

The educational provision of the Cambridge Colleges¹

The purpose of this document is to provide a descriptive account of the role of the Colleges as educational institutions, and by doing so to act as a point of reference for the Colleges themselves, for their students, and for those within and beyond the University who are concerned with the nature and efficacy of Cambridge as a collegiate University. It should be made clear at the outset that it is a document which describes threshold provision, and that it makes no attempt to detail the many additional educational activities or particular emphases developed by individual Colleges in the pursuit of their central aim of providing the best possible educational environment for their students.

The document is in four sections:

- Section 1 provides a general account of the common functions and objectives of the Colleges as educational institutions in relation to individual students and to the University, and outlines their processes for assuring the quality of their educational provision;
- Section 2 describes the academic provision of the Colleges and their role in relation to the academic progress of their students;
- Section 3 describes their role in relation to the welfare of their students;
- Section 4 describes their administrative functions.

1. The Colleges and their educational function

1.1 As self-governing intellectual communities dedicated to the pursuit of education, learning and research, Colleges have important functions beyond those of straightforward 'educational provision', and in many respects their strengths lie in their diversity. As far as their educational function is concerned, however, the Colleges have a shared interest in promoting access to Cambridge; in selecting for admission to Cambridge those candidates with the highest academic potential; and in seeking to ensure that collegiate provision for all students in Cambridge is of the highest standard, that it is seen to be so within Cambridge and from outside, and that proper processes are employed for the assurance of its quality.

1.2. Within the structure of the University's overall educational programme and the teaching offered by the Faculties and Departments, the Colleges are the focus for individual academic and pastoral support at undergraduate level, providing academic direction, individual tuition, learning resources, and highly proactive, multiple and comprehensive avenues of monitoring and guidance. For graduate and undergraduate students they offer continuity in academic support and guidance throughout the period of study, and provide personal and direct advice on academic and related matters. They are responsible for undergraduate recruitment and admission and play a significant role in the admission of graduate students. They are responsible for the induction of new students; for the management of course transfers and any periods of intermission necessitated by ill health or other factors; for making suitable provision for those unable, e.g. because of a disability, to take examinations under normal conditions; and in general for all aspects of an individual student's interaction with University administration. Alongside the provision of accommodation for almost all undergraduate and most graduate students, they offer facilities for study and for social, cultural and recreational activities which greatly enhance their students' academic and personal development.

¹ This document has been prepared by the Senior Tutors' Committee as an agreed position statement on the educational provision of the Cambridge Colleges. ('Educational provision' is here taken to include the broader aspects of tutorial or welfare provision as well as more directly academic provision.) It takes account of a series of discussions in the Senior Tutors' Committee and its Standing Committees between January 2001 and October 2002, and also of the following documents: the University/Colleges Memorandum, the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University's Mission Statement, and the University's Institutional Self-Evaluation Document prepared for the QAA's Institutional Audit visit to the University in 2003. The Colleges have also agreed a Code of Good Practice for Admissions, and this may be regarded as complementary to the present document which does not itself deal directly with admissions matters.

1.3. The Colleges also have a significant role in educational administration in conjunction with the University, and in the management of teaching and ancillary support for their students, e.g. through the appointment and management of academic and other staff within the College (including academic staff solely supported by the College), the development and implementation of policies relating to their function as educational bodies, and the provision of teaching rooms and other learning resources such as libraries and I.T. facilities.

1.4. The educational brief of the Colleges may be summarised as follows:

- To recruit and educate outstanding students, regardless of background and disability.
- In partnership with the University to provide education of the highest quality in all major subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate level.
- To offer, through their members' cross-disciplinary interest, a stimulating and broadening educational environment.
- To act as administrative channels of communication between students and the University and other official bodies.
- To give individual attention to students through College teaching and care for welfare.
- To provide small group supervision teaching for undergraduates.
- To provide students with regular reports on their academic progress and guidance on their academic development.
- To ensure that there are adequate opportunities for feedback from students on all aspects of College provision, and that appropriate arrangements are in place for responding to and reviewing such feedback, including formal complaints.
- To facilitate the access of individual students to central University services and any necessary external professional support.
- To assist students in applications for financial assistance.
- To offer opportunities to acquire and develop transferable skills.
- To offer opportunities for participation in sport, music, drama, the visual arts, and other cultural activities.
- To facilitate, as far as is practicably possible, the residence in Cambridge which is central to most courses.
- To support students as appropriate in developing their further careers, e.g. through the provision of references and certification of status.

1.5. The ultimate responsibility for managing and assuring quality in all aspects of collegiate provision for students admitted to Cambridge lies individually with the Senior Tutor of each College. The role of the Senior Tutors' Committee, working through its Standing Committees, including the Graduate Tutors' Committee which deals with all aspects of graduate provision, is to co-ordinate college provision in the light of external requirements and developments within and beyond the University, and to facilitate the sharing of information (e.g. through its web-site and email list) and of good practice.

1.6. While valuing the diversity of the Cambridge Colleges and recognising the difference in the resources available to them, the Senior Tutors' Committee is committed to the principle that all students, regardless of which College they attend, shall be adequately provided for in terms of education, welfare and access to information about financial support.

2. The academic provision of the Colleges

2.1 Admissions

The Colleges are collectively responsible for the selection of undergraduates for admission to Cambridge, and co-operate through the inter-collegiate 'Pool' system in seeking to ensure that the most promising applicants are admitted in each subject. The Senior Tutors' Committee has overall responsibility for collegiate admissions policy, and in this regard works closely with the Undergraduate Admissions Committee which brings together representatives of the inter-collegiate and University bodies involved in admissions. The implementation of admissions policy is largely devolved to the Admissions Forum. The Senior Tutors' Committee is closely associated with the Admissions Forum in moves relating to access and equal opportunities issues, and maintains an awareness of the implications for the educational provision of the Colleges and the University of

changes, e.g., in school curriculum and admissions constituency. Admission of Graduate Students is centralised through the Board of Graduate Studies, and Graduate Admissions Tutors act within Colleges in co-operation with the Board to admit all candidates who are successful in meeting University conditions of admission to a College in accordance with College capacity and policy.

2.2 Directors of Studies

Colleges are responsible for the appointment of Directors of Studies in each subject for which they admit undergraduates. Directors of Studies play a crucial role as the primary point of contact between the College and the individual Faculties and Departments. They have responsibility for the academic life of all the undergraduates in the College who are reading their subject. The role of the Director of Studies is described in a document agreed by the Senior Tutors' Committee and available on the Senior Tutors website. A range of further advice and information for Directors of Studies is produced by Colleges and by individual Faculties and Departments. Directors of Studies in a specific subject area are encouraged to meet together as a committee or other forum to discuss issues relevant to College teaching and its coordination with University teaching. Almost all subject areas in the University now have such fora which report on a regular basis to the Senior Tutors' Committee through its Standing Committee on Education.

2.3 Supervisions

Supervisions are the core of the Colleges' contribution to the education of undergraduate students. Through the Senior Tutors' Committee the Colleges agree the defining conditions for supervision as opposed to other forms of teaching, and work with individual Faculties and Departments to ensure that these conditions are met. The Senior Tutors' Committee in conjunction with the Bursars' Committee annually agrees the rate of payment for supervisions.

Supervisors are appointed by the Directors of Studies in the relevant subject, and are required to produce a report on the progress of each student at the end of the term in which they have supervised them: CamCORS ('Cambridge Colleges' Online Reporting for Supervisions') facilitates this. Colleges encourage new supervisors to participate in the training courses available from the University's Centre for Personal and Professional Development, and also offer their own additional guidance, both through their individual Directors of Studies and through CamCORS and the Senior Tutors' website (see, e.g., the document 'Guidance for Supervisors').

Supervision quality is monitored in various ways within individual Colleges, in particular through individual Directors of Studies and through student feedback forms.

Through its Standing Committee on Education the Senior Tutors' Committee takes note of any areas where difficulty has been reported in securing suitable supervision, and pursues these cases with the relevant Faculty or Department.

The Standing Committee on Education receives and considers the annual supervision figures produced via CamCORS, and takes steps to ensure that supervision norms are specified by Faculties in their advice to Directors of Studies and students.

2.4. Specific academic provision for graduate students

Graduate Tutors and other Fellows in Colleges participate in the admissions process in conjunction with the Board of Graduate Studies and the Faculties and Departments. They coordinate general induction of graduate students on their arrival in Cambridge and have the task of smoothing the path of graduate students, in co-operation with their supervisors and advisers in Faculties and Departments, to enable them to make maximum use of the academic resources of the University. They act as advisors in the case of students whose personal circumstances may be in danger of affecting their studies, and in cases where students encounter difficulties within their departments that require independent intercession. They can direct students towards sources of funding for activities which would enhance their research, such as conferences, and give advice in cases of financial hardship.

College library and other study (e.g. I.T.) facilities are available for the use of graduate students, and Colleges aim to assist in providing, e.g. through seminars or through interaction with senior members of the College, a stimulating academic environment in which to study for post-graduate and research qualifications.

3. Student welfare

3.1 Tutors and tutorial support.

Tutorial support implies general oversight of student welfare, in the widest sense. Individual Colleges have various ways of delivering this support, so that while in some there may be a single person with this particular remit, in others it may be delivered by several people, each with certain students to look after, or specific areas of responsibility (e.g. financial advice). Hence a College may involve a variety of individuals, e.g. Tutors (who are generally Fellows of the College, and may have separate academic responsibilities within the College and the University), nurses and chaplains. However it is delivered, tutorial provision is an essential component of collegiate life. Tutors are not trained counsellors: the role is that of general adviser, and includes a pastoral, financial, administrative and general academic remit. The role of the Tutor in relation to undergraduates is described in a document agreed by the Senior Tutors' Committee and available on the Senior Tutors' website. It is the responsibility of the Colleges to ensure that all appropriate material is distributed to Tutors, that they are kept up to date on relevant regulations and developments, and that they receive appropriate advice and support in their role as Tutors, e.g. through regular Tutors' meetings.

3.2 Financial assistance

Colleges, out of their charitable resources, are actively committed to raising and allocating money for access bursaries and other grants for those who would otherwise find it difficult to undertake a course of study in Cambridge. They are responsible for the effective publicising within each College of all relevant information about student support funds, for advising individual students on their eligibility for such funds, and giving assistance with student support applications. Up-to-date information about sources of funding is available on the Senior Tutors' website.

3.3 Health and welfare

The Colleges offer information and advice on health matters and some supplementary medical provision for their students through the employment of a College Nurse or Health Adviser (such appointments sometimes being shared between Colleges). All students in Cambridge have access to the University Counselling Service, to which Colleges contribute through a per capita levy. Some Colleges also employ their own counsellor. Colleges work closely, through their Disability Officers and through Tutors, with the Disability Resource Centre to make appropriate provision for students with disabilities.

4. Administration

4.1 Colleges, through Tutors and/ or the Tutorial Office, have a general administrative responsibility for a student's progress through the University from matriculation to graduation. They are responsible for the maintenance of student records for their own undergraduate and graduate students, and for supplying information to central University and other bodies (e.g. electoral register) as required. They are also responsible for examination entries, for communicating the results of examinations to students, for assisting students who wish to make a complaint or to lodge an appeal against an examination result, and for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made for students who need, because of disability, illness, religion or some other cause, to take examinations under special conditions (these arrangements include the provision of a suitable examination room and invigilation). In relation to individual students Colleges also have responsibility for advising in the case of a change in course, a change of College or an application to be allowed to intermit a course of study for a period, and for making any necessary application to the University on the student's behalf.

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