BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM VISIT
(Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: Mediterranean College

ADDRESS: 8 Pellinis Street
                                    11251 Athens, Greece

                                    Egnatia 2-4, GR546 26,
                                    Thessaloniki

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Professor Sophocles Xinis

DATE OF INSPECTION: 17 May 2018

ACCREDITATION STATUS AT INSPECTION: Accredited

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION ON ACCREDITATION: Continued accreditation 19 July 2018

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1.   Background to the institution

Mediterranean College (MC/the Institution) was founded in 1977 and belongs to the Xinis Educational Group, a major provider of private education in Greece. MC is licensed by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs as a private higher education institution. Its stated mission is for academic excellence, student success, academic and technological innovation and social contribution and to become a renowned international learning centre in Greece. The aims, through which it intends to achieve its mission, focus on student attainment, support and employability, high quality academic staff, quality assurance and improvement, an international profile and collaboration and participation in the community.

MC has offered higher education programmes in partnership with United Kingdom universities since 1992, working through franchise and validation agreements. It has had a number of different collaborative partnerships and its current partners are the University of Derby (UoD), for the majority of its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). MC offers its programmes on campuses in Athens and Thessaloniki, both near the city centre, with identical curricula.

MC delivers bachelor's and master's degree programmes leading to awards from UoD and MMU. They are a combination of franchised and validated courses, depending on the evolution of the partnership relationship and the approach of the partner universities. Courses offered through the partnership with UoD are generally delivered under a franchise arrangement, meaning that MC delivers an approved UoD programme. The exceptions are engineering courses, which are validated so the programmes, which are designed and delivered by MC lead to a UoD award. MMU courses operate under a validation arrangement in years one and a franchise arrangement in years three and four. Partnership agreements set out the terms of the contractual relationship and they are reviewed every five years.

MC is governed by the Board of Directors, on which mainly Xinis family members sit. Key policy decisions are made by the Board, in consultation with the Institution's Academic Committee, which has the primary responsibility for overseeing academic policies, standards and programme quality. The Head of the Institution reports to the Board. A Head of Academic Affairs and Head of Administrative Affairs report to the Head of the Institution.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Institution's undergraduate courses leading to UoD awards are Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) degrees in civil and construction and mechanical engineering; BSc degrees in computer science, computer networks and security and applied psychology and Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees in business management and business management with specialisations, business studies and business studies with specialisations, early childhood studies, culinary arts, and international hospitality management. BSc degrees are awarded by MMU in speech language and therapy as well as physiotherapy.

At postgraduate level, MC offers Master of Science (MSc) degrees in mechanical and civil and construction engineering subjects, computer networks, marketing management, hospitality management and counselling and psychotherapy. There are Master of Arts (MA) degrees in education specialisations. MC also offers a Master of Business Administration (MBA) global, and an MBA in global finance. Many postgraduate students are part-time and are studying on the MBA Global, which has the largest number of students at 115. All postgraduate degrees are UoD degrees.

All courses are available on both sites, although market demand and organisational priorities determine whether they are all run on both sites in a particular academic year.

A total of 836 full-time and 314 part-time students were studying at the Institution at the time of the inspection and a third of students were based in Thessaloniki.

The Institution aims to produce graduates who are proficient in their discipline and able to apply it in both Greek and English-speaking environments. The vast majority of students are native Greek speakers. On undergraduate programmes, the students transition from being taught and assessed in Greek to being taught and assessed in Greek and English and then taught and assessed in English for the final part of the programme. This gradual conversion from Greek to English is intended to facilitate students' shift from Greek secondary education to United Kingdom (UK) higher education. International students study the whole of their course in English. Teaching at postgraduate level is in English, apart from the MBA which is also taught in Greek.

Students are normally expected to have an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or equivalent score of 4.5 on entry to the Institution. Postgraduate course entry requires a minimum IELTS 6.0 or equivalent. All applicants are interviewed and there is an internal English language placement test for candidates who do not have an IELTS or equivalent certificate. Candidates may be required to attend the Institution's English language intensive summer short course. There is also an option to attend a year-long foundation programme, which concentrates on building English language and generic academic skills, before the student starts their core studies.

Most of the 76 academic staff are temporary and part-time and there are 22 permanent teaching staff. There are six management staff and 42 permanent full-time and eight permanent part-time administrative staff.

3. Inspection process

An inspection was conducted for half a day by one inspector at the Thessaloniki site. Meetings were held with the Deputy Head of Academic Affairs and the Principal of the Thessaloniki site, and with teaching staff including two programme leaders. A discussion was held with students.

4.   Inspection history

Reaccreditation inspection: 22 & 24 February 2016

Interim inspection: 30 April 2014

Re-accreditation inspection: 18-20 May 2011

Interim inspection: 29 April 2010

Supplementary inspection: 11 May 2007

Re-accreditation inspection: 16-17 Feb 2006

Interim inspection: 4 Feb 2002

Accreditation inspection: 25 Jan 2001

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments 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

The Institution now has a single license from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs for the Athens and Thessaloniki sites, which previously had separate licenses. This is to better reflect the fact that the Institution is a single entity with two campuses. This change has not had a major impact on the day to day operation of the sites, although the Institution is examining whether the single license will enable any administrative efficiencies.

The Institution plans to introduce several additional courses, with UoD as the partner university. The majority are at master's level, in civil, construction, and mechanical engineering subjects, data analytics, special education needs and disability, counselling and psychology subjects, and an MBA in global shipping. At undergraduate level, a bachelor's degree in computer games programming is planned. They are a mixture of validated and franchised courses. They are being proposed for approval shortly after the inspection.

2.   Response to action points in last report

7.7 The Institution must introduce a procedure for staff appeals and complaints.

The Institution has produced an appropriate procedure for staff appeals and complaints.

10.2 10.4 The Institution is recommended to pursue its aim to establish a Research Strategy, which should include in its scope transparent information to its staff regarding the availability and the procedures for obtaining any funding to support research.

The Institution takes research activity into consideration in staff recruitment. Requests for financial support for research are considered individually and on a case by case basis and making use of appropriate criteria. However, there is no research strategy. Given that the Institution's aims include broadening research relations with national and international education institutions and academics of international reputation, a research strategy is needed to ensure coherent development. A strategy would maximise efficient use of research resources and foster effective research collaboration with partner universities. It would also enable decisions about the direction and funding of staff and student research to be made on the grounds of compatibility with the Institution's research strategy.

23.3 It is recommended that the Institution continues its ongoing review of library provision to support its programmes and plans for necessary improvements in response to staff and student feedback.

The budget for the libraries in Athens and in Thessaloniki has substantially increased. Students also have access to the collaborating universities' e-libraries and to state universities' libraries. A new policy is in place for common book purchases for Athens and Thessaloniki. Students in Thessaloniki are very clear that the library had greatly improved since they had started at the Institution and the students were satisfied with the library provision. Inspection findings confirm this view.

3.   Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

Develop a more explicit statement regarding risk assessment, together with the associated formal processes relating to all aspects of its operation, to support its internal planning and for the reassurance of external stakeholders.

MC has appropriate separate polices about the way to mitigate the risks of the challenges it faces, for example the Academic Success and Student Retention Strategy. However, there is no overall consolidated risk assessment statement, strategy and register.

Work towards a more comprehensive statement of its strategic plan with clear targets, in a published form, with regular review of performance at institutional level.

At the end of each academic year, the Academic Committee evaluates organisational performance through the year in terms of meeting goals and targets. It also sets goals and targets for the next academic year. These are recorded in the committee's minutes. However, there is no consolidated published strategic plan.

Strengthen further its existing arrangements for staff appraisal, so as to extend systematic appraisal procedures to its administrative staff. The procedures should include an enhancement dimension which supports planning for staff development.

Arrangements for the appraisal of academic staff are robust and are documented in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH). Arrangements for the introduction of a formal documented appraisal system for administrative staff are under discussion.

Ensure that the introductory information given in the programme handbooks is related to the local context (details of teaching staff, facilities etc.) and that best practice with regard to the 'Hellenisation' of student information is adopted across all its programmes.

Handbooks from partner universities are adjusted to contextualise them to the Greek situation and to provide information about, for example, MC contacts. Both the original handbook and the Hellenised handbook are available to students.

Continue monitoring of feedback on assessment so as to ensure consistency across programmes, thus supporting good practice in this area.

Moderation is the main method of obtaining academic staff feedback on assessment and promoting consistency of marking. Internal moderation frequently includes Athens teaching staff moderating Thessaloniki-marked scripts and vice versa, with external moderation by partner universities. Students are asked to evaluate each module of their programme by completing a questionnaire, the results of which are summarised in a module evaluation report completed by the module team and considered by the programme committee. It includes assessment. Programme Performance Logs (PPL) show that staff development sessions were held on marking and moderation.

To seek ways in which it can define and meet reasonable deadlines for the return of graded work, so that students can benefit from comments on one piece of assessment before attempting another.

Institution policy is that coursework is marked and returned within two weeks, and that verbal or electronic feedback is given then too. The exception is when samples of student work are externally moderated by UK partners, when the timeline has to be extended.

Monitor the students' transition from Greek to English classes and target its additional support so as to achieve, wherever possible, more homogeneous groups with regard to language competence.

The language entry requirements are satisfactory, the language support offered by the English Department is comprehensive and commendable and there is language testing at the end of year two. However, there are incidents of where there are different levels of English language fluency among students in the same class. Therefore, the aim to have more homogeneous classes, to ensure that all students being taught and assessed in English are fluent enough to fully benefit from the course and that the learning of fluent English speakers is not adversely affected, needs to be kept under review.

Carry out a review of the use of space in the Thessaloniki Egnatia building, with a view to improving some classroom layout and also to provide more social space for staff and students.

The use of space has been reviewed, with a rearrangement of furniture to optimise the use of the classrooms. There are now two areas for recreation.

Realise its stated aim to produce a Quality Assurance Manual, integrating the documentation on existing procedures.

The Institution has produced an AQH 2017 to 2018, which integrates the documentation on existing procedures. However, there is scope for more effective structuring and formatting of the AQH and for a comprehensive flow chart of the programme quality assurance and enhancement process.

Develop a more formal and transparent communication pathway to inform students about changes and improvements made as a result of their feedback.

Students are satisfied with the extent to which their voice is heard and reported that they usually got an explanation if MC was unable to implement a suggestion. The channels of communication are in place, with class representatives included on student liaison boards, an active students' union and a student affairs office. Students are not systematically informed when their suggestions are implemented, and sometimes have to assume a change was due to their representations.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

4.   Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1   Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments The Institution effectively manages its UoD and MMU partnerships with their differences in policies and procedures. The current Student Handbook states that it contains general information and is not a substitute for the official regulations of the partner university. Various sections of the handbook emphasise that the relevant UoD and MMU regulations should be consulted, for example with regard to class attendance and exceptional extenuating circumstances regulations. Links to the academic regulations sections of the UoD and MMU websites are included in the handbook. The informative AQH includes diagrams of the MC management structure, job descriptions of key academic and administrative posts and committee membership and remits.				

Ongoing planning and monitoring will be required to ensure that MC's physical and human resources keep pace with the expanded course portfolio.

4.2   Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments Teaching staff report that they are supported in their staff development by both MC and the partner universities. There is a well-developed multi-criterion evaluation of teaching staff that includes their evaluation by students, class attendance rates, peer observation and evaluation by the programme leader. The resulting annual evaluation report is used for making decisions about the teacher's contract, further development, and any reward for outstanding performance and promotion. This creates a tangible link between teaching performance and career progression. There is an annual staff development schedule in the AQH, which sets out the pedagogical themes to be covered during the year, for example, teaching methodology, student needs and learning barriers, assessment, learning outcomes and educational goals. It also includes the topics that will be covered and by whom, for example, programme leaders or the Academic Director. There is an annual Learning and Teaching Conference that informs teachers about educational developments and disseminates best practice. Both are commendable.				

4.3   Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be		✓		
Comments Students are very positive about the quality of teaching, the commitment and accessibility of academic staff, the personal tutor system and the helpfulness of administrative staff. They commented that the smaller scale of the Thessaloniki base resulted in more individual attention and informal interaction with staff, enhancing their learning experience. Academic teaching staff praised the communication with their colleagues on the Athens site as excellent, with constant interaction and meetings held through telecommunications. Student research projects are presented either orally or by poster presentation at the annual student excellence conference to be held in Athens and Thessaloniki at the end of May. The student with the best presentation is awarded a research excellence award and a postgraduate scholarship. This is a commendable initiative to encourage student researchers. 10.2 10.4 There is no research strategy. Given that the Institution's aims include broadening research relations with national and international education institutions and academics of international reputation, a research strategy is needed to ensure coherent development.				

4.4   Student Recruitment, Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			

Comments

Examples of undergraduate and postgraduate applicants' interview forms are included in the AQH and are comprehensive documents that provide the interviewer with set questions to ensure consistency in the student recruitment process.

An example of the four-day student orientation and induction was provided, and it is comprehensive.

The English Department delivers the English language modules of undergraduate courses and provides services available to all students, including internal English placement tests, extra English classes and tutorials, English as a Foreign Language workshops, seminars, testing preparation, and drop in sessions. This support appears appropriate and comprehensive.

In the Student Handbook 2017 to 2018 information about staff contacts, staff office location, and location of student facilities and services appears to refer only to the Athens site. Similar information about the Thessaloniki site should be included in the 2018 to 2019 handbook.

4.5   Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			

Comments

The Institution owns its premises in Athens and leases the Thessaloniki premises. The standards for educational buildings and leasing conditions are defined by Greek law. MC hires external facilities for the specific requirements of some of its courses, for example, professional kitchens, physiotherapy facilities.

The Institution is likely to hire an additional building in Athens to accommodate the likely expansion in the number of programmes, but this is not finalised. Monitoring of the suitability of the accommodation in Athens and Thessaloniki should be part of the wider monitoring of the resource impact of expanding the number of courses.

The Thessaloniki premises is a refurbished hotel. It provides a satisfactory learning environment including classrooms a computer laboratory, library, and a large lecture conference room and recreation areas for students. The issue of obstruction of classroom exits by whiteboards referenced in the last report has been fixed.

Comprehensive health and safety information is included in the Student Handbook.

4.6   Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			

Comments

Partner universities play a major role in programme quality. MC works within UoD 's comprehensive collaborative provision framework which sets out eight aspects of quality monitoring and review that UoD undertakes with partners including MC, covering external examiner reports, student feedback, programme

committees, annual visit to collaborative partners, annual monitoring reports, periodic review and partnership review. MMU specifications on quality are set out in an institutional code of practice. These provide a rigorous framework of for quality control.

Each MC programme team maintains a continuously updated rolling PPL that includes suggestions for modification of the programme, analysis of student performance data, examples of good practice and enhancement, management of quality and standards, programme management and delivery review, and an action plan. Programme teams review and update it at team meetings. PPLs are considered and approved annually by both MC and partner university bodies and both monitor implementation. A specimen example of a PPL for the BA in early childhood studies is included in the AQH and is appropriate.

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS
The arrangements with the partner universities are clear and provide a framework for the assurance and enhancement of the Institution's functions.
Internal monitoring processes are clearly defined and action-focused.
Academic staff are supported in the development of pedagogical skills.
Events are held, for example, the student excellence conference, the learning and teaching conference, that develop student and staff knowledge and skills.
Students met at Thessaloniki are very satisfied with the quality of their MC experience.

ACTIONS REQUIRED	Priority H/M/L
10.2 10.4 The Institution must develop, disseminate and implement a research strategy which will inform the direction of research, the funding of staff research, and research opportunities available to students.	M

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
MC should develop and implement a comprehensive consolidated risk strategy and processes for monitoring and mitigating risks.
MC should develop and publish a strategic plan.
MC should continue to work towards full implementation of an appraisal system for non-academic staff, which identifies generic administrative core competencies against which performance is reviewed.
The Institution is recommended to keep the aim to have more homogeneous classes, to ensure that all students being taught and assessed in English are fluent enough to fully benefit from the course and that the learning of fluent English speakers is not adversely affected under review and take appropriate action as required.
MC should review the structuring and formatting of the AQH and include a quality review process organogram and add information about staff contacts, staff office location, and location of student facilities and services at the Thessaloniki site to the latest version of the Student Handbook.
The Institution should ensure that feedback to students always identifies where changes have been made in response to their comments and concerns.
The Institution is recommended to undertake on-going planning to ensure that the Institution's physical and human resources keep pace with the growth in courses and that programme quality is maintained.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS	
Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	**YES**
Further comments, if applicable	