



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM AND SUPPLEMENTARY INSPECTION NEW / ADDITIONAL PREMISES (College)

INSTITUTION: Cambridge Seminars College

ADDRESS: 87–89 Cherry Hinton Road
Cambridge
CB1 7BS

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Mr Phil Scherb

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 21 May 2021

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation 22 July 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Cambridge Seminars College (CSC/the Institution) is a privately owned organisation that offers group and individual tuition. Courses offered include General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Advanced-level (A-level) qualifications, pre-university Foundation programmes, Pre-Master's and Pre-Doctoral programmes, and programmes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The Foundation programmes are especially attractive to overseas students who wish to gain entry to United Kingdom (UK) higher education institutions. The EFL provision is designed to enable students to take proficiency tests, including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Courses are also offered to visiting groups, and, on a part-time basis, to students living locally.

The Institution is based in Cambridge. It aims to provide personal support to students to meet their educational needs and enable them to achieve their aspirations for their future careers.

Established in 1981, CSC is a private limited company with two shareholders, who also act as Directors. The Principal is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Institution and is supported by a management team and teaching staff. There have been significant staff changes since the last inspection.

The Institution holds the lease on a spacious Victorian building, a short distance from the city centre. This has recently been refurbished and provides 11 classrooms, reception and office space, together with social areas for students and staff. A laboratory will be added later in the year.

2. Brief description of the current provision

At the time of the inspection, A-level courses, EFL and university preparatory courses at Foundation level were running. The vast majority of courses are full time.

The Institution is an approved centre for the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and Pearson Edexcel. The Foundation programmes are based on A-level subjects, and the Institution's certificates are accepted by a range of universities as meeting their entrance requirements.

As part of the A-level and Foundation programmes, all students take a supplementary course on Training in Research, Academic and Cultural English, and Study Skills (TRACES). In addition, all students attend the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) workshops to register their details, draft personal statements and make appropriate choices for their university studies.

Students are taught in small groups, and in some cases, they receive individual tuition. The TRACES programme and UCAS workshops are taught in larger, cross-disciplinary groups to help students to integrate and to promote a collegiate atmosphere.

Prior to March 2020, all tuition was undertaken in person. Between March and October 2020, tuition took place online. In October 2020, students were able to access their courses both remotely and in person at the Institution. However, between November 2020 and March 2021, the Institution reverted to online tuition only. The Institution currently provides online, in-person and blended learning. It is likely to continue with online and blended courses, subject to circumstances and demand.

At the time of the inspection, the Institution had 31 students, the majority of whom are male. Of these, 13 students are studying on A-level programmes, 15 are on Foundation programmes and one part-time student is studying EFL. Students come from a wide range of countries, including Mexico, Kazakhstan, Russia, Japan, Spain, Nigeria, Israel and the UK. Just under 20 per cent of the students are aged under 18.

Entry requirements include previous qualifications at an appropriate level, depending on the course for which the applicant has applied. There is an application and interview process, and school-leaving certificates, existing qualifications and English language levels are checked. The Institution normally operates three intakes a year for A-level and Foundation courses. EFL, Pre-Master's and Pre-Doctoral programmes are offered on demand. In 2021, due to the pandemic, there were no new enrolments in January 2021.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken remotely by one inspector over one day. The new premises were inspected remotely through a video link. Meetings were held with the Principal, the Academic Manager, the Student Services Manager, the Receptionist/Assistant Administrator, teachers and students. Documentation was scrutinised and teaching and learning sessions were observed. The Institution provided information efficiently and co-operated fully with the inspection.

4. Background to the supplementary inspection

CSC has moved to new premises and the supplementary inspection was conducted to check compliance with the standards.

5. 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
Re-accreditation	25–26 January 2018
Mid-way Probation Review	31 October 2018
End of Probation Review	28 March 2019
Supplementary	30 November 2020

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

The Institution has moved to a new building. Course delivery has been adapted to include a mixture of online, in-person and blended learning.

A number of new posts have been created, including a new full-time Receptionist/Assistant Administrator and Activities Coordinator, two new Sales and Administration Officers, and a Marketing Manager. The Student Services Manager is also a new appointment.

2. Response to action points in last report

The role, responsibilities and duties of the Principal must be clarified.

The Principal now has a well-defined job description, with clear roles and responsibilities. As a result, the management of the Institution is effective.

Academic senior management arrangements must be reviewed in the light of the Director of Studies' promotion to take into account his additional responsibilities.

The job description for the Academic Manager/Director of Studies role is now clear and there is no confusion regarding the extent of the responsibilities of the post.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that the website is updated to ensure it gives an accurate and up-to-date depiction of the Institution, its policies and current ethos.

A new website has been uploaded that provides up-to-date and accurate information on the Institution, its courses and location. As a result, potential students are able to gain a much more accurate picture of the Institution's location, premises and facilities and the courses on offer.

The Institution should consider revising pre-arrival initial assessment tasks to give a more accurate baseline to inform lesson planning.

Pre-course assessment now includes a baseline test in all subjects that assesses prior subject knowledge, together with academic writing. English language skills are also tested to identify areas requiring support. This informs planning for each student's programme and also provides a baseline to enable evaluation of progress.

The Institution is recommended to review the terms and conditions of teachers to provide for attendance at academic meetings and for in-house professional development.

Terms and conditions have been reviewed. Staff meetings are held remotely and recorded to allow more flexible access by staff. The Institution has expanded the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), for example to include instruction on the provision of remote learning. There is also a new partnership with West Suffolk College to facilitate free online CPD for tutors.

The Institution is recommended to provide a common room for teaching staff within its new premises.

A staff lounge has been provided for tutors. This includes a kitchen area that enables staff to make drinks and snacks. Tutors are now able to relax, mark work or prepare lessons on the premises.

It is recommended that the Principal should ensure his meetings with teachers, individually or in small groups, are undertaken systematically.

The academic management team holds regular meetings with tutors. Group meetings are recorded and made accessible to anyone unable to attend. As a result, communication is clear, and staff are fully aware of the ethos and policies of the Institution.

It is recommended that, pending full clarification of senior academic management arrangements, the Principal should hold regular liaison meetings with designated senior academic staff.

Regular meetings are now held between the Principal and Academic Manager, and with the Head of Science. The online project management system of the Institution also supports effective management. Consequently, senior academic management arrangements are now clear and effective in ensuring high-quality educational provision.

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

There is a clear organisation chart, and the management structure is clearly defined. The members of the senior management team are well qualified and experienced and there are excellent channels of communication between management and staff.

Administrators are suitably qualified and ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the Institution.

Selection and recruitment processes are effective in ensuring that suitable staff are employed. Qualifications and experience are verified before employment, and the necessary pre-employment checks are carried out.

Entry requirements for courses are set at a suitable level and students receive an appropriate initial and diagnostic assessment to ensure their suitability for the course and to inform lesson planning.

Accurate and secure records of attendance are kept for each student and reviewed regularly. Unauthorised absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action is taken.

The Institution has effective mechanisms for obtaining stakeholder feedback, which is analysed and leads to appropriate actions for improvement.

There are effective systems for monitoring all aspects of the Institution's performance, including stakeholder questionnaires, observation of teaching and learning, and staff appraisals. Consequently, standards are high, and students receive a good education.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The academic management team is suitably qualified and experienced. Classes are timetabled appropriately and are allocated a room, even if the students are learning remotely.

Courses are well planned and enable students to succeed. Achievement rates are high, and students make excellent progress.

Teachers have a good level of subject knowledge and pedagogic skills, and employ effective strategies to encourage student interaction and engagement.

Assessment outcomes are monitored, and the student database enables the effective tracking of student progress and prompt provision of additional support where appropriate.

The TRACES course and UCAS workshops are effective in preparing students for higher education courses and enabling them to progress.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Students receive an appropriate induction and relevant information when they arrive, which helps them to settle into their course quickly.

International students receive appropriate information and advice before arrival to help them make effective preparations, although there is no complete checklist of specific equipment they need to bring, for example appropriate IT devices to enable the students to take full advantage of remote learning resources.

Students are enrolled on courses under fair contractual conditions and have access to an appropriate complaints' procedure.

Residential accommodation is clean, safe and of an adequate standard.

There is a suitable code of conduct for staff. All staff have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and have received training in safeguarding, and the prevention of radicalisation and extremism. There is a Single Central Register with all the necessary information recorded.

The social programme has been limited by the Covid-19 pandemic, but online activities have been organized. A new member of staff has responsibility for co-ordinating the social activities.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (supplementary inspection)

The numbers below refer to the standards as presented in the Institution scheme document and main full inspection report.

24. The institution has secure possession of and access to its premises

24.1 The institution has secure tenure on its premises. Yes No NA

24.2 Where required, the institution has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature. Yes No NA

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

CSC has a 15-year lease on the premises and its tenure is secure.

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

25.1	Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
25.2	The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
25.3	There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories), made readily available to students, staff and visitors.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA
25.4	General guidance on health and safety is made available to students, staff and visitors.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
25.5	There is adequate signage inside and outside the premises and notice boards for the display of general information.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
25.6	There is adequate circulation space for the number of students and staff accommodated, and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
25.7	There are toilet facilities of an appropriate number and level of cleanliness.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
25.8	There is adequate heating and ventilation in all rooms.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

This standard is judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met**Comments**

Entry to the building is controlled by an entry code to a staffed reception area. Consequently, access to the premises is secure.

The building has been completely renovated and is clean, attractive and well decorated.

Appropriate general guidance on health and safety is made available to students, staff and visitors.

Signage is clear both inside and outside the building and notice boards provide clear general and health and safety information.

There is a suitable area in which to receive visitors and adequate circulation space for staff and students.

Toilet facilities are clean, located on every floor, and of sufficient number for the size of the Institution.

Heating and ventilation are adequate and there are windows in every classroom.

26. Classrooms and other learning areas are appropriate for the courses offered

26.1	Classrooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes allocated to them.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
26.2	Classrooms and/or any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, workshops, studios) are equipped to a level that allows for the effective delivery of each course.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
26.3	There are facilities suitable for conducting the assessments required on each course.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

This standard is judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met**Comments**

There are sufficient classrooms and learning areas to accommodate the needs of the students.

Classrooms are well equipped, with tables and chairs, multimedia projectors and interactive whiteboards that allow for very effective course delivery.

There are suitable facilities for conducting assessments.

27. There are appropriate additional facilities for students and staff

27.1	Students have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private study, including library and IT resources.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
27.2	Teaching staff have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work and relaxation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
27.3	Students and staff have access to space and facilities suitable for relaxation and the consumption of food and drink where appropriate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> NA
27.4	Students and staff have access to storage for personal possessions where appropriate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> NA
27.5	There are individual offices or rooms in which academic staff and senior management can hold private meetings and a room of sufficient size to hold staff meetings.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
27.6	Administrative offices are adequate in size and resources for the effective administration of the institution.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

This standard is judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Students have access to sufficient space for private study and use their own Information Technology (IT) equipment.

The switch to online learning has, at times, caused equipment and connection difficulties, which inhibits private study and can be frustrating.

There is a small stock of library books. An online resource bank is available for students and staff.

A staff common room, with a small kitchen, provides sufficient space for teaching staff to prepare lessons, complete marking and relax.

Students and staff have lounge areas for relaxation or study, with access to kitchen facilities where they can make hot drinks and snacks.

There are secure lockers for both staff and students, which enables them to store their belongings safely.

There are sufficient individual offices and rooms to enable private meetings and a room of sufficient size for staff meetings.

Administrative offices are adequate in size and are well equipped to enable effective administration.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The speed and efficiency in moving to good-quality online and blended learning have ensured that students have been able to continue learning effectively.

Helpful teachers are greatly appreciated by the students and teachers utilise a range of different strategies to ensure that students understand the course content. They respond promptly to students’ queries with clear explanations.

The use of regular assessment and monitoring of students’ progress ensures that any additional academic support needs are identified and met.

The friendly and supportive atmosphere makes students feel safe and enables them to settle in quickly.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

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

It is recommended that the Institution clarifies exactly what equipment students need to bring with them before they arrive.

CSC should consider strengthening IT connections, and providing additional IT equipment to supplement the students’ devices, to ensure that they are able to connect to the learning platform effectively at all times.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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