



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION: Middlebury College - Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies

ADDRESS: St Michael's Hall
Shoe Lane
Oxford
OX1 2DP

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Professor Paul Monod

Accreditation status: Accredited

Date of inspection: 24 April 2015

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation 9 July 2015

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Founded in 1975, the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS, the College) was first accredited by BAC in 2009. CMRS is a charity and a limited company registered in the UK. The College is sited within the well-appointed four-storey premises of St Michael's Hall in the centre of Oxford, held on a long lease. Since its foundation CMRS has provided interdisciplinary, one- and two-semester courses related to the Medieval, Renaissance and early modern periods, almost exclusively to students studying undergraduate or postgraduate courses in the USA. Courses completed at CMRS were awarded credit by the US home institution.

With the recent retirement of one of the co-founders from active day-to-day involvement, the directors of the charity have taken steps to ensure the College's continuation and security.

Following a long association with Middlebury College, Vermont, USA, an arrangement has now been made for the CMRS programme to become part of its global network of overseas study programmes. This change came into effect in September 2014 and is for an initial three-year period, although it was reported that it is likely to be extended. Reflecting this, the programme is now renamed the Middlebury College-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program (Middlebury-CMRS or M-CMRS).

The senior staff at the time of the last BAC inspection have relinquished their posts and two new senior appointments have been made. A senior academic from Middlebury is Principal, on secondment from the USA (and a British citizen), and a British academic has taken up the post of Senior Tutor. Both are members of Senior Common Room at Keble College, Oxford, with which CMRS has had a longstanding association.

Constitutionally, the legal and management arrangements are somewhat complex. While CMRS Ltd continues as the leaseholder, the Middlebury UK Trust Ltd, an independent UK charity already in existence prior to the new arrangements, has assumed general oversight and responsibility for the College, although fees are set by Middlebury College trustees. As current directors of CMRS Ltd retire, they will be replaced by nominees from Middlebury College and Keble College. There is also close liaison with Middlebury College International Programs Office.

Academic affairs are overseen and decided by an Academic Board consisting of US and UK academics, to which the Principal and Senior Tutor report and whose meetings they attend. The Principal and Senior Tutor meet frequently and informally but also constitute the Academic Committee, which meets more formally to make key decisions on admissions and grading and to agree proposals to the Academic Board. A Faculty Advisory Board, drawn from Middlebury faculty, provides key input to decisions by the Academic Board. Students are now awarded Middlebury credit for the courses undertaken at the College, subsequently recognised for credit purposes by the home institution for students from elsewhere.

In 2012 CMRS achieved QAA Review for Educational Oversight (QAA REO). The College has UKBA HTS status and out of a total of 29 students during the Spring semester 2015, all were from US institutions and all but one had US nationality, one had dual US/EU country nationality, and seven were general visa students. Middlebury-CMRS has well-established links with the Bodleian Library, where students are readers, and with Keble College, which offers students library, dining, social and sports facilities through associate membership.

In addition to the Director and Senior Tutor, the College employs an administrator, librarian and two residential junior deans. Most teaching is undertaken by self-employed tutors, most of which hold positions within colleges or the humanities faculties of the University of Oxford, and teach a few hours each week at M-CMRS.

2. Brief description of the current provision

An extensive range of semester-long courses is offered in the Humanities, all of which are at NQF Level 6. A student's normal programme incorporates four areas of study: a Seminar (with a maximum of six students), two Tutorial courses and a Research course. The structure of the programme allows for some tutorial courses to be tailored to a student's specific interests and requirements.

During the summer period Middlebury faculty members may attend the College for personal scholarly activity or occasional conferences. The College is also proposing to offer a summer course for students for the first time in 2015. This will be at NQF level 6 on Museum Studies, with seminars, lectures, study visits and practical elements, and operated in conjunction with Compton Verney Art Gallery.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken by one Inspector during a half-day visit to the College. He reviewed the College website and recent QAA report in advance, and during the visit met with the Principal and Senior Tutor.

4. Inspection history

Full Accreditation inspection:	10 and 11 March 2009
Interim inspection:	12 March 2010
Re-accreditation inspection:	7 and 8 March 2013

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

There have been significant changes to the institution since the last BAC inspection in March 2013.

The changes in constitution and senior personnel are reported in the introduction.

The academic course offering has been broadened in period and to include a full range of humanities subjects, as included within the Humanities Division of the University of Oxford, from which many tutors are drawn. Courses have been added and withdrawn, and a considerable number of courses have been revised in content.

The programme structure has been modified. The Integral course has been reformulated as a Research course, in which students undertake supervised research within a designated broad area, underpinned by accompanying lectures and instruction in research methodology.

Seminar papers and research essays are being double marked, with second blind marking being undertaken by a Subject Adviser, appointed from the pool of tutors.

Students have access to Middlebury online academic resources.

The College is drawing on Middlebury procedures and protocols for certain aspects of human resource management, including staff appraisal, which has operated on an ad hoc basis hitherto.

Employed staff excluding the Principal are reviewed by the Principal, and the Principal is subject to review by Middlebury directly.

It was reported that beneficial links had been established with human resource/personnel management colleagues at Middlebury.

2. Response to action points in last report

Action point with Medium Priority

It is recommended that current discussions with CMRS regarding adopting a system of classroom observation are adopted in the near future. This could possibly be allied to a staff appraisal system as a means of disseminating good teaching practice across the College.

The College has undertaken limited observations of seminar teaching, but this has not been established on a regular basis.

Most teaching is by self-employed tutors who regularly teach for the University of Oxford or its consistent colleges, and who undertake only a few hours teaching weekly for M-CMRS, as required. The scale and nature of any appraisal process therefore needs to reflect this.

The College holds, and the inspector would concur, that observation of tutorial courses is neither appropriate nor necessary. There is frequent informal feedback from students to the Senior Tutor and this, with written feedback at the end of each course, provides an insight into the processes and quality of tutorial teaching. Issues arising with students during a course can usually be addressed by discussion between the tutor and the student or the tutor and Senior Tutor.

The College has undertaken limited observations of seminar teaching, but this has not been established on a regular basis. It is recognised that there may be some sensitivity on the part of some tutors to such observation. But equally, structured professional observation can provide useful feedback on teaching to tutors which they could find helpful in itself and, in some cases, valuable in securing permanent teaching positions in higher education. Observation is also a potentially important part of quality assurance by M-CMRS.

It is a minimum standard of BAC accreditation that classroom observation of teaching is undertaken, and the College must implement this for seminar courses in a suitable and appropriate way.

Recommendation

It is recommended that CMRS ensures that lists of key printed texts are regularly updated and supplemented with lists of periodical publications and digital sources, including journals, websites and e-book publications, where possible.

It was reported that reading and reference lists have now been updated or produced for all courses.

3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

3.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
<p>The newly appointed Principal and Senior Tutor have a good working relationship and have introduced a number of beneficial changes.</p> <p>Although complicated, the new management and governance arrangements appeared to be working well.</p> <p>The introduction of appropriate human resources procedures from Middlebury should strengthen the College’s management of this area.</p>				

3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
<p>The changes to the scope of the academic offerings, the replacement of the Integral course with the supervised Research course, and the introduction of double marking are evidence of the extensive review of academic provision that has been undertaken.</p> <p>The Senior Tutor maintains a close oversight of students’ work and progress through frequent informal contact with students and tutors, and through regular scheduled meetings.</p>				

3.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p>Comments</p> <p>The Principal retains primary responsibility for student welfare, but the Senior Tutor, junior deans and other members of staff also play their part. The concern of both the Principal and Senior tutor for student welfare was evident.</p> <p>All employed staff, with the exception of the librarian, have undertaken first aid training.</p>				

3.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p>Comments</p> <p>The premises are well maintained and presented. The library is a considerable asset and provides a very good working environment.</p> <p>Health and safety matters are the responsibility of the Principal, who delegates many of the day-to-day tasks and some risk assessments to the Administrator. The College also employs external consultants to prepare some risk assessments.</p>				

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Institution’s strengths

The College retains its historic strength of teaching by highly qualified tutors in small groups or one-to-one. Following the withdrawal from day-to-day involvement of the co-founder/founding principal, the College’s longer term security has been enhanced by the recently established incorporation within the Middlebury College Schools Abroad network.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
A system of classroom observation of seminar courses must be introduced.	M

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	