



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

SUPPLEMENTARY INSPECTION CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT/STAFFING (College)

INSTITUTION: Cambridge Seminars College

ADDRESS: 87–89 Cherry Hinton Road
Cambridge
CB1 7BS

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Phil Scherb

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 30 November 2020

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, February 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Cambridge Seminars College (the Institution/College) is a privately owned organisation, established in 1981 to offer short courses and private tuition. Courses offered include General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Advanced-level (A-level) qualifications, pre-university Foundation programmes, Pre-Master's and Pre-Doctoral programmes, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The Foundation programmes are designed for students based outside the United Kingdom (UK) who wish to gain entry to UK Higher Education institutions.

The Institution is based in Cambridge. It aims to provide personal support to students and to enable them to meet their educational needs and aspirations for their future careers.

Cambridge Seminars College is a private limited company, with two shareholders who also act as Directors. The Principal is responsible for the day-to-day running of the College and is supported by a management team and teachers.

The Institution holds the lease on a spacious Victorian building, a short distance from Cambridge city centre. This is currently being refurbished but will provide 11 classrooms, a laboratory, reception, office space and social space for students. The refurbishment has been delayed and teaching has been moved to an online platform.

There have been significant staff changes since the last inspection.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Institution offers A-level courses, EFL and university preparatory courses at Foundation level. 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 groups, and, on a part-time basis, to students living locally.

The Institution is an approved centre for the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and Pearson Edexcel. The Foundation programmes are based on A-level subjects and the Institution's certificates are accepted by a range of universities as meeting their entrance requirements.

As part of the A-Level and Foundation programmes, all students also take a supplementary course on Training in Research, Academic and Cultural English and Study Skills (TRACES). In addition, all students attend UCAS workshops to register their details, draft personal statements and make appropriate choices for their university studies. Teaching on all programmes is in small groups and, in some cases, students are taught individually. The TRACES programme and UCAS workshops are taught in larger, cross-disciplinary groups to help students to integrate and to promote a collegiate atmosphere.

Prior to March 2020, all tuition was face to face. Between March and October 2020, all tuition took place online using a virtual learning environment (VLE). In October, students were able to access their courses both remotely and in person in the College. However, since November, the College has reverted to online tuition only. The College aims to revert to full- or part-time face-to-face tuition when this is possible and subject to circumstances and demand.

At the time of the inspection, the Institution had 21 students enrolled, the majority of whom were male. Twelve students are studying for A Levels, six are on Foundation programmes and three part-time students are studying EFL. Students come from a wide range of countries, including Mexico, Kazakhstan, Albania, Angola, Turkey, Russia, Japan, Spain, Nigeria, Israel and the UK. Just over half of the students are aged under 18 years.

Entry requirements include previous qualifications at an appropriate level depending on the course for which the applicant has applied. There is an application and interview process, and school-leaving certificates, existing

qualifications and English language levels are checked. The College normally operates three intakes a year for A-level and Foundation courses. EFL, Pre-Master's and Pre-Doctoral programmes are offered on demand.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken remotely by one inspector over one day. Meetings were held with the two proprietors, the Principal, the Academic Manager, the Student Services Manager, the Head of Recruitment and Business Development, teachers and students. Documentation was scrutinised. The Institution co-operated fully with the inspection.

4. Background to the supplementary inspection

There have been changes in management and staffing since the last inspection. The Principal, Student Services Manager, Assistant Student Services Manager and Academic Manager are all new appointments. There have also been changes in teaching staff.

5. 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 Review	31 October 2018
End of Probation Review	28 March 2019

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. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

1.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (full inspection)

The numbers below refer to the standards as presented in the college scheme document and main full inspection report.

1. The institution is effectively managed

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|-----|--|---|-----------------------------|
| 1.1 | The management structure is clearly defined, documented and understood, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, trustees or governing body. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 1.2 | The head of the institution and other senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 1.3 | There are clear channels of communication between the management and staff. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The management structure is clearly documented, well defined and understood. The two shareholders and joint proprietors act as Directors of the College and have regular weekly meetings with the Principal to ensure that the Institution is well managed.

Senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced. They are very clear about their specific responsibilities and carry them out very effectively.

There are clear channels of communication through meetings, e-mail and video conferencing. As a result, communication is clear and effective, and the College is managed effectively.

2. The administration of the institution is effective

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| 2.1 | Administrators are suitably qualified or experienced and understand their specific responsibilities and duties. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2.2 | The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the institution. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2.3 | The administrative support available to the management is clearly defined, documented and understood. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2.4 | Policies, procedures and systems are well documented and effectively disseminated across the institution. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2.5 | Data collection and collation systems are effective. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Staff with an administrative role are well qualified and experienced. Job roles are clearly defined.

The Directors manage the administrative tasks for the College as required, including finance and marketing functions. Day-to-day administration is shared efficiently amongst the team and responsibilities are clear. As a result, day-to-day operations run smoothly, and the team members work together well.

Roles and responsibilities are clearly documented and understood by the team.

Policies and procedures have been systematically revised and updated and are disseminated across the Institution. The relevant documentation is held on a shared drive.

Data is collected, collated and analysed very effectively and used well to improve the provision.

3. The institution employs appropriate managerial and administrative staff

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|-----|--|---|-----------------------------|
| 3.1 | There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3.2 | Experience and qualifications claimed are verified before employment. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3.3 | There is an effective system for regularly reviewing the performance of staff. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Policies and procedures for staff recruitment are effective and support the selection of appropriately qualified and experienced staff. References, qualifications and enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are all recorded on the Single Central Record (SCR), together with the dates of the training that has been undertaken.

Qualifications and experience are appropriately verified before employment.

Comprehensive staff performance appraisals are completed and, in the case of teaching staff, linked with lesson observations. All teachers are observed, initially in the first two weeks and on a regular basis thereafter.

Appropriate areas for development are identified and action points agreed to improve the student learning experience.

4. Publicity material, both printed and electronic, gives a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the institution and its curriculum

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| 4.1 | Text and images provide an accurate depiction of the institution's location, premises, facilities and the range and nature of resources and services offered. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4.2 | Information on the courses available is comprehensive, accurate and up to date. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The website is satisfactory and provides accurate information on the institution's location, facilities and the range and nature of resources and services offered.

However, the website is not very easy to navigate and the most recent changes to some of the policies are not currently reflected in the information on the website.

There are plans to move the website to a new platform and totally overhaul it in order to provide more easily accessible and up-to-date information for prospective students.

Course information is accurate and provides a clear outline of content for potential students, who can then ask for further information if needed.

5. The institution takes reasonable care to recruit and enrol suitable students for its courses

5.1	Entry requirements for each course are set at an appropriate level and clearly stated in the course descriptions seen by prospective students.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5.2	A formal application process ensures that students meet the entry requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5.3	Students are properly briefed on the nature and requirements of the courses for which they apply, and all application enquiries are responded to promptly and appropriately.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5.4	Any overseas recruitment agents are properly selected, briefed, monitored and evaluated.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> NA
5.5	Students receive a proper initial assessment, which includes language ability, to confirm their capability to complete the courses on which they are enrolling.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> NA

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Entry requirements are set at an appropriate level according to the chosen course. Those wishing to study A-level or Foundation courses need school-leaving certificates at an appropriate level. Those wishing to study at pre-Master's or pre-Doctoral levels need qualifications at appropriate degree levels. Evidence of suitable levels of English is also required.

The formal application process is robust and includes a personal statement, language checks, an application form and an interview. Qualifications are verified. The Institution contacts schools to check the school-leaving certificates.

Most students make their first contact through the website. These enquiries are responded to immediately with e-mails briefing potential students on course details and requirements. All enquiries receive a prompt response.

Most agents have been used for many years and are well known by the Institution. New agents who apply are carefully checked through a telephone interview and discussion, and references are elicited from UK sources. All agents are thoroughly briefed and, if requested, they are put into contact with the Institution's partner lawyer to ensure visa regulations are met. They are kept up to date by newsletters and e-mails and monitored to ensure that everything is processed correctly.

Appropriate initial assessment is used to determine students' levels in order to identify knowledge gaps and ensure that they are placed on courses that meet their needs. Students complete English language tests as part of the application process and on arrival. Initial assessments to check specific baseline subject knowledge to enable detailed lesson planning are only completed on arrival. At times, this limits teachers' ability to plan courses of study in advance.

6. There is an appropriate policy on student attendance and effective procedures and systems to enforce it

6.1	There is an appropriate, clear and published policy on student attendance and punctuality.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6.2	Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality at each session are kept for all students, collated centrally and reviewed at least weekly.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6.3	Student absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action taken.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The attendance and punctuality policies are clear and well implemented. Students are aware of the requirements.

Attendance and punctuality are accurately recorded at each session. Responsibilities for attendance recording are shared. Each manager takes responsibility for recording attendance in specific time periods during the day. This involves visiting the class and ensuring that everyone is present. As a result, the students see another member of staff and recognise the importance the Institution places on their attendance, which is recorded on a central spreadsheet.

Student absences are followed up immediately. A system is in place to e-mail the student at once, followed by a telephone call if no reply is received. If students miss classes without authorisation, the Welfare Officer talks to them and then they receive an e-mail from the Academic Manager.

Any student with an average attendance of under 90 per cent receives a written warning. If the problem persists after the second written warning, the student risks not being allowed to continue on their course. Attendance recording and follow-up procedures are excellent and consequently, average attendance is extremely high.

7. The institution regularly obtains and records feedback from students and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary

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|-----|--|---|-----------------------------|
| 7.1 | The institution has effective mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students and other stakeholders (such as staff, partner institutions and employers) on all aspects of the institution's provision, including formal student representation where appropriate. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7.2 | Feedback is obtained, recorded and analysed on a regular basis. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7.3 | The feedback is reviewed by management and action is taken where necessary. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7.4 | There is a mechanism for reporting on the institution's response to the feedback to the student body. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Institution has effective mechanisms for obtaining feedback. Student surveys are conducted in week one, at the end of each term and at the end of the course. Each student receives an academic tutorial at half-term and one-to-one welfare and academic tutorials at the end of each term, which also allow staff to gather feedback from students. There is also a student council meeting every term.

Staff present their views at regular staff meetings and complete satisfaction surveys. Staff confirmed that they feel their voices are heard. Student satisfaction levels are extremely high.

Feedback from all sources is regularly analysed and reviewed by staff, who then decide what action should be taken. Effective action is taken to make improvements where appropriate.

There is a written response to the student council and a response mechanism on the VLE so that the students know what has been done in response to their feedback. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are held on the same platform and these are informed by feedback. Consequently, students are assured that their voice is heard, and improvements are made to enhance their experience.

8. The institution has effective systems to review its own standards and assess its own performance with a view to continuing improvement

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|-----|---|---|-----------------------------|
| 8.1 | There are effective systems for monitoring and periodically reviewing all aspects of the institution's performance. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|-----|---|---|-----------------------------|

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- 8.2 Reports are compiled at least annually that present the results of the institution's reviews and incorporate action plans. Reports include analysis of year-on-year results on student satisfaction, retention, achievement, examination results and completion rates. Yes No
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- 8.3 Action plans are implemented and regularly reviewed, with outcomes reported to the management. Yes No
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This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Institution uses effective systems to monitor performance, including lesson observations, appraisals, student surveys, achievement results and data analysis.

An annual report is produced and includes analysis of year-on-year trends in areas where previous data exists. Student and staff satisfaction, achievement, attendance, staff performance, staff training, college services and welfare are all analysed and evaluated.

Action-planning for improvement is comprehensive and housed on a virtual platform, with clear action points and defined responsibilities. Progress is easily and efficiently monitored by managers. As a result, the College has demonstrated measurable quality improvement for the benefit of the students.

1.2 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

High

Medium

Low

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

It is recommended that the website is updated to ensure that it gives an accurate and up-to-date depiction of the Institution's current policies.

The Institution should consider revising pre-arrival initial assessment tasks to provide a more accurate baseline to better inform lesson-planning.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE
