

Commercial in Confidence



matrix Accreditation Review Report

For

**Hackney Community College
(Student Services)**

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On behalf of ENTO LTD

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1. Executive Summary

Further to the Accreditation Review, which was carried out in accordance with the guidelines provided, Hackney Community College (Student Services) has demonstrated that it continues to meet the **matrix quality standard for information advice and guidance services**. Continued Accreditation to the **matrix** Standard is granted for the external services provided by Hackney Community College (Student Services).

This Accreditation Review Report details the services provided by Hackney Community College (Student Services) and includes a brief description of the organisation, the Assessment methodology and an overview of how the organisation demonstrated that it continues to meet the **matrix** Standard.

2. Introduction

Hackney Community College is a medium sized Further Education College situated in the inner city borough of Hackney. Its students are predominantly recruited from Hackney and neighbouring boroughs, though some students enrol from further afield, particularly for specialist and higher level courses.

With a mission for “unlocking community potential through success” the Advice and Guidance service met the **matrix** Standard in 2004 and was successfully reaccredited in 2007

The Accreditation Review was preceded by a successful Ofsted inspection with strong indications (the Ofsted report is not yet in the public domain) that the College is making significant progress in its aim to achieve “good” status by 2010 and “outstanding” by 2012.

Since the last Assessment, the Assistant Director of Student Services has championed the role of IAG across the curriculum and has realigned some IAG services to reflect student feedback and provide quality bespoke support to help the individual make realistic and relevant learning and work decisions.

The scope of this Accreditation Review has been broadened from the 2007 Assessment and is focused upon all aspects of the Student Services function.

The scope comprises a suite of interrelated though discreet functions:

Admissions and Customer Services - the Customer Service functionality has been integrated with the admissions team since the 2007 Assessment to provide a seamless service to the end user. Activities comprise telephone, email and drop in information and advice on the full portfolio of opportunities available at the College but also across and a pan London catchment area and an effective enrolment process. Also included are advice and support on the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and Adult Learning Grant (ALG).

Access and Guidance services - providing: a **nextstep** IAG service to the local community through outreach and community engagement; IAG to individuals with mental health needs; a student enrichment programme; volunteering and mentoring activities and a recently established Careers and Employment service.

Learning Resource Service – comprising a state of the art library with a dedicated careers library and suite of resources linked to the five Every Child/Learner Matters outcomes. The library has a large ICT suite and adapted technologies support individuals with disabilities.

Nursery – in house provision that helps remove child care barriers to adult learning by ensuring nursery services either within the College or through signposting to children’s centres in and around Hackney.

Chaplaincy - promoting information and support on all faiths with referrals to additional IAG support as and when appropriate.

The organisation’s objectives for the Accreditation Review were:

- To continue to meet the **matrix** Standard for all external services provided by Student Services
- To obtain independent feedback on the quality of IAG delivery through a rigorous review of processes and practices
- To highlight areas for continuous improvement and areas of good practice that may be helpful as the College continues to adopt a “building block” approach to a whole organisation IAG **matrix** Standard assessment in future months.

3. Methodology

The Assessor used a range of methods to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard;

- One-to-one interviews with the senior managers of the service (3)
- One-to-one interviews with project managers and IAG delivery staff (19)
- One-to-one telephone interviews with partner organisations (2)
- One-to-one and small group interviews with a diverse and representative sample of service users (30)
- Observation of delivery premises across the College main campus
- Document review including the 3 year Development Plan 2009/2012, self assessment reports, college wide and service level quality improvement plans, quality manuals, marketing and promotional materials, client documentation, monitoring reports and appropriate policies and procedures.

4. Strengths

During the Accreditation Review, five strengths were identified. These are outlined below. The numbers and letters in brackets refer to the relevant elements and criteria in the **matrix** Standard.

- The service's commitment to equality of opportunity continues to be a strength of the service delivery, being highly visible throughout the Review and a core value underpinning IAG, Every Child/Learner Matters activities and the Personalisation agenda. Targeted support for adults with mental health needs was particularly impressive. The Assessor noted the importance placed upon equality and diversity and the role of a cohort of students as Equality Champions. Equality data targets seeking to narrow the achievement gap are monitored with rigour. (1d, 2b)
- The Assistant Director provides leadership and direction to a very high standard and ensures that IAG is intrinsically linked to the College's Improvement Plan. The effective management steer and direction permeates many college wide themes and sub groups including Safeguarding, Learner Voice and Every Child/Learner Matters outcomes. Throughout the Review the Assessor consistently saw how the innovative and 'can do' leadership has played a pivotal role in managers, curriculum and IAG staff understanding how IAG should not operate within a vacuum but instead be seen as core to achieving the College's strategic objectives. (5a, 5b)
- Hackney Community College continues to effectively network both strategically and operationally with a comprehensive range of partners. The Assessor noted the extent to which Student Services has embraced the Public Service Promise to improve customer service experiences across the Local Strategic Partnership in Hackney. The mental health project continues to work effectively with the local NHS Trust. Since the last Assessment this project has been the subject matter of external praise for best practice in partnership activities to enable greater social inclusion for the targeted audience. Perhaps the most measurable impact from effective partnership is highlighted with Student Services' lead role and coordination of the Borough Wide NEET young people. Through targeted support and strong partnership leadership Hackney's NEET data has been reduced from over 13 percent in 2008 to the current 7.8 percent. (5g)
- Since the last Assessment, the feedback cycle and voice of the service user have developed considerably. The Assessor noted that the Student Involvement Policy is driven by Student Services with energy and creativity. A recently established Student Parliament meets termly and has representation of nominated representatives for each college area. The Parliament alongside a blend of questionnaires, surveys and focus group activities has ensured that the students are empowered to promote their voice. Monitoring and evaluation of these feedback mechanisms is ongoing and led by Student Services staff. Whist on campus, the Assessor noted that the "you said we did" mantra is visible on noticeboards and students provided many examples

of how their feedback has been acted upon. Examples cited included the student's lounge, internet café and the Principal's question time. (7a-d)

- Student Services lives and breathes the values of continuous improvement, striving for excellence and quality IAG, as espoused in various corporate documents. The “plan, do, review” cycle permeates every team within the Directorate. In the last three years the College has further developed management information systems (MIS) to collect, evaluate and manage information about a wide range of service areas. The Assessor noted the quality MIS for all aspects of Student Services and the importance placed on evaluation to help demonstrate that services are having an impact on the student experience and overarching college aims and objectives (8a-d)

5. Areas for Continuous Improvement

The Assessor identified two areas where further development may improve the quality of service. The numbers and letters in brackets refer to the relevant elements and criteria in the **matrix** Standard.

- Information held by Student Services is appropriate to the stated IAG offer and is readily available across appropriate points of access within the Directorate. The Assessor noted that some delivery staff have limited knowledge of the breadth of national free learning and work information resources and interactive software. Training on IAG information resources would help ensure that all staff have current and accurate knowledge of the range of resources to support learners.

Plans are afoot to refresh the information content across the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This electronic platform will contain broader information on learning and work but is currently at a formative stage. In considering the VLE developments, Student Services may wish to explore how best to promote learning and work information that relates to the annual year planner. For example by developing UCAS or job hunting careers education packages for student and tutor usage Student Services would be able to ensure consistency of delivery and that resources being used were current, accurate and appropriate to the monthly theme. Additionally, national IAG services which include comprehensive occupational and careers aptitude packages and training provider data could be made more visible on this platform.

The organisation may wish to consider the development of specialist responsibility for the management and evaluation of VLE information resources to ensure the tutorial programme is underpinned with managed information resources that remain relevant to the stated service. (3a-c)

- Discussions with the College management team have already explored the priority need for Business Development Services funded by the Train to Gain income stream to meet the **matrix** Standard. Furthermore on the tail of a very positive Ofsted inspection and **matrix** Standard Assessment the College may wish to review their whole organisation IAG strategy, approach and practices and consider a **matrix** Standard Assessment for their embedded IAG service

in due course. Student Services is a passionate champion of the benefits of the **matrix** Standard and it would seem appropriate to utilise this vision, leadership and energy to penetrate the curriculum areas of the College. This would have the advantage of a whole organisation IAG approach and help ensure learner support is firmly embedded as an underpinning feature of the Learner Entitlement. (8a-d)

6. Detailed Findings against the matrix Standard

The following information is a summary of the findings against each element and should be read in conjunction with the previous sections.

1.

People are made aware of the service and how to engage with it

Hackney Community College Student Services continues to promote information advice and guidance services through a range of flyers, posters, open events, prospectuses and the student diary. Throughout these resources IAG is highly visible and projected to learners in accessible and clear language.

The Assessor observed how the widening participation agenda is dynamic across the College with Student Services actively taking IAG to local residents to help them overcome barriers to learning and work. A community access coordinator provides IAG to a range of delivery sites such as the local Jobcentre Plus with **nextstep** branded marketing activities helping to promote the service.

The Mental Health, Education and Employment project is promoted in partnership with the Primary Care Trust with marketing literature and staff presentations ensuring that key workers, social workers and community mental health teams are aware of the service, and how to access it for their service users.

A rigorous student induction ensures that all new learners are introduced to the IAG service and the scope and range of support available. Throughout the learner journey groups of students are visited by an IAG colleague to promote essential information about the nature of Student Services and explain key activities such as UCAS, higher education fairs and financial support matters.

The team maximise the events and year planner to promote key themes such as being healthy, careers, employment and volunteering and progression.

The Student Services team continue to promote and champion equal opportunities issues as a core value across all aspects of service delivery and management. Equality of opportunity is celebrated and support for adults with additional needs, such as clients with mental health needs, was particularly impressive throughout the Review.

The students' events programme ensures that equality and diversity is a golden thread woven through all themes. One colleague explained:

“An underpinning theme of our enrichment programme is to celebrate equality and diversity. The programme strives to reflect back to the student base the diversity that they bring to our College as students”.

The Assessor reviewed the Equality and Diversity reports and noted the rigour with which data is analysed and recommendations for action highlighted.

Staff explained at interview how equality and diversity training is ongoing and how best practices are shared to influence staff development.

2.

People’s use of the service is defined and understood

The Hackney Community College Learner Entitlement is well promoted across the main delivery site and marketing materials and clearly defines what IAG support the learner can expect from the provider.

The Learner Entitlement is brought to life by staff verbally outlining the service. This was consistently well explained to the Assessor.

Front line reception staff were able to explain to the Assessor how they make users aware of the nature of the service and how service users are signposted to Customer Services and then admissions for additional support.

In addition to the Learner Entitlement the Assessor noted that Student Service teams have their own Statement of Service. The Assessor discussed this with staff from the nursery and noted how the standards were monitored to ensure effective implementation.

Interviews with 30 service users confirmed that they understood their entitlement to the IAG support available from Student Services.

Details of the confidentiality and diversity policies were made available to the Assessor and staff were able to explain how they ensure the effective implementation of these policies.

Students spoke of the welcoming and friendly approach of staff and explained how they were able to and encouraged to explain their current needs and requirements and explore whether Hackney Community College was able to meet their future goals.

During interview staff could describe circumstances in which they would signpost or refer people to other services. For example, clients were given information on other further education colleges, local adult education provision and children’s centres.

3.

People are provided with access to information and support in using it

Information held by Student Services continues to be sufficient for and relevant to the external service provided. Learning and work information is provided in a range of formats: prospectuses, course fact sheets, Adult Directions and NARIC software, the VLE and the internet.

The Assessor noted that the information resources within the Customer Services and Careers Centre were current and accurate and that the Learning Centre resources complemented rather than duplicated those within the Careers Centre.

The Assessor was able to view the VLE and discuss with managers the potential which this platform can bring to remote learners who want to access information on learning and work through a controlled student environment. The VLE is under development and there is a clear implementation plan to ensure that information sources on learning will be effectively marketed to enable equality of access and usage.

When exploring improvements to the VLE and information resources generally, the staff may wish to research the breadth of careers information publications and software and consult with staff and students to ensure information meets the diverse needs and abilities of the targeted cohort.

Feedback from discussion with staff and service users confirmed that where the service does not hold the required information or is unable to answer queries, they endeavour to access the data and/or refer service users on to other organisations as appropriate. Verbal feedback also confirmed that all staff support individuals to use the information effectively.

4.

People are supported in exploring options and making choices

Advisers across the delivery teams were consistently able to describe to the Assessor how they ensure that students and service users are supported in exploring options and making choices. All staff interviewed strongly emphasised that the service was impartial and customer focused.

Staff were able to describe and give examples of clients being offered choices and options to meet their needs, and being given time to consider and decide on their next steps.

Interviews with a diverse sample of 30 service users confirmed that they understood the support available from the relevant IAG service and were familiar with the information on other IAG services across the College that could help review their next steps and choices.

Action planning is a core component of the IAG journey and is updated at the end of each interaction. The Assessor reviewed client records and action plans and it was noted that these were completed in a clear and concise manner. The review of action plans clearly demonstrated that the learner is in the driving seat when making decisions about choices and progression.

Verbal feedback from clients confirmed all of the above, as summarized by two service users who commented:

“My adviser has been a diamond. She understands where you are coming from and then helps you plan your future. The service is so motivating and I am now full of hope”;

“My adviser whilst being independent has helped me develop a career pathway. From personal statement advice to financial and motivational support, she has been there at every stage of my UCAS procedure”.

5.

Service delivery is planned and maintained

Since the last Assessment, Student Services has reviewed and enhanced the methodology for defining measurable aims and objectives for each aspect of the service.

The Assessor observed that managers and delivery staff were all aware of the three year development plan and the key performance indicators for their respective service that in part could be realised through the effective delivery of IAG.

The Assistant Director and the team of programme managers received consistently high praise and feedback from all staff interviewed by the Assessor. Staff were effusive in explaining how leadership, communication and vision is working effectively.

Staff at interview were able to demonstrate how they could inform service delivery and planning and share good practice, and commented on the meetings as being consultative and empowering.

Feedback from service users and delivery staff confirmed that the organisation ensures that Student Services resources are sufficient to deliver a quality service in line with service level agreements and delivery contracts.

Staff at interview were able to confirm that they were kept up to date with changes in legislation and were also able to explain how the legislation training, for example on Safeguarding, has resulted in improved practices across the service to improve the customer's experience.

The organisation's policies and procedures are located on the shared drive of the company intranet. The Assessor was able to view the range of policy documents and current procedures and could confirm that they are reviewed and updated on a frequent basis. In particular the Assessor noted that newly created policies such as the Student Services and Support Policy and the Student Involvement Policy were providing clarity and steer to help the team achieve service wide targets. Staff were able to confirm that all policies are accessible.

Throughout the Accreditation Review, the Assessor observed that IAG delivery was entirely in keeping with the principles established by the National IAG Board.

Student Services continue to work with an extensive range of partners both internally within the College and externally across Hackney and London more generally. The Assessor spoke with two partners, who provided positive feedback about the staff and the IAG service provided to individuals.

One partner highlighted:

“The service provides fantastic, high quality support to the individual. The staff are highly skilled and have a true person centred approach to client engagement and motivation”.

6.

Staff competence and support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service

Arrangements and practices for staff development and training across the College are robust. Staff competence to deliver the IAG service is continually maintained and developed. Indeed, the organisation’s commitment to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was highlighted by many staff as being one of the highlights of working for the institution.

The College continues to ensure that all new staff receive the corporate induction. This is enhanced with a job specific induction process, which is provided for new staff and staff moving into a new role. The job specific induction received favourable feedback from recent recruits.

Since the last Assessment, the management team has continued to invest in the development of the delivery staff. Many more staff have achieved nationally recognised IAG qualifications in the last three years which has led to staff commenting that they feel more confident and skilled to deal with the broad range of needs and recognise their boundaries and limitations and so seek appropriate support within the organisation or externally. Additionally some colleagues have accessed the award in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector, Diploma in Counselling, and management qualifications.

During interview, staff were able to confirm that they understand their limitations and were able to give examples of how they would access help from colleagues internally or refer on for additional support from the extensive and robust partnership and networking foundations.

Staff were able to describe formal and informal mechanisms through which they can access support. These include team meetings, regular one-to-one supervision discussions with their team leader and continual support from team members and the approachable Assistant Director. Advisers delivering the mental health IAG project also explained in detail the effective and specialist supervision that they receive from their partnership with the NHS trust.

Hackney Community College has an annual performance review process for all staff. Colleagues within Student Services confirmed that their annual review interviews were up to date and that the process includes a review of their performance and how this might be improved by training and development activities.

7.

Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained

Over the last three years, systems for gathering service user feedback have been further developed.

Proactive marketing of the feedback procedure is visible in the form of suggestion boxes, a well promoted feedback and complaints procedure and questionnaires.

Staff were consistently able to describe to the Assessor how they verbally capture feedback from clients at each information advice and guidance interview in order to check that the client is satisfied with the service. This was confirmed by feedback from a number of clients.

The Assessor observed how the organisation has adopted a College wide “you said ...we have done” approach to demonstrate that the service user is listened to. Particularly good examples of this methodology working in practice were noted within the Student Update publication and the well used Learning Centre noticeboard.

Additional feedback mechanisms include questionnaires, the Student Parliament, Learning Councils, Ambassadors and Student Voice forums. The College has also taken part in the Framework for Excellence feedback activity and has just completed promoting the 2009/10 learner questionnaire to the cohort.

The Assessor was able to view the range of feedback questionnaires and evaluation reports and noted that comments were consistently very positive from students.

The College management team embrace the student voice. Student forums are a core part of the College belief system and the Principal and governors have placed particular importance on ensuring that the feedback channels are rigorous and transparent.

Feedback on the recently launched Careers and Employment service is at its formative stage. However the Assistant Director confirmed that the same rigour applied elsewhere within the Directorate would be embedded within this service with impact data captured to help show a contribution to Every Child Matters framework outcomes as well as the College’s Key Performance Indicators.

Staff were able to describe to the Assessor how they are encouraged and enabled to participate in the evaluation of the service. Examples cited included the staff development days, regular team meetings, supervision and the open door culture that is embedded across Student Services.

Feedback from internal and external partners is gathered through the team’s attendance at a plethora of strategic and operational fora, and from tutors via College networking. Partners confirmed that the team embrace feedback and act upon it as part of their overall drive to achieve excellence.

8.

Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring, evaluation and action

Since the last Assessment in 2007, Hackney Community College has adopted a whole organisation approach to demonstrate how services are measurable and help record data impact upon recruitment, retention, completion and other key performance indicators.

The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its services against a range of key performance indicators at organisational level, as well as at an individual service or departmental level. The Assessor was shown Student Services' self assessment reports and quality improvement plans.

The College quality improvement cycle is effectively managed and reviewed by the senior management team and demonstrates a culture of striving to achieve and sustain excellence and ensure continuous quality improvement. Managers and delivery staff were able to show how IAG activities are linked to Student Services' performance and how this service in turn contributes to college wide key performance indicators and the whole organisation Development Plan.

The Student Services 2010 Impact Report was made available to the Assessor. This report relies on the College Reporter MIS system to help demonstrate how student successes may be attributed to particular initiatives. It was noted that within the report there is a range of positive variations to achievement in students using student services such as the enrichment programme, mental health and childcare support compared to those who do not. These data sets are being continually reviewed but provide a strong example of the priority being placed upon monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement.

7. Conclusion

Since the last Assessment in 2007, Hackney Community College has further embedded the **matrix** Standard as the continuous improvement tool that helps manage, shape and deliver a range of quality student services. The **matrix** Standard is transparent across all areas of the service and is clearly understood and valued by the full range of delivery staff.

In the coming months as the College further develops the tutorial programme alongside core support tools such as the VLE, it is hoped that the Assistant Director of Student Services and his delivery staff are consulted to ensure the programme is underpinned with IAG support and staff training. By empowering the tutors with clearly defined IAG roles and responsibilities, the College would have made a fundamental step closer to enabling a whole organisation embedded **matrix** Standard Assessment.