



**DARLINGTON COLLEGE –
CAREERS GUIDANCE SERVICES**



Table of Contents

1. Assessment Information.....	1
2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes.....	2
3. Strengths.....	4
4. Areas for Development	5
5. Methodology	6
Conditions of Accreditation.....	7

1. Assessment Information

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Visit Date	07/05/2019 – 08/05/2019
Client ID	C16093
Assessment Reference	PN104273
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	08/06/2020
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	08/06/2021
Accreditation Review on-site visit to be conducted by	08/06/2022

2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes

Darlington College is a small to medium-sized vocational general further education college in the north-east of England. Darlington College Careers Guidance Services is part of the Student Services team that includes admissions and course information, school liaison, student support and counselling, safeguarding and student finance. There are around 5000 students studying vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. There is a close working relationship with Teesside University for higher education, and with local employers for vocational routes. In June 2016 the College was graded “Good” by Ofsted.

The Careers Guidance Services Team (referred to hereafter as the Careers Team) comprises a manager, two full-time careers advisers and a full-time data and progression support worker. The team sees around 1100 current and prospective students per year, supporting them through a combination of group sessions, one-to-one clinic appointments and individual guidance interventions, and arranging other activities such as trips, visits, events and employer-led initiatives. The range of the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is as follows: the Careers Team supports students to make an informed choice about appropriate pathways, including initial course choice, and in developing the skills needed to manage the next stages in their career, whether this is seeking support around deciding on higher education places, apprenticeships, employment opportunities or achieving personal and economic well-being throughout their lives.

The strategic direction is agreed through discussions between the Deputy Principal and the Student Services and Safeguarding Manager. The mission of the College is *“To be a centre of excellence for education and skills that supports and inspires people to achieve their aspirations and prepares them for their next steps in life.”* Within the Careers Team, staff confirmed that they influence the broad direction to be taken through development days, internal workshops and subsequent team meetings. The agreed vision for the Careers Team is to provide an inclusive, impartial service which supports individuals, encouraging them to fulfil potential and enhance their experience when achieving their aspirations and career goals.

Strategic planning includes senior managers, managers and staff teams as well as intelligence from external partners who provide accurate advice about careers and labour market needs within the area. This allows for the planning of careers guidance activities which meet the needs of the communities and students. It is clear to the College leadership team and the Careers Team staff that effective IAG contributes to the overall retention of students in College by ensuring the right person is undertaking the right course at the right level and is supported to remain in College. Overall College retention rates for ages 16-18 have improved from 91.2 % in 2017-18 to 93.5% in 2018-19. For adults (19+), retention in the same periods remained high at 97.9% and 97.8% respectively. For those students deemed to be at greatest risk of dropping out of College, the Careers Team have ensured that 67% remain in College by changing courses to meet career goals. Other contributing factors that affect retention from an IAG perspective included examples such as: the improved quality of pre-entry guidance; investment in staff training and new software; inclusion of higher education progression pathways in the College prospectus (dispelling the myth that you can only access university by studying A Levels); and there is more work through the National Collaboration Outreach Project (NCOP) raising the aspirations of students to remain in college and achieve which will lead to higher education opportunities.

Students spoken with confirmed that they understood what outcomes the service from the Careers Team would help them achieve. Student outcomes are improved skills, confidence and motivation. These are assessed through student satisfaction measures and through spontaneous compliments. Satisfaction rates are consistently high at over 95% as assessed through these routes. Case studies are produced that describe the impact of the IAG on students' lives and these are used by the marketing team for use in various College publications. Feedback during the assessment included comments such as *"they were very understanding about my situation and were totally non-judgemental"*, *"it has reduced the stress on me and this has had less impact on my family due to the support"*, and *"I feel like I have more self-belief due to the positive reinforcement and feedback"*. Progression is another positive student outcome with 91.9% of students reporting that they know what to do after their course and 88% commenting that there are good careers resources available in College to help them decide what to do next. Data for student destinations demonstrates an improving picture with 83% of 16-18 year olds staying in education, moving into work or starting an apprenticeship showing that the IAG has assisted in creating sustainable, positive progression.

The Assessor found a passionate staff team offering wide-ranging support to students through the services delivered. Students consistently cite that staff are committed and enthusiastic. Resources are appropriate for the service being delivered and are of a good quality. Staff are a credit to the service, and students' experiences matched the service described. The continuing **matrix** Journey has been beneficial in formalising processes and procedures to deliver more effective outcomes.

3. Strengths

A number of 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 inspirational leadership for IAG in the College from the Deputy Principal and the Student Services and Safeguarding Manager. Staff in the Careers Team are directed to look at aspirations and life readiness rather than focus solely on courses and jobs. The result is that staff feel clear that students are at the heart of their work and that challenging societal barriers in localities is a key feature of their support. Management of the IAG service is equally clear and provides staff with a framework within which they operate. The key tenets of IAG are maintained as a result with a particular focus on impartiality. (1.2)
- The Careers Team is a well-trained and supported part of the College workforce. They are passionate about reaching out to enable and empower people to realise their potential. They are highly committed to policies of equality, social inclusion and social mobility. The provision of second-chance solutions and linking up undiscovered talent to opportunities is truly inspirational. Staff leave no stone unturned in supporting people to overcome challenges and create a journey to a more compelling future. Approaches to safeguarding are particularly robust. (1.3)
- Promotion of the support available is very clear and students report that induction and ongoing careers service presence in their tutorials encourages them to access help. The current location facilitates the ease of access for students in a purpose-built setting. (1.7)
- There are very strong partnerships and networks that enable the effective delivery of IAG. Partnerships with employers, training providers, the National Careers Service, universities and other local support organisations means that a culture of impartiality is present, with numerous examples of staff supporting and enabling other providers to deliver services to students. The service is seen to deliver IAG that supports the objectives of partners. External partners spoke of a *“great working together that helps students achieve their potential”*. (1.8)
- Staff have regular one-to-one meetings and appraisals which are ways of agreeing objectives and identifying development needs. Continuing Professional Development planning is discussed to determine what relevant support and learning opportunities can be offered to individual members of staff. Staff described how they had good access to training and development opportunities as required. Examples included equality and diversity, safeguarding and Prevent, conferences and IAG qualifications. Overall, staff feel they receive very good levels of support and direction. (2.4)
- Students speak favourably about the quality of support and the benefits of having someone who is non-judgemental and accessible. Students report this reduces anxiety and helps them concentrate better at College. Student comments included *“The Careers Team help you understand your options and support your decisions”* and *“They are there to support you not choose for you, it’s your life at the end of the day.”* (3.4)

4. Areas for Development

Areas for development are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and are a way for an Assessor to add value. For example, 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.

- The Careers Team's work clearly impacts on the ability of students to attend College, remain on programme and to achieve their learning aims. It also impacts on softer outcomes such as mental wellbeing, confidence and knowledge of progression opportunities. It is suggested that where there are longer-term interactions with students, tools which assess the 'distance travelled' may assist in demonstrating service impact yet further. These include the Outcomes Star, the Rickter Scale and the Resilience Compass however there are many more. (4.2)
- The IAG policy has some clear aims and objectives which are described in the form of a statement of service. The service is asked to consider whether there are sufficient feedback mechanisms which encourage potential and current students to give feedback against these. In doing this it may be worth considering the development of an overarching feedback strategy. This would determine what level and type of feedback is required, from whom, at what frequency and through which feedback mechanism (for example survey, focus group, forum or mystery shopper). This should help the organisation to be more inclusive in gaining feedback. (4.3)
- Partnerships are a strength and there is much informal operational contact that helps to drive service improvements; however, there is less formal evaluation of partnerships undertaken. By scheduling regular formal evaluative activities, this would ensure that any feedback can be acted on. (4.4)
- Informal peer observations are conducted by the careers advisers. The service may wish to consider whether a more structured process would be helpful and perhaps external sharing of practice might bring fresh ideas and approaches into the service. This could be through peer observations of colleagues in other student support functions within the College or in other external organisations. (4.5)

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.


- Meetings with managers and staff (5)
- Small group and one-to-one interviews with clients (10)
- Face-to-face and telephone discussions with partners (4)
- Review of key documentation (College Strategic Plan, Self-Assessment report, Quality Improvement Plan, promotional materials, feedback forms and analysis, statistical reports, Compass Careers Benchmark tool results)

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@assessmentsservices.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.

	
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