

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: Cambridge Muslim College

ADDRESS: 14 St Paul's Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EZ

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dr Timothy Winter

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 5 June 2020

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 16 July 2020

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Cambridge Muslim College (CMC/the Institution) was established in 2008 as a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. It offers a range of programmes in Islamic studies, including a non-accredited Diploma in Contextual Islamic Studies and Leadership.

The Institution is based in a former vicarage and associated alms-houses in Central Cambridge. The Institution also offers residential accommodation in Cambridge in two houses located a short distance from the main premises. All students on the full-time programmes are required to live in Cambridge.

CMC is headed by the Dean, who reports to the Board of Trustees and is supported by the Bachelor of Arts (BA) Programme Manager, the Head of Research and External Academic Partnerships.

The mission of the Institution is to develop Muslim faith leadership through world-class education and training and research based on a dialogue between the Islamic intellectual tradition and the ideas and circumstances of the modern world. The aims include the development of validated courses that meet the education and training needs of those working in Muslim faith leadership, while also supporting research that will inform course development and contribute to the broader area of Islamic studies.

The history of CMC dates from 2002 when the trustees of the Muslim Academic Trust agreed to the idea of founding a college for training Muslims in the classical Islamic sciences in the City of Cambridge. The first cohort of students enrolled on the Institution's diploma programme in 2009, with nearly 100 students having completed the course to date. In May 2017, CMC's undergraduate degree programme in Islamic Studies was validated by the Open University and commenced delivery in September 2017.

The diploma programme is being reviewed and redeveloped and no students were recruited in the last year. The management structure has been revised and several management posts have been replaced by new posts, as part of a rationalisation of functions.

2. Brief description of the current provision

CMC currently offers a single Bachelor of Arts (BA) Honours degree in Islamic Studies, which commenced delivery in September 2017. It was established as a pilot programme with a single cohort of students, all of whom are now in their final year of study. A new intake is being recruited for the next academic year. The non-accredited Diploma in Contextual Islamic Studies and Leadership is being revised with a view to possibly re-commencing later in 2020 or in 2021.

In addition to the full-time courses, the Institution offers a range of non-accredited short courses known as external programmes. These cover areas such as Islamic Approaches to Psychology and Psychotherapy and History of Science: An Introduction to Select Themes, along with a series of open lectures offered both online and as evening or weekend sessions.

At the time of the inspection, 10 full-time students were enrolled on the BA Honours programme. They were aged between 25 and 40, with the majority being male. The Institution does not recruit students under 18 years of age. A significant majority of students are from the United Kingdom (UK), with a minority drawn from the European Union, including Poland and Sweden. No students were studying on the diploma course at the time of the inspection.

The full-time courses commence in September each year. The entry requirements for the degree programme are a minimum of three B grades at General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A Level) or equivalent. All delivery of accredited provision is face to face at the Institution's Cambridge premises. Students enrolling on the BA programme whose language skills in classical Arabic are not at the required level are directed to study an

Arabic language course in Marrakesh. This provision does not form part of the BAC accreditation. There are no formal entry requirements for the diploma.

3. Inspection process

The interim inspection was undertaken online by a single inspector in one day through the use of online technology. Online meetings were held with the Head of Institution, administrative staff, academic staff and with two undergraduate students. An observation of an online teaching session was completed, and a virtual tour of the campus undertaken which included viewing teaching, study and social interaction areas. A range of documentation was scrutinised and the Institution cooperated very positively with the inspection process.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	12–13 February 2013
Interim	25 June 2014
Re-accreditation	4–5 December 2017

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 is undergoing a restructure. The recruitment of a new Principal is under way, with the current Dean staying in place until the new appointment is made and a handover completed. The Academic Director post has been abolished, and two new posts of Operations Manager and Diploma and Certificate Manager are in the process of recruitment.

The Diploma in Contextual Islamic Studies and Leadership is being revised and has not recruited students since 2018. The linking of some modules with those of the BA Honours in Islamic Studies is being explored to facilitate progression for students. The development of new programmes will be taken forward once the new Principal is in place.

2. Response to actions points in last report

4.10 4.11 The Institution must formalise its action planning and review processes.

The review processes and action planning have been effectively formalised. The Institution produces a full academic and institutional overview report for the Open University each year. Reports include consideration of student retention and achievement data and the results of student surveys. An action plan is drawn up based on feedback from the Open University, external examiner reports, student feedback and other identified areas for development. Reports are also produced for Faculty Boards and Examination Boards, and summary reports are submitted to the Board of Trustees.

5.6 The Institution must further support the Continuing Professional Development of its permanent teaching staff in order to develop their subject-specific pedagogy.

Academic staff are currently supported in undertaking research and also receive support from the BA Programme Manager and the Dean, as appropriate, to help improve teaching delivery. However, there is as yet still no formal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) linked to subject-specific pedagogy available to teaching staff. Professional development of pedagogy is now under consideration for the next academic year, supported by a recommendation from the Institution's partner university, and remains an area for development.

8.8 The Institution must improve its lesson planning in order to provide sufficient detail in lesson plans and to ensure consistency.

Lesson planning is undertaken for all modules, and detailed schemes of work are made available to students, linked to the module descriptors. Academic staff produce the delivery plans, which are formally reviewed by the Programme Manager before the start of each academic year. Additional revisions are made based on student feedback. The Programme Manager ensures that plans contain sufficient detail across all modules.

9.4 The Institution must ensure that all students are given detailed written feedback and guidance on how to improve their written assignments.

Students receive constructive, written feedback on all written assignments, which indicates where and how improvements may be made. However, students report that the quality and clarity of feedback vary between module lecturers, and that the timing of feedback does not always comply with the four-week period set out in the assessment policy to support students effectively to improve on subsequent assessments. The constructiveness and consistency of feedback remain areas for further development.

25.5 27.4 *The Institution must formalise its action planning and review processes.*

The Institution compiles robust annual reports and action plans linked to its performance for the Open University. Short summary reports are also compiled by the Dean for the Board of Trustees, which meets twice a year. The reports include information on the Institution's performance, research profile, conferences and the development of academic and community links.

Action plans and reports are discussed at the Faculty Board meetings that are held twice a term, and a summary of progress on key actions is also considered at the Board of Trustee meetings. The planning and review processes ensure that all aspects of the Institution's performance are systematically reviewed and action plans regularly monitored.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The Institution should restructure the Diploma programme to prepare for formal accreditation.

The Diploma in Contextual Islamic Studies and Leadership is being reviewed and work is being taken forward to explore links with first-year BA modules to support student progression. This will require final approval from both the Board of Trustees and from the Open University.

The Institution should allow students longer daily access to the libraries.

The Arabic library, which is housed in the alms-house building, now has extended opening hours in response to student feedback. Students are able to gain access at any time, seven days a week, and to undertake private study in the library. The library in the main building is available to students during the Institution's normal opening hours, and for limited periods at weekends when staff are on duty. In addition, students have access to a range of online resources, including through a digital library.

The Institution should consider using online submission software for student assignments.

The Institution now makes effective use of an online submission platform, and also checks the originality of the work submitted. Students and staff report that the system is working well.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The current organisational structure is being reviewed and a new structure developed with the agreement of the Board of Trustees. The current structure and governance are well understood by staff, students and external stakeholders.

All staff, including those in senior roles, are appropriately qualified and experienced.

The Institution has a clear committee structure, with the Faculty Board overseeing academic matters. The Board of Trustees maintains oversight and authority linked to major expenditure and the overall development of the Institution to ensure its effective operation.

Clear policies are in place, including an explicit risk assessment procedure that is kept under regular review by the senior managers and the Board of Trustees. The policies and the Institution's development strategy are easily available to stakeholders through the website.

The partnership arrangements with the Open University are clear and formally documented.

The Board of Trustees and the Dean have oversight of day-to-day budget management and finances. The Institution's financial accounts are externally audited annually.

4.2 Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

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

Comments

The Institution is effectively managed, with clear job descriptions in place for all posts. All staff responsibilities are clearly understood by all stakeholders. However, as the role of Academic Director no longer exists, the reporting lines for all academic posts will need to be updated.

The roles and remits of the Faculty Board are clear. Committee meetings are recorded, with enhancement actions followed up and monitored by senior managers.

A regular and systematic review of performance is undertaken, including through bi-annual reports to the Board of Trustees, Faculty Board reports twice termly and the annual reports and action plans produced for the Open University. Reports include consideration of student feedback, retention, progression and achievement, as well as feedback from external examiners. Clear action plans are formulated and progress is kept under review by senior managers.

The procedures for programme development are clear and in line with the mission of the Institution. Learning outcomes are set out in clear module descriptors approved by the validating partner. The Faculty Board, which meets twice each term, ensures that academic programmes and student performance are kept under review. Reviews are informed by the outcomes of student surveys and input from the elected student representatives.

5.6 No formal programme of staff development to support subject-specific pedagogy has been developed, and a recommendation from the validating body has made this a priority for the next academic year to enhance the quality and consistency of learning and teaching.

The administrative team is small, but appropriate for the size of the Institution. Administrative roles are clear and understood well by staff and students. Policies and procedures, including those related to the collection and refund of fees, are well documented and available to all stakeholders through the website. The timetabling and the allocation of staff to modules are effectively managed and overseen by the Programme Manager and the Dean.

Data collection mechanisms are clear, and all data is accurately maintained. Student information is verified by the admissions and administration team. Examinations and the internal and external moderation of assessment are effectively managed, in line with the requirements of the validation partner.

Clear and appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the recruitment of well-qualified staff, supported by comprehensive job descriptions and induction. All permanent staff have annual appraisals that are informed by teaching performance reviews and student feedback, as appropriate. Staff have access to a clear complaints and appeals procedure.

4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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

Comments

The teaching staff are well qualified and suitably experienced and use a range of appropriate delivery methods to support student-centred learning. Students are encouraged to engage in discussions and to learn about the different practices and challenges of Islamic faith and leadership. A mixture of core theory and context-based learning enables students to develop their knowledge and independent learning skills

effectively. Individual learning needs are well supported through a range of delivery activities and additional or adapted materials provided by tutors.

All staff are required to produce detailed schemes of work that support effective lesson planning and are available to students online.

Students have access to a range of resources through the two libraries on campus, as well as to online resources through the digital library system. Teaching staff also provide additional materials linked to the modules they deliver. Students confirmed that these assist them in their studies. Inspection findings confirm this view.

Assessment schedules are provided as part of the module descriptors, and the volume of assessment has been reviewed and reduced in response to student feedback. Assessments are clearly written and appropriate to the level and course content, as verified by the external examiner.

All written assignments are submitted online through a portal that checks work for its originality and supports the provision of online marking and feedback.

9.4 While students receive useful feedback and annotation of their work, the quality of the feedback is not always consistent in terms of detail, constructiveness and transparency. Furthermore, the timing of feedback is not always in line with the four-week period set out in the assessment policy, to enable students to improve on their subsequent submissions effectively.

Second markers are used to ensure the fairness and accuracy of marking. However, as noted by the external examiner, second markers do not provide any commentary to support their judgments.

Academic staff are actively encouraged to undertake research and to publish their findings, as well as to attend conferences and other relevant external events. Staff are encouraged to share their work with colleagues, and the small size of the Institution promotes both formal and informal staff interaction and sharing of research and good practice.

4.4 Student Recruitment, Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The information published through the website is clear, including access to programme outlines and descriptors and programme costs. Information is regularly reviewed and updated, and the website has been recently re-designed. However, the information on the Diploma in Contextual Islamic Studies and Leadership does not indicate that the programme is not currently being offered.

Entry requirements for programmes are published on the Institution's website, including the requirement for Arabic language literacy skills. All enquiries about programmes are promptly responded to, and students confirmed that all information about programmes was clear and sufficient to inform their programme choice.

Welfare and pastoral support are effectively provided through access to a Welfare Officer, a Chaplain and through tutors. Students confirmed that the staff are approachable and helpful.

Students are provided with a comprehensive induction programme that includes details and locations of key policies, including the complaints procedure, expectations of students' conduct, staff e-mail addresses, and contact numbers available outside teaching hours. Effective arrangements are in place to protect staff and students from the risks associated with discrimination, radicalisation and extremism. A clear policy and regular risk assessments are in place, and staff have undertaken appropriate training.

Academic support is provided to students through scheduled individual tutorials that take place once every three weeks, with records kept of discussions. Students also have access to their lecturers outside teaching time and can request additional meetings and support. Examination board and Faculty Board meetings ensure that individual student progress is kept under regular review, and additional support is provided as appropriate.

Students have access to support and guidance on further study options from lecturers, the Programme Manager and the Dean. This meets their support needs well. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are encouraged to disclose their needs as part of the application process, and additional support is provided as required.

Student attendance is noted for all teaching sessions by the lecturers, and results held by the administrative staff. All non-notified absences are followed up promptly by the administrative staff.

No international students are recruited. The small minority of EU students who speak English as an additional language are provided with access to speakers of their first language, through the broader Cambridge community.

All students are required to live in Cambridge, and accommodation is provided for single students in two local residential properties that are of a good standard. Where students wish to live with their partner and family, suitable advice on private accommodation is provided.

A good social programme is provided and trips are arranged for students. All students are aged over 18 years and are encouraged to identify and arrange their own activities.

4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

The Institution has secure tenure on its premises, which it owns. Access to the premises is secure and restricted. Posters alert staff, students and visitors to the health and safety requirements. Emergency exits are clearly signposted.

A range of social and circulation spaces is provided, including a dining area and common rooms and space to receive visitors.

The campus buildings include sufficient toilet and washing facilities for the number of staff and students. The rooms are well lit, heated and ventilated.

Classrooms and other areas provide sufficient accommodation for the number of students and are equipped with appropriate Information Technology (IT). Classrooms are also used for examination purposes.

Staff are provided with office space to prepare work, to undertake marking and to meet with students. Space is available for holding meetings, and administrative offices are of an appropriate size. Students are encouraged to keep their possessions with them while on campus.

The two libraries provide a wide range of books and access to online resources through computers and the wireless network. The main library, which is open during the day, provides adequate private study space for students. The Arabic library is smaller and offers study space for a small number of students. It is accessible 24 hours a day. Students can seek advice from teaching and academic staff on the use of the resources provided.

An external company is employed to provide IT technician and systems support, and staff and students confirm that support is provided as needed. Students have access to two computers in the main building, as well as to wireless connection throughout the campus and in the residential accommodation.

4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The quality management policies and procedures are linked to those of the Open University to ensure that its requirements as the validating body are met. Faculty Board meetings keep the management of academic standards under review, and appropriate annual reports and action plans are compiled for the Open University, which include consideration of student retention, achievement and progression, student feedback, and feedback from the external examiner.

The Dean compiles reports twice a year for the Board of Trustees, which include the results of the annual institution oversight review produced for the Open University. Reports are also compiled by the Programme Manager for the Faculty Board, which include the outcomes of student surveys. Action plans linked to the annual reports are effectively monitored by senior management, with oversight by the Board of Trustees.

Student feedback is obtained formally twice a year through student surveys, and summary reports are produced for senior management. Student representatives attend the Faculty Board meetings and provide input as appropriate. Student feedback is used to inform annual reports, as well as reports to the Board of Trustees. In addition, students confirmed that they can request meetings with staff, including the Dean, and provide ongoing informal feedback to lecturers and tutors. Students and staff are made aware of actions taken in response to their feedback through meetings attended by student representatives.

The end-of-course and end-of-year reports include identified areas for improvement. Action plans are reviewed by the Faculty Board and by senior management. Staff are encouraged to share best practice and new developments through informal discussion, as well as in documented meetings. Staff appraisal provides opportunities for the identification of professional development needs.

4.7 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The clear vision, objectives and policies, which are communicated effectively to all stakeholders through an informative website, provide transparency for all interested parties.

Highly qualified and experienced academic and management staff provide opportunities for students to learn through contextualised discussions and engagement with current practices and challenges, to inform students’ understanding of Islamic leadership.

The clear and accessible academic support available to students through regular scheduled tutorial meetings is effective in enabling students to gain advice and guidance on their academic progress and on how to improve their work.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

5.6 The Institution must further support the Continuing Professional Development of its permanent teaching staff in order to develop their subject-specific pedagogy skills.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
9.4 The Institution must ensure that all students are provided with consistently detailed and constructive written feedback and guidance on how to improve their written assignments across all modules.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low

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

It is recommended that job descriptions are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect accurately changes in management structure and reporting lines.

The Institution should ensure that all assessment feedback is provided in a timely manner and in accordance with timings set out in the assessment policy.

The Institution should ensure that second markers provide clear commentary to support their marking decisions.

To ensure complete transparency, it is recommended that the Institution makes clear on its website that the Diploma in Contextual Islamic Studies and Leadership is undergoing review and is not recruiting for the 2020/21 intake.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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