

# BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

## INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

**INSTITUTION:** Middlebury College, CMRS Oxford Humanities Program

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

**HEAD OF INSTITUTION:** Dr Guy Perry

**ACCREDITATION STATUS:** Accredited

**DATE OF INSPECTION:** 21 November 2019

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:** Continued accreditation 20 February 2020

### **1. Background to the institution**

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Middlebury College, CMRS Oxford Humanities Program (M-CMRS/the Institution) was formed in 2014 when the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS) became part of the Middlebury College Schools Abroad network. This was a temporary arrangement which became permanent in 2017. The Institution offers residential study abroad programmes for undergraduate students, mainly from the United States of America (USA). Middlebury College UK Trust, an independent UK charity that is part of Middlebury College, has oversight and responsibility for the operation of the Institution and works in partnership with Keble College, University of Oxford.

CMRS is a limited company, registered in the United Kingdom (UK), which holds charitable status. At the time of its foundation in 1975, CMRS provided one or two-semester programmes concerning the interdisciplinary study of the medieval, renaissance and early modern periods. Middlebury College is a highly regarded liberal arts college in the USA. It is particularly well-established in the field of international education, with a wide range of schools operating around the world.

M-CMRS operates from a four-storey premises at St Michael's Hall in the centre of Oxford, which is made up of two linked properties.

The Institution is run by a senior management team consisting of the Principal, the Senior Tutor and the Administrator. They are supported by the Assistant Senior Tutor and the Librarian, as well as two Junior Deans, two housekeepers, and various other temporary staff. The Principal, Senior Tutor and Assistant Senior Tutor collectively comprise the Academic Committee, which regularly meets to make decisions on admissions and grading, to discuss other academic and/or pastoral matters, and to agree on proposals to submit to the Academic Board. The latter, which consists of UK and US academics, meets once a year, and the Principal, Senior Tutor and Assistant Senior Tutor all report to it. A Faculty Advisory Board, drawn from members of Middlebury's staff, also provides key input into the Institution's strategy and quality control, and its members visit M-CMRS each year.

### **2. Brief description of the current provision**

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For the two semester programmes which are held each year, an extensive range of humanities related subjects is offered, at Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) Level 6. The standard programme consists of four elements. These are a seminar, two one-to-one tutorial courses, and a research course. Tutorials are selected from a comprehensive list, and the structure of the programme allows for some courses to be tailored to a student's specific interests and requirements. Most students attend for only one semester, but a small minority attend for two.

Since 2017, M-CMRS has also offered a five-week credit-bearing programme in Museum Studies at Level 6, which incorporates seminars, lectures, study visits and practical elements. This is operated in partnership with Compton Verney, a stately home and art gallery in Oxfordshire.

Middlebury acts as the School of Record and awards graduation credit for each semester successfully completed at M-CMRS. For students who come from other universities, who collectively constitute about a third of the cohort, this is recognised for credit purposes by the Institution at which the students are registered, using the standard USA academic credit transfer processes. M-CMRS also works very closely with the Middlebury Study Abroad Office, which provides support for admissions, recruitment and marketing.

Although the Principal, Senior Tutor and Assistant Tutor provide some of the teaching, most of the teaching is done by self-employed part-time tutors. The greatest majority of these hold positions within the colleges or humanities faculties of Oxford University.

M-CMRS students are also Associate Members of Keble College, which gives them access to dining, library, sports and social facilities. However, their academic progress and overall welfare remain the responsibility of M-CMRS.

At the time of inspection, there were 27 students approximately half male and half female, the majority coming from the USA. The Institution does not accept students under the age of 18.

### **3. Inspection process**

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The inspection was conducted over one day by one inspector. Meetings were held with the Principal, the Senior Tutor, the Assistant Senior Tutor, the Administrator. In addition, focus meetings were held with a group of students and a group of tutors. A tour of the premises was carried out and the website and various documents were scrutinised. The information required was readily provided and the Institution co-operated well with the inspection process.

### **4. Inspection History**

<b>Inspection Type</b>	<b>Date</b>
Full Accreditation	10-11 March 2009
Interim	12 March 2010
Re-accreditation	7-8 March 2013
Interim	24 April 2015
Re-accreditation	24-25 July 2017

## **PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

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*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**

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In December 2017, the initial three-year partnership, by which CMRS would become a part of Middlebury College's global network of Schools Abroad, was transformed into a permanent arrangement.

The previous Principal left M-CMRS at the end of June 2018. A recruitment process was carried out, and a new suitably qualified and experienced Principal was appointed soon after. Since then, the previous Principal has become part of the Board of Directors of CMRS Limited.

Following a restructure of committees and working practices, M-CMRS's Academic Committee now consists solely of the Principal, Senior Tutor and the Assistant Senior Tutor. In order to save time and increase efficiency, it was decided that the Administrator should no longer be part of the Committee.

The position of Assistant Senior Tutor is now well-established as a development post for early career academics, with appointments being made on a fixed-term basis.

### **2. Response to actions points in last report**

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*24.1 The SMT must secure an extension to the lease on the Queen Street premises and notify BAC when this has been done.*

The extension to the lease has not yet been secured, but under UK law, M-CMRS is secure under its expired lease until a new one is agreed. The Principal has worked to secure conditions under which a new lease is signed, but will only sign a new lease which ensures that fire access and escape routes are fit for purpose. Negotiations with the landlord and the tenants of the retail premises situated below the Institution are ongoing. The Principal has been advised by its surveyors that M-CMRS is secure under the expired lease until a new one is agreed.

### **3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report**

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*The College is recommended to review its current practices for the creation of individual student records on its in-house system, with the aim of establishing secure and reliable links between the admissions system operated by Middlebury and the student record system used at Middlebury-CMRS.*

M-CMRS conducted a review of its practices in this field with the Assistant Director of International Programs at Middlebury. The intention was to integrate the two student record systems. However, the two were found to be incompatible, and M-CMRS has concluded that the best policy would be to retain two systems for the time being, with all information fully shared and available to both sides. This is currently working well.

*The College may wish to explore the possibility of gaining external input into classroom observations from an academic development unit in a university such as Oxford Brookes.*

M-CMRS has not found a suitable academic development unit at Oxford Brookes or elsewhere that fits the requirements of its programmes, so no external input into classroom observations has been put in place. The appraisal procedures for teaching staff do not incorporate regular classroom observation.

*The College is recommended to monitor the revised processes for providing out of hours support and cover for the Junior Deans, after they have been in operation through a full semester, to ensure that they are working effectively and not simply transferring an undue burden to other staff.*

The Principal reviewed this soon after taking office in the summer of 2018. The Junior Deans remain the first port of call on an out-of-hours basis, with a further line of support provided by Keble College lodge, which is open and available to M-CMRS students 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This provides an extra layer of support and cover for the Junior Deans.

*The College is recommended to provide greater signage within its premises.*

Additional signage has been put in place, with a particular emphasis on fire safety and security. As a result, signage is now sufficient.

#### 4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

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##### 4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

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The standards are judged to be:  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

##### Comments

There is a clear management structure that includes suitably qualified and experienced team members. Communication is clear and meetings are minuted. As a result, the Institution is well managed.

The Administrator has effective systems in place to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the organisation and works very well with the management team.

The Institution has clear policies and procedures for the recruitment of new staff and has a strong network of contacts to ensure that new staff are of a high calibre. Permanent staff performance is appraised by the Academic Committee who regularly review informal and informal student feedback.

Publicity is accurate, up-to-date and gives rise to realistic expectations.

Enrolment procedures are thorough and formal, ensuring that all students meet the entry requirements and are well briefed on the nature and requirements of the course.

Attendance and punctuality are monitored effectively by the Administrator with support from the Senior Tutor and Assistant Senior Tutor. In cases where attendance or punctuality become a concern, the Principal takes the lead.

Student feedback is collected on a regular basis, and is reviewed in detail by the Academic Committee. In addition, students feedback informally to the Senior Tutor and her assistant. Appropriate action is taken and recorded. However, the Institution does not communicate to students the action taken as a result of their feedback

The Academic Committee and Board reviews the Institution's performance on an ongoing basis. In addition, annual reports are produced, and an action plan is developed.

##### 4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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The standards are judged to be:  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

##### Comments

The Academic Committee has primary responsibility for the academic management of the Institution, and is made up of suitably qualified and experienced members. Academic management is effective.

Students, tutors and managers fed back consistently that courses are academically rigorous and effectively develop students' knowledge and skills.

Tutors are appropriately experienced and qualified. Students fed back that their subject knowledge was very good. Tutor appraisal procedures are mostly informal and informed by student feedback. Not all tutors have had classroom observations.

Students receive personal oral and written feedback on their progress from their tutors and are highly aware of how their progress relates to their targeted level of academic achievement.

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#### 4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met     Partially Met     Not Met

**Comments**

Welfare provision for students is very good. There are a number of trained staff members with responsibility for student welfare, physical and mental health first aiders. Advice and information provided prior to and upon arrival are appropriate to international students. There is a comprehensive relevant one-week induction for all students.

Terms and conditions and complaints procedures are fair and transparent and include reference to BAC's complaints procedure.

Residential accommodation is clean, safe and appropriately supervised by the Junior Deans.

A social programme is provided for students, as well as extensive information about leisure opportunities in Oxford. Staff accompanying social activities are appropriately trained. However, they are not given risk assessments which have been carried out by the Institution.

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#### 4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met     Partially Met     Not Met

**Comments**

M-CMRS is secure under its expired lease until a new one is agreed.

The premises provide a safe, secure and clean environment. There is good guidance on health and safety made available to students and staff.

There are classrooms of a variety of sizes which provide suitable spaces for one-to-one tutorials, seminars or larger lectures.

There are excellent facilities for private study, including a spacious well-resourced library.

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#### 4.5 Compliance Declaration

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**Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.**

Yes     No

**PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS**

**STRENGTHS**

Policies and procedures for staff recruitment are clear and the Institution has a strong network of contacts to ensure that newly recruited staff are of a high calibre.

Students and staff feedback states that courses are academically rigorous and effectively develop students' knowledge and skills.

Welfare provision for students is very good, with trained staff members, useful advice and information and a comprehensive relevant one week induction for all students.

There are excellent private study facilities.

**ACTIONS REQUIRED**

The Institution must develop appropriate policy and practices to monitor and evaluate classroom teaching.

High     Medium     Low

The Institution must consider ways in which it can communicate to students the action taken as a result of their feedback.

High     Medium     Low

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

Staff supervising the social programme should be provided with risk assessments for social activities.

**COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE**