# BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

# END OF PROBATION REVIEW
## (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:**     Probation accreditation

**DATE OF INSPECTION:**       22 November 2019

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:**    30 January 2020

## PART A – INTRODUCTION

### 1.     Background to the provider

Connexcel Limited (the Provider) is a privately-owned organisation. Since 2017. 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 Provider was first established in 2011 as an education agency to support learners' applications to study in the UK.

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/or guardians.

The aim of Connexcel Limited is to provide a tailored programme of tuition that is designed to reflect the ability levels of each learner providing an opportunity for development that is specific to that individual. The programmes of study are non-accredited.

The Provider is governed by a Board, which is comprised of two Company Directors. The directors undertake specific management functions within the organisation. One Company Director focuses on business engagement, finance, recruitment of staff and tutors, health and safety and the legal and statutory aspects of the business. The second Company Director takes the lead on sales, marketing, human resources and relationships between the organisation and the parents and learners. The directors are supported by a team of five administrative staff who undertake the operational aspects of the business. The tuition programmes are supported by a team of self-employed tutors.

### 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 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 technology.

The tuition is undertaken by a team of 19 self-employed tutors who are engaged when there is a need and demand for their services.

The courses are offered to learners aged 8 to 18 and the content of each course is tailored around the ability of each learner rather than a specific level or age group. The majority of the learners are between 11 and 17 years of age and are mainly female. At the time of the inspection, there were 17 learners from China enrolled across ten different programmes.

Enrolment is offered on a continuous basis which provides the opportunity for learners to join and leave the programmes at any time.

### 3.     Inspection process

The end of probation review was carried out on 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, the Office Administrator for Tuition, and the Student Welfare Coordinator. Three online lessons were observed. A wide range of documentation was made available during the inspection. The Provider provided full support and cooperation throughout the inspection.

## 4.  Inspection history

| Inspection Type | Date |
| --- | --- |
| Full Accreditation | 12-13 March 2019 |

**PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

*The following judgments 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

There have been some staff changes. The Office Administrator (Tuition) has left and an Online Tuition Officer has been recruited. This member of staff has the specific responsibility for managing the relationship between the Provider, the tutors and the students regarding 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 an 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.

### 2. Response to actions points in last report

*2.5 The Provider must devise a suitable method by which tutors receive up-to-date copies of relevant policies and procedures.*

Relevant policies and procedures have been reviewed to ensure currency and coverage. All new and existing tutors have been issued with the policies on commencement of their employment by e-mail and they are available to view and download via a centralised support system to ensure that they are accessible and updated centrally. The Tutor Guideline Handbook and the Staff Handbook have also been updated to provide comprehensive detail on all aspects of policies and procedures.

*3.3 The Provider must introduce a formal, documented appraisal process for staff.*

The appraisal process has been reviewed and developed and draws upon different sources of information, such as learner feedback and observation documentation, to appraise and evaluate an individual on their performance. This information is used effectively to support a discussion between the Managing Director and the member of staff on an annual basis. Separate standardised templates have been developed for both staff and tutors. Tutor appraisals are scheduled to start in early 2020.

*5.4 The Provider must introduce a documented system for tutor observation that identifies strengths in their performance and also areas of development.*

The process for tutor observation has been developed, documented and communicated to all tutors. Termly observations are scheduled for a tutor. New tutors are observed within the first two weeks of joining Connexcel. The process has been well received by tutors who have found the experience supportive and developmental. Observation feedback forms demonstrate a comprehensive approach to the process with key sections providing a standardised and consistent focus across all observations. Feedback from parents was also positive with specific reference to the added layer of quality assurance that observations will bring to the tuition process.

*5.7 The Provider must implement an internal programme review process so that each plan is reviewed on a regular basis.*

The Online Tuition Officer has led on an internal review of all course study programmes. Each tutor uploads their programme to a secure shared platform so that it can be monitored for content, relevance and parity across all tutors. Feedback and actions are communicated to the tutor and then monitored to check that they have been addressed and the programme has been updated.

*5.9 The Provider must undertake an exercise of standardising course materials to ensure parity and consistency of the learners' experiences of being tutored in the same subject by different tutors.*

As a result of the internal programme review process, work has commenced on checking the quality and content of the course materials. This exercise also forms part of the project led by the Online Tuition Officer to look at opportunities to integrate and embed curriculum content and references into all programmes. This work is in its infancy and ongoing. Its impact is effectively monitored through the programme review process at management level.

*6.4 The Provider must undertake a review of the current appraisal procedures for tutors to ensure that they receive regular feedback on their performance and that areas of development and training recommendations are identified and documented.*

An appraisal system for tutors has been developed and introduced and is currently due for implementation in early 2020. The templates that have been designed are appropriate and will be monitored to identify the strengths and areas of development for an individual tutor. The Provider also plans to draw out emerging themes to enable the further development of the support infrastructure for tutors.

*6.5 The Provider must develop and implement a training programme for tutors and staff to provide initial and update sessions on policies and procedures, learners' needs, instructional approaches and techniques and the use of appropriate ODBL technology.*

All current and revised policies and procedures have been communicated via e-mail to all tutors. New tutors are introduced to the same documents during their induction. The documents are also stored on a centralised platform for tutors to access. Although there is no specific training programme in place, updates are communicated to all tutors which effectively support tutor awareness. However, guidance is not currently provided on how to identify and support the specific needs of a learner and the learning styles that would be most appropriate. Further training on instructional techniques would ensure that tutors are updated on the tutoring approaches that are most effective.

Specific training on ODBL technology is provided both when a new member of staff or tutor joins as well as update training for existing staff and tutors when new appropriate and relevant technology applications become available. Feedback indicates that the training is both appropriate, timely and of a high standard thus allowing tutors to undertake their roles effectively and with confidence.

*11.4 The Provider must investigate the opportunities for peer interaction to facilitate learner discussion.*

The feedback from the Provider is that, due to safeguarding implications, discussion between learners is not appropriate. However, a platform for parents has been introduced to provide a forum for discussion and conversation and this has been well received by the parents.

*14.2 Reports must be compiled at least annually which present the results of the Provider's reviews and incorporate action plans.*

The Provider has introduced a review and an action plan, both of which are monitored and updated on a biannual basis. The actions are recorded and communicated to relevant parties. Whilst the review is undertaken by senior management and includes consideration of the full spectrum of the business interests, it does not provide a specific focus on the online tuition.

*14.3 The Provider must develop and implement a robust self-evaluation review and reporting process to include analysis of a number of metrics relating to performance.*

The Provider has developed a self-evaluation review and reporting process containing a number of metrics, which include learner enrolments, income and expenditure. However, the review does not provide specific detail on the online tuition element. The metrics referenced have a business focus and rather than focusing on

the evaluation and review of the performance of the online tuition. The self-evaluation does not include consideration of tutor, parent or learner feedback or the effectiveness of the processes and systems that have been introduced as part of the evaluation of the online tuition.

*14.4 The Provider must include clear action points as part of the action planning that are effectively communicated so that they can be reviewed on a regular basis to support continuous improvement.*

The action plan specifies actions that relate to the whole of the business for Connexcel and, as a result, not all actions are relevant and pertinent to the online tuition activity. The self-evaluation review and action plan are communicated across the Connexcel team and contribution and input by all members of the team are encouraged and valued by the Company Directors.

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

*It is recommended that the Provider undertakes a refresh of its website and uses this opportunity to showcase learners' work and success stories.*

The website is currently under review and being updated. Changes have already been implemented to include quotes from tutors and learner case studies.

*It is recommended that the Provider introduces an induction programme for staff, learners and tutors that is supplemented and supported by appropriate handbooks outlining key information and all pertinent policies and procedures.*

All staff, tutors and learners participate in a comprehensive induction programme that is supported by policies and procedures, handbooks, training on ODBL technology as well as a welcoming introduction to Connexcel and the infrastructure of support it provides.

*The Provider is recommended to analyse feedback it receives in order to collate the common themes that could then feed into the performance review process.*

The Provider has undertaken an initial analysis of feedback but recognises that further work is needed around the collation of common themes and how these inform the performance review process.

## 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**

The roles and responsibilities of the management and staff are well documented and supported by their Curricula Vitae (CVs) which confirm that they are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake their role.

The tutors have defined job descriptions with clear roles and responsibilities. All staff have undertaken an induction process and have been issued with a staff handbook. All tutors have been issued with the Tutor Guideline Handbook, which has been updated to reflect the current versions of the policies and procedures and supports the effective management of the online learning. Both handbooks provide clear information and support for staff and tutors new to the organisation and also act as an effective point of reference for established staff and tutors.

The primary method of communication is e-mail which is followed up, if necessary, with a telephone conversation.

The Company Directors are supported by a team of administration staff who demonstrate a thorough knowledge of both the requirements of providing online tuition to overseas learners along with a sound knowledge of the operational elements of the business. The close working relationships allow the Company Directors to have a direct line of communication with the team to ensure that there is currency of data and business development. There is also a clear commitment to work collaboratively and improve standards for learners and parents.

The Provider continues to operate effective mechanisms for the recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff. These are detailed in appropriate procedures. An appraisal system for tutors has been developed and is due for implementation shortly. The process and templates provide an opportunity for supportive and developmental feedback on a tutor's performance.

The Provider has introduced a programme review system to evaluate the content and structure of all course programme to improve the parity of experience across tutors and also to inform continuing improvement. This review is supported by the update of the website to ensure that the accessible information is accurate and current.

| 4.2 | Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check) |
| --- | --- |

**The standards are judged to be:**  ☐ Met   ☒ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
**Comments**

Programmes of study are managed, designed and tailored by tutors and reflect the requirements of the individual learner. This provides a bespoke and personalised tutoring programme for each learner. Tutors employ effective planning and structure sessions so that a variety of resources and activities are integrated to promote learner engagement in line with best use of ODBL technology. Formative assessments via homework are planned and centrally stored so that there is a layer of transparency and tutors can be monitored on setting homework as well as learner engagement with homework.

Observations of learner participation confirmed that they had achieved the learning objectives and felt comfortable asking for clarification or further questions, which evidenced the effective working relationships that exists between the tutor and the learner. However, in all three observed sessions, there were issues with connectivity with either the tutor or the learner not being able to hear the other, which led to some disruption in the flow of delivery.

The tutors are appropriately qualified and demonstrate sound subject knowledge. Many of the tutors have prior experience of working in the field of online tuition and are able to demonstrate effective pedagogic and communicative skills to facilitate the online tuition experience. Each learner has an individual tuition plan that is tailored and bespoke to their needs. The Provider is effective in matching the learner to the tutor, based on subject knowledge and experience of dealing with specific aspects of the curriculum.

The tutors have defined job descriptions with clear roles and responsibilities. All have undertaken an induction process and have been issued with a Tutor Guideline Handbook. 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.

6.5 The Provider does not currently provide guidance to tutors on how to identify and support the specific needs of a learner. In addition, further training on instructional techniques would ensure that tutors are updated on the approaches that are most effective using the ODBL approach of tutoring.

The training programme is supported by a schedule of homework and monitored through a centralised system so that non-engagement can be followed up and addressed with the parents. The Provider is committed to providing effective communication channels with parents and has developed and implemented a platform to allow parents to communicate with each other. Initial feedback has been

positive with the platform acting as an effective forum to discuss the parents' experiences of online tuition as well as the wider context of how Connexcel supports and prepares their children to come to the United Kingdom (UK) to study.

Each programme is tailored and bespoke to the individual learner needs and academic background. There are course designs available although individual tutors choose to develop their own course material and resources, which include a detailed assessment plan and homework schedule coordinated by the administration team. This centralised approach is effective and enables the Provider to maintain an overview of the non-submission of homework so that a parent can be notified. Non-engagement with homework assessments is documented to allow for prompt intervention. As a result, there is a clarity of expectation from both the tutor and the learner as to the requirement to complete homework in preparation for the next session.

## 4.3     Learner Support (spot check)

**The standards are judged to be:**               ☒ Met      ☐ Partially Met      ☐ Not Met
**Comments**

Connexcel 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 administration team are highly proactive and committed to ensuring and delivering the highest standard of learner experience and providing a personalised and bespoke service that is tailored to the needs of an individual learner. The Provider has established mechanisms in place to support the learner from initial application through to individual tuition.

Rigorous recruitment and selection processes for tutors ensure that each learner's needs are tailored and matched to a tutor. The tutors are highly qualified both within the curriculum area, and in the use of ODBL technology to deliver sessions that are designed to develop the knowledge and skills of an individual learner.

Training materials are audited within the programme review to ensure currency and relevance with feedback provided by the Online Tuition Officer. The Provider has a dedicated support person within the administration team who support learners, parents and tutors on all Information Technology (IT) related matters.

## 4.4     Management of Quality (spot check)

**The standards are judged to be:**               ☐ Met      ☒ Partially Met      ☐ Not Met
**Comments**

A number of new quality assurance processes and systems have recently been implemented and include an audit for individual programme contents and homework tasks to ensure parity of experience for learners undertaking the same level of study within the same subject area. Many of the processes and systems are new so it was not possible to measure their impact at the time of the review. The training programme for tutors has been enhanced to provide support on policies and ODBL techniques.

There are effective mechanisms in place to capture feedback from both learners, tutors and parents, which is then analysed and informs the review process.

There is currently no formal system for documenting key decisions which would provide an audit trail.

14.2 The newly introduced review, undertaken by senior management, does not currently provide a specific focus on the online tuition.

14.3 The self-evaluation review does not provide specific detail on the online tuition element.

14.4 Not all actions in the action plan are relevant and pertinent to the online tuition arm.

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4.5    Premises and Facilities – face-to-face component (spot check)

**The standards are judged to be:**    ☒ Met    ☐ Partially Met    ☐ Not Met
**Comments**

The Provider is based in rented premises. The premises are well maintained and provide a professional working environment.

The premises are part of a larger office space which is shared with other businesses. The Provider has access to shared toilets and a shared kitchen area.

There is clear guidance regarding health and safety that is communicated to all staff when they join the organisation and is clearly displayed within the lobby of the building as well as being available and visible on notice boards on each floor.

The premises have appropriate signage outside and provides a conducive environment to work.

The space and facilities are appropriate to support the number staff working within the office area and allow for adequate circulation space.

Toilet facilities are adequate and appropriate for the number of people within the premises and maintained to an excellent standard of cleanliness throughout the inspection.

Heating and ventilation are appropriate for the size of the building and number of staff on the premises at any one time.

A conference room is also available to hire when a meeting space is required.

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4.6    Compliance Declaration

**Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.**    ☒ Yes    ☐ No

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

**STRENGTHS**

The Provider is committed to delivering high standards of service which is realised through the recruitment of highly experienced and qualified tutors in their field of expertise as well as the ODBL approach.

The investment in systems and platforms has introduced a culture of transparency and openness to support the experience of both the students and their parents.

The Provider encourages a culture of working together and all members of the team having a voice and an input into how the online tuition arm of the business can develop and be enhanced as part of its approach to continuous development.

**ACTIONS REQUIRED**

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|---|---|---|---|
| 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. | ☐ High | ☒ Medium | ☐ Low |
| 14.2 The newly introduced review, undertaken by senior management, must include a specific focus on the online tuition. | ☐ High | ☒ Medium | ☐ Low |
| 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. | ☐ High | ☒ Medium | ☐ Low |
| 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. | ☐ High | ☒ Medium | ☐ Low |

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

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.

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

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

**COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE**