



New Directions (Reading Borough Council)



Table of Contents

1. Assessment Information	1
2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes.....	2
3. Strengths.....	5
4. Areas for Development.....	6
5. Methodology.....	8
Conditions of Accreditation	9

1. Assessment Information

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Assessor's Name	GRAHAM PICKUP
Visit Date	04/02/2109 – 06/02/2019
Client ID	C12064
Assessment Reference	PN104104
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	11/02/2020
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	11/02/2021
Accreditation Review on-site visit to be conducted by	11/02/2022

2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes

The New Directions (hereafter referred to as the Service) is part of Reading Borough Council's (RBC) Directorate of Environment & Neighbourhood Services (DENS). It provides adult education from five RBC owned centres (two designated learning centres in Caversham & Whitley and three shared premises) plus several outreach locations in the borough for example Children's Centres. It provides a mix of courses including accredited courses in Maths, English and Access courses, vocational courses, for example in Education and Training and Business and Administration as well as non-accredited course, for example in Crafts and Creativity and Health Wellbeing and Lifestyle. It also offers a range of short courses and courses for Special Education Needs and Disabilities.

The Service also manages the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) project on behalf of RBC.

The Service is led by the Principal who is supported by the senior leadership team, which includes Principal, the Assistant Principal and the Deputy Principal. The Assistant Principal heads up the Business Support team, which includes Business Development, Operations Assistants (who cover reception as part of their role), management information and central functions. The Deputy Principal heads up the delivery teams of Tutors/Assessors and volunteers, which include the Skills for Life team, the Vocational team and the Community Learning team. She also leads the Quality/Exams team.

The Service's mission is,

'To provide best value, high quality adult and family learning, which meets the needs and aspirations of each individual in the local community'.

and its vision is,

'To support individuals to achieve their personal aims and aspirations whether they are to gain employment, improve their skills or to help them be part of their community'.

The Service has priority aims which include, amongst others;

- To engage the most vulnerable learners and improve their life chances
- To support individuals to achieve their personal aims and aspirations whether they are to gain employment, improve their skills or help them be part of their community.
- To support residents to achieve a level of English and mathematics that will allow them to progress into further education, training or employment.
- To improve the skills of Reading workforce through good quality apprenticeships and vocational courses that will prepare and provide learners with better job/career opportunities.

The IAG service is provided by staff from the initial contact a learner has with the Service, through the initial assessment process, tutorials on the course and at any time the learner requests it. The BBO project offers IAG support to people over 25 and are on benefits.

The Service's key measures include retention and achievement. It aims to be above the minimum standards threshold, which for Basic Skills is 63%, in 2017-18 it achieved 66.2%, for Award level qualifications the threshold is 80% and in 2017-18 it achieved 46.7%, down from 98.2% in 2017-17. For Vocational qualifications overall it achieved 74.5% with other areas achieving above the threshold. For retention it aims to be above 85% and in 2017-18 it achieved 92.3%. For positive destinations it aims to be above the national average, which is 71% and it achieved 73% last year. The low performance in Awards was due to the low pass rate in British Sign Language, consequently the Service has stopped offering this course as it decided it did not have the right resources to successfully deliver it.

The Service aims to enable learners to achieve their goals, as described in the mission and vision statements. Staff monitor the progress of learners as they go through their qualification and will identify any extra support needed for anyone not progressing as expected. Examples of this include bringing in a Learner Support Worker to provide more 1 to 1 support for a learner, allowing a learner to have a break in learning if they are ill and unable to attend or providing learners with extra sessions for areas they are struggling with, for example use of IT. Attendance can be an issue and in these cases staff will contact the learner, by text or phone to understand the reason for the non-attendance and will address any issues identified. These can include ill health or homelessness and in these cases the learner will be allowed more time and signposted to appropriate support services.

Learners come to the Service through several ways. On accredited and non-accredited courses most come through word of mouth from family or friends, the apprentices come through their employer. Learners can come through partner organisations, for example Children's Centres, or the Jobcentre particularly for the work placement service.

For accredited courses learners are taken through an initial assessment process. This is aimed at ensuring the learner is going on the right course for them at the right level. They are assessed for both English and Maths and will be advised about what course would be appropriate for them for both subjects, but it is up to the learner to decide which to go on, they may choose to do both at the same time or one at a time. At their first session with their Tutor the learner will develop their Individual Learner Plan, (ILP), which identifies their goals and it is this that their progress is measured against through the course.

On the ESOL courses they will be taken through a diagnostic assessment to ensure they are on the right level, at this stage the learner can still change the level of course they are on. Learners have tutorials once per term to discuss their progress and address any issues they may have, as described above. They will discuss their possible next steps with their Tutor, who may refer them to other services for more information or support as appropriate. This can include referring a learner to the BBO Manager for more in depth IAG support, if they are eligible.

The work placement service will help learners to find a placement with the Council, which will last for 8 weeks. The learner will be placed in a role that is as close to their preference as possible. Learners are supported with any additional needs, for example they are referred to partner organisation for help with clothing. The aim is to help the learners back into work and in the last year 60% of learners on placements went back into work.

Apprentices have an initial induction, when they have the course detail explained to them and told what support they can expect and what is expected of them. They have reviews with their assessor every 10 to 12 weeks when they discuss their progress and any issues are addressed, for example the provision of extra sessions if the learner is falling behind.

In all areas it is up to the learner to decide what they do for their next steps, which can include doing more courses with the Service, but learners are also referred to other Colleges and Universities if that is more appropriate to their goals.

Comments from learners included,

'It was explained how it would work at the start and it has happened as I expected'

'I have discussed what to do with my Tutor but I am still not sure, so I have been signposted to the National Careers Service.'

'My friend brought me, if I had not started to come I would be in hospital now'

'I did a test to identify the right level for me, it is building my confidence to look for a job'

'It has helped me with my stress and built my confidence and I am thinking of doing a Teaching Assistants course next'

'I have a meeting with my Tutor each term when I can raise any problems I have but I can raise any concerns at any time'

3. Strengths

Three strengths were identified during the assessment. These are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- There is a clear strong ethos in the Service to support and enable people, especially from deprived areas, which is shared by staff. Staff were able to describe, in their own words, the aims of the Service and link them to the values that they shared with the Service. (1.2, 3.2)
- The Service has strong, well developed partnerships, which cover all areas of support a learner may need to enable them to progress and achieve their goals, from becoming less isolated to progressing on to university or getting a job. (1.8)
- The Service has developed the IQIP, which is the quality improvement plan for an individual member of staff and links to the overall quality improvement plan (QIP) for the Service. This helps staff to clearly understand how they are contributing to the overall quality improvement of the service (1.2, 4.5)

4. Areas for Development

Areas for development are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g. where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is; or to give insight to practice seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and areas for development. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in anyway lacking. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard. These will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) conducted twelve and twenty-four months from the date of this Assessment, along with any other notable developments.

Seven areas for development were identified during the assessment. These are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- Good information is provided on the courses and services by the Service, it is also looking to develop information on pathways available to learners after completing their qualification. This information will be provided on the website, in literature and at initial meetings with learners. (2.2)
- The Service has strong partnerships in place but not all staff were clear about the organisations and services in partnership with the Service. It may wish to consider how it could make staff aware of the partners and what they do so staff are clear about who they can signpost or refer to. (1.8)
- The Service holds staff and team meetings which address any issues. The Service may wish to consider including IAG as a specific item on the agenda for these meetings. This may help to ensure any IAG related issues are raised and help to identify ways to develop the IAG service further. (1.2)
- Some staff have had IAG training but not all. The Service may wish to consider enabling all staff involved in providing IAG to have access to IAG training as appropriate to their role. This can take the form of sessions at staff meetings, workshops or full qualifications. This may help to ensure there is a consistency of IAG provision in all areas and help to identify ways to develop the IAG provision further. (2.4)
- Learners have conversations with their Tutors about what they could do for their next steps but not all are clear about what to do next or how to achieve their goals. The Service may wish to consider how it could ensure that these people receive a more in depth IAG service by enabling access to a qualified IAG practitioner. (3.2)
- On the BBO project the manager asks for feedback on an informal basis. The Service may wish to consider how it could enable participants to provide feedback in a more structured way, using questionnaires, surveys or forums. This may improve the quality of the feedback received and help to identify ways to develop the service further. (1.7)

- The Service does collect feedback from learners through forms and questionnaires. These tend to give quantitative feedback. The Service may wish to consider how it could develop ways to collect more qualitative forms of feedback. This can include forums, learner groups and inclusion of learners on Service committees/meetings. This may help to identify ways to further develop the IAG provision and service overall. (1.7)

The annual **matrix** Continuous Improvement Check will allow the organisation to demonstrate on an ongoing basis the developments they are continuing to make in order to support individuals <http://matrixstandard.com/continuous-improvement-checks/> . These may include the Areas for Development above.

Please note that annual Continuous Improvement Checks are mandatory and non-completion within the required timescale will impact on your organisation's accreditation, please see Section 1 for dates.

5. Methodology

The following methods were used to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard during the assessment process.

Telephone conversations and email with the Assistant Principal in preparation for the visit including an understanding of the Service.

Site visit	St Magnus House, 3 Lower Thames Street, London, EC3R 6HD
Staff	22 staff interviews.
Clients	29 client interviews in 4 groups of 4, 1 of 5 and 1 of 8.
Partners	4 partner interviews
Document review	including website, organisation plans, monitoring statistics, brochures and leaflets.

The Principal, Assistant Principal, Deputy Principal, Skills for Life Manager, Vocational and Apprenticeships Manager and the BBO Manager attended the feedback meeting at the end of the assessment.

Conditions of Accreditation

Holders of the **matrix** Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
- Throughout the period of accreditation satisfy Assessment Services Ltd that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.
- Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.
- Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the **matrix** Standard at least 3 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 3 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrix@assessmentservices.com.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- Only use the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines. For example, if a certain department is successfully **matrix** accredited, the Quality Mark can only be used on that department's letterhead or on that department's page on their internet homepage.
- Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for accreditation review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to being a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.

Whilst accredited the organisation will be signed up for IAGonline - a community website for all **matrix** holders. Once signed up, any employee of the organisation can join the community and access regular posts and join specialist interest groups for support and discussion.

	
PO Box 14, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 0EL	T: 0044 (0) 2038805059 E: matrix@AssessmentServices.com https://twitter.com/matrix_standard