactive teaching and learning activities.
4. Improve monitoring of student progress, welfare and achievement by introducing regular tutorials in all programmes of study.
5. Improve existing support for students whose English language skills are a barrier to achievement by incorporating language support into learning programmes.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) Assessment of students prior to or on arrival**

- 3.1 Initial assessment of students meets requirements. Though the college does not undertake assessment of students prior to arrival, prospective students' ability is effectively monitored through the verification of external qualifications prior to and on arrival. The college supplements this with video-conferencing interviews where they consider it necessary. Information, advice and guidance regarding programmes of study are accurate.
- 3.2 Accurate and effective assessment of students' English ability and knowledge is undertaken on arrival with a spoken and written placement test, aligned with levels defined in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students indicate high levels of satisfaction with the induction they receive. As a result, students settle quickly into their classes.
- 3.3 Assessment information is used effectively by teachers in setting targets in individual learning plans which are regularly reviewed and updated.

#### **3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum**

- 3.4 The curriculum and course offer are appropriate and meet expectations. Students are well educated in accordance with their objectives and the college's aims. Courses are well matched to students' needs and objectives and meet awarding body requirements. As a result, students are able to learn and make progress. Provision is well structured to provide coherent courses of study at different levels. Clear progression routes are provided, based on accredited qualifications which meet UK Border Agency (UKBA) requirements. Most students satisfactorily complete the course for which they register.
- 3.5 Students express satisfaction with their learning programmes. All programmes of study develop students' skills adequately, are up-to-date, relevant and meet external requirements. However, some students need additional English language support in order to fully benefit from their management courses. The college offers excellent support in the form of free English language support classes to all students, though take-up of this provision is currently low.
- 3.6 Classes are accessible in terms of timing, location and duration. Courses match those detailed in the prospectus and college website and further courses are planned and currently being marketed.

#### **3.(c) The quality of teaching and its impact on learning**

- 3.7 The quality of teaching is good and enables students to acquire new knowledge and skills. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Learning activities are well



planned and suitably demanding. Teaching staff have good subject competence and are skilled in their subject areas. Appropriate resources are utilised to support learning. In the better sessions, teachers engage all students through group work and interactive learning activities which foster collaborative and independent learning. In the less effective sessions, teaching is didactic and tutor-led and student participation is limited.

- 3.8 Students' progress towards learning goals is monitored, although processes are still being embedded. There is evidence of the college's commitment to improvements in this area. Students are partially aware of their progress and what they need to do to improve through individual learning plans and conversations with teachers. Students on ESOL courses receive tutorials but learners on other programmes do not benefit from this.
- 3.9 Staff have a good understanding of students' cultural and linguistic diversity and engage with all learners. Assessment is fair, accurate and is carried out regularly. Internal verification processes are strong, well managed and contribute to improvements in quality. The college adheres to regulatory body requirements.

### **3.(d) Attainment and progress**

- 3.10 Students reach acceptable levels of attainment and the college's overall success rate for external qualifications is over 80 per cent. Students' progress is monitored through classroom discussion, formative testing, individual learning plans and, in ESOL classes, tutorials. Students make suitable progress. Recording of progress tests is carried out by class teachers. However, staff, managers and the students themselves do not have formal opportunities to analyse and discuss ongoing student performance.
- 3.11 Students receive good opportunities to develop their written work and marking is generally of a high standard with extensive annotations of students' work. In the business qualifications, English spellings and grammar mistakes are not always corrected in the text. Otherwise, practice in this area is rigorous.
- 3.12 During induction, students are given sessions on referencing and academic writing. Checks are carried out on authenticity in order to guard against plagiarism. Assessments are verified by external awarding bodies.

## **4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises (in line with expectations of educational institutions)**

- 4.1 Arrangements for students' health, safety and welfare meet expectations. All necessary measures are taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards. These measures meet legal requirements. Students and staff are aware of the fire regulations. Fire drills are regularly carried out and logged. Several staff are appropriately trained in first aid and fire safety. Signage is appropriate.
- 4.2 The college provides a safe and comfortable learning environment for its students. Lighting, ventilation, maintenance and decoration are of high quality. Furniture and fittings are appropriate for the needs of the students. Students confirm inspection findings that the learning environment is safe and welcoming and that all are respected and treated equally.
- 4.3 Toilet facilities are sufficient in number, though students commented that they are inconvenient to access. Negotiation is underway with the building's management to improve this. There are appropriate access arrangements for those who are disabled on another floor with lift access.
- 4.4 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective and off-site activities are risk-assessed appropriately. Security of the premises is good and arrangements are effective in ensuring the safety of students.

### **4.(b) Student registration and attendance records**

- 4.5 The college has clear and legally endorsed procedures for the collection and refund of fees which is accessible on the college website. Admission registers are properly maintained and attendance is rigorously monitored. Students who fail to attend are dealt with through an appropriate series of warning letters.
- 4.6 The college complies with UKBA reporting protocols and maintains accurate records.

### **4.(c) Pastoral support for students**

- 4.7 Staff members provide effective support and good quality guidance in accordance with the needs of students and the college's aims. Students report that they find all staff members friendly and approachable. Relationships within the college and between staff and students are positive and promote a good working atmosphere.
- 4.8 Guidance provided through induction processes and documents is effective. Students are introduced to the structure and demands of learning programmes and their rights and responsibilities. This helps them to settle into their courses quickly. The college positively promotes integration and tolerance and has appropriate policies in place to prevent bullying and harassment. Staff are highly sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity and provide good support for students. Students

report that there is a friendly atmosphere and they feel safe. The college provides appropriate advice and guidance for further study and career development during and at the end of students' programmes.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) Ownership and oversight**

- 5.1 Ownership and oversight of the college are good. The proprietors are involved in the college as director and marketing manager and discharge their responsibilities for financial planning and investment in accommodation, staff and resources very well. Considerable investment has been made to ensure that college premises are comfortable and conducive to learning. Students particularly value the proximity of the new premises to the facilities of the city centre and the convenient transport links. The owners provide support and stimulus for growth and development.
- 5.2 All necessary legal permissions from appropriate bodies are in place. Regulatory requirements are understood and implemented effectively. Appropriate recruitment checks are carried out and the owners fulfil their responsibilities for safeguarding, health, safety and welfare. However, data is not routinely analysed to inform strategic decision making and effective development planning.
- 5.3 Operational and academic management is devolved to the principal and academic director and there are appropriate policies to ensure that educational achievement and standards are high. However, tracking and monitoring systems are still being developed.

### **5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities**

- 5.4 Leadership and management are satisfactory. Appropriate policies are in place to ensure the educational objectives of the college are achieved. The college is effective in safeguarding students and ensuring student welfare. All legal duties are fulfilled. However, the mission statement, vision, strategic objectives and operational plans are not clearly understood across the organisation, nor consistently translated into practice.
- 5.5 Communication with staff is managed well although decisions and action points are not always recorded. Effective teamwork was observed during the inspection. Self-evaluation processes are in place but are under-developed and lack focused, measurable action points to ensure continuous improvement. Use of data for quality monitoring purposes is inconsistent.
- 5.6 The college is successful in recruiting and retaining suitable staff that are well qualified in their vocational areas. Staff responses during discussion indicate that relationships with managers are good and staff are happy working at the college. Health and safety are a high priority and staff receive appropriate training to ensure that student welfare is safeguarded and all responsibilities are implemented effectively.

**5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback**

- 5.7 Arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory and improving. The college has systems for monitoring and evaluating student performance through individual learning plans and tutorials, though tutorials are only available for ESOL students. Implementation of these strategies is inconsistent and requires more rigorous management controls. There is some analysis of student data to improve performance but students' formative grades are not closely monitored or analysed.
- 5.8 The college has a clear business plan but action planning, both as an institution and in individual areas of the college, is not carried out effectively. The college's self-evaluation report shows little evidence of the requisite level of reflection or the contribution of all stakeholders. Students' views are taken and used, but the college does not effectively extend the range and scope of questions to ensure that views are elicited on all aspects of the student experience. The college has a clear quality assurance cycle which has not yet been fully implemented. However, good progress has been made and many of the quality targets have been met.
- 5.9 The college has a coherent complaints policy which meets requirements. No complaints have been received to date. In pre-inspection questionnaires and during meetings with students, they expressed high levels of satisfaction and feel that the support provided by the college is good. Inspection evidence confirms these views.

**5.(d) Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks**

- 5.10 Procedures for selection and recruitment of suitable staff are effective and appropriate checks are made. Teachers are well qualified in their vocational areas and have very good subject competence. The college is successful in encouraging staff development by supporting staff to develop their teaching skills through financing courses such as Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS).

**5.(e) Provision of information**

- 5.11 Provision of information meets expectations. The college's website contains all the information required in the Standards for educational oversight. Inspectors received full co-operation from the college in providing all the information required by inspectors as laid out in the Standards.

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with students and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietors, and attended registration sessions. The responses of staff and students to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

### Inspectors

Mrs Pauline Bateman	Lead Inspector
Mr David Cox	Team Inspector
Mr Jason Merrill-Glover	Team Inspector