

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

END OF PROBATION REVIEW (College)

INSTITUTION: Cambridge Seminars College

ADDRESS: Logic House
143-147 Newmarket Road
Cambridge
CB5 8HA

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Mr Michael Trehwella

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Probation Accreditation

DATE OF INSPECTION: 28 March 2019

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Re-accreditation, 23 May 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Cambridge Seminars College (the Institution) is a privately owned organisation, established in 1981 to offer short courses and private tuition to students taking General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced level (A level) qualifications, pre-university Foundation programmes, pre-Masters foundation programmes and pre-Doctoral programmes. The Foundation programmes are especially attractive to overseas students who wish to gain entry to United Kingdom (UK) higher education institutions.

The Institution aims to provide personal attention and individual support to students and to enable them to meet their education and aspirations for their future careers.

Cambridge Seminars College is established as a private limited company with two shareholders who also act as the two directors. The former Principal retired and was replaced in October 2018 by the Director of Studies, who currently holds both roles. The former Principal has also relinquished his shareholding in and directorship of the company. The Principal is supported by the Head of Compliance, the Welfare and Health and Safety Officer, the Compliance, Admissions and Human Resources Officer and by senior academic staff. In addition, one of the directors has an operational role.

The Institution occupies a modern block of premises on a major road in Cambridge, a short distance from the city centre. The building includes eight classrooms, administrative offices and limited recreational space. The lease on this building ends later in 2019 and preparations are under way to refurbish another leased building in Cambridge for the Institution's use.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Institution offers A level courses, university preparatory courses at Foundation, pre-master's and pre-doctoral levels, and courses in English as a second or other language. The English language provision is designed to enable students to take proficiency tests, including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Courses are also offered to visiting closed groups, and, on a part-time basis, to students living locally. The pre-master's programme offers a wide range of subject areas covering arts, humanities, pure science, engineering and social and political sciences, and is normally bespoke. The pre-doctoral provision is tailored to meet individual students' progression requirements around specific research interests, strengthening academic writing and pre-doctoral skills including the preparation of research proposals. In addition, support is provided with writing doctoral submissions.

The Foundation programmes, in which the majority of students are enrolled, are based on A level and Advanced Subsidiary level (AS level) subjects that are offered by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and Pearson Edexcel. Delivery is based on the syllabuses and recommended schemes of work of these awarding bodies, appropriately adapted, with assessment undertaken by the Institution. Foundation and A level courses are offered in humanities, law, art and design, pure science, engineering and social and political sciences. The Foundation programme certificates are accepted by a range of universities as meeting their entrance requirements.

Teaching on all programmes is in small groups. The majority of classes have less than ten students. In some cases, students are taught individually, or in groups of two or three students, particularly on pre-master's and pre-doctoral preparatory courses.

At the time of the inspection, the Institution had 90 students, 80 of whom were studying on full-time programmes. The Foundation Programmes had the largest enrolment with 73 full-time students. Eight students, six full-time and two part-time, were studying on A-level programmes, eight part-time students on the English language programme, and one full-time student on the pre-master's course. The Institution has more male than female students and 17 students were aged under 18 years. Students come from a wide variety of countries, with 49 nationalities present at the time of the inspection. The countries represented included Albania, Ghana,

India, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, South Korea, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and the United States of America. Ten participants were from the UK.

Of those students who completed their studies in 2017 to 2018, most progressed to higher education studies, with a few progressing to work, and a very small minority either withdrew or are continuing their studies.

The Institution operates four intake dates across the year to accommodate students wishing to start higher education in the September or January semesters.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken by one inspector over half a day. Meetings were held with the Principal, the Admissions and Compliance Officer and the Welfare and Health and Safety Officer. A variety of documentation was scrutinised and one lesson was observed. The Institution had prepared thoroughly for the inspection and was fully cooperative both before and during the inspection.

4. Inspection history

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	19-21 November 1991
Interim	3 May 1994
Re-accreditation	27-28 February 1997
Re-accreditation	8-9 November 2004
Interim	21 February 2008
Re-accreditation	16-17 March 2010
Interim	4 February 2013
Re-accreditation	3-4 December 2013
Interim	24 February 2016
Re-Accreditation	25-26 January 2018
Mid-way Probation	31 October 2018
End of Probation	28 March 2019

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments 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

The Director of Business Development, who was also a company director, has left the organisation. Two shareholders who are also directors remain, one of whom is now taking a more active role within the organisation. Elements of financial monitoring and oversight formerly undertaken by the Director of Business Development and the Finance Officer have now been outsourced to a firm of accountants. This has led to some changes in the roles of the administrative staff. An additional part-time member of staff has been appointed to assist with aspects of compliance and quality assurance. She has assisted the Principal with teaching observations.

The organisation has ordered, and will shortly introduce, a software management package. This will enable student attendance to be registered and monitored more effectively.

English language classes offered on a part-time stand-alone basis are being phased out. English language provision and IELTS preparation, as an adjunct to the academic courses, will continue, as will English language courses for visiting closed groups. The buildings that are currently hired to accommodate English language classes will be relinquished.

2. Response to actions points in last report

2.4 Academic policies and procedures must be consolidated in programme handbooks.

The Academic Handbook has been revised to incorporate an overview of academic courses, policies and procedures, including for academic appeals, course and subject changes, examination retakes and learner support. It now provides a useful document for students and teachers. More detailed information on individual academic courses is available online.

7.1 Systems must be devised for eliciting feedback systematically from parents and academic staff.

Feedback from academic staff is now elicited through three routes. Newly introduced regular questionnaires provide opportunities for systematic feedback on specific areas, as well as for more general comments. The Principal continues to hold meetings with teachers individually or in small groups, during which feedback is obtained. The meetings between the Principal and teachers take place on an occasional basis and more systematic scheduling would ensure that all teachers have regular opportunities to provide input and feedback.

Annual staff appraisal meetings also offer opportunities for staff to provide comments. Parents have been sent e-mail invitations to complete an online survey, the results of which have been analysed. This procedure will be continued, on a termly basis or on student exit

The results of the first academic staff feedback questionnaire have been thoroughly analysed and staff recommendations arising have been taken forward by the Principal to the Directors.

7.1 The new student feedback mechanisms must be reviewed, and enhanced so that a pattern for regular feedback, both oral and written, can be established.

A mid-term student feedback survey was conducted for the first time during autumn term 2018. Such mid-term surveys will be continued on a regular basis. These surveys and the recently established student council will complement and supplement the student exit surveys previously undertaken.

7.2 The Institution must maintain a systematic and regular analysis of student feedback to inform improvements to delivery of provision and resources.

A thorough analysis of the first mid-term student survey has been undertaken and action points identified. Such analyses will be continued.

8.2 The Institution must devise formal mechanisms for academic staff to provide input on and review of its performance.

This has been undertaken through a teachers' questionnaire which it is planned to continue on a regular basis.

8.3 Action plans must be implemented and regularly reviewed with reports sent to senior managers.

Regular meetings are now held between the directors, the Principal and senior administrative staff. These are minuted with action points.

13.1 Students must be provided with programme handbooks which detail learning outcomes and assessment and grading criteria to support consistency of understanding.

The revised Programme Handbook provides useful information applicable to all programmes. Specific information on learning and assessment relevant to individual programmes is available online.

18.7 Risk assessments on radicalisation and extremism must be undertaken.

Risk assessments have now been prepared as part of a comprehensive set of documents outlining the Institution's policies and procedures in relation to radicalisation and extremism.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that measures are taken to elicit systematic feedback before the end of the student's first term, perhaps by both written and oral and less formal means.

A simple but well-designed mid-term questionnaire has been introduced. This provides additional systematic feedback at an earlier time than previously, enabling responses to be made sooner. This will enhance the quality of the provision.

The Institution is recommended to involve all academic staff in the processes of monitoring, analysis and review in areas that relate directly to their work.

The questionnaire for academic staff provides opportunities for teachers to contribute to reviews of academic arrangements.

Universities are provided with comprehensive information on foundation courses. It is recommended that a modified version of this information should also be provided to students.

The new enhanced Academic Handbook contains much relevant information and is available for students and to be sent to universities.

It is recommended that professional development work on the use of written feedback sheets be undertaken, in which teachers could share and identify good practice.

On the basis of feedback from teachers, the format of the written feedback sheets is to be revised, to promote greater consistency.

The Institution is recommended to review terms and conditions of teachers to provide for attendance at academic meetings and for in-house professional development.

This is being kept under consideration.

The Institution is recommended to provide a common room for teaching staff within its new premises.

The provision of a common room for teachers in the new academic premises will be considered when arrangements for the new building are more advanced.

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

Files were reviewed for recently appointed staff. These contained written references, prepared using a form requiring confirmation of suitability to work with young people. Copies of qualifications had been made and were retained on file. Contracts were up to date, and in one instance there was confirmation of satisfactory completion of a probationary period.

Conversations with administrative staff indicated that the changes associated with the departure of the Director of Business Development and the greater day-to-day involvement of the principal shareholder, who is also a director, have proceeded smoothly.

The former Director of Studies assumed additional responsibilities as Principal in late 2018, although the precise responsibilities were not fully determined at the time. With the recent departure of the Director of Business Development, and the greater involvement of the principal shareholder/director in the day-to-day operations of the Institution, the extent of the Principal's role, duties and responsibilities is still unclear.

The academic management arrangements have not been modified since the Director of Studies' promotion to Principal, to take into account his additional responsibilities.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The teaching observed was of a very good standard and was highly interactive. The teacher was very knowledgeable and skilled in asking questions to confirm the comprehension and recall of students. Explanations were clear and comprehension was effectively checked. Students were actively engaged.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Welfare Officer is knowledgeable about the homestay arrangements and her more general welfare responsibilities. There is evident care shown for the well-being of the students. Responsibility for student welfare is centralised, and teachers pass on to the Welfare Officer any concerns they may have. Students with welfare issues see either the Welfare Officer or the Principal, with whom the Welfare Officer works closely.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

The recently appointed Health and Safety Officer is knowledgeable about the procedures in place to ensure security of the science laboratory. These constitute good arrangements. Safety rules are clearly displayed in the science laboratory.

Premises are clean and well decorated and provide a good working and learning environment.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes

No

PART C – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

FURTHER WORK TO MEET OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

None	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
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FURTHER WORK TO MEET OUTSTANDING RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Institution is recommended to review the terms and conditions of teachers to provide for attendance at academic meetings and for in-house professional development.

The Institution is recommended to provide a common room for teaching staff within its new premises.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS REQUIRED

The role, responsibilities and duties of the Principal must be clarified.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
Academic senior management arrangements must be reviewed in the light of the Director of Studies' promotion to take into account his additional responsibilities.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low

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

It is recommended that the Principal should ensure his meetings with teachers, individually or in small groups, are undertaken systematically.

It is recommended that, pending full clarification of senior academic management arrangements, the Principal should hold regular liaison meetings with designated senior academic staff.