



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

END OF PROBATION REVIEW (Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: College of Medicine and Dentistry

ADDRESS: Floor 3
32–34 Colmore Circus
Birmingham
B4 6BN

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Professor Maher Almasri

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Probation

DATE OF INSPECTION: 5 July 2021

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Full accreditation, 8 October 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

The College of Medicine and Dentistry (the Institution/COMD) is a privately owned institution offering Master's degrees validated and awarded by Ulster University (UU) in a range of dental specialties. COMD is based in modern premises in Birmingham city centre, in the United Kingdom (UK).

COMD's mission is to deliver excellence and innovation in medical and dental education through knowledge and academic values, and to develop clinical leaders. It aims to provide education based on scientific enquiry and the latest research, and to produce graduates who are influential in their chosen field and who serve the needs of patients. Courses are career focused and intended to enhance employability by producing graduates who deliver high-quality specialist dental services.

COMD is a limited company and its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who is also the Dean, is one of the three owners. The CEO is supported by academic and operational managers and administrative staff. The governing body of the Institution is the Board of Directors, which is responsible for both academic and administrative matters.

COMD was previously a faculty of BPP University, which is based in the same building. COMD has been an independent entity since November 2018, and its first intake of students started their programmes in September 2019. COMD has a service level agreement with BPP to teach out dental students remaining on BPP programmes. Students are not now being recruited to BPP programmes. The final BPP cohort is due to graduate in 2022. This inspection only applies to COMD.

2. Brief description of the current provision

COMD currently offers 17 Master of Science (MSc) Dental Specialties courses. COMD signed a memorandum of agreement with UU in May 2019 for eight years. All degrees are awarded by UU.

There are three modes of delivery. Full-time courses are delivered in person. Part-time blended learning courses are primarily delivered online, but include three one-week on-campus practical activities annually. Part-time distance learning courses are delivered entirely online. Some courses are available in all three modes. The length of courses varies between one year and three years, depending on the content and mode of delivery. There are exit awards of postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma and Master's degree.

Courses include clinical practice learning. This can be undertaken in the clinic on COMD's premises by full-time students and by students on blended learning courses who choose that option. Students on blended learning courses who prefer to do so and all students on distance learning courses complete the clinical cases requirements in their workplace.

Twelve Master's courses, with 40 full-time and 86 part-time students, were running at the time of the inspection. In addition, there is one doctoral student working towards a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The most popular courses are the full-time Advanced General Dental Practice (AGDP) course with 38 students and the part-time Facial Aesthetics course with 21 students. Three Masters courses have a single student. COMD has capacity for 100 full-time students and approximately 500 part-time online students and 300 part-time blended learning students.

The majority of students are of international origin, with a minority from the UK and a small minority from the European Union (EU). The majority of international students are from Asia, primarily India and Pakistan, and from the Middle East including Egypt, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates. EU countries represented include Germany, Bulgaria, and Spain. The majority of students are male. All the students are over the age of 18.

Programmes currently have three points of entry in January, May, and September.

Courses are primarily aimed at practicing dentists and admission requires a relevant dental qualification. The MSc in Digital Dentistry is also open to dental technologists and dental therapists, and the MSc in Facial Aesthetics is open to medical doctors and dentists.

3. **Inspection process**

The inspection was carried out remotely over one day by one inspector. The inspector had discussions with the CEO, the directors responsible for academic affairs, student services, quality and research, and other managers. Students, academic staff, and support staff were interviewed. Premises and facilities were inspected remotely. A wide range of documentation was reviewed. COMD fully cooperated with all aspects of the inspection process.

4. **Inspection history**

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	30–31 January 2020
Mid-way Probation Review	29 January 2021

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

Changes to course entry are being made for the coming academic year. COMD has decided to discontinue the May intake for all programmes. The January intake will also be removed from six of the full-time MSc programmes. It has proved challenging for COMD to manage the multiple entry-point system. Reducing the number of entry points will simplify administration and facilitate assurance of the quality of provision, while not reducing the uptake of the programmes.

Changes will be made in the content of the AGDP full-time and part-time programmes. The current course content is more suitable for delivery on real patients and some of the learning outcomes are more difficult to deliver in simulated practice. Access to patients is likely to be limited for some time by the need to take special measures in clinical course delivery. AGDP learning outcomes have therefore been revised to enable more effective delivery of the learning outcomes in a simulated environment. In addition, the content for some modules has been revised.

Assessments for the AGDP are also being revised. The assessments for the current modules are heavily reliant on portfolios of real-life clinical cases. Since student learning with simulators will increase in future, assessments will be revised to reflect that.

Changes are being made to all other programmes for the coming academic year. The amendments apply to module structure and order. A review by COMD found that revisions are required to facilitate delivery of shared modules and to remove all modules which cross the boundary of academic years.

COMD has made a strategic decision to expand the clinical disciplines in its course portfolio in September 2022. It plans to introduce its first medical programme, the one-year full-time MSc in Advanced General Medical Practice. It is targeted at internationally qualified doctors who want to work in the UK. COMD also plans to deliver a one- or two-year part-time national diploma course in dental nursing. The purpose of the qualification is to prepare trainee dental nurses in the foundations of dental nursing.

2. Response to action points in last report

27.2, 27.4 27.5 COMD must ensure that quality assurance and enhancement inform strategic management, that there is regular and systematic monitoring of performance against clear indicators, and that the results of reviews are compiled and included in action plans.

The Institution's Board of Directors ensures that quality assurance and enhancement inform strategic management, that there is regular and systematic monitoring of performance against clear indicators, and that the results of reviews are compiled and included in action plans. Each quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors reviews the progress made in achieving the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the Institution's strategic plan. Status, required actions and target dates are recorded and tracked. The Directors also monitor governance, finance, operations, staffing and compliance. A Directors' strategy day was held earlier in 2021 to set the priorities for the 2021–25 strategic plan and to ensure that plans remain fit for purpose.

As part of this strategic monitoring process, the Board of Directors meetings are used to scrutinise the work of committees. The Board of Directors is therefore able to tap into the data and analysis provided by the committees to inform its oversight.

As a result, there is effective strategic management to review, maintain and enhance COMD's performance and development.

27.7, 27.8 28.2 COMD must produce annual programme reports that review student performance, issues to be addressed and areas for enhancement, and that include an action plan.

COMD's annual programme monitoring process is being rolled out with the completion of module report forms. Some of these module reports have been completed and are fit for purpose. The remaining module reports will be available after the particular modules have been completed. Student performance is therefore satisfactorily reviewed at modular level.

The results of the module reviews, when all have been completed, will be integrated and consolidated into annual programme reports. These will review student performance, issues to be addressed and areas for enhancement, and will include an action plan. Module reviews and reports are a good foundation for the annual programme reports. A detailed and appropriate template has been produced for the programme reports. This means that COMD will be able to make good use of this consolidated information to maintain and enhance programme quality.

27.10 General performance reports must include an analysis of year-on-year institutional data and a review of resourcing issues.

COMD plans to produce an annual general performance report for the current academic year that includes an analysis of institutional data and a review of resourcing issues. The regular performance reviews by the Board of Directors form a good foundation for the annual general performance report. COMD will therefore be able to make effective use of this information to audit and improve its overall performance.

27.11 Regular review and revalidation of COMD programmes must involve external assessors as appropriate.

COMD's review of the ADGP involved external examiners. The future revalidation of the Master's in Medical Sciences programmes mandated by the Institution's agreement with UU will include external examiners. Effective procedures for appropriate external input are therefore in place.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

There were no recommendations identified in the last inspection report.

4.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The overall organisational structure of COMD is clear. The remit and responsibilities of the Board of Directors and committees are clearly defined and communicated, and this supports effective governance.

The Institution intends to revise its governance structures following a review. It is being guided by the code of governance for independent higher education providers produced by Independent Higher Education, the not-for-profit membership organisation for higher education. The code emphasises separation of functions. COMD therefore intends to establish a new Board of Governance accountable to the Board of Directors. The Board of Governance will have oversight of an academic council responsible for programmes and of a senior leadership team responsible for executive functions. The Board of Governance will include independent members, as well as a staff representative and a student representative. The new structures will come into effect during the next academic year. Reviewing governance to adhere to best practice is commendable.

The agreement between COMD and UU clearly sets out the responsibilities of both parties. The relationship between COMD and UU is formally defined and transparent. This means that both parties can play their appropriate roles and that the affiliation is productive.

There are clear channels of communication between the governing body, the executive, academic management, staff, students and other stakeholders. The agreement with UU, the committee structures, regular staff meetings, effective use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the interaction between students and staff facilitate effective communication and common understanding.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.2 General and Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

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

Comments

Management structure and roles are clearly defined and documented. Responsibilities and reporting arrangements at all levels are clear and communicated effectively in job descriptions and in the staff handbook. There is an appropriate committee structure with reporting lines to inform strategy and managerial decisions. There are regular joint COMD and UU meetings. This supports effective management.

Meeting minutes include action points and assign ownership to the member(s) of staff responsible for delivery. The inclusion in minutes of timelines for review and completion provides a mechanism for effective monitoring.

The administrative support team has been increased and further recruitment is planned. This ensures that the size of the administration team continues to be sufficient for the effective administration of the Institution.

Staff are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their duties and carry them out effectively. They are headed by the CEO, who has a dynamic and innovative approach. He is supported by a very capable management team. This ensures that the Institution has effective leadership.

All staff attend inductions. The new staff interviewed were very positive about the induction they had recently received and had found that it helped them to perform their roles effectively.

There is an effective appraisal and development process for all staff. The staff interviewed praised the support that is given for the maintenance and improvement of their skills. This includes support to obtain relevant additional qualifications with, for example, a member of staff currently undertaking a PhD in Dental Education.

An active Staff and Student Liaison Committee provides a formal channel for student involvement in academic development. Student representatives praised this committee as an effective mechanism for two-way communication between students and the Institution.

Staff were positive about COMD's encouragement of research activity. They also praised the support they received in their role as research supervisors for students doing dissertations and PhDs. This enables them to support students' research skills development effectively.

4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

COMD is committed to developing each student's ability to use their own initiative, and to reflect on and solve problems. Learning methods include the use of logbooks, portfolios and project work. The programmes include research methodology. Master's students are required to complete a dissertation. These methods foster independent learning skills.

Policies about student feedback are included in documentation for students and reiterated at induction. An assessment handbook for staff specifies their responsibility to provide timely and effective feedback. COMD has also produced posters setting out the feedback loop, which are displayed in classrooms. The importance of feedback and the mechanisms for it are therefore communicated effectively.

Students reported that they receive regular and supportive formative oral feedback from teachers. For more formal feedback, each student is assigned a study adviser with whom they meet regularly. A form with a summary of the discussion and action points is subsequently agreed. Issues covered include the student's attendance, assessments and performance. The student provides feedback on their modules, teachers and learning materials and resources. This enables students to give and receive feedback and they find it very helpful.

Supervision of research for dissertations and for PhD students is systematic. Research supervisors are required to document their meetings with students and agree action points. The clear framework and regular meetings enable students to maintain the appropriate pace and momentum for timely completion.

There is effective use of ICT. All teaching sessions are live streamed and available on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This ensures that international students and students in clinical practice can access the sessions at a time that is most suitable for them. The Institution currently uses the UU's VLE, but it is developing its own platform, which will enable more interactive learning. It is anticipated that this will be introduced during the coming academic year.

There is dedicated administrative ICT support. An additional VLE team member has been recruited and another will shortly join the team, providing increased support and ensuring that quality is maintained.

Students from full-time and part-time Master's courses and from the PhD programme were very positive about the quality of COMD's teaching, learning and assessment.

4.4 Student Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

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

Comments

Students praised communication with staff before they joined their courses. This and an effective induction meant that they knew what to expect, and what was expected of them. They therefore felt prepared to begin their studies and to derive maximum benefit from them.

Students were aware of the pastoral support available. They reported that all staff were approachable and responsive. They understood and were comfortable contacting staff about an academic or personal issue. They gave examples of where COMD acted upon issues they had raised and felt that their views were valued and where possible acted upon. COMD informed them when changes were made because of students' comments. This acts as an incentive for students to participate.

COMD has an appropriate policy and system for ensuring that students are safeguarded from radicalisation and extremism. COMD staff are suitably trained, and certificates of completion of training are kept in staff records. This ensures that all staff understand their responsibilities and students are protected.

Student attendance and punctuality are logged on the administrative system. The progression meetings with study advisors have attendance and punctuality as a standing item. Unexplained absences or a pattern of absences are reported to the Head of Student Services and action will be taken if necessary. The progress forms examined showed excellent attendance.

Students are very positive about COMD's support and guidance and were very satisfied with the processes in place for supporting their progression. Inspection findings support this view.

4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

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

Comments

The state of repair and decoration of the premises is excellent. Rigorous health and safety measures are in place. Students reported that COMD's meticulous adherence to best practice in hygiene and infection control made them feel protected and able to concentrate on their studies.

Impressive facilities include four classrooms, a simulation centre, clinical training pods and two clinical training rooms. All classrooms and specialist learning areas are well equipped for theoretical and practical teaching and learning and enable effective delivery of the programmes and assessments.

The simulation centre and the clinical pods utilise modern technology to support students in developing key practical specialist skills. A significant increase in equipment for practising clinical skills is being made to facilitate the expected increase in AGDP full-time students in September 2021. This supports the maintenance of a high standard of course delivery.

COMD is planning to expand its premises by leasing adjacent modern offices. The new area will house administrative staff ensuring that, as staff numbers increase, they have sufficient space to undertake their duties effectively. The space being vacated by the administrative staff will be converted to a dental laboratory.

The premises therefore provide a safe, secure and clean environment for students and staff.

4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

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

Comments

There is a strong institutional emphasis on quality assurance, and a quality ethos is embedded in the Institution. As the Institution matures, this culture is increasingly demonstrated in the progress it has made in implementing practical monitoring mechanisms. These include the Board of Directors' and committees' regularly monitoring against clear indicators, tracking using action plans, the active Staff and Student Liaison Committee and student representatives on committees, systematic progress reports and module reviews, and the state of preparation for the end-of-year programme reviews. The review and revision of programmes show that effective quality monitoring and enhancement are taking place.

COMD's commitment to a high-quality learning experience and fairness for students is evident in its policies and procedures, the high calibre of its staff and their teaching, and the academic and pastoral support that students receive. The students confirmed that a high-quality learning experience is being delivered and that students are treated fairly.

27.8 & 28.2 Annual programme reports that review student performance, issues to be addressed and areas for enhancement, and that include an action plan have not yet been produced.

27.10 An annual general performance report that includes an analysis of year-on-year data and resourcing issues has not yet been produced.

Good practice is identified and shared formally and informally, via meetings of programme leaders, the Senior Leadership Team, COMD committees, student feedback, the Board of Directors, and joint meetings with UU. This is effectively disseminated across the Institution to enhance provision.

4.7 Online, Distance and Blended Learning (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met NA

Comments

The experience and qualifications of staff provide for a clear understanding of the specific requirements of online, distance and blended learning and support effective delivery.

The VLE team provides induction to new members of staff on using the VLE. New staff praised this as good preparation for their role.

Extra sessions on the VLE were provided for students or members of staff who needed it in the light of the increase in online learning due to the restrictions on in-person teaching.

COMD has access to the expertise of UU's Access, Digital and Distributed Learning Directorate. This ensures that staff's knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and challenges of distance learning remain up to date.

Course specifications make it clear that students must have an appropriate level of literacy to learn online and to utilise the necessary technology. Students confirmed that they were equipped to use the VLE as intended, and that the VLE team members were very helpful if students needed assistance.

Online, distance and blended learning is therefore effectively delivered.

4.8 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

