



The British Accreditation Council
For Independent Further and Higher Education

INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

THE ABBEY COLLEGE
2 FEBRUARY 2007

INSPECTION REPORT: TOP-UP VISIT

THE ABBEY COLLEGE
253 Wells Road
Malvern
Worcestershire WR14 4JF

HEAD OF ESTABLISHMENT
Mr Philip Moere

Dates of BAC Visits:

Top-Up Visit: 2 February 2007

BAC Inspection Team:

Reporting Inspector: Mr Robin Laidlaw, MA

Accreditation Status: **Full Accreditation, expiring April 2006**

DATE OF CONSIDERATION BY
THE ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE
19 APRIL 2007

Report of a Top-Up Visit to:

**The Abbey College
253 Wells Road
Malvern
Worcestershire WR14 4JF**

1. Introduction

1.1 The Abbey College is a residential college offering GCSE, AS/A2 and a variety of pre-degree Foundation Programmes, as well as English Language programmes which are accredited by Accreditation UK. The College has been accredited by BAC since 1994, and was most recently re-inspected in 2001. An interim visit was carried out in August 2005.

1.2 The College was inspected by OFSTED under Section 16A of the *Education Act 2002* on 13-16 November 2006. The OFSTED report says in part:

The College has many strengths. Significant improvements have been made since the last inspection conducted by OFSTED in 2000, so much so that a number of features of its current provision are of notable high quality. Improvements, as well as future development plans, demonstrate the clear vision provided by the current college leadership.

Only two requirements were made to enable the College to comply with regulations fully: to require staff to undertake medical checks prior to taking up their posts (not a BAC requirement) and to install adjustable seating in the IT suite (which was, and is still an outstanding issue).

1.3 The College's residential provision was inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) in 2005 and found to be of good quality. Accreditation UK inspected the College twice in 2005 (one was an unannounced spotcheck at the time of the peak summer English Language operation) and, apart from requiring changes to publicity material, found it of accreditable standard.

1.4 The owners of the college acquired a small English Language school in Cheltenham some years ago. This has never formed part of BAC's accreditation and is now not operating and likely to be sold (its accreditation by Accreditation UK was allowed to lapse at the end of 2006).

1.5 In the light of the recent very good OFSTED report, it was determined that only a "top-up" visit would be required to review the award of continuing accreditation.

2. The Current Situation

- 2.1** At the time of the 2001 inspection, the college had a "Principal Designate" after an extended period of relatively short-term appointments, including periods when the "Proprietors Representative" had been Acting Principal. Although this appointee did much valuable work in introducing much needed procedures, he too moved on. However, the present Principal, who was appointed in 2002, has at last provided the College with continuity of senior management which is reflected in the marked improvements noted by OFSTED.
- 2.2** At the time of the visit there were 78 students in the College, including a small number of students taking English Language before moving on to the mainstream academic programmes. About 20 students were taking GCSE or pre-GCSE programmes, and around 20 more taking Foundation programmes before moving on to UK universities. 11 students were enrolled in a Medical Foundation Programmes for students going on to medical or dentistry degrees in either Prague or Brno in the Czech Republic. The rest were taking AS/A2 subjects.
- 2.3** Although the largest single national group was from China (mainland and Hong Kong), there was a reasonable spread of nationalities, including French, Spanish and Swiss students, as well as students from Iran, Vietnam and Kazakhstan. Up to 50 students, including a good number from the UK, joined the college for a two week revision course before taking the entry exams for the Czech medical/dental course.
- 2.4** The buildings and grounds were in good condition and little changed from previous inspections, although one of the recommendations of the last inspection – to relocate the gas cut off point in the science laboratories – has now been implemented. The owners attempted to buy the rather splendid premises of a girls residential school in Greta Malvern itself last year (the school was amalgamating with another girls school) with a view to relocation, but was outbid.
- 2.5** A-level results last year were somewhat mixed, with at least one outstanding result (the student going on to UCL) and a number of poorer results. However, last year's AS results indicate that the 2007 A-level results should be excellent.
- 2.6** Given the coverage of GCSE and AS/A2 programmes by the OFSTED report, it was decided to focus in this report on the Foundation programmes.

3. Detailed Observations

- 3.1** All of the Foundation programmes offer 24 hours per week of tuition with an additional two hours allocated to sport. All include four hours of English language, aimed at IELTS 6.5, although it is compulsory even for those arriving with an IELTS score which meets university entrance requirements. The college has arranged for IELTS tests to be held in its premises twice annually. All of the courses include a supplementary ICT component.
- 3.2** The assessment for the UK pre-degree programmes are set and moderated internally, by staff with experience of both teaching and examining at AS/A2 levels and the standard is described as being between AS and A2. The College had considered a link to a specific university for the purposes of validation, but decided that this was unnecessary and possibly undesirable in the light of the wide acceptance of the programmes for entry (more than forty universities have accepted students). The College has been unable to

receive any systematic feedback from universities as to the success of the students, but the principal considers that the fact that universities which have taken students ask for lower levels of achievement in the programmes' assessment is an indication that Abbey students cope well with their HE experience. Success rates run at around 90%, which is good given that a proportion of the students will have transferred to a Foundation programme after a poor performance in the first year of AS/A2.

- 3.3** The Czech Medical/Dental Foundation programme has increased its enrolments since the closure of Irwin College, the other provider of this pathway. Irwins failure was largely the result of the default of the BETTA agency, and Abbey took on a number of Irwins students whose fees had been caught up in BETTA's failure to pass on money which it had collected. The degrees in the Czech Republic are taught fully in English and since the Republic's accession to the EU are fully recognised by the GMC. The Abbey course offer units in Chemistry, Biology, Maths and physics, which some students take alongside A-levels. Classes are offered in survival Czech and students are taken on a trip to Prague. Final examinations are available in June and September and are set and moderated by Czech academic staff. Abbey's success rate is near 100%. The Czech programme is becoming more popular with UK students (as noted, substantial numbers attend the revision course in August or come to the College to take the September examination). These are primarily students whose A-level results did not gain them places at British medical schools, although, as the Principal pointed out, despite an annual tuition fee of €9000, because of the comparative cost of living, it is probably now cheaper to take the degree in Brno than in a UK city.
- 3.4** Curricular were available for all of the Foundation programmes and appeared to offer a good balance between academic subjects and support/skills provision.

4. Recommendations to the College

- 4.1** None, other than a renewed recommendation to install height adjustable chairs in the IT suite

5. Conclusion

- 5.1** The Abbey College has benefited from stable management which has enabled a marked improvement in the College's performance to have taken place since the last inspection. The Principal and all those who have worked with him to achieve this should be congratulated.
- 5.2** The Accreditation Committee agreed that continuing accreditation should be awarded.

APPROVED FOR DISTRIBUTION TO THE HEAD OF

THE ABBEY COLLEGE

19 APRIL 2007