

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

MID-WAY 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: 31 October 2018

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued probation accreditation 31 January 2019

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. Courses are also offered to overseas students who wish to gain entry to United Kingdom (UK) higher education institutions.

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 in 2019 and preparations have already begun to refurbish another leased building in Cambridge for the Institution's use.

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 two of the three listed directors. The former Principal has recently 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, and has been replaced as shareholder and director by the Director of Business Development. With the retirement of the former Principal, the Institution's connection with the Cambridge International Education Centre (CIEC) has also come to an end.

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). 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 68 students, 61 of whom were studying on full-time programmes. The Foundation Programmes had the largest enrolment with 52 full-time students. Seven students, six full-time and one part-time, were studying on A-level programmes, eight students on the English language programme, and two on the pre-master's course. The Institution has more male than female students and ten students were aged under 18 years. Students come from a wide variety of countries, with 38 nationalities present at the time of the inspection, mainly African, European and Asian. Most

countries are represented by single individuals, with the following having two to four representatives: Angola, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sweden. Nine 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 and the Admissions and Compliance Officer, changes made to equipment and premises since the last inspection were looked at and a variety of relevant documentation was scrutinised. At the time of the inspection, English language students were being taught in rented premises off-site. These were not visited during the inspection. 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

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 former Principal, who was also a shareholder and Director, retired in October 2018. The Director of Studies has assumed the additional role of Principal, and supporting academic appointments will be made in due course. The Director of Business Development has become a shareholder and director, joining the sole continuing shareholder/director. The Institution's connection with the Cambridge International Education Centre (CIEC), owned by the former Principal, has ended.

The Institution has taken the lease on a new building in Cambridge and is in the early stages of planning its refurbishment. The Institution will move to the new premises when the lease on the current building comes to an end early in 2019.

There has been significant investment in equipment since the last inspection.

2. Response to actions points in last report

2.4 Policies which affect student learning must be more effectively disseminated to students.

The Institution has taken appropriate steps to improve the dissemination of academic policies and procedures to students. Students are provided with a programme for each subject, which is informed by some policies. Copies of the policy manual are now available for students in their common room. The separation of academic policies into different documents and places makes their dissemination more difficult.

7.1 More formal gathering of feedback, including from staff and parents, must take place and be used to better inform enhancement to the quality of the student learning experience, and ensure that provision is effectively reviewed to meet changing requirements.

The Institution has introduced a number of additional measures to elicit student feedback more effectively. Exit questionnaires completed by students were introduced at the end of the 2017 to 2018 academic year. These elicit a considerable amount of useful and relevant feedback, much in the form of numerical ratings. A termly questionnaire has been formulated for use for the first time in December 2018.

Two student representatives have been designated, to meet with management and provide another avenue for feedback to management, and for relaying its response. The Institution has therefore taken a number of very good measures to meet this requirement, in part.

Feedback from academic staff has not yet been formalised. There are opportunities for feedback during individual appraisal meetings, but currently there are no opportunities for staff to discuss issues and provide feedback collectively.

The issue of feedback from parents remains to be addressed. Most students at the Institution are over 18 and there is little contact with parents.

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

Student feedback on exit questionnaires is partly by numerical grading. The numerical scores from exit questionnaires earlier in the year have been comprehensively analysed and used as a basis for discussion at a senior staff meeting.

A good start has therefore been made to fulfil this requirement. To establish that analysis is systematic and regular, the analysis of feedback must be maintained and this will be checked at the next inspection to ensure that this action point is fully met.

7.4 The Institution must develop appropriate systems to enable it to report to the students on appropriate actions taken to in relation to their feedback.

The election of student representatives provides an appropriate opportunity for the Institution to report to the students on actions taken in relation to their feedback.

8.1 The Institution must implement formal systems for the periodic review of its performance across all aspects of its operation.

The Institution held an annual monitoring and performance review in August 2018 and an interim review meeting is scheduled for December 2018. These meetings include the Principal plus senior administrative and management staff.

8.2 Regular reports, linked to annual monitoring, must be produced to include year on year analysis of student satisfaction, retention, and achievement rates.

The Institution has made a promising start to this process by introducing formal review meetings of senior staff. Year-on-year analysis of data will become possible as these meetings are continued. Currently, the Institution does not involve academic staff in the processes of monitoring, analysis and review in areas that relate directly to their work.

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

The new monitoring and review meetings provide suitable opportunities for action plans to be implemented and reviewed regularly with reports to senior managers. The minutes of the first such meeting demonstrate a commitment to review and action. Work to meet this requirement is ongoing and it can only be fulfilled after a period of practice has been demonstrated.

11.3 The Institution must include consideration of teaching observations in its appraisal system for academic staff.

Classroom observations are systematically carried out by the Principal and discussed with teachers very soon afterwards. Completed observation sheets were seen for a number of teachers and there is now brief reference to the observations in their completed appraisal documentation.

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

Students are provided with learning outcomes and assessment and grading criteria in various ways, through access to online examination board syllabuses, through access to the policy manual which includes an appeals procedure and by schemes of work and student programmes which set out work on a week-by-week basis.

Students are not provided with comprehensive information on foundation courses and programme handbooks have not yet been produced.

13.6 The development of mechanisms to support both the clarity and consistency of written feedback must be introduced.

A well-designed but simple feedback cover sheet has been devised on which staff record comments on marked written work. A number of examples were seen of these sheets being used for extensive, constructive, focused and helpful comments. The extent and quality of written feedback is variable.

18.7 The Institution must introduce training for staff on the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and carry out appropriate risk assessments.

Staff have undertaken online training in this area. Risk assessments have not yet been undertaken.

20.3 The Institution must ensure that reference is made to the BAC complaints procedure in its complaints procedure.

The BAC complaints procedure is included as part of the full complaints procedure in the Student Handbook.

26.2 The Institution must review its IT facilities and update the computers used in classrooms and in the computer laboratory.

Four new computers have been purchased for use in classrooms, and one for the library. In addition, new projectors have been purchased so that most classrooms now have a laptop and projector or smart television. IT facilities have now been considerably enhanced and the Institution has met this requirement.

27.1 The Institution must establish a discrete library within the Institution to provide greater access to a wider range of materials, and a quiet study space for students.

A room has been designated as a library/study space, considerably larger than that previously available as a study space. Books formerly distributed around the Institution have been brought together here and there are computer work stations. This new space provides a good addition to the Institution's facilities.

27.4 The Institution must provide locker or other storage space for students to store their practical work to avoid damage.

Large lockable cupboards for storage of art work have been installed in the library. A suite of 48 smaller lockers has been fitted in the student recreation room.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The Institution is recommended to consider the introduction of an internal programme of teaching staff development, which would ensure that information is exchanged and best practice is effectively shared.

This has not yet been introduced. Teachers are engaged on an hourly paid basis and the Principal is formulating recommendations for payment for attendance at additional meetings.

The Institution should consider the introduction of a system of student identity cards.

This recommendation is being kept under review, but a computer-based identity card system is currently considered to be too expensive.

The Institution is recommended to review future options for providing a teaching staff room to facilitate greater sharing of good practices.

The Principal is aware of the benefit of providing a teaching staff room and hopes the new premises will enable this provision to be made.

PART C – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

FURTHER WORK TO MEET OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

2.4 13.1 Academic policies and procedures must be consolidated in programme handbooks.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
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.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
7.1 Systems must be devised for eliciting feedback systematically from parents and academic staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
7.2 The Institution must maintain a systematic and regular analysis of student feedback to inform improvements to delivery of provision and resources.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
8.2 The Institution must devise formal mechanisms for academic staff to provide input on and review of its performance.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
8.3 Action plans must be implemented and regularly reviewed with reports sent to senior managers.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
13.1 Students must be provided with programme handbooks which detail learning outcomes and assessment and grading criteria to support consistency of understanding.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
18.7 Risk assessments on radicalisation and extremism must be undertaken.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low

FURTHER WORK TO MEET OUTSTANDING RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Institution is recommended to review 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

None	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
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ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

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.

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.

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.

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.