



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER: Oxford Summer Courses

ADDRESS: 18 Beaumont Street
Oxford
OX1 2NA

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Mr Harry Hortyn and Mr Robert Phipps

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 1 August 2019

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: 28 November 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

Oxford Summer Courses (the Provider) was founded in January 2010 as a limited liability partnership. It became a registered private limited company in March 2012.

The organisation provides short academic courses which take place in colleges of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London and elite private schools. The Provider has a permanent administrative base in Oxford with two satellite offices in Cambridge and London in shared office spaces. The Provider also offers courses in India and Singapore. However, BAC only accredits the provision offered in the United Kingdom (UK).

The courses blend teaching from Oxbridge academics with other experienced specialists and teachers. The aim is to share exceptional education and provide an enriching experience of the best of English culture.

The governing structure is headed by two directors who share responsibility for online business development. One director has responsibility for finance, operations and academic departments and the other for admissions, technology and marketing departments. The two directors are supported by 37 permanent administrative staff and, when courses are running, by 47 temporary staff.

Since the last inspection, there has been a significant expansion in the number of courses, participants, locations and staff.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Provider offers a range of summer and spring courses in various subject areas including sciences, business, classics, arts and humanities, literature, mathematics and law. The courses run over a three-week period in March and April, and a nine-week period from early June to late August. They are normally offered in two-week units, although one week, three week and four-week variants are also offered.

A total of 61 subjects are offered across the various locations and age groups of which 58 were provided in 2019. Subjects may be withdrawn in response to projected participant numbers and all participants are asked for a second subject choice to ensure appropriate class sizes and to maintain the quality of the academic experience.

Teaching for older participants is structured around small group seminars and individual tutorials, which are delivered by University academics or Oxford and Cambridge alumni. Class sizes are capped at eight. Younger participants are taught in groups of no more than 15 students. Participants are enrolled onto courses according to the quality of their application and their level of English language proficiency. All provision is face-to-face, and all courses are residential with the exception of London which has a non-residential option.

The Provider targets well-motivated international participants aged between 9 and 24. A total of 2292 participants have been enrolled in 2019. The Provider has a total capacity of 3094. The participants are drawn from about 110 nationalities. Nearly half the participants in 2019 come from North America and Europe and about a quarter come from East Asia and India. The rest come from a wide range of other countries including Australia and New Zealand. The majority of participants are under 18 years of age. On the day of the inspection, there were a total of 516 participants enrolled across all the Provider's UK sites. There were 86 in London and Cambridge and 430 across the other 12 sites being used by the Provider in Oxford.

All participants are enrolled before their course date and can enrol at any time up to the Friday before their course begins. Courses begin on a Sunday in either one-week blocks, for 9 to 12 year olds, or two-week blocks, for 13 to 24 year olds. Multiple blocks can be booked.

3. Inspection process

The inspection took place over one day by one inspector. Meetings were held with the Senior Operations Manager, the Oxford Programme Manager, the Academic Manager, the Programme Managers, a tutor and two groups of participants. Two lessons and an administration meeting were observed. Documentation, the website and printed publicity materials were scrutinised. The Provider was most co-operative with facilitating the inspection.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	25-26 July 2013
Interim	8 August 2014
Reaccreditation	18-19, 21 & 24 July 2017

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

Participant numbers have more than doubled since the last inspection and there has been considerable expansion of the programme with new courses and venues. A total of 428 courses ran during the current academic year.

In terms of the provision, changes since the last inspection include the introduction in 2018 of Project Based Learning courses for participants aged 15 to 17 based in London and the introduction of stand-alone English Language courses delivered separately from the academic courses. In 2019, courses for participants aged 9 to 12 took place at Wycombe Abbey School and Cheltenham Ladies' College as well as Spring courses for participants aged between 16 and 24 year based in Oxford colleges.

The expansion of the provision has led to the appointment of four new senior staff. These are a Senior Marketing Manager, Senior Finance Manager, Senior Academic Manager/Product Development and a Senior Sales Manager. The management structure has expanded since 2017 to include staff specialising in Finance, Marketing, Operations, Academic, Sales and Admissions, Human Resources and Technology. To accommodate this the head office in Oxford relocated to Beaumont Street in August 2018. Permanent staff levels have increased from 12 to 37 since the last inspection.

A new website for was launched in November 2018.

2. Response to actions points in last report

2.3 2.4 2.5 The Provider must formalise data collection and documentation to ensure accurate records are kept, to track the development of business.

The past two years have seen important developments in the way data is collected and analysed. Conversion rates of website visits to enquiries and from enquiries to applications are closely monitored. Improved data processing, coupled with the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives and Key Results (OKRs), has been introduced. Since the last inspection the Provider has developed a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to collate data collection. This has greatly improved data management and the accuracy of record keeping.

11.5 Oxford Summer Courses must ensure that academic staff, who teach participants aged 12 to 16 and who have no prior experience of teaching this age group, receive appropriate training to improve their teaching methods for this age group.

The teaching experience of academic staff is identified at application. There is an online training suite of tutor resources and guidance on syllabus creation. Quality assurance of teaching is carried out through lesson observations and a first day survey of participants. The results of the lesson observations feed into the tutor debrief sessions. However, teacher observations are not centrally allocated and co-ordinated.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

Monthly staff meetings should follow a standing agenda and be formally minuted.

Since the last inspection, the Provider has introduced standing agendas. Action points are drawn up during meetings and these are checked at the following meeting. Process maps effectively show the accountability of decision-making.

The Provider should ensure consistency of language in publicity materials.

The Provider has taken significant steps to bring greater consistency to publicity. The recently appointed Senior Marketing Manager has created an in-house marketing strategy and a guidance document that ensures consistency of publicity materials.

The Provider is recommended to ensure that potential participants with disabilities are aware of the support available to them and so are not discouraged from applying.

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on the website makes clear the nature of support available to participants with disabilities. In 2018, a participant in a wheelchair and a severely visually impaired participant were able to complete the course. Participants report strong levels of satisfaction with the pastoral support they receive.

The Provider should inform parents in writing of the expectations for participant behaviour and the potential consequences of a participant not meeting these expectations.

The code of practice and participant rules make clear in considerable detail the standard and type of behaviour expected of participants. However, there is a need to clarify the importance of privacy with regard to the participants' use of cameras whilst on the course.

The Provider should liaise with the host colleges to ensure all participants are taught in suitable accommodation.

The facilities used vary given the considerable age and range of venues used. However, the Provider conducts appropriate classroom inspections of all premises prior to signing the contract and the teaching accommodation meets the needs of the participants. Students report that any issues relating to teaching accommodation are dealt with promptly.

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 Provider is effectively managed.

Administrative staff are appropriately qualified and procedures have been enhanced with the creation of systematic documentation such as the Code of Practice.

For the permanent staff, the weekly mapping of KPIs and OKRs helps them to achieve company objectives.

The website gives comprehensive and accurate descriptions of the courses offered.

Participant feedback is systematically collected and analysed and this feeds effectively into annual reports and action plans.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Provider appoints trainers with an in-depth knowledge of their subject. Participants report that the trainers' level of knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects helps to inform their teaching. Lesson observations of teaching staff are regularly undertaken and the feedback helps to maintain the quality of the teaching.

However, some tutors reported delays in responses to queries. With a rapidly expanding administrative team, it is important to ensure that feedback to tutors is maintained and that communication with tutors is effective.

There is a clear policy on the procurement of academic resources and the use of pre-loaded credit cards gives trainers and course leaders greater flexibility in purchasing resources to ensure their sufficiency at all times.

Participants receive both oral and written feedback from teaching staff. The participants report that the small class sizes and availability of tutors outside of classes provide good opportunities for them to obtain feedback on their progress.

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Course documentation for pastoral staff is extremely detailed with information covering different scenarios making it clear what actions are expected in different situations. As a result, the participants feel well looked after and safe at all times. They praise the professionalism and commitment of the staff who look after them and report that staff successfully combine an appropriate level of supervision with making the course enjoyable.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are thorough. There are effective measures for the prevention of extremism and radicalisation in place. There is suitable policy wording and procedure within the safeguarding policy and safeguarding training for all staff includes prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

International participants have access to detailed advice on the website and the Provider has staff who can meet participants at the airports upon arrival if required.

Residential accommodation is fit for purpose and there is a high level of supervision.

Social activities are plentiful, varied and enjoyed by participants.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Provider has hired the colleges it uses in Oxford for several years and has established a close working relationship with the colleges.

There is a wide range of teaching and residential accommodation in buildings of different ages across twelve different sites in Oxford. Participants value the experience of living and working in an Oxford College.

The teaching accommodation is fit for purpose and participants report that any problems that arise are addressed quickly and effectively. Participants have access to student common rooms in the colleges where they are staying and private study facilities in their rooms. Staff can use their teaching room to prepare work.

The new head office provides appropriate accommodation for all staff as well as meeting rooms.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The Provider enables staff to contribute to the planning and development of new courses.

The two Directors are actively involved in the day-to-day management of the Provider and provide a clear vision and effective oversight.

There is a clear governance structure which is well supported by experienced staff.

The commitment and enthusiasm of the staff results in high levels of participant satisfaction.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

High

Medium

Low

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

The Provider should consider introducing the central allocation of teacher lesson observations to ensure the consistency of feedback to aid teacher development.

The Provider should introduce a policy to avoid issues of unwanted photography.

The Provider should ensure that the communication between the tutors and staff members is effective at all times.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE