

EDUCATION TRAINING COLLECTIVE



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Assessment Information

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| Assessment Type | Initial Assessment |
| Assessor's Decision | Standard Met |
| Assessors' Names | Susan Smith / Kathy Leahy |
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Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

The Education Training Collective (Etc.) is a further education college group based in the Tees Valley. The Group serves the boroughs of Stockton-On-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland. Etc. was previously known as the Stockton Riverside Group prior to the merger of Stockton Riverside College (SRC) and Redcar & Cleveland College (RCC) on 1 August 2018. Other parts of the Tees Valley-based group are the engineering training provider NETA, the Bede Sixth Form College, and the Skills Academy. In terms of secondary school performance, Stockton performs well against local and regional performance indicators, Redcar less so. This trend is evident across the majority of social and economic indicators. In recent years Redcar has been hit hard by the demise of some large businesses based in the Borough, and to some extent continues to be so. The constituent parts of the Group are one of a number of choices for students in the area and has positive links in the wider community. There is a clear sense of being a resource for the local community, developing a curriculum offer (and therefore pathways) into local industries and job opportunities “*big enough to offer a broad curriculum, but small enough to care*”.

At Etc. during 2018/19 there were 2,032 learners aged 16-18 on a wide range of academic and vocational study programmes from entry to level 3 across the Group. 4,006 learners aged 19+ were on entry to level 5 programmes, 501 apprentices completed their studies in 2018/19 with most apprentices on framework programmes at levels 2 to 5 and 191 learners were in receipt of high-needs funding.

The scope of the **matrix** Assessment is the whole Group. Both an embedded and an explicit (specialist) Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) entitlement is clearly visible across all key stages of the learner journey. Comprising extensive schools liaison, front line IAG delivery, tutor on programme support, specialist student support and tutorials, with the support being firmly focused upon sustaining already high retention and achievement rates. The aims for the IAG service are to offer advice that recruits people on to the right course, to remove barriers to learning and to provide advice and support for students to progress. The objectives of the IAG service that support this are to ensure that all students receive clear, accurate, up-to-date, accessible, objective and impartial information before committing to a course and understand how a proposed course meets their needs with a specific link to future careers aspirations, receive on-programme support to remain on programme and succeed in achieving their qualification and access clear, accurate, up-to-date, accessible, objective and impartial IAG about progression opportunities.

There is a Careers Education-IAG strategy which is framed by the Etc. strategic goal ‘*to deliver an outstanding student experience*’. Specifically, the service comprises pre-enrolment IAG that is provided across a number of engagements, traditionally including school visits, open evenings, interviews, College tours, taster events and enrolment. Once enrolled, students benefit from IAG during one-to-one interviews, careers events and workshops, tutorials, enrichment activities including service providers with information stands, student services drop ins, through College principal assemblies/ briefings who also advise on IAG provision / services within their own colleges. Additionally, when a learner ends their study, they are included in the Sustained Destination monitoring that takes place, during which they are offered further IAG and regular contact to ensure that they have sustained their onward destination. Students who are completing their studies or who are in defined vulnerable groups are all offered one-to-one careers guidance with specialist staff. During the COVID-19 period and as a result of the restrictions, the Group moved to the use of online platforms, ensuring young people could access the information they require to support them in setting and achieving their own career aspirations.

The Etc.'s mission statement is *'We will deliver great learning opportunities, inspirational educational experiences and real practical skills training for the young people, adults, businesses and the diverse communities that we serve.'* The Group sets its annual strategic goals as part of a rigorous process, which involves the Group Management Team, and Governors. These are drafted for the year ahead in September, shared with managers and staff before being considered and by the Board of Governors at an annual event in late January. These are then shared with Heads of Department and with the wider workforce via a CEO briefing. The organisation is governed by Vision, Values and a Tone of Voice which is shared frequently with the entire workforce.

The impact of the IAG across the whole group is measured through the Retention and Achievement rates. These are on the whole well above national average and targets are set accordingly. There have been a number of different improvements made to initial IAG through improvements to taster and open days, to the enrolment process and to the on programme support which have resulted in improvements in overall retention in 2018/19 at 94.2% compared with a national average of 91.2% and for 2019/20 the target has stretched to 95%. Similarly, achievement rates are affected by the quality of the whole college approach to IAG and the re-alignment of resources to provide additional and differentiated specialist support which has resulted in an overall improvement in achievement. For example, at RCC achievement rates improved by +6.3% points in 2018/19 to 88.8% which is +2.9% points above national rate. At SRC achievement rates consolidated and further improved by +2.7% points to 92.1% which is +6.2% above national rate. There has been good progress in apprenticeships with Group overall achievement at 72.5% (+3.8% above national rate) and timely achievement at 69.6% (+10% points above national rate). The 16-18 A level achievement rates at Bede Sixth Form rose +22.8% points to 96.8%. In adult learning there were very high overall achievement rates at Group level which, at 93.1% in 2018/19, is +4% points above national rate. More specific IAG development details can be found in the Strengths section of this report. Further measures also reinforce the positive impact of IAG at Etc., for example in 2018/19 331 learners accessed Free College Meals (against 272 the previous year) as a result of improved IAG to students and parents, additionally there was a 86% of learners (an increase of 3%) who felt that enhanced information about student bursary, provided prior to enrolment was of good quality; and 91% of staff identified that the Careers Team are responsive to needs, as reported in the Support Services Survey.

Learner outcomes are measured through progress on the Individual Learning Plan and the achievement of softer targets. For some students, their Education, Health and Care Plan targets also demonstrate distance travelled in terms of softer skills whilst at college. For many students the outcomes are greater confidence, motivation and clarity about future goals and aspirations. In 2018/19, 95% of students were aware of what to do after their course ends and 92% feel prepared to take their next steps (+4% on the previous year). During the assessment, the Assessors found that all students could describe the personal benefits of the support that has enabled them to stay at college, feel motivated to achieve and to progress. Comments included *"I feel we have been given lots of opportunities to progress into what we want to do next"* and *"The support is really good. They take the extra time to help you progress."* In terms of the specialist IAG offered through the Careers Service, more aggregated distance travelled measures are considered to assess the outcomes, for example, 11% of students felt that they knew 'a lot' about job application and interview skills before the session and this increased to 36% after the session ; 39% of students felt that they had a high level of confidence in job application and interview skills which rose to 78% after the session; 0% of students felt that they knew 'a lot' about LMI before the session and this increased to 16% after the session. 8% said they knew 'quite a lot' before and 59% they knew 'quite a lot' after and 4% of students felt that they had a high level of confidence in LMI which rose to 48% after the session.

Staff have a reflective approach to reviewing improvements and developments to ensure they are fit for purpose and will support the ongoing IAG needs of the students. The Assessors found a committed whole Group team that offers wide ranging support to students. Comments from staff included *“results are always important, but holistic development is more important”*; *“success is when a student gets to where they want to be (destinations)”*, *“I think we are amazing at IAG because we will have those difficult conversations... the proof of the pudding is in the 100% positive destinations”*.

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.

- There is inspirational and consistent leadership for IAG across the Group. Staff are directed to look at aspirations and life readiness rather than focus solely on courses and jobs. The strategy for CE-IAG is described as being about *'the learner journey'* and incorporates how the services and partners can support this. The result is that staff feel clear that learners should be 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. Staff are able to clearly articulate the vision and values for the Group and feel connected to the aims and values through the objectives agreed in their personal reviews. The result is a motivated whole staff team. (1.2)
- Internal and external partnerships are a clear strength, with the outcomes for all parties being significant in achieving their mutual and individual partnership objectives. One partner described Etc. as being *"efficient and seamless"* and that they *"are wholly in support of the greater good not just achieving their own priorities"*. Strong partnerships have been critical during lockdown to ensure that the most vulnerable learners within the Group were and continue to be provided with prompt and accurate IAG. During the lockdown period, 100% contact with vulnerable students was maintained through effective partnerships with local authority partners, resulting in signposting to specialist services, where required (1.8 / 3.6)
- There are good levels of staff and other resources in the Group that support the delivery of IAG. There has been investment in IT, software licences and extra staffing in specialist services for example to address the increase in mental health challenges. The benefits of the investment in additional resourcing to the learner population can be clearly seen through the improvement in learner satisfaction rates which put Etc. in the top 11% of the FE Choices survey. (2.1)
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) continues to be invested in. Overall, the Group is fully committed to investing in staff development that increases skills, motivation and confidence of staff when working with learners. Of particular note has been the investment in IAG qualifications and in other professional training, such as motivational interview techniques and UCAS and other university conferences. Staff commented favourably on opportunities and note that this has been improving over the period since the merger. (2.4)
- Etc. implements a high quality embedded IAG experience for the full breadth of learners. Curriculum staff embrace their role as key deliverers of the service(s) on a day to day basis. Their contribution is much more than foundation level IAG with so many of the tutors themselves being industry specialists. Aspects of coaching and mentoring were evident across service delivery with clear messages that the emphasis is, as one Tutor explained, about *"realising ambitions"*. Staff are very clear on professional boundaries and limitations with expertise from Student Services adding their specialist tier of support. There is a significant proactive response to learners at risk from the Welfare Services across the Group which assists both staff and learners and reduces early withdrawals. (3.2)

- The IAG service is delivered impartially. Learners speak favourably about options and choices that are not just about the Etc. offer but staff inspire them to think about “*what’s right for me*”. A significant amount of resource is offered to schools to assist in Year 11 transition and young people and parents are encouraged to use the facilities of the Group for independent advice and guidance. Examples were found of people being advised of other options and other institutions to better meet their needs. Of particular note were the efforts made by the Marketing and Student Recruitment teams during the COVID-19 lockdown to maintain contact with potential learners and to ensure that IAG was available through online meetings, activities and the provision of exciting new resource packs to assist in making choices. (3.3)
- Learner feedback is very positive across the IAG services. Support is well embedded, and learners are clear that this is helping them to remain on programme and achieve their learning aims. Learners spoke highly of new IAG developments such as Careers In Days and the Career Ready programme. Other positive comments included “*My tutor has been fantastic. I am now feeling prepared to not only enter my profession but to grow with it*” and “*My whole experience at the College has been excellent. In particular I have found my tutor inspiring and the financial support team full of empathy*”. One manager succinctly described how across their department there were “*countless examples of learners who as a result of customised support from curriculum and student services were now inspired and equipped with self-focus to achieve career goals*”. (3.2 / 4.3)
- Feedback mechanisms are varied and well used. Learners feel confident about how to give feedback about the quality of support they receive from both specialist teams and from the academic staff. The range includes surveys, online questionnaires, focus groups, ad hoc requests as well as a well-structured programme of Student Voice activities. The result is that Etc. bases its improvements to support on the voice and views of the learners. Many examples were found of improvements and importantly students are able to share how they know what has changed as a result of their feedback. For example, the change to start time at Bede and the increase in mock interview preparation support. (4.3 / 1.7)
- Quality assurance processes are robust and support the IAG strategy across the Group. Of particular note was the new Deep Dive process that has resulted in the development of improved IAG processes and outcomes. Quality assurance through observations and walk throughs are also noted by staff as being helpful and supportive. For example, to support the improvement of retention at NETA from 87.7% in 2018/19 to 96.8% in 2019/20, quality assurances support assisted in improving behaviour management, highlighting the additional need for welfare support for non-attenders and improved initial signposting. (4.5)

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 Group is encouraged in its existing plans to launch a new website. This will link directly with ProSolutions and provide instantaneously accurate course information. This is a significant investment in resources and will ensure that learners and potential learners have access to robustly quality assured, accurate and timely information. (2.2)
- Learner outcomes are measured through the distance travelled as recorded in the Individual Learning Plan. The plan to ensure greater consistency of soft target setting and recording are encouraged and there will be a staff development implication for this. In addition, for those areas which use a scale to measure the distance travelled at the individual learner level, it may be helpful to consider the benefits of aggregating the data to assess both staff and service impact. (4.2)
- As highlighted in the Strengths section of the report, learners have a variety of feedback mechanisms. Nonetheless, the **matrix** Assessment is also a good opportunity for feedback too! A group of students suggested that one improvement might be to increase the IAG on how to manage finances after leaving their programme. (4.3)

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 the organisation's accreditation, please see the section Assessment Information for dates.

Methodology

As the Covid-19 UK restrictions were in force at the time of the **matrix** Assessment, it was conducted remotely. The Assessors would like to thank all staff, partners and students involved in the Assessment for demonstrating their flexibility and tenacity in coping with new ways of working.

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

Meetings via MS Teams with 62 managers and staff

Telephone calls with 4 external partners.

MS Teams meetings with 18 learners.

Document review via MS One Drive (including various strategies and plans, data reports, marketing materials, monitoring system information, meeting minutes and presentations, feedback and evaluation reports, website, staff training information and case studies).

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.
11. 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 The Growth Company and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to be a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
12. Be aware that The Growth Company reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.