

# cife

The Council for Independent Education

## Briefing Notes

cife began in 1973, as the Conference for Independent Further Education. "Independent Further Education" described fee-paying institutions that taught the final stages of a pre-university curriculum but did not include enough under-16 pupils to be classified as a school. In 1973, the Department for Education decided that it was no longer willing to inspect such educational establishments and that sector of education provision became unchecked.

cife was founded by a group of colleges which felt that some form of inspection was essential to help the public choose independent colleges safely and avoid 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 the return of a separate inspection framework, cife's role has emphasised the provision of professional support to its member colleges, in collective marketing, in the provision of opportunities to students at cife colleges, 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 had in common was an emphasis on small-group teaching of students aged 16 or older.

The first cife members were:

1. Pax Hill Education Centre, Lymington
2. Stafford House Tutorial College, Canterbury
3. Birmingham Tutorial College
4. Kirby Lodge, near Cambridge
5. Greylands College, Isle of Wight
6. St Clare's Hall, Oxford
7. Basil Paterson College, Edinburgh
8. Concord College, Shropshire
9. Modern Tutorial College (now Bales College), London
10. Davies's Hove
11. Davies's London
12. Cambridge Tutors (now Cambridge Tutors College), London
13. Davies Laing and Dick (now DLD College), London
14. Queen's Gate Palace Tutors, London
15. Padworth, Reading
16. Wood Tutorial College, London

In the 50 years since cife was founded, Further Education has changed considerably. Exams are different, and university entrance is an almost universal aim rather than the preserve 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). New colleges have started and old ones have diversified. Some such as Concord have become mainstream schools, and others have specialised, like St Clare's which was an early UK adopter of IB courses, and Basil Paterson which is now an EFL college. Bales, Cambridge Tutors and Padworth are still cife members.

The 'finishing school' concept has long gone, and 'cramming' evolved into a small-group teaching format with an emphasis on individual attention and exam technique. This 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 has gradually followed where cife colleges led in the 1970s and '80s. Crammers changed, becoming firstly tutorial colleges and then fully-provisioned 'independent sixth-form colleges'.

cife colleges have also been pathfinders in opening 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 boarding, 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 continue to teach in small groups with an emphasis on adapting to the individual rather than requiring conformity to a school ethos.

### **The 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 much more as young adults;
- They generally offer a wide range of subjects – over 30 A-level options 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
  - final-year A-level
  - university foundation programmes
  - Easter revision
  - English as a second language

More information is available on the cife website ([www.cife.org.uk](http://www.cife.org.uk))

### **Inspection**

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

### **Current CIFE members**

In 2024 the following colleges were cife members:

1. Ashbourne College, London
2. Bath Academy
3. Bales College, London
4. Bosworth Independent College, Northampton
5. Brooke House College, Market Harborough
6. Cambridge Tutors College, London
7. Carfax College, Oxford

8. CATS College Cambridge
9. Cherwell College, Oxford
10. Collingham College, London
11. Guildhouse School, London
12. David Game College, London
13. LSI Independent College, London
14. MPW Cambridge
15. MPW Birmingham
16. MPW London
17. Oxford Sixth Form College
18. Padworth College, Reading
19. Regent College, London
20. Rochester Independent College
21. Westminster Tutors Independent Sixth Form College, London
22. Worthgate School, Canterbury

### **CIFE Presidents**

- 1975-1982      Brian Rees, Headmaster, Merchant Taylors', Charterhouse, and Rugby Schools
- 1983-1994      Lord Beloff, Educationalist and historian
- 1995-2002      Sir Eric Ash, Rector of Imperial College London; President of the Institution of Electrical Engineers
- 2002-2013      Lady Perry, Educationalist; formerly Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools; the first woman to lead a British University
- 2013-current    Lord Lexden, Educationalist, politician and historian

### **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. These academic awards reward 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 2023, the top 20 university destinations of CIFE students were as follows:

1. University of Exeter
2. City University, London
3. King's College, London
4. Westminster University
5. Queen Mary's, London
6. University College, London
7. Manchester University
8. Bath University
9. University of the Arts, London
10. Royal Holloway, University of London
11. Nottingham University
12. Reading University
13. Bristol University
14. Sussex University
15. University of Kent
16. Oxford Brookes University
17. Cardiff University
18. Kingston University
19. SOAS, University of London
- 20= Newcastle University, and Goldsmiths, London

In 2023:

- 1,042 CIFE students gained entry to a UK university.

- 51% entered a Russell Group university, **twice** the national average success rate.
- 10 students gained Cambridge and Oxford places, **four times** the national average success rate.

Correct as at February 2024