



**matrix**<sup>®</sup>  
quality standard for information  
advice and guidance services

# Assessment Report

Vision West Nottinghamshire College –  
Careers Team and Placement Team



The matrix Standard is delivered by The Growth Company on  
behalf of the Department for Education  
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ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Maintaining Accreditation
Assessor's Name	Aly Jackson
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	06/03/25 – 07/03/25
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C10062 PN202928
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	27/04/28

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	Remote Assessment using video, phone calls and email, plus visit to the Open Evening on 6/3/25
Staff interviews	12
Recipient interviews	19
Partner interviews	6
Document review	Range of documents relating to each team within scope, including policies, strategy, career plan, feedback, marketing, the website and various online tools

## About the organisation

Vision West Nottinghamshire College operates across multiple campuses, each offering a range of courses and facilities tailored to different areas of study. The Derby Road Campus, the largest of the sites, provides courses from entry level to Level 5 and houses commercial ventures, including a 150-seat theatre, a fine dining restaurant, and a hair and beauty salon. The Chesterfield Road Campus, located in the centre of Mansfield, has been an educational hub for the local community since the early 1900s.

Specialist facilities include the Construction Centre in Kirkby-in-Ashfield, which provides hands-on training for students preparing for careers in the construction

industry, and the Engineering Innovation Centre in Sutton-in-Ashfield, where students study mechanical and electrical engineering and motor vehicle maintenance from beginner levels up to Level 5. The Old Brewery in Mansfield offers dedicated workshops for those beginning their journey into the construction trade, while the temporary Kirkby Road Campus in Sutton-in-Ashfield delivers bricklaying courses for both young students and adults.

The college also supports adult learners through the Adult Learning Centre in Mansfield's Four Seasons Shopping Centre, where a variety of part-time, evening, and drop-in courses are available, covering employability skills as well as hobbies and personal interests. The Mansfield Education Hub on Commercial Street focuses on helping young people aged 16 to 18, or 19 to 25 with an Education, Health, and Care Plan, to prepare for further study.

Each year, the college provides education and training to nearly 11,000 full-time and part-time students, including 1,400 apprentices, across all major industry sectors, from entry level to Level 5. Following the completion of a £50 million redevelopment, it now offers modern buildings, state-of-the-art facilities, and expanded opportunities. Students benefit from industry-standard equipment and learning environments designed to develop the skills needed for employment.

The college remains committed to supporting individuals who are motivated to improve themselves, achieve their goals, and reach new heights. With appropriate resources, high quality teaching, and comprehensive student support, it provides the guidance and tools necessary for successful transition into higher education and employment opportunities. Within the curriculum, provision is in place for vulnerable groups including students with SEND, care experienced young people and home educated students. Smaller groups, specialist teaching and support staff, and a robust wellbeing offer ensure that students have access to all they need to succeed within the college.

The scope for the current matrix Accreditation Review is the Careers Team and Placement Team. The Careers Team are responsible for the guidance needs of all students and have recently moved into physical curriculum areas, where they are able to build knowledge and positive working relationships with staff and students. This development has enabled staff to offer bespoke advice and guidance, whilst continuing to operate as a distinct team.

The Placement Team work closely with employers and students to fulfil the requirements for formal employer interventions/work experience. The team are part of curriculum areas, gaining knowledge of both course content and the range of employment opportunities for students.

Both teams work together, in conjunction with curriculum staff, to arrange employer/higher education visits and events, operating collaboratively to provide a range of opportunities for students which will provide essential knowledge to support decision making and future success.

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) are integral to the offer for all students and are incorporated into the published careers strategy. The college works closely with the Careers and Enterprise Company to assess against the Gatsby Benchmarks and the cross college approach is well-embedded, integrated across curriculum and support services and supported by senior strategic managers.

## The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

IAG is both discreet and embedded into the curriculum with all staff playing a part in supporting individuals to develop their knowledge and skills which will lead to success in their career goals. For the purposes of this report, the scope includes the Careers Team and Placement Team. The college is in an excellent position however, to broaden this scope in future Accreditation Reviews to include support, pastoral, wellbeing and teaching staff, as the careers strategy and senior leadership commitment has resulted in cross college understanding of CEIAG and collaboration across all delivery areas, and should be recognised for this.

Employers play a large part in preparing students for their working lives and this is borne out by the wealth of IAG provided through highly effective partnerships with employers from a range of disciplines. Both teams work tenaciously to develop positive working relationships with employers who can then support the IAG strategy for students by offering meaningful experiences and events to broaden knowledge and skills. The Placement Team offer a key resource in finding, developing and maintaining employer links which in turn, support the ongoing IAG needs of students.

Both teams begin their delivery of IAG through attendance at open evenings, other events, enrolment and induction, enabling them to speak with possible students and their parents/guardians about all aspects of college life and beyond. Where potential students are unsure about their choices or have applied and want to change course, careers staff work with individuals to consider other options, both within the college and externally. This work is carried out in conjunction with curriculum areas and having careers and placement staff within the curriculum has supported greater knowledge and the ability to support students in their choices.

All students are introduced to the Careers and Placement Teams early in their studies, with staff attending tutorial sessions, using stimulating presentation tools and describing their roles, as well as how to access one to one support. The offer is clearly understood and feedback from students during the Assessment demonstrated the clarity of roles as well as how to access IAG support. For example, placement staff work with individuals to consider work placements within the context of future aspirations. This includes access to employers' workplaces as well as visits from employers to the college, Live Briefs and workshop attendance.

Placement staff also work closely with students to prepare for work placements, through tutorial input covering general issues and preparation for being on employer premises. Employers gave positive feedback on the Team's ability to prepare students for workplace interview sessions, and one employer commented on the

improvements year on year to the quality of student preparedness for a working environment.

The Careers Team introduce themselves through tutorial groups within their respective curriculum areas and offer one to one guidance to all students, with a focus on those due to leave, transition to employment or higher education and for those at risk of becoming NEET or who are identified as potentially vulnerable. Both teams have access to student records as well as regular reviews of progress and any issues, which are discussed with teaching and tutorial staff. The processes involved are cohesive and inclusive, ensuring that all relevant staff are aware of barriers facing students.

For one to one guidance work, Careers Advisers consider the student's presenting issues and work impartially to support decision making, aspirations, changes in course and career direction as well as providing step by step action plans to meet agreed goals.

There has been a concerted effort to increase access for students to higher education opportunities, particularly for those who were not considering this route. To this end, the teams have organised bussed transport for groups to visit local and regional universities, which has resulted in more take-up of visits and greater consideration of higher education as a viable option. Significant work is also taking place with parents and families to provide meaningful information on the financial aspects of higher education as an option. This work is supporting increased knowledge and understanding amongst students and parents/carers, enabling them to make better informed decisions.

Feedback from students during the assessment was unanimously positive and some of the comments included:

“Once I had talked everything through about what I could do next, it all became clear and I felt better, more able to make a choice.”

“The support is perfect, especially as I have a disability and the staff have really helped me.”

“They are brilliant at finding the right work placement if you are struggling to find something. They know the employers really well and I have had great placements.”

“Everything about this college is great. They all do more than I expected.”

“I had loads of help with my UCAS application and I now have the offers I wanted thanks to them.”

“I really didn't think I'd go to university, but I have had so much help and encouragement and now have a place for September. I'm really excited.”

“I think it's great that they are doing visits to unis. We all want to see places in real life as it's better than just reading about them.”

Feedback from partners was equally positive and comments included:

“We have worked with the Placement Team for years and they know us really well. They are absolutely amazing.”

“The fact that they support students to hone their cover letters, CV and applications for placements, has meant that we get fantastic applicants, all of which we could have offered places to if we could have taken more than two.”

“A willingness to bring students onto an HE campus is incredibly valuable in raising students’ awareness and help in their understanding of HE opportunities.”

“It is clear there is a commitment from the college to provide their learners with insight to so many career options which is commendable and supportive.”

“It is a pleasure to work with the Careers team who are always proactive in planning and organising events for their students.”

## The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

Evaluation is a key delivery element and all activities are monitored and evaluated to improve the service year on year. Evaluation is both quantitative and qualitative, demonstrating the holistic approach to continuous quality improvement. As well as key performance indicators and objectives held within teams and within the Careers Strategy, all ongoing and developing activity is carefully planned and evaluated to gather meaningful feedback which drives the service forward.

For example, it was acknowledged that for some students, university was not an option due to perceived issues around finance and debt. This was mainly anecdotal and was felt that it could cause inaccurate information to prevent students from even considering this option. In order to counter this perception, all possible barriers were removed to enable students and parents to visit HE establishments. This included key staff completing First Aid training to be able to accompany students on a bus, provided by the college to access HE visits. The detailed and robust evaluation of the activity (through feedback from students and parents/carers) demonstrated significant learning about prior perceptions, how the input during the shared journey had supported knowledge (in terms of preparation for the visit) and how a greater understanding of the financial considerations of HE had given food for thought. There was significantly greater understanding and a change of viewpoint after the event, meaning an increased number of people widening their future options.

There is an ongoing commitment to continuous quality improvement. For example, since the previous Accreditation Review, changes have been made to embed the teams into curriculum areas, providing a more cohesive approach which involves all relevant staff in the future aspirations and planning for students. There has been an increase in UCAS applications as a result of early interventions and access to relevant visits and speakers. Partners felt that they were listened to and collaborative work has been enhanced. Changes have been made to premises to provide work spaces within curriculum areas for careers and placement staff. Staff have had access to an increased range of CPD, including formal qualifications and care has

been taken to ensure the teams have time allocated for sharing ideas and issues with each other, despite being in different settings.

Gathering and using feedback is an essential part of the service activity, providing data to improve the services to students and parents/carers, but also to celebrate success. Much use is made of narrative stories to demonstrate how individual's experiences have supported their aspirations and future choices. These are widely publicised and visible around college premises as well as being available as digital resources.

## What is working particularly well

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

- Levels of support for staff and students are considerable. Staff and students felt safe and able to seek support for any issue, whether work related or personal. The wellbeing offer is substantial, providing students with a menu of support options, from an informal wellbeing space, through coaching and guidance and professional counselling options. (1.3, 1.4)
- Staff have taken feedback onboard and developed creative methods of ensuring their services are promoted and understood. Use of creative publications and humour, for example, superhero caricatures for the teams to ensure students know who they are, and thoughtful presentations which are simple to understand but get the messages across have been used successfully. Feedback from students confirmed that they were fully aware of the Careers and Placement Teams. (3.1)
- Students believe they have a voice within the college and have numerous methods of giving feedback. There is an inclusive ethos where students' needs are heard and met. Staff from the Careers and Placement Teams were highly praised by students, who felt listened to and able to seek support. The student ambassador role is a key step towards developing skills and confidence for future roles, supporting a wide range of individuals to take a greater part in college life and experience a working role within a supportive environment. (1.2, 2.4, 3.1, 4.2, 5.2)
- Well timed and thoughtful input on a range of IAG related areas is available through tutorials and for individuals based on deadlines and identified needs. Increased visits to universities and access to visiting employers has been a positive development, which has resulted in excellent feedback from both students and families. This is a growing area which will support improved decision making and access to wider choices for students. (4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
- Both teams work effectively with partners to enhance the experience for students and to support their progress towards future career options. There is

an extensive range of high quality connections with a diverse group of employers and other partners, with ongoing evaluation of what works well. (2.7, 6.1, 7.2)

- Services are well managed and robustly monitored and evaluated to provide the best possible outcomes for students. Perceived problems are discussed and solutions found through tenacious determination to offer the most effective service possible, particularly within the context of constrained budgets and resources. Detailed and robust evaluation provides relevant data and the evidence base to identify service needs. (7.2)

## Development suggestions

Development suggestions 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 development suggestions. 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 teams are working effectively to encourage students to be aspirational and motivated in order to explore all relevant ideas and options for their future career goals. It would enhance the current offer of visits and events if there were a dedicated events/visits coordinator role, as the current model relies on staff who have numerous other responsibilities. There is evidence through robust evaluation, that access to visits and speakers enhances the knowledge and motivation of students, however, the planning and delivery of a comprehensive programme requires a more coordinated and dedicated approach to continuously develop students' access to external providers. (2.8)
- There is some lack of parity across curriculum areas and in funding for incidentals, such as college branded clothing for events. Not all staff have access to branded clothing, or budget for offering thanks to employers. It would be beneficial to ensure all staff have equitable access to such items, particularly as they are representing the college at open events. (2.8)
- It would be useful to consider corporate CDI membership for guidance staff, as there is some lack of parity in this area, with not all Level 6 staff having paid access to the professional development and networking activities of the CDI. (2.8)
- Feedback is gathered from a wide range of sources and contributes to

ongoing evaluation of the service. It would be useful to produce a specific evaluation report of the developing 'in curriculum' model for advisers and Placement Team, to identify the impact of this approach. This could include the effects on students, curriculum staff and how much the careers and placement teams are impacted in terms of team identity/ability to share with their team colleagues. (7.2)

- The college is in an excellent position to consider extending its **matrix** Accreditation to include all CEIAG activity. The Careers Strategy is embedded across curriculum and support areas, which reflects the extensive work done by senior managers and the Careers Lead, as well as many other staff. Many staff contribute to the effective delivery of IAG, including first point of contact/reception teams, Student Services, Learning Support, as well as teaching and tutorial staff. They are not currently formally recognised for this IAG work, but are integral to its success. A number of Further Education Institutions across the country have gained matrix Accreditation for the whole college and have benefitted from a cohesive approach to IAG delivery. The college may wish to consider a building block approach which includes additional services for **matrix** Accreditation, leading to a whole college Assessment. (6.2, 7.2)

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