



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Online, Distance & Blended Learning)

PROVIDER: Connexcel Limited

ADDRESS: Excalibur House
Priory Drive
Langstone Business Park
Langstone
NP18 2HJ

HEAD OF PROVIDER: Mr John Zhang

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 21 January 2021

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 27 May 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

Connexcel Limited (Connexcel/the Provider) is a privately owned organisation. It provides online tuition courses in a variety of subjects to support learners in their applications to educational providers in the United Kingdom (UK), such as boarding schools, independent schools and universities. The accreditation applies solely to the UK provision offered by the Provider.

The Provider is based in Newport, South Wales, but has established links in Shanghai, China, where it has an office that manages the initial introduction and face-to-face interactions with learners and their parents and guardians.

The aim of the Provider is to provide a tailored programme of tuition that is designed around the specific needs of the learner to enable and support an individual learner's application to study in the UK. The programmes of study are designed to reflect the ability levels of each learner, providing an opportunity for development that is specific to that individual.

Connexcel is a limited company that is owned by two Company Directors, who undertake specific management functions within the organisation. The Provider is governed by a Board. The directors are supported by the Host Family Relationship Officer, Student Progression Officer, Online Tuition Officer, Office Administrator and the Student Welfare Co-ordinator.

The Provider was first established in 2011 as an education agency to support learners' applications to study in the UK. Since 2017, the Provider has offered online tuition to learners who wish to study in the UK.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Provider offers online, non-accredited tutorial courses across a number of subject areas that include English Language, English Literature, English Writing, Creative Writing, Writing Skills, Science, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Life in the UK, Humanities and History. The content of each course is tailored based on the ability of each learner rather than a specific level or age group.

The organisation does not offer face-to-face tuition as all learners are based in China. All the tutors are based in the UK and undertake teaching through the use of online, distance and blended learning (ODBL) technology.

At the time of the inspection, there were 26 learners from China enrolled across 12 different programmes and a total number of 147 learners enrolled in the previous year, also from China.

The courses are offered to learners aged eight to 18 and the majority of learners are between 11 and 17 years of age. They are of an equal gender balance.

Enrolment is offered on a continuous basis, which provides the opportunity for learners to join and leave the programmes at any time. Each programme of study is designed to reflect the individual ability profile and needs of the learner and do not carry specific entry requirements. The Provider has a comprehensive and supportive enrolment process that is led by the administrative team. The learners and their parents or guardians are introduced to the online tuition system and also briefed on the policies and procedures in place.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out remotely over one day by one inspector. Meetings were held with both Company Directors, the Tutor and Host Family Relationship Officer, Student Progression Officer, Online Tuition Officer, Office Administrator and the Student Welfare Co-ordinator. A further meeting was held with three tutors. The inspector also observed three teaching sessions. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised. The Provider provided full support and co-operation throughout the inspection.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	12–13 March 2019
End of Probation Review	22 November 2019

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the provider.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The staffing structure has undergone a minor change with the recruitment of an Online Tuition Officer who holds the specific responsibility for managing the relationship between the Provider, the tutors and the learners with regard to the assignment and monitoring of homework and examination preparation. This member of staff is also working on an initiative to review course content so that there is alignment to the National Curriculum.

The number of tutors has been extended to provide a greater range of skills and expertise to deliver the portfolio of courses effectively, notably for English Language and Science, which have seen an increase in demand.

2. Response to action points in last report

6.5 The training programme must be developed to consider the identification of learners' needs and also instructional approaches that would support the ODBL approach to tutoring.

The Provider has reviewed the application, enrolment and induction stage for onboarding a learner, with an enhanced focus on the identification of any specific learning needs. This information has been shared with the individual tutors to provide a personalised profile of each learner. This has allowed tutors to adapt their teaching and learning strategy to reflect these needs. The enhancement of the learner needs identification process has positively impacted on learner support and the provision of personalised interventions to ensure that their programme of study is fully accessible.

The established tutors are experienced in the ODBL approach to tutoring and are recruited based on their use and effectiveness of online instruction. All new tutors are provided with training in the use of the specific learning platform and also to build confidence to resolve any technology issues. Tutors are also encouraged to access external online training resources to support their own professional development as a self-employed ODBL tutor and to improve the learners' experience.

14.2 The newly introduced review, undertaken by senior management, must include a specific focus on the online tuition.

The Provider has reviewed its self-evaluation process so that it now includes a specific focus on the online tuition element. The Provider has identified performance indicators that reflect the online tuition part of the business. This process is currently being implemented. As a result, an evaluation of its impact would need to be measured at the next review.

14.3 The Provider must develop and implement a robust self-evaluation review and reporting process with specific reference to online tuition to include analysis of a number of metrics and performance.

Although a self-evaluation review is in place, further work is required regarding the analysis of data and specific metrics to measure performance. The review draws upon a number of quantitative data reports, which include the weekly data provided on the subjects delivered, number of learners accessing the learning and also data on tutor demand. This data also feeds into a monthly review to identify which courses need to be targeted, as well as subject areas to develop. However, there is little analysis of the data collected to provide a narrative that would inform the self-evaluation process and provide qualitative evidence against the performance indicators.

This is an area that requires further enhancement to ensure that the identified performance indicators effectively support the necessary scope of a self-evaluation review and will allow the Provider to identify areas that are working well and also those that need further attention.

14.4 The Provider must implement, monitor and regularly review the action plan with specific reference to online tuition to identify clear targets and those responsible for realising them.

The current self-evaluation review process of the online tuition element is in the initial stage of implementation. As a result, the action plan process is not fully developed, with targets being general in nature and not clearly linked to performance indicators. It is also not clear how progress will be measured and supported by target dates. The self-evaluation review and subsequent action plan need to make specific reference to the online tuition element of the business, and identify clear, time-bound actions with responsibility allocated to key individuals.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

The Provider is recommended to continue its analysis of the feedback it receives in order to collate the common themes that could then feed into the performance review process.

The mechanisms for gathering feedback from tutors, learners and their parents or guardians has been reviewed and updated. This formal feedback system is supplemented by regular and supportive conversations with the various parties to identify any potential issues at the earliest opportunity so that these can be promptly resolved. Themes arising from the individual feedback of learners is then fed through to the organisational performance review, where it is discussed and monitored. The Provider is highly proactive in responding to stakeholder feedback.

It is recommended that the Provider evaluates the impact of current and new processes and systems and their effectiveness to identify areas for further development and embeds this within the self-evaluation review.

The Provider is committed to an ongoing review of the effectiveness and impact of any new processes and systems. Its agility and response rate are demonstrated in its proactive approach to responding to emerging requirements. However, the impact of these processes and systems does not clearly transfer through to the self-evaluation review process. Consequently, the impact of current and new processes is not clearly identified within the review process.

It is recommended that a formal system for documenting key decisions is introduced to provide an audit trail.

Having a small and focused management team structure enables the Provider to make key decision and these are, in the main, documented. This is still an area that would benefit from further development to ensure that there is a clear audit trail of decisions made and that these are reflected in both the Provider's operational and strategic planning documents.

It is recommended that the Provider monitors continuity of connectivity between the learner and the tutor to avoid disruption in session delivery.

The learning platform has undergone a number of updates, and connectivity and functionality have been enhanced. Parents and tutors are advised of the technology requirements at the start of a contract to minimise disruption during teaching sessions. As a result of the changes made, the learner experience has improved and reduced the disruption caused by poor connections during sessions.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Connexcel has a clearly defined management structure in place, which is documented in an organisation chart. The organisational structure is communicated to staff, tutors, parents and learners and clearly identifies the remit and responsibilities for each role within the structure.

The roles and responsibilities of the management and administrative staff are well documented and supported by their Curricula Vitae (CVs). The staff are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake their roles, specifically with regard to the requirements of online, distance and blended learning. The team brings extensive experience of the Chinese education system, as well as working knowledge of the school application process within the UK. There have been minor changes to the staffing structure and the associated individual roles and responsibilities within the management and administrative teams. As a result, reviewed job descriptions are in the process of being updated.

Connexcel has established effective modes of communicating and disseminating key information across the organisation through a structure of meetings and informal discussion. This supports good opportunities for accessibility of information and collaboration.

Members of the administrative team are well supported in their roles by both Company Directors, and bring a focused contribution and specific expertise to the overall team structure.

An annual appraisal system for staff and tutors has been introduced to review performance and identify targets and training. New tutors have an additional appraisal after the initial three weeks of working with an individual learner to ensure that the teaching relationship is effective. This forms part of the tutors' probation process.

The Provider has undertaken a review of the publicity material and the website to ensure that they provide a comprehensive and up-to-date description of the online tuition services it offers. This review has included the addition of testimonials and recommendations from parents, learners and tutors to provide first-hand experience of studying with Connexcel. The website could be further enhanced by including input from alumni and their success stories.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Achievement (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Company Directors exercise their responsibilities for teaching, learning and achievement effectively. They work closely with the administrative team and tutors. They ensure that there is appropriate experience and expertise in online, distance and blended learning and that the courses are well planned, meet requirements and provide an approach to learning that is tailored to the needs of the specific learners.

Teaching sessions are well planned, with clear information about the timetabling communicated to both tutors and learners. Timetabled sessions are scheduled to reflect the time difference between the UK and China. They adopt a balanced approach to study for those learners who are undertaking tuition across a number of subject areas.

The Provider continues to operate effective mechanisms for the recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced tutors. All tutors participate in a comprehensive recruitment and induction process to ensure that they are well equipped and effectively supported to deliver online tuition. Tutors are recruited based on their subject knowledge and experience of working within an online tuition model. They are appropriately qualified, with CVs demonstrating a high standard of professional experience and also pedagogic knowledge and skills, with a specific focus on providing individual tuition and working in an online environment.

The tutors have defined job descriptions with clear roles and responsibilities and are issued with a handbook that is updated annually to reflect the current versions of the Provider's policies and procedures. The handbook provides clear information and support for tutors new to the organisation and also acts as an effective point of reference for established tutors. Policies and procedures are also centrally stored on the online training platform, which is accessible at all times.

Each course is bespoke and tailored to an individual learner. Tutors are allocated based on their profile and also to reflect the specific learning needs of the learner.

The Provider has introduced a process to monitor and observe tutors whilst they are teaching. The outcomes of the observation process inform the tutor review and support process.

5.4 The observation process does not currently draw upon a number of other useful elements, including learner feedback, performance over time and adherence to policies and procedures. It does not clearly identify strengths in the tutors' performance and also areas for development, which would then feed into the tutor appraisal system.

There are limited opportunities to share best practice between tutors. Peer observation, although encouraged, has a low level of engagement as the majority of tutors balance their role with Connexcel with other work commitments. Following the introduction of an online training platform, the Provider would benefit from extending its use and content to provide training on best practice, as well as the dissemination of key updates, including policies and procedures.

Tutors liaise with the administrative support team to identify and respond to the individual learning needs of learners and tailor their course to suit. Learners who require additional help or who are not making satisfactory progress are also well supported. Intervention processes are in place to support knowledge and skill development through conversations with parents and also refinement of the course structure, teaching strategies and choice of resources.

Informal oral feedback is provided on a regular basis so that parents and learners have individual progress updates. This process is well established, and is a particular strength of the Provider. The feedback provides an update on the learner's progress and identifies areas for improvement or other courses that would be of benefit. Connexcel is highly proactive in ensuring access to administrative and tutor help outside class hours and adopts a flexible and supportive ethos towards the learners.

4.3 Learner Support (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Connexcel provides comprehensive information to potential applicants regarding the online tuition services it offers. This is managed through advice and guidance sessions both in China and remotely via video communication software and e-mail.

The Provider delivers an effective infrastructure of support and care for learners, evidenced through the positive feedback received as well as the success rates for the programmes of study. The management and administrative teams, supported by the tutors, are committed to ensuring and delivering high standards of learner experience that are supported by established systems, from the initial enquiry through to application to study in a UK-based school.

The application and enrolment procedures are well documented and robust so that parents are well informed and prepared for the expectations of the tuition programme. Parents are issued with all relevant course content and connectivity requirements to engage effectively with the online tuition process. Each application is rigorously vetted to confirm eligibility and suitability to access online tuition. Initial meetings

with the parent inform the learner profile to allow Connexcel to match the learning needs to an appropriate tutor and tuition plan.

There is an effective tutor feedback system in place to highlight any concerns with individual learners' progress, which are communicated and shared with the administrative team. By working collaboratively, the aim is to develop a plan to support the learner. In the situation where a learner is not responding to a support plan, the Provider is able to provide advice on suitable alternative programmes of study.

Each learner benefits from an individual learning plan that is tailored to the subjects they have chosen, their academic background and any specific identified support needs. Learners receive support and training in accessing the learning platform both pre-course and also during the course, should a technology-related issue arise. The observed teaching sessions clearly demonstrated the breadth and variety of resources the tutors use to support the learner and also their confidence in the use of the learning platform.

4.4 Management of Quality (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Provider has undertaken initial development work on a self-evaluation review process and supporting documentation that have a specific focus on the online tuition arm of the business. This process is currently being implemented and the revised format provides the opportunity to capture and evaluate the online tuition element.

To date, the self-evaluation review process has had a data focus and has comprised operational reports, which include data on applications, enrolments, withdrawals, achievement, learner progression and course developments. As a result, the review is quantitative rather than qualitative in its approach and content. Analysis of the data, specifically regarding learner experience and feedback, is required to evidence an evaluative approach to reviewing the online tuition element.

The action plan is data driven in its design and not always aligned to the specific targets and performance indicators identified in the self-evaluation review. The action plan needs to be reviewed and monitored regularly as part of the self-evaluation process to document where and when actions have been achieved.

Adopting this approach to self-evaluation review and action planning will provide an informed process that can be used to reflect on and review performance and set targets for the coming year.

There is a robust system to monitor learner progress to ensure that they are supported during their studies. Learner views are canvassed at regular points during the course to collect their feedback on the quality of the tuition they are receiving and also their working relationship with the tutor. Feedback from parents is also used to inform the effectiveness of the tuition arrangements and to provide a means to identify any potential issues.

Feedback records from both learners and parents indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the service provided, highlighting the high standards of tuition and support resulting in a conducive and tailored learning environment.

The administrative team, in communication with the tutors, is highly proactive in following up with parents when learners miss deadlines or work is submitted that is not of a satisfactory standard.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

A commitment to delivering high standards of bespoke online tuition is supported by a team of tutors who are highly experienced and qualified in both their subject areas and the ODBL delivery model.

Connexcel’s staff provide a very good level of support that is underpinned by effective and proactive communication channels, resulting in a learner-centered approach and responsive relationships with both parents and tutors.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

5.4 The Provider must develop and implement a robust tutor performance review system that feeds into the tutor appraisal system.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
14.3 The Provider must develop and enhance the self-evaluation review process to include qualitative analysis against the metrics and performance indicators.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
14.4 The Provider must develop, monitor and regularly review the action plan to identify clear targets, supported by performance indicators.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

It is recommended that the Provider evaluates the impact of current and new processes and systems and their effectiveness to identify areas for further development and embeds this within the self-evaluation review.

It is recommended that the Provider revisits the individual roles and responsibilities within the management and administrative teams to ensure that these align with the strategic priorities.

It is recommended that the Provider explores the role of alumni and examples of previous success in promoting its services.

It is recommended that the Provider would benefit from extending the use of the online training platform and content to provide training on best practice, as well as the dissemination of key updates, including to policies and procedures.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

--