Hertford Regional College

Compact Report V7
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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Stuart McRill
Visit Date	14/03/2022 – 17/03/2022
Client ID	C11061
Assessment Reference	PN201198
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	16/03/2023
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	16/03/2024
Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	16/03/2025

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Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Hertford Regional College (hereafter HRC, the College or the organisation) is a medium-sized, general further education college with campuses in Broxbourne and Ware. The college provision includes a wide range of post-16 professional and technical education and training, including study programmes for 16- to 19-year-old learners, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships, provision for learners with high needs, higher education and commercial programmes.

With a mission of '*achieving sustainable economic and social impact through high quality responsive education and training*' HRC has at its core the strapline *'Destination Curriculum'* which is a deeply embedded guiding principle and approach. This is firmly embraced by staff with the intention to '*prepare the students of today for the roles of tomorrow'*.

Acknowledging the importance of qualifications, the *'Destination Curriculum'* approach is focused upon the qualification being just one outcome (rather than the definitive outcome) and that it is how this qualification, alongside the wider gained employability and life skill outcomes, enables the student to achieve their destination of choice. Integral to the realisation of '*Destination Curriculum'* is an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service that is broad based and designed to help students with their learning, career, employability and life skills in order to be destination ready.

The College's Student Services has met the **matrix** Standard for almost a decade, with the last accreditation review in 2019. A positive Ofsted 'Good' outcome, late in 2021, was followed by the submission of a booking form for whole college **matrix** assessment, this goal being a strategic target since the last assessment.

HRC maximised the assessment to showcase an end-to-end IAG service that is: of a high quality; shaped by industry and external stakeholders; and delivered by a workforce that is passionate about removing barriers to success.

The HRC IAG offer is multi layered with the following staff and services all making a positive contribution to the assessment:

Pre-entry marketing and Information Centre – the marketing team is made up of largely newly recruited staff, with school engagement and social media approaches that are re connecting with providers of 14-19 education as part of post covid recovery plans. This team is also successfully reaching out to targeted community groups. The Information Centre works hand in glove with the marketing team and is staffed with a team of front line advisers whose IAG combines admissions, enrolment, some financial advice and signposting for specialised IAG, particularly to the curriculum programme managers. Combined, the teams showed how their IAG provision is making a significant contribution to recruitment, with college applications some 300 up on this time last year.

Student Services – this team provides a suite of specialist IAG services including counselling, welfare and pastoral support, Safeguarding, enrichment (including student voice activities and Duke of Edinburgh provision) and a progress monitor role (focused upon support linked to attendance and retention). Each of these services has its defined intent and implement approaches, with health and well-being and broader community and societal IAG helping to instil values of citizenship. In addition, a careers calendar managed by the Head of Student Services and the career adviser focuses on the organisation's Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) provision. The programme is broad based and makes good use of wider and national events (such as National Apprenticeship Week and National Careers Week), higher education workshops/UCAS support, employability workshops and one to one careers advice and guidance. Student Services has continually met the **matrix** Standard and at each three-yearly review has demonstrated development

and rigorous linkages to Gatsby Benchmarking. The newly introduced cross college promotion of *'Be a Career Hero'* is highly visible and aims to keep CEIAG fresh and relevant.

Additional Learning Support (ALS) – provides individualised support for students with a range of additional support needs including higher education students' access to Disabled Students' Allowance. This team of skilled support workers is intrinsic to curriculum delivery approaches and was much praised by tutors for a support service that is "*providing differentiation support to make a deeper impact on students' progress*".

Curriculum based IAG – from a starting point of *'everyone provides IAG'*, the college provided a broad array of curriculum delivery staff to make a contribution to the assessment including business studies, travel and tourism, hospitality and catering, accountancy, construction and motor vehicle. Delivery staff and curriculum area managers all made the very clear linkages to the cause and effect of effective IAG and student progression and destination readiness. With so many of the staff from their industry specialism it was clear that IAG delivery utilises mentoring and coaching skills to keep *"the IAG real"*.

Through a combination of group tutorials, one to one support and work experience and live briefs staff consistently highlighted the holistic nature of their delivery approaches. This extends to health and well-being with tutors highlighting how sexual consent and Safeguarding CPD inputs have been invaluable. IAG delivery in the curriculum is embracing technology. A good example being within motor vehicle where use of Nearpod is keeping students engaged in the monitoring of their skill developments. As well as being seen as "*less dry than paper based skills reflection"* the platform is seen as an added value approach for embedding digital skills that are core within the industry.

Inclusive Learning – this *'college within a college'* setting provides programmes of study for young people with severe learning difficulties and moderate learning difficulties whose priority is to develop their communication skills, increase participation and develop the social, personal and practical skills they need to live as independently as possible. IAG delivery by tutors and programme managers was brought to life with passion and integrity. For many of the cohort, the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) acts as the framework to deliver bespoke support. Here the focus is upon meeting the pre-determined targets and celebration on a day-to-day basis of gained independent living and employability skills

Apprenticeships – a team of tutor/assessors support around 400 apprentices. This directorate also oversees work experience IAG. Whilst the team is a managed entity there are seamless links with curriculum area managers and programme managers. This approach is working especially well and is enabling progression from study programme to apprenticeships.

Additional teams that made a direct contribution to the assessment included staff from the Technology Centre and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutors.

College wide, IAG delivery is firmly focused upon the individual, with one business tutor describing an "*always presenting options, never dictating*" approach. This is translated into practice throughout the learner journey with '*pivot don't pause'* IAG adopting an *'it's ok to change your mind'* stance, normalising uncertainty for students.

The senior leadership team made a compelling case of how IAG is especially impacting upon recruitment, enrolment, retention and achievement targets. This understanding was firmly the case at manager, team leader and delivery staff level, with linkages constantly made to the destination curriculum and progression readiness. A review of HRC data sets highlighted that study programme targets for the last two years were realised and the current attendance and achievement milestones of 90% are on profile.

Some departments provided impact data to highlight the return on investment of IAG. For instance, across ALS the team evidenced that of those students receiving this support, 98.1% were retained and 95.3% achieved, both data being significantly above national comparative datasets. Student Services' key performance indicator data tells a similar positive message with 98% of student benefiting from counselling staying at the college.

The positive destination rate for 2020/21 is very high at 92.9% (94.9% for 16-18 and 87.2% for 19+) and likely to be above the sector average.

At the individual student level, IAG impact is continually monitored. From the outset the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) sets out the career goal and identifies support needs and barriers to be overcome to increase career readiness. Promonitor is working well to record and evaluate learner progress, with some good capturing of gained soft outcomes. Across Inclusive Learning, staff and students can describe the Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) outcome based approaches. This methodology is also utilised across ESOL provision. Here, examples were provided that evidenced how improved English (and maths too) are realising societal outcomes such as family cohesion, family learning and confidence to engage in the community.

Interviews with students were plentiful in generating examples of gained outcomes:

"I have more independent living skills and want to work in animal care. I start another college in September";

"I'm not ready for an apprenticeship yet but that's ok as I need more support and time at the college";

"My tutor has been incredible and has shaped a career path with me from level three up to level 7. I know where I am heading and how I am going to get there";

"My PM is so caring and has helped me with lots of personal stuff over the last year. Sometimes just getting to college is an achievement and my tutor helps me to recognise skills of punctuality and determination".

In summary, this assessment confirmed that HRC provides a high-quality outcome based IAG service that is equipping students with the employability, life, learning and career skills to reach their potential and their destination of choice. This end-to-end IAG entitlement is making a real difference to learners and is implemented by a workforce whose dedication and passion to their cohort is empowering, enabling and firmly student centred and is best captured in one tutor's words:

"My job is about supporting students create their own identity with underpinning skills and values. Every time we get this right through IAG, a brickie leaves us as a professional…. and my learners leave as ambassadors in their sector".

Strengths

A number of strengths were identified during the assessment, which are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- From the outset, the senior leadership team's commitment to effective and quality IAG across the whole curriculum was unquestionable. HRC showcased how IAG interventions and support enable the organisation's key performance indicators to be realised. The clarity and understanding of IAG as a golden thread to realise *'Destination Curriculum'* was firmly outlined and then evidenced organisation wide with confidence and competence. (1.1, 3.2, 4.1)

- HRC staff described how their senior leadership team has implemented organisational change and business development by adopting a '*culture of kindness and support'*. Staff feel listened to and consulted with an air of post Ofsted optimism that is leading to continuous college evolution as the organisation designs its five-year strategic plan. (1.2)

- The whole college curriculum is designed with outcome based IAG at its core in order to facilitate *'Destination Curriculum'*. IAG approaches are anchored in Student Services and then deeply embedded across curriculum provision. A triangulated portfolio of support is provided by tutor, programme manager and the wider suite of Student Services/ALS with a clarity of roles, responsibilities and limitations. The result of this tripartite approach is bringing about career and progression readiness for the full range of students. (2.1, 3.2, 3.6)

- Information Centre staff have benefited from their manager's commitment to upskilling and professionalising pre entry IAG. Over the years of accreditation, it has been clear how front line staff are enabling increased informed decision making amongst students, with career goals outlined and explored from the onset. A review of documentation developed since the last assessment confirmed staff are applying a Skilled Helper model of IAG. Here the focus is to progress aspiring and current students from their present scenario to their preferred scenario. (1.2, 3.2, 3.4)

- Inclusive Learning staff consistently described the team's '*with me, not to me'* IAG approach when supporting their range of students. With each curriculum and learner journey designed with the student and their parent/carer, expected outcomes are clearly defined, monitored and evaluated and link to learning for living and preparation for progression outcomes. Support Plans are of a high quality and define expected student outcomes which are reviewed and celebrated within the ILP. Students confirmed that they are feeling "*independent*", "*excited*" and "*confident*" about their future plans which include supported internships, further education colleges and internal progression onto a higher level at HRC. (1.3, 1.5, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2)

- Across construction and motor vehicle provision the full range of staff demonstrated an IAG experience that is listening to industry and applying this gained knowledge to IAG realism and relevance. Coaching approaches were visible across these teams' IAG approaches, with staff successfully transforming students' attitudes and behaviours, and providing industry ready expectations and realism in a manner that is keeping dreams and goals firmly alive. (3.2, 3.4)

- Effective and collaborative partnership practices are injecting industrial and work related learning and support to help students' work readiness. Feedback confirmed how the college is viewed by local employers as an essential component of their talent pipeline. This has resulted in very high progression data in recent years, and with some employers investing in industry standard equipment donations in order to facilitate training on the latest/most current practices. (1.8)

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 into practices 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 any way lacking. 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 numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- The breadth of topics across the tutorial framework is all encompassing and provides tutors in the curriculum with a model to customise into sector specific group based IAG activities. As the college year enters its final term, there is an opportunity for a working party to revisit the programme and enhance individual workshop content. In so doing, a project refresh type approach can review embedded content such as videos and replace those that are perhaps less relevant to Hertfordshire (for instance American content) with a regional and localised perspective. Reaching out to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and employer base to support with employer talking heads inputs and regional and local information will help to keep the tutorial content current, accurate and relevant. (2.2, 4.5)

- There is no question that People Management practices are entrenched across the organisation. During the assessment some experienced staff highlighted a little frustration that progression opportunities internally are limited. Whilst this may prove to be the case within a small to medium sized college, HRC has many exciting development plans that may enhance career progression options. The next round of staff performance reviews provides an opportunity for the senior leadership to have career discussions and hear the voice of those staff who are keen to develop career pathways internally. Taking such action may help maintain staff engagement and identify motivated talent for future projects. (1.2, 1.7, 2.1, 2.4)

- Student centred IAG delivery has been highlighted earlier within this report. Looking ahead, there are still merits in the college investing in IAG training to support with succession planning and talent development. The assessment highlighted, for instance, that for some staff such as the information team and the progress monitor role, investing in IAG qualifications will accredit current competencies as well as provide stretching and challenging IAG development goals for those that are keen to provide enhanced IAG. Elsewhere, internal IAG workshops across curriculum staff will help with maintaining tutor understanding and consistency of the role of IAG within the HRC learner journey. (2.4)

- Harnessing technology was evident throughout the assessment with some curriculum areas developing Microsoft Forms approaches with much success. Looking at ways of integrating these technology teaching and learning approaches so that they can be passported into the ProMonitor suite is encouraged to minimise duplication. Elsewhere the work experience toolkit would benefit from an overhaul. As well as being largely text based, the design is centred upon the work experience process rather than serving as an impact tool. Investment here would help with the college with its wider T Level work related learning which will be rolled out more fully in 2023. (3.5, 4.7)

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. These may include the Areas for Development above. https://matrixstandard.com/assessment-journey/continuous-improvement-checks/

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 the section Assessment Information for dates.

Methodology

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

Microsoft Teams interviews with the leadership team (12)

Microsoft Teams interviews with the full range of managers, team leaders and staff delivering the IAG service (33)

Microsoft Teams and telephone discussions with partners (3)

Microsoft Teams and telephone discussions with a sample of learners (19)

A review of planning, implementation and impact documentation including marketing and promotional videos and prospectuses, self-assessment reports, quality improvement plans, job descriptions, data monitoring reports and content on the college's virtual learning environment.

Conditions of Accreditation

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

1. Maintain and continually improve upon their services.

2. Throughout the period of accreditation satisfy The Growth Company that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.

3. Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.

4. Inform The Growth Company or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.

5. 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.

6. Inform The Growth Company of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrixStandard@growthco.uk.

7. Inform The Growth Company immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.

8. Inform The Growth Company of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).

9. Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause The Growth Company and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.

10. 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.

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