



## **BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT**

### **INTERIM VISIT St Clare's College, Oxford**

**INSTITUTION:** St Clare's, Oxford (International College)

**ADDRESS:** 139 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7AL  
18 Bardwell Road, Oxford OX2 6SP

**HEAD OF INSTITUTION:** Paula Holloway

**Accreditation status:** Accredited

**Date of visit:** 24 August 2016

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:**

## **PART A - INTRODUCTION**

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

St. Clare's, Oxford (the College) was founded in 1953, with the aim of advancing international education and understanding. It strives to be a residential community that seeks to advance international education and understanding, bringing together students from as many countries and cultures as possible, so they can interact with each other in academic and non-academic settings, in a safe and tolerant environment.

The College occupies 28 buildings in North Oxford, which are located very close to each other. It is made up of two elements, which offer distinct programmes; an International College (which is the subject of this report) and an International Baccalaureate (IB) Sixth Form College. The College is an educational charity, overseen by the Principal, who reports to a single Governing Body. The day-to-day operation of the two aspects of provision is the responsibility of separate teams, each with their own management structure. In-house services such as Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT), buildings and maintenance are shared across the college.

The International College is based at 18 Bardwell Road and also occupies four further buildings, dedicated to accommodation, activities, welfare and teaching. Other facilities of the College, notably the nurse practitioner service and the library, although based within buildings primarily used by Sixth Form students, are also open to students. There are 13 classrooms and four rooms for private meetings, a dining room, common room, staff room and offices at the International College. Up to 80 students can be accommodated in residences, with some choosing home-stay or private residence. Students under the age of 18 are accommodated in home-stay accommodation.

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

The International College offers three programmes for students, who are mainly over the age of 18. Each programme comprises a range of courses that allows a mix of topics, which are personalised for each individual student. In addition, English language courses are provided across the academic year.

The three core programmes are Liberal Arts, which is for American students to gain credits towards their home university degree studies. The University of San Diego accredits these courses as the University of Record; English plus Academic Subjects, which is for international students. This caters mainly for pre-university and/or gap-year students from the European Union. It is a hybrid programme combining English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and academic subjects, similar to those subjects offered to students on Liberal Arts. Finally, the University Foundation Course is offered. This prepares international students with English language and study skills, and the subject preparation they need in order to enter a British university or other Higher Education Institute. Typically, these students have completed their secondary education, but are without GCE A-level qualifications.

The maximum class size is 12, although students are often taught in smaller groups. This enables the College to monitor student progress closely. It has the capacity to offer extra tuition for English language and/or subject courses as necessary. One-to-one tutorials facilitate individual guidance, assessment and academic and language feedback.

Classroom learning is supported by initiatives including: Theme of the Week (around which extra-curricular activities are structured), Oxford Passport (activities that encourage students to engage with the city in which they are based), study visits, cross-college events and a varied programme of activities and excursions. These are designed to provide integrated learning opportunities and reinforce the linguistic benefits of studying in the UK and in Oxford in particular.

Students are offered specialist careers and higher education advice to support their progression.

**3. Inspection visit process**

The interim inspection was conducted by one inspector over half a day. Key documentation was inspected and spot-checks made of staff and student records. In addition to meeting management and administrative staff at both premises, a visit was made to the new Arts Studio. This inspection report is in relation to the provider's provision in the United Kingdom only.

**4. Inspection history**

<b>Top-up inspection:</b>	14-15 April 2010
<b>Interim inspection:</b>	19 May 2011
<b>Re-accreditation inspection</b>	11-12 November 2014

## **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**

A new Art Studio was completed on the 131 Banbury Road site, as part of a £5.5 million development at the rear of a building already owned by the College. The studio is a shared resource. Students from Sixth Form and International College groups are given access at different times, to reflect the different age profiles and requirements of the two. The studio is a valuable addition to the resources available to St Clare's students and is in an impressively designed and executed, modern addition to a substantial Victorian building.

During the inspection, it was reported that the Principal is stepping down at the end of 2016. Her successor has been appointed and a handover of responsibilities is underway.

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

*3.2 Initiate regular updating of staff and tutor CVs - perhaps at each annual review.*

As part of the annual review process, staff are asked to update their CVs to include information about teaching posts held elsewhere (applicable to part-time staff) and any publications.

*10.1 Check WiFi signal strength in all classrooms, especially for streaming video material.*

Additional boosters have been fitted. These support the increased use of on-line resources, including via the recently introduced Apple TV.

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

*Staff to develop and extend documentation of procedures towards flow-charts for quick and easy reference.*

A new easier to follow approach to sections of the student handbooks, both in print and on-line, is being introduced for September 2016 starters to address the information need identified.

*Timetable larger classes to bigger rooms when available.*

Timetabling now reflects class sizes.

*Tutors to increase use of IT audio-visual facilities.*

Apple TV has been installed and new interactive whiteboards have been introduced in teaching rooms. IT staff provide group and personal training to tutors to make best use of IT resources in the classroom.

*Increase class observation of younger and less experienced tutors.*

Class observation is seen as an important part of quality control within the International College. The guidance on observations has been amended recently and there is a focus on ensuring that appropriate follow-up is provided, rather than on increasing the quantity of observations.

*Explore ways and means to increase responses of student feedback.*

The level of response from students to the provision of student feedback is satisfactory. An increased emphasis is placed on feedback interviews with students.

*Apply anti solar-gain film to some south-facing windows.*

This is not considered to be appropriate for buildings in a conservation area. Additional blinds have been installed where needed.

*Increase librarians' office space.*

The librarian's office space remains unchanged. It is adequate as library staff can work in other areas of the library if required.

#### 4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check

##### 4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b>            HR records are well maintained and appropriate checks are in place.</p> <p>Professional (non-teaching) staff are part of a structured unit, with opportunities for development and internal progression.</p> <p>The International College may wish to consider using elements of the BAC's self-evaluation form as a management tool, providing the basis for internal Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and other measures of progress.</p> <p>Once the new Principal is in post, a supplementary inspection, to review the implications of this change, should be considered.</p>				

##### 4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b>            The move to embed Critical Thinking in the curriculum provides long-term benefits for students. This form of pedagogy encourages evidence-based critique of open questions and is therefore a valuable form of preparation for study at university level. It is being piloted carefully with appropriate monitoring and feedback, to ensure the most effective implementation.</p> <p>Academic staff development is planned to support the move towards Critical Thinking. Teaching staff are given opportunities to reflect on how this can be developed through their practice. Class observations include this as one criterion.</p>				

Each student has a one-to-one meeting with an academic tutor three weeks after arriving, to check on their academic programme and how they are settling in. The Course Director meets each student mid-way through their course. These interviews, plus regular assessment and feedback during the course, enable the International College to identify and support any student with difficulties at an early stage and address issues before they become a barrier to successful completion.

#### 4.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>Both academic and extra-curricular provision are structured to encourage students to mix beyond their own national groups.</p> <p>An imaginative programme of additional activities and excursions is offered by the College, with appropriate planning and risk assessment of off-site trips.</p> <p>Provision for safeguarding of students under the age of 18 is effective. It is administered with a light touch, so that these students are able to integrate as fully as appropriate with their older classmates.</p>				

#### 4.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>Older buildings, such as those occupied by St Clare's, can provide some practical challenges, and the College has a rolling programme of improvements to address these. Buildings are well-maintained and there is a strong programme of investment to enhance facilities.</p> <p>Recent investment in IT has enhanced facilities available in teaching rooms.</p> <p>A new approach to the management of residences, bringing it into line with the standard university model, has been introduced, to improve further the College's services and the security of its residents.</p>				