

CIFE
The Council for Independent Education

Briefing Notes

CIFE began in 1973, as the Conference for Independent Further Education. Independent Further Education was a catch-all term which described fee-paying institutions which, though they taught the final stages of a pre-university curriculum, did not include enough pupils younger than 16 to be classified as a school. In 1973 the Department for Education decided that it was no longer willing to inspect such educational establishments, leaving that sector of education provision unchecked.

CIFE was founded by a group of colleges which felt that some form of inspection was essential to provide help to the public in choosing safely and avoiding rogues. In the absence of 'official' inspection CIFE set up its own independent inspectorate to visit member colleges, to promote best practice and to deal with any failings. CIFE retained its own inspectorate until the British Accreditation Council was founded in 1984, with assistance from the Nuffield Foundation. The BAC provided a comprehensive inspection scheme for all types of independent college, whether they prepared students for university entrance or for more vocational courses.

Since 1984 CIFE's role has emphasised the provision of professional support to its member colleges, particularly in collective marketing, and in providing an advice service to the public to help with questions about courses, university entrance etc.

Founding colleges

The founding members of CIFE were a diverse group of colleges. Some, like Davies Laing and Dick, were London-based 'crammers', direct descendants of old-fashioned colleges which emphasised no-frills exam preparation, while others, like Stake Farm and Kirby Lodge, were small boarding schools which placed more emphasis on 'finishing' than on exam results. What they all had in common was an emphasis on small-group teaching of students aged 16 or more.

Those first CIFE members were:

- Pax Hill Education Centre
- Stafford House Tutorial College
- Birmingham Tutorial College
- Kirby Lodge
- Greylands
- St Clare's Hall
- Basil Paterson College
- Concord College
- Modern Tutorial College (now Bales College)
- Davies's Hove
- Davies's London
- Cambridge Tutors (now Cambridge Tutors College)
- Davies Laing and Dick (now DLD College)
- Queen's Gate Palace Tutors
- Padworth
- Wood Tutorial College

Since that time the face of Further education has changed considerably. Exams are different, and university entrance is an almost universal aim rather than the reserve of the very academic. Regulation, though providing a safeguard against incompetent practice, has made it less easy for small innovative colleges to survive, and a number of those early members have disappeared (Kirby Lodge, Greylands College for instance). Over the past 25 years new colleges have started and old ones have diversified. Some such as Concord and Padworth have become mainstream schools, and others have specialised (for instance St Clare's which now teaches IB courses, and Basil Paterson which is now an EFL college). Bales, Cambridge Tutors and DLD are still CIFE members.

The 'finishing school' has gone, and 'cramming' evolved into a 'liberal' small group teaching format with an emphasis on individual attention and exam technique which has proved both attractive and successful not just within CIFE colleges but in a much wider range of schools: sixth-form teaching in most independent schools is now much closer to the CIFE-college model than was the case in the 1970s and '80s. Crammers became tutorial colleges and now 'independent sixth-form colleges'.

CIFE colleges have also been pathfinders in opening up overseas markets with courses tailored towards university entrance. The recruitment of pre-university students from Malaysia, Vietnam and China was pioneered by CIFE colleges.

Current nature of CIFE colleges

Some colleges now cater primarily for students from abroad while others deal mainly with British citizens. Some have several hundred students, some fewer than 50. Some are primarily residential while others deal mostly with 'day' students. Some remain colleges which primarily prepare for exams but others provide a more complete environment for development. All teach in small groups with an emphasis on adapting to the individual rather than requiring conformity to a school ethos.

Distinctive nature of independent sixth-form colleges

Although mainstream independent schools have become more flexible and student-centred over the years, independent sixth-form colleges such as those in CIFE retain a range of distinctive qualities:

- Because most of their students are 16+, their staff have special expertise in sixth-form teaching and exam preparation and Students tend to be treated as young adults;
- They generally offer a wide range of subjects – over 30 A levels is very common, and they offer timetables with few (if any) restrictions on subject combinations;
- Most offer specialist courses in addition to A-levels over two years. These include:

- one-year A-level and GCSE
- short exam retake (up to January 2013)
- final-year A-level,
- university foundation
- Easter revision
- English as second language

More information is available on the CIFE website (www.cife.org.uk)

Inspection

The Department of Education eventually resumed inspection of independent sixth-form colleges in 2004. It is currently a requirement of membership that CIFE colleges undergo regular inspection by the BAC, or Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate

Current CIFE members

In June 2014 the following were CIFE members:

- Ashbourne College, London
- Bath Academy
- Bales College, London
- Bosworth Independent College, Northampton
- Brooke House College, Market Harborough
- Cambridge Centre for Sixth-form Studies
- Cambridge Tutors College, London
- Carfax Tutorial Establishment, Oxford
- Chelsea Independent College
- Collingham College, London
- DLD College, London - Belgravia campus
- DLD College, London - Marylebone campus
- Duff Miller Sixth-form College, London
- Lansdowne College, London
- MPW Birmingham
- MPW London
- Oxford International College
- Oxford Tutorial College

CIFE Presidents

1975-1982	Brian Rees
1983-1994	Lord Beloff
1995-2002	Sir Eric Ash
2002-2013	Lady Perry
2013 -	Lord Lexden

CIFE students' achievements

The achievements of students attending CIFE colleges are considerable. They are recognised each year at an annual awards ceremony held at the House of Lords. In March 2014, in addition to an overall prize awarded by each college to its most deserving student, a total of 21 academic awards were made, rewarding excellence in areas such as mathematics, science, literature and the humanities. The awards recognise the achievements of the previous summer's examination cohorts.

In the summer of 2013, the top 20 university destinations of CIFE students were as follows:

1	University College London
2	Manchester

3	King's College London
4	City
5	Nottingham
6	Bristol
7	Queen Mary London
8=	Exeter
8=	Newcastle
10	Westminster
11	Leeds
12	Oxford Brookes
13=	Aston
13=	Durham
13=	Essex
13=	Royal Holloway
13=	Sussex
13=	Warwick
19	York
20=	Brighton
20=	Kingston
20=	Southampton
	Overall CIFE destinations
47%	To a Russell Group University
2%	To Oxbridge
16%	To one of Top 10 in Complete University Guide table
34%	To one of Top20 in Complete University Guide table
14%	To one of Top 50 Times World University Rankings table

Stuart Nicholson
CIFE Chairman
June 2014