



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION:	Oxford Media & Business School
ADDRESS:	Southern House 1 Cambridge Terrace Oxford OX1 1RR
HEAD OF INSTITUTION:	Mrs Andrea Freeman
ACCREDITATION STATUS:	Accredited
DATE OF INSPECTION:	17 May 2021
ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:	Continued accreditation, 19 July 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Oxford Media & Business School (OMBS/the Institution) was originally established as St Aldates Secretarial College in 1976. St Aldates Secretarial College became part of the British Study Centres Group and changed its name, in 1999, to Oxford Media and Business School.

In 2007, the Institution was purchased by two senior members of staff, who are the current Principal and Bursar and the Institution's Directors. OMBS is a private limited company. The Principal and Bursar are supported by a Registrar, who is also the Principal's Personal Assistant (PA), and a Marketing and Communications Executive.

The Institution is based in the St Aldates area of central Oxford, where it occupies a second-floor suite of rooms in a modern building.

OMBS offers a course leading to Professional Business Diploma, which changed its name in September 2019, from the Executive PA Diploma, to better reflect the course content and career opportunities. It aims to provide a comprehensive, intensive and practical training course for students who are looking for a fast track into a career in any role in any business sector. In addition, attendance on the course aims to enable students to live a university-student lifestyle in Oxford and to gain independent living skills.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Professional Business Diploma was developed to meet current employment needs. It is an internally awarded diploma programme that is graded Pass, Merit, Distinction or Distinction with Honours. It includes modules in Advanced Information Technology (IT), Business Communication, Business Environment, Digital Marketing and Media, Office Skills and Personal Development. A work placement is provided for each student, and visiting speakers from commerce and industry are included in the course delivery.

The course provides 21 taught hours, in person, from Monday to Friday within a classroom setting. The duration of the course is nine months and it runs from September to July. It comprises three 12-week terms and includes one week's work placement.

At the time of the inspection, there were 65 students enrolled on the programme and 30 students enrolled for future courses. Most of the current students are female and over the age of 18. All are based in the United Kingdom (UK), although the country of origin of a small minority of students includes Brazil, Spain and France. The typical student age range is 18 to 23. The Institution admits a maximum of 70 students a year.

Student recruitment is targeted at UK independent schools, although other applicants, after successful interview, are also enrolled. All students either have a degree, a General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A-level), or equivalent. All prospective students are interviewed by the Principal. Students are required to be fluent in English and, as a guide, there is an expectation that students will meet the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.0 if they are to be successful on a course of study. Enrolment takes place in September and the terms start in January, April and September.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out online by one inspector over one day. Video-conferencing and online document-sharing tools were used during the inspection. Meetings took place with the Principal and Registrar, a group of students, four members of teaching staff and the Head of Student Recruitment and Marketing. A virtual tour of the Institution's premises was undertaken, and recent photographs of the student residential accommodation were examined. Lesson observations were undertaken remotely. Documentation was examined. All staff co-operated well in advance and during the inspection.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	2 November 1999
Re-accreditation	18 March 2002
Interim	2 February 2006
Re-accreditation	30–31 January 2007
Interim	4 June 2008
Re-accreditation	19–20 January 2011
Interim	23 April 2013
Supplementary	20 May 2014
Re-accreditation	11 February 2015
Interim	2 March 2017
Re-accreditation	20–21 May 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. Significant changes since the last inspection

No significant changes have taken place. The Covid-19 pandemic required a move to online delivery and assessment. This was undertaken successfully, with effective and high-quality support for students during that period.

2. Response to action points in last report

7.4 The School must put in place an effective mechanism for reporting to the students on the School's response to their feedback.

The Institution has developed an effective group tutorial system led by a group tutor. There is a timetabled weekly group tutorial where issues are identified and as necessary referred to senior management. Feedback to students on issues raised is provided via this mechanism. This is effective and appropriate and meets the requirements of the action point.

8.2 Annual reports must be produced that cover the results of the School's reviews and analysis across the whole provision and incorporate centralised action plans.

Annual reports are now generated, providing a cross-provision review and analysis of the Institution's performance as required by the action point. The reports cover a suitable range of performance measures. These are considered by senior management as an element of general planning and in the development of specific action plans. These are suitable and provide the management with the necessary planning oversight.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The School is recommended to consider the establishment of a suitable data collection system that brings all the relevant data, including performance data, together so that management reports can be easily generated to assist with improvement planning.

The Institution has reviewed several potential data-collection and management packages, and one has been provisionally chosen. The Institution is currently considering its future requirements now that the potential of a data-collection system has become clear, before a final decision is taken.

OMBS should review the records of staff appraisals to ensure that they are used to record the staff member's views of their own performance against specific criteria and that they capture clear, specific and measurable improvement objectives and training and development actions.

All staff have an annual appraisal with the Principal. An element of this is to discuss, determine and formally record personal development targets. The documentation for this has been updated appropriately.

The School should consider obtaining formal recorded student feedback in the early stages of the course and setting up a system of student representation.

Weekly group tutorials are used as an effective mechanism to obtain student feedback. The majority of the issues are dealt with by the group tutor. Where appropriate, issues will be discussed at the weekly staff meeting, where the issue will be recorded in the minutes. The small size of the Institution does not require a more formal student representation system as the current system for obtaining and responding to student feedback is sufficient.

It is recommended that OMBS logs all the staff's, including the tutors', Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activity to demonstrate how their skills are maintained up to date.

The formal recording and management of staff CPD activities are currently still evolving. The recent disruption from the pandemic has slowed the development of this.

It is recommended that the lesson plans contain greater detail about the activities and exercises that are planned in lessons to ensure that there is always appropriate variety in the teaching that engages all the students throughout the session.

Lessons plans are thorough and complete, providing details of the teaching and teaching-related activities. The activities to be undertaken are clear, with a clear rationale, timing and resource requirements. The plans show a good mix of activities with tutor-led, student-led, peer learning and feedback periods.

The School should continue to research the possibility of obtaining formal accreditation by a recognised awarding body or formal recognition by a university and consider the introduction of external moderation of assessments.

The Institution has approached a number of awarding bodies and explored formal recognition of its award. No appropriate organisation has been found that matches the needs of the Institution.

The School should carry out a written risk assessment relating to radicalisation and ensure that all the staff have been appropriately trained.

The Institution has a suitable policy document to prevent radicalisation and extremism, supported by a written radicalisation risk assessment. All staff have had appropriate training.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

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

Comments

Senior staff are experienced and well qualified to fulfil their roles, and they do this efficiently and effectively within a well-defined and clearly understood structure.

There is a checklist for all new academic and administrative staff, ensuring that they meet the requirements of the Institution as well as legal requirements.

All staff are subject to a clearly defined annual appraisal process that focuses on developing the skills that both the Institution and the staff member wish to develop. This allows the Institution to ensure that all staff remain up to date within their role.

The Institution's administrative functions are effectively distributed among staff, who hold multiple roles. The size of the Institution, and the close working relationships among staff, allow this to work well in practice, and this provides an effective and responsive service to students.

The Head of Student Recruitment and Marketing ensures the accuracy of promotional materials on an ongoing basis. This provides a consistent and robust approach, ensuring that up-to-date information is available to potential students. All potential students are interviewed at application stage, ensuring they fully understand the course and the award, as well as providing the opportunity for discussion.

Feedback is taken from students via weekly group tutorials. This also provides a suitable mechanism for feeding back actions taken in response to student feedback. Group tutors are also responsible for monitoring attendance and taking action as necessary. This works well and absenteeism is well managed.

Students were largely unaware of the student handbook and its contents, and this has the potential for students to be under informed on academic and pastoral issues. Group tutorials are used effectively to resolve issues rather than referring students to the handbook.

The Institution has a number of reports, which when combined provide a robust and effective mechanism for reviewing its performance. These are generated on an annual and ongoing basis, providing the Institution with comprehensive performance analysis and management tools.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Teaching is well organised, with timetables published well in advance and suitable rooms allocated. Teaching issues are managed via a weekly staff meeting that is minuted and made available to all staff, both full time and part time. The size of the Institution allows this approach to be effective and efficient.

The employability focus of the course is integral to its design and delivery. Feedback from employers and recruitment agencies is the key method by which the course is kept current. This provides a robust mechanism for course development.

Teachers are suitably qualified and understand what is required of them. A minority are part time and provide an additional relevant perspective to the students' learning. In some cases, teachers' job descriptions have not been updated to reflect the individual's current roles.

Learning resources are appropriate. The majority have been developed by the Institution itself. These are available via a shared network drive. Additional resources are available on the internet. Staff provide links to suitable support material.

Much of the study is practically based and is well designed to develop the students' independent learning skills through close and responsive support from the teaching staff. Students reported the effectiveness of this approach, as it provides immediate and effective feedback.

Feedback is both informal within the teaching setting, and formal via assessments. This works well in ensuring that all students are provided with timely and specific feedback on their performance.

There is high employability among those who graduate with the diploma. This provides confidence that the diploma is effective in meeting its aim of training students for employment.

There is currently no formal quality assurance policy or process, and no external oversight of the provision or its standards. This has the potential to allow varying, inappropriate or weak standards.

Careers advice and support for employment are integral to the philosophy and delivery of the diploma. This is achieved by a focus on specific employment skills, supported by a weekly personal development planning tutorial. This is highly effective in developing students' career planning and job application skills. Applications to higher education are suitably supported by the Principal.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Pastoral support is a strong feature of the Institution's ethos. All staff provide good support to students, and a senior member of staff has a counselling qualification. Pastoral issues needing specific support are referred to specialists outside the Institution. This approach ensures appropriate and effective support for students' welfare.

Comprehensive information is made available to students prior to their arrival and during induction. This is supported by a structured induction period. This ensures a rapid and effective transition to studying at the Institution. Students are well informed about the course, the accommodation and the social aspects of studying at the Institution.

The Institution has recently developed a radicalisation policy, has undertaken a radicalisation risk assessment and ensured all staff have had Prevent duty training. This is appropriate.

The few international students present are provided with effective one-to-one support during the application, enrolment and induction periods.

The terms and conditions of study at the Institution are clearly published on its website and on the enrolment form. This is a suitable approach, and ensures that all students are well informed about the contract they are entering into.

The residential provision is in 12 leased houses. The majority of students live in these houses in groups of four to six. The accommodation is of a high quality and appropriate. Clear and effective mechanisms exist to manage accommodation issues as they arise.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Institution has a ten-year renewable lease from 2014 on its premises. Access is via a keypad or by contacting reception to gain entry, which provides adequate entry security.

The premises are of a high quality and provide effective learning spaces for the students. IT facilities are good and are supported by a clear acceptable use policy.

A suitable staff room is provided for staff, with adequate space for both part-time and full-time staff to prepare work and relax. The students have a well-equipped common room that is appropriate for their needs.

Private study space is available in classrooms when they are not in use. While this is normally sufficient, on occasions students report not being able to undertake private study due to all the rooms being in use.

The Institution has limited floor space specifically allocated to administration. However, many administrative functions are part of staff's additional roles. In practice, there is sufficient administrative space.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The small size of the Institution engenders and provides a close, intimate and supportive environment.

There is a strong focus on employment, with the outcome that students are highly successful in obtaining employment in fields that the Institution has helped them identify.

Students are enthusiastic about the Institution and loyal to it, with alumni being involved in supporting current students.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

The Institution must investigate the use of external moderators for diploma assessments to provide an external overview of assessment standards.

High Medium Low

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

The Institution should complete the establishment of a suitable data collection system that brings all the relevant data, including performance data, together so that management reports can be easily generated to assist with improvement planning.

The Institution should consider how it can actively promote the existence of the student handbook.

The Institution should consider reviewing teachers' job descriptions and ensure they are up to date.

The Institution should consider the development of a formal quality assurance policy and procedure to support ongoing academic improvement.

It is recommended that the Institution consider the provision of additional private study facilities for students.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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