



The Skills Service

ASSESSMENT SERVICES
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1. Assessment Information

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Assessor's Name	SONIA RENZO
Visit Date	25/03/2019 – 26/03/2019
Client ID	C19257
Assessment Reference	PN104119
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	22/03/2020
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	22/03/2021
Accreditation Review on-site visit to be conducted by	22/03/2022

2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes

The Skills Service (hereafter referred to as the Service) is part of Opportunity Peterborough, a private company limited by guarantee which is an economic development company that supports economic growth across Peterborough. Key priorities for Opportunity Peterborough are business growth, to promote inward investment, develop skills in the region and ensure young people are aware of employment opportunities so they can 'be the best they can be'.

The Service, which was established in 2013, was originally funded by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to offer a brokerage service to bring employers and schools together to support the delivery of Careers Education. Since the last assessment in 2016, the LEP has been replaced by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA). This has led to changes to the funding in the areas the Service has traditionally operated i.e. it has taken on Huntingdon and the Fenland but lost Rutland, South Kesteven, South Holland, Kings Lynn and North Norfolk. During the transition of funding from the LEP to the CPCA, the Service was operating on a 3-month rolling contract, with a 12-month agreed from the 1st March 2019. During the transition, issues were also experienced with the management of the Service, due to the long-term absence of the previous Skills Lead due to illness.

Six months ago, a new Skills Lead was recruited. Her role was to support the transition of the Service and develop a Skills Brokerage Delivery Plan linked to the CPCA priority sectors and whose ambition is to establish the creation of a local skills system that is World Class at matching the needs of employers, learners and communities.

The Service also had a contract with the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) to support schools to work towards the Gatsby Benchmark by undertaking Compass Audits to identify gaps and make recommendations. It also provides an income generating Work Experience 'service' for schools in Peterborough which as a minimum ensures Health and Safety and Safeguarding requirements are met within the businesses before students undertake placements, to recruiting businesses to offer Work Experience opportunities.

In addition, to the Skills Lead, there is a Lead Business and Education Development Manager (BEDM) who is currently on maternity leave, three BEDMs, a School Engagement Lead, two Work Experience and Safeguarding Co-ordinators, an Events and Media Co-ordinator and an Information and Contracts Manager.

The Service has three clients:

- Employers who offer Work Experience and employees who volunteer to work in the schools
- Schools, providing Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and various employability and enterprise activities
- Students who attend the various activities and events to obtain CEIAG.

The scope for this **matrix** assessment is focused upon the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) / support provided to the different clients, from their initial engagement and throughout their time with the Service. An integral part of this is offering informed, comprehensive IAG to help 'raise the aspirations' of students through developing their understanding of learning, education and employment opportunities and help address the skills gaps within local businesses.

The Service mission is:

'to provide inspiration and raise aspirations of young people for future careers by connecting schools with local business and other education providers to facilitate work related learning activities'

The Service Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relate to the different contracts and income generation to maintain its sustainability and include:

2017/18

- Deliver 125 Business Led events with schools
- Engaging with 15,000 Young People
- Income generation from Work Experience £50k

Sept 2018 – Feb 2019

- 200 named business directly involved with events
- 10,000 Young people have direct contact with an employer
- 30 schools completed compass for the first time or carried out a 6 -12-month review
- 100 Business led events/activities brokered in schools
- 84 Interactions with schools

March 2019 / February 2020

- 175 events delivered
- Interaction with a minimum of 15000 young people
- Interactions with 90% of mainstream schools in the area
 - a) Planned schools careers activity and evaluation of impact
 - b) Schools informed of statutory obligations for careers
- Bespoke activity delivered in 80% of mainstream schools in the Fenlands to meet area priorities
- 80% of events to have at least 1 priority sector in attendance
- 100K income generation.

Senior Managers explained how the Service was integral to helping Opportunity Peterborough and ultimately the CPCA to achieve the strategic aims around the development of skills in the region and ensuring young people were aware of the opportunities *'to raise aspirations'* and *'be the best they can be'*. This was through encouraging local employers to work with schools to provide opportunities for students to develop enterprise and employability knowledge and skills to help them make informed decisions around career choices.

The staff interviewed were very clear about what the Service wants to achieve in terms of helping to *'raise aspirations'* of students, through facilitating the links between business and schools, to make the curriculum more interesting and engaging. They also talked about developing the understanding of teachers and parents on different career opportunities and routes e.g. Apprenticeships. All staff understand the KPIs and it was evident during the interviews that they are passionate about doing their best for the clients often *'going above and beyond'* to ensure they receive the IAG/ support they need.

'Raising aspirations of the young people by giving them a realistic insight into the world of work'

'Making young people aware of the opportunities in the area'

'Helping to raise aspirations and getting the young people to realise the opportunities are there'

Staff meetings along with one to ones and Performance Development Reviews PDRs are used to discuss performance against KPIs. In addition, with the recruitment of the new Skills Lead a review of Service delivery has been undertaken and a Continuous Improvement Plan developed.

The Service has always overachieved on its measures due to its successful engagement with businesses, schools and students. In 2017/18 it delivered 203 Business Led events with schools, engaged with 29198 young people and generated £50k from Work Experience. In the last 6 months of its contract it had 830 named businesses directly involved in events, engaged with 18384 young people, brokered 122 Business led activities/ events and had 142 interactions with schools.

With the recruitment of the new Skills Lead there has been a review of the Service to link delivery to the priorities of the CPCA, with measures linked to this within the new contract. In addition, it was identified that the different 'teams' were working in 'silos' and had limited understanding of the financials. Therefore, over the past six months monthly staff meetings have been introduced to bring the 'teams' together and involve them in the planning and design of the Service. Work has been undertaken to identify priorities and the funding available to ensure that all staff have a good understanding of what the Service wants to achieve and their contribution. This includes allocation of budgets to the different areas and development of Delivery Plans.

In addition, staff are being trained to be able to take on additional responsibility and work across the teams to increase capacity e.g. BEDMs being able to undertake Compass Audits to support the Schools Engagement Lead and the Events and Media Officer has undertaken IOSH and Safeguarding to support the Work Experience team. Staff interviewed felt that as a result there was clearer leadership and direction, increased teamwork and better understanding of the financials.

'We have much clearer focus, used to work in silos but now much more transparency and teamwork'

'XXXXX is a breath of fresh air, looking more strategically and more commercially focused'

The Service works with schools undertaking Compass Audits to identify gaps against the Gatsby Benchmarks. To support this, all events and activities have been clearly linked to the Benchmarks on promotional literature and the website. A form has recently been introduced for schools to book activities, indicating which Benchmark(s) the activity meets. The clear links between Service delivery and the Gatsby Benchmarks has led to the schools, the Service is working with, meeting higher than nationally 5 out of the 8 Benchmarks. 43.3% of its schools are achieving Benchmark 5 - Encounters with Employers and Employees against 38.3% nationally and 50% of Peterborough schools where the Service currently delivers Work Experience achieving Benchmark 6 - Experience of Work places, as opposed to 36.6% nationally. There are now plans to offer Work Experience to schools in other geographical areas.

Another improvement is the investment in the Altogether database, which is web based and allows schools to access businesses directly for Work Experience placements. This also provides the opportunity for the Service to deliver in a wider geographical area to benefit more schools and increase income generation.

Outcomes for schools is they work with businesses to enhance the curriculum, raise pupil awareness of career opportunities, prepare them for work and meet the Gatsby Benchmarks. Over the years the Service has built up good relations with schools and the Career Leads. E mails, newsletters and networks are run to provide information on the offer. schools undertaking the Compass Audits are made aware of the activities / events available to address gaps against the Gatsby Benchmarks along with being signposted to other support and websites for additional information. BEDMs arrange a one to one meeting to 'plan' activities for the forthcoming year, with a booking form completed. At the end of the activity an evaluation form is completed with an annual review undertaken with the school. Those schools accessing Work Experience have a meeting with the Co-ordinators to discuss requirements and manage expectations relating to numbers of placements and timescales. Once an employer has been selected the Co-ordinators undertake Health and Safety and Safeguarding visits to ensure compliance.

Outcome for employers is that they work with schools to promote opportunities to aid recruitment and/or meet Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) requirements. BEDMs operate in a geographical area and make new businesses aware of the Service via different networks e.g. business breakfast meetings and Chamber of Commerce. They also use the website, social media and direct contact. A meeting is arranged with the employer to find out why they would like to get involved e.g. part of their Corporate Social Responsibility and/or make students aware of the opportunities in the sector. Discussion takes place on how they can be involved e.g. undertaking mock interviews, delivering employability workshops, raising awareness of career choices and Work Experience. For larger organisations BEDMs have just started to develop an employer engagement strategy e.g. Travelex, which can be shared with staff who are considering volunteering. A Skills Champion Workshop is available for employees to improve their confidence of working with young people in schools and expectations e.g. Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity and explanation of GCSE gradings.

Once signed up, the employer is provided with a list of activities, dates and schools which is circulated to volunteers, who indicate which ones they are available to attend. BEDMs provide information to the volunteers on the specific event e.g. time, contact in the school, objectives of the session, expectations along with Safeguarding and Health & Safety requirements. On the day of the event, BEDMs provide a briefing prior to the session. Following the event feedback is sought from the volunteers on the session to capture what worked well and any suggestions for improvement.

Outcomes for students is they are well informed, have a clear direction of travel in relation to their careers and confidence and motivation to make decisions on their career pathways. IAG is provided through various workshops and events e.g. CV Writing and how employers may use social media to gain an insight into the individual, 'meet the professional' to find out about different careers, demonstrations such as butchery, feedback from mock interviews, and Work Experience. Activote is used as a tool to measure 'distance travelled' in relation to understanding different career opportunities and softer outcomes such as improved confidence and motivation.

Clients interviewed were clear about what they could expect from the Service and were very complimentary about the IAG/ support provided.

'Reassuring to work with people who know what they are doing and know the school, would struggle to manage without them'

'Keeps us informed of mandatory requirements relating to Gatsby'

'The impact and effort they have put in has been amazing'

'Very happy with the help and support provided'

'Really sensitive to the needs of the students, make employers aware of Safeguarding needs, always go above and beyond'

'The volunteers they bring in from business are always well prepared and enthusiastic'

'I'm glad the Skills Service are there to break the information down to help make it more understandable and manageable'

'They were instrumental in helping us to develop a plan to work towards the Gatsby Benchmarks'

'The newsletter is brilliant, invaluable in keeping up to date with changes, information provided in a short and clear format and signposts to other websites for information'

'Their breadth of business contacts is invaluable in helping us deliver careers education''

Management Information, staff meetings along with feedback from clients through surveys and informal discussion have been used to improve the 'client journey' and outcomes. These include:

- Introducing student evaluation on Work Experience, however, limited responses were received as forms sent to Careers Leads, who did not always circulate to the students. This year student evaluation has been built in as a requirement on the Service Level Agreement (SLA) to try and improve completion rates
- Organising specific sector events to increase the focus on priority areas as opposed to organising one big Careers Fayre
- Introducing written feedback to support the verbal feedback provided to students after mock interviews so they have something to take away and work on
- Using Activote with teachers to identify gaps in knowledge e.g. Labour Market Intelligence. Twilight sessions introduced to help develop their understanding on how they can enhance their curriculum by utilising the expertise of local businesses to raise awareness of employment opportunities
- As part of the CV workshop raising awareness of how employers may look at what a potential employee puts on their Facebook i.e. their on-line footprint
- Setting up a school's network which is run termly to enable careers issues to be discussed and good practice shared amongst Careers Leads
- Introduction of a careers newsletter, signposting to resources and different websites linked to the Gatsby Benchmark along with a termly network meeting to share practice.
- Formalising the school booking process for activities and events ensuring these are linked to the Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Service is still in the transition stage and is currently sourcing other funding through the CPCA to continue to enhance the provision of CEIAG in schools.

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.

- With the recruitment of the new Skills Lead, staff feel that the Service has clearer leadership and direction and a stronger focus on the priorities and outcomes. Positive feedback was received from staff on the increased transparency and involvement along with less 'silo' working and more of a teamworking approach as a result of regular staff meetings. Despite the challenges faced by the Service over the past couple of years, it was evident that the staff are passionate about ensuring that young people are made aware of the career opportunities available and supporting them to prepare for the world of work. (1.1; 1.2)
- The 'passion' of staff was further demonstrated in the positive feedback received from both clients and partners on the IAG/ support provided and the good reputation it has developed linking businesses to schools to enhance CEIAG. Clients also commented on the approachability of staff and their willingness to 'go the extra mile' to achieve a positive outcome. This has been recognised in the continued funding of the Service by the CPCA, which in turn ensures its sustainability. (1.5; 3.1; 4.8)
- Strong emphasis is being placed on supporting schools to work towards achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks. Compass Audits are being used to identify gaps and ensure that the Service activities and events are linked to addressing these. In addition, the careers newsletter provides current and accurate information for Careers Leads on any changes and/or good practice along with signposting to websites for additional information and resources. This is contributing to the schools in the area achieving a higher number of Benchmarks than nationally. (1.1; 1.5; 2.2; 3.1; 3.2; 4.1)
- The Work Experience information provided to employers is clear and concise and outlines expectations and the benefits to help them make an informed decision about offering placements. (3.1; 3.4)
- The website provides comprehensive information about the Service and its activities. This along with the promotional literature, BEDMs networks and the use of twitter are being used to effectively promote the IAG available to the different client groups which is further demonstrated in the levels of engagement achieved. (1.6; 3.2; 4.7)

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.

- There is a Brokerage Delivery Plan which identifies the contract targets for the 'brokerage service' to meet the needs of the CPCA and measures from other contracts i.e. CEC and income generation, with area delivery plans currently being produced to deliver the targets. As part of the planning process, continue to develop an overall Service Plan to include all the measures for the Service e.g. Work Experience and Compass Audits. In addition, consider additional measures to evaluate the impact of the Service e.g. recruitment / retention of employers for Work Experience and supporting other activities in schools; % of businesses who recruit students undertaking Work Experience; client satisfaction; income generation and % improvement against Gatsby Benchmarks. Progress against the overall plan could be reviewed at staff meetings to identify successes but also any areas for improvement. (1.1; 3.2; 4.1)
- Although, IAG is embedded in the delivery of the Service and in the different programmes, consider developing an overall IAG Policy which identifies the IAG delivered to each of the client groups i.e. employers, schools and students This could be in the form of a route map to make the information more visual. Consideration could also be given to identify how the impact of the IAG is measured e.g. engagement, retention, satisfaction, meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks. This could be used in the induction of new staff to help them understand the IAG provided by the different teams and how it impacts on Service performance. (1.1; 2.5)
- Feedback from employers interviewed was very positive, however formal feedback on their involvement with the Service appeared to be limited, particularly relating to Work Experience and the benefit of providing volunteers. Therefore, consider on an annual basis introducing a review meeting with 'key' employers. This could be used to identify what has worked well and any suggestions for improvement along with establishing the impact / benefits to the employer of its involvement. For example, how many Work Experience students had been taken on as employees, increased awareness of the sector and an increase in young people applying for jobs/apprenticeships. It could also be an opportunity to revisit the employer to identify if they have any further Work Placements and promote new opportunities they could be involved in, along with providing case studies to promote the Service to other businesses, particularly in the priority sectors. (1.6; 4.2; 4.3)

- Employer, school and student evaluation questionnaires are being used to gain feedback on the various activities, however, it is unclear as to the value of the feedback being obtained. Therefore, consider reviewing the questionnaires to ensure that feedback focuses on the outcomes of the intervention including some form of scoring mechanism to measure the level of satisfaction. For example, satisfaction with the support provided by the Skills Service and the quality of information provided; how likely they would work with the school again/ support the skills service at an event and how beneficial they felt the input was in providing CEIAG. In addition, providing an opportunity to reflect on the experience identifying one thing that worked well / one thing that could have worked better (or liked and disliked) which could be used to inform the future development of the Service. (1.7; 4.3; 4.8).
- As mentioned previously, feedback from clients was very positive, however, there was a suggestion from one employer that they would like feedback on the impact of their involvement e.g. how 'meeting the professional' had raised awareness of the industry and whether having heard about the opportunities available young people would be more likely to consider a career in the industry. As there is an increased focus on raising awareness of careers in the priority sectors, consider introducing some form of questionnaire pre and post workshop session to gauge student understanding and whether it has improved at the end of the session to evaluate the impact of the information provided and whether outcomes have been achieved. (1.5; 3.1; 4.2)
- Activote is being used in some schools as a tool to gain a baseline of student understanding of CEIAG and can be used over a period of time to measure 'distance travelled'. Reports are sent out schools, however, there appeared to be little use of the data to inform gaps in the IAG provided and little evidence of improvements in distance travelled. Therefore, to add value to the process, consider analysing the information and making recommendations to the school on action that could be taken to further improve understanding of the information and increase distance travelled e.g. If limited understanding of Apprenticeships what information/ activity could be undertaken to improve this. (1.5; 3.1; 4.2)
- Some of the staff have relevant IAG qualifications to support the delivery of the Service. Therefore, consider the merits of all staff who work with clients undertaking an IAG qualification to further promote the impartiality and objectivity of the Service provided. (2.3; 2.4)
- The Service has built up its expertise in supporting schools to meet the Gatsby Benchmark. As it is looking to develop its 'commercial offer' there may be opportunities to offer this expertise/ share good practice with private training providers e.g. those delivering 16-18 Apprenticeships & Study Programme. Therefore, consider exploring this opportunity to inform future Service aims and objectives. (4.8)

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.

- Visit to the offices in Peterborough
- Interviews with the CEO of Opportunity Peterborough and Skills Lead
- Interviews with 8 staff individually face to face
- Interviews with 3 partners
- Interviews with 13 clients individually by phone
- Review of appropriate plans and documentation
- Formal feedback at the end to the Skills Lead

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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