



## **BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT**

### **INTERIM VISIT (Short Course Provider)**

**PROVIDER:** Maxer Education Group

**ADDRESS:** Sheraton House  
Castle Park  
Cambridge  
CB3 0AX

**HEAD OF PROVIDER:** Mr Zheng Jiang

**DATE OF VISIT:** 9 May 2018

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:** Continued accreditation 19 July 2018

## **PART A - INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Background to the provider**

Maxer Education Group Limited (Maxer/the Provider) is a private limited company. It was founded in September 2015 to provide short training programmes in a range of professional skills for participants from outside the United Kingdom (UK) and is based in Cambridge.

The Provider is headed up by a Managing Director and the day to day management is carried out by the Head of Operations and Partnerships. The management team has experience in organising short-term residential courses through Maxer's sister company, China UK Development Centre (CUDC), which is also accredited by the British Accreditation Council.

Maxer focuses on recruiting individual students from China. It is also working with universities, institutions and organisations outside China, for example in South Korea.

### **2. Brief description of the current provision**

Maxer's current provision started in August 2016. It offers a summer and winter programme, called the Cambridge Academic Research Seminar (CARS). This programme provides two-week courses, which include a series of academic lectures, workshops and language courses to develop participants' professional research skills.

CARS focuses on the areas of social sciences and natural sciences and on developing the research skills required to study in these fields. Participants are mainly undergraduates or postgraduates studying relevant subjects at universities in their home countries.

Twenty-four participants, the majority of whom are female, attended the winter CARS programme from 28 January to 10 February 2018. They were all over the age of 18 and were university students, directly recruited in China. Over the previous year, the participant population consisted of 40 participants, 14 male and 26 female, from China. The age range was 18 to 22. At the time of this inspection, no participants were enrolled.

Courses are run twice yearly, in the winter and summer and enrolment takes place accordingly for the two courses. There are no academic entry requirements. Participants are required to undertake an interview to ascertain their level of English language skills.

### **3. Inspection visit process**

The inspection was conducted over half a day by one inspector. Meetings were held with the Head of Operations and Partnerships, the Assistant Manager in Planning and Quality Control and the Assistant Manager in Operations. A tour of the administrative premises was carried out, as well as a tour of one of the colleges where courses are delivered. During the tour, the inspector met Maxer's point of contact at the college. The website and various documentation were scrutinised. The information required was fully available and the provider cooperated very well with the inspection process.

### **4. Inspection history**

Full inspection: 14 & 16 February 2017

## **PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

*The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the provider*

### **1. Significant changes since the last inspection**

A new Assistant Manager in Partnerships Development was recruited in Spring 2018. The purpose of this role is to develop new partners in Higher Education institutions, initially in Oxford and London. These areas have been targeted because they are more recognisable to the prospective participants. In the future, it is intended to expand this to other areas. The annual target is four new partners.

There are plans to introduce differentiation into the courses, to cater for different levels of participants in terms of both language and skills. The exact nature of the differentiation will depend on feedback from lecturers and participants. It is hoped that this will lead to greater participation by participants in the lectures and workshops.

The current timetable for the courses offered, includes free time. This is being reviewed and there are plans to remove the free time as, although the participants are over the age of 18, Chinese law still requires approval from parents and teachers before the participants can go out alone.

A new policy has been introduced. Full-time staff are required to submit a summary at the end of each day, making recommendations regarding the company and how it operates and the quality of the programme. It is intended that the resulting recommendations will be implemented, if appropriate, leading to improvements in the management of the company and the delivery of the courses.

### **2. Response to action points in last report**

*3.3 A staff appraisal system must be set up to facilitate an annual review of staff performance.*

An appropriate appraisal form is now in place and an annual appraisal meeting takes place between the full-time employees and their line managers. An appraisal of the programme assistants has already been carried out by the programme managers. This appropriate system will be fully effective from October 2018. The staff have not directly input into the design of the new appraisal form, in order to facilitate a more positive acceptance of the form and possible improvements to its content.

To effectively review temporary staff performance, a meeting with each member of temporary staff is held annually, during which the Director evaluates the performance of the staff.

The programme managers and programme assistants receive full and thorough feedback from their managers, lecturers, participants, teachers accompanying the participants and, in the case of programme managers, from the programme assistants.

Lecturers on the two-week courses receive feedback from participants and an inspection of their lecturing is carried out by the Assistant Manager in Planning and Quality Control. Feedback is delivered face-to-face or by e-mail.

*7.4 A formal mechanism must be put in place so that participants are routinely informed of what has been done to respond to their feedback.*

There are various opportunities, throughout the programme, to share experiences on the programme. Experience sharing sessions are organised by the programme assistants. The comments made are collected and discussed, as are any changes made in response to the feedback from the participants. In addition, there is a social media chat group which enables on-going discussion to take place between staff and participants and a quality inspector collects feedback from the participants and informs them about the action taken. A page on the website is also used to inform participants of what has been done to respond to their feedback.

A fully researched proposal to set up a committee, called the Your Voice Committee, will be implemented in 2018. The members of the committee will represent all students and staff. The committee will provide a face to face forum to raise suggestions for improvement, report issues, communicate with the managers, provide real time feedback and build effective action plans. Meetings will be held weekly, with a formal agenda, and committee representatives will continually provide feedback to participants.

*8.3 The Provider must put in place a system which ensures that all actions are systemically followed up on to ensure they are resolved.*

There are regular staff meetings that provide a forum for monitoring the initiation, implementation and resolution of action plans associated with the day-to-day and longer term running of the organisation. Managed action plans for the entire operations team will be fully implemented in the forthcoming programmes. The project plans are maintained and updated by the programme managers and office assistant manager and shared with the project operation team.

*9.4 A clear policy must be added to the Staff Handbook regarding the acquisition of resources.*

Information for lecturers regarding the Provider's policy for acquisition of resources has been added to the lecturers' guidelines. These are the main staff members who would need to raise any issue about resources. The information includes the point of contact in case of a need to acquire new resources, the participants' backgrounds, which materials are supplied and how lecturers can resolve a sudden need for new materials. It also includes examples of resources such as laptops, projectors and course materials. Information regarding the policy has not yet been added to the Staff Handbook.

*11.5 11.6 A range of strategies must be used to encourage participation throughout lectures. For example, a group or pair activity could be given at regular intervals with participants being encouraged to give feedback on their findings.*

As part of the course design, interactive sessions, such as group questions and tasks, are included as suggestions to the lecturers. Programme assistants play an important role in supporting the interaction between the students and the lecturers. They initiate and lead question and answer sessions. Relevant staff training in this regard has been delivered.

*12 Slides and other handouts must be disseminated to participants and maintained by the Provider, for example in their course files.*

The Provider has made appropriate arrangements to disseminate handouts to participants. These arrangements include providing handouts to the participants on their first day in the UK, sharing research slides with the participants during the supervision sessions before lectures and sharing slides for the academic courses when they become available. All lecturers are asked to submit their slides on the day that the course is being run and these are shared through the social media chat groups.

### **3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report**

*It is recommended that required (international English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) ability levels be added to the course descriptions, presently participants are required to have the Certificate in Education and Training (CET) Level 4.*

The participants are students studying in universities in China and South Korea. They do not take IELTS or TOEFL examinations and, therefore, this recommendation is not applicable. Should the target student group be expanded, the inclusion of IELTS and TOEFL equivalencies within the course descriptions will be considered.

*BAC's complaints procedure should be added to the Participants' Handbook and the website if accreditation is awarded.*

The BAC complaints procedure has been added to the Participants' Handbook and the website.

*It is recommended that participants are given the opportunity to mix with University of Cambridge students in a social setting.*

The participants have good opportunities to socialise with University of Cambridge students during social events and activities such as concerts. Students from the University are also invited to the formal dinners. During the winter programme, the participants are given a list of open lectures to attend to give an opportunity to mix with local students and speakers. As a result, participants see the cultural differences for example in how British students interact with the lecturers.

There are plans for a networking session to be introduced into the programme design. Programme managers and assistants will invite students from University of Cambridge to share their experiences.

#### **4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements**

##### **4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)**

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>There are clear channels of communication between the management and staff and those working at the delivery venue.</p> <p>Data collection and collation systems are effective.</p> <p>Texts and images in publicity provide an accurate depiction of the Provider’s location, premises, facilities and the range and nature of resources and services offered. The information on the courses available is comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date.</p> <p>Students have an initial oral interview, in addition to meeting the CET Level 4 requirement. The aim of the interview is to assess the level of participants’ English language listening and speaking skills. Participants are not required to conduct a presentation and question and answer session as part of the interview. This would allow the Provider to better assess prospective participants’ language level and assist with the planned delivery of differentiated courses.</p> <p>There is a clear and published policy on participant attendance and punctuality.</p> <p>Lecturers give feedback covering areas such as participants’ level of English and level of engagement, their punctuality, the staff on site and the venues. Participants give feedback on the programme, the programme staff, lecturers, the catering and the accommodation. This results in a quality assurance process, which is comprehensive and effective.</p>				

#### 4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be		✓		
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>Lecturers have a good level of subject knowledge and pedagogic skill, which are demonstrated in their course content and delivery. Slides are submitted and checked before they are delivered to ensure they are appropriate.</p> <p>The Assistant Manager in Planning and Quality Control conducts observations of teaching during the course programme.</p> <p>Courses are planned to include a final presentation, the quality of which contributes to the participants' final level of achievement.</p> <p>9.4 Information regarding the policy on the acquisition of resources has not yet been added to the Staff Handbook.</p> <p>New lecturers could be better supported prior to the start of the course through a check on their course content, language level, any areas of cultural sensitivity and their preparation. This would pre-empt any issues arising and ensure that all participants can engage with the content.</p> <p>Participants using mobile phones in the lecture room or workshops can cause a distraction, leading to disengagement with the activity and impacting adversely on the teaching and learning.</p>				

#### 4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>Participants have 24-hour emergency access to the Assistant Manager in Operations. Programme managers are also available to take calls out of normal working hours.</p> <p>Participants, who are absent from classes, are called immediately. Any unauthorised absences are flagged up by the programme assistant.</p> <p>Participants register their dietary requirements and food allergies prior to the course starting.</p>				

#### 4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>A current lease for the administrative premises is in place as well as an appropriate agreement with St John's College.</p> <p>Participants have access to the University of Cambridge's library.</p>				

Rooms for lecturers to prepare their classes can be booked, although most lecturers work with the University of Cambridge and have their own offices for preparation.

Private meetings can be held in the administrative offices, which are adequate in size.

**PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>
<p>The Provider’s commitment to implementing the quality assurance cycle in all areas of operations.</p> <p>Good channels of communication enable appropriate discussion to take place between staff, stakeholders and participants.</p> <p>The input gathered from alumni about their experiences is fed into course planning. This helps the Provider to gain a holistic view of the quality of the programme delivery.</p>

<b>ACTIONS REQUIRED</b>	<b>Priority H/M/L</b>
9.4 Information regarding the policy for the acquisition of resources must be added to the Staff Handbook.	H

<b>RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b>
It is recommended that the Provider seek staff input into the new appraisal form.
It is recommended that the Provider introduces more challenging interview techniques to better assess prospective participants’ language level and to assist with the planned delivery of differentiated courses.
It is recommended that new lecturers are better supported prior to the start of a programme in order to prevent any issues arising and ensure that all participants engage fully with the content.
It is recommended that the Provider implements a policy of not using mobile phones in the lecture room or workshops and adds this to the participants’ handbook.

<b>COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS</b>	
Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	