

Commercial in Confidence



Derwen College



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1. Assessment Information

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Assessor's Name	CAROL PROBYN
Visit Date	2/5/2018 to 9/5/2018
Client ID	C11441
Assessment Reference	PN103375

2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes

The scope of the accreditation review is the provision of information, advice and guidance to students and prospective students.

Derwen College is a specialist residential college for young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. The College is located in Oswestry, Shropshire close to the border of North Wales. The College has 3 satellite sites providing day facilities for students and which promote further links with local communities. The close proximity to North Wales means that the College has formed strong relationships with partners and networking organisations from England and Wales and is well placed to attract Welsh students.

The College's aim is to provide further education in the broadest sense, including employability skills, through the teaching of vocational skills and the development of independent living and social competences. The College is one of the leading specialist colleges in the country and has been recognised as Outstanding by Ofsted on three consecutive occasions.

There are approximately 180 students all of whom have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and some have communication challenges that require professional support. The age range of students is 16-24 years. The specialist nature of provision means that students are drawn from across the UK, complete a residential or day programme at College and then return to their local area with the aim of gaining employment, education and/or independent living accommodation.

The College is led by the Principal and senior management team and teams comprised of teaching, care, medical, administration and support staff. At the time of the review the College was in the process of restructuring and part way through the consultation with those staff at risk of redundancy. The restructuring is the result of the reduction in student numbers and the decision to reduce 4 vocational areas to 2 in response to ongoing analysis of destination data.

The College mission is "to provide inspirational learning, development and care and enable the achievement of aspirations which transform lives". The vision statement is "to be the first choice in specialist education and independent living". Information, advice and guidance is fundamental to the way this is achieved and is embedded in teaching and learning and support processes. The delivery of information, advice and guidance provision is through the Personal Tutor system as well as staff in a variety of roles who also deliver the service to students on a one to one or group basis.

Information, advice and guidance are provided to potential students and students on a range of topics: career pathways and careers advice, employment and work experience, social and independent living skills and a range of information and advice to assist students to overcome a variety of barriers through working with other agencies and partners.

Much of the information, advice and guidance service is embedded in the curriculum and extended curriculum and is integral to student learning and development programmes in the broadest sense. For example, Independent Living Skills includes a workshop where students research the appropriate way to dress for job interviews in different types of settings, interview behaviour and techniques.

The Strategic Plan 2017-2021 sets out the direction of the College and how it will work towards achieving the mission and vision. The plan sets out six strategic aims and associated key performance indicators. Each department contributes to the overall College plan through the self-assessment review and planning process. The self-assessment report shapes and influences the College Quality Improvement Plan and a series of action/developments plan that set out how departments will contribute to the achievement of aims and objectives including where the provision of information, advice and guidance is instrumental in working towards them

The measurable aims and objectives for information advice and guidance include those for attendance, punctuality, achievement of accredited qualifications and progression towards programme aims. Student outcomes include student destinations including students gaining paid employment, voluntary work or a work placement, those going into further education or training and/or those students that move into a form of independent living accommodation in line with the aim to support students to be independent.

Staff at all levels described how student outcomes have been defined by staff through consultation and discussion and all demonstrated a high level of awareness of how student outcomes are aligned to the measurable aims and objectives of the College by virtue of the Programme Aim, goal and bespoke target setting process through which individual student targets are linked to curriculum and outcomes. On a one to one level, student outcomes are discussed and agreed by the Personal Tutor with the student and logged on the electronic Individual Learning Plan. The review and updating of the Individual Learning Plan enables staff to monitor and review progress towards and achievement of student outcomes on a one to one basis and at cohort, department and College level.

The student progress tracking system provides a mechanism through which to monitor individual student progression against a range of hard and soft outcomes aligned to Programme Aims, student goals and bespoke targets. The A to E rating system is used to monitor individual distance travelled and also provides the means through which the College is able to monitor and evaluate the impact of information, advice and guidance.

There is an inclusive approach to the evaluation of the service against its aims and objectives. All aspects of the service are evaluated through the SAR process in which staff are involved and which evaluates leadership and management, delivery to students, resources and promotion and engagement. In addition, the file audit, observation and student review processes input to the evaluation of the service.

Targets are set for 98% attendance and punctuality against which the College achieves between 96% and 98% over the course of the academic year. Student destination data for 2015-2016 is segmented by work and living destinations.

Work destination data shows that 7% of students went into paid employment of 16 hours per week or less; 26% went into voluntary work; 5% were looking for work; 27% progressed to college or further training; 4% progressed to other destinations and the destination of 1% students was unknown.

Living destination data for those students where information is available shows that 14% students went into supported independent living; 3% went into independent living, 24.3% went into a residential placement and 21.2% returned home.

The evaluation of destination data highlighted the type of work/volunteering roles secured by students (predominately within hospitality and customer service roles), for example, in recent years no student has progressed to a role involving animal care. The analysis of destination data has informed the decision to reduce vocational areas and focus on those areas where students are most likely to secure a positive outcome. In addition, the evaluation of destination data has informed the decision to bring Admissions and Transition together in recognition that plans for onward transition out of College begins at the pre-entry stage.

Living destination data has also been analysed and has led to a greater focus on understanding the environment to which a learner will return post College and ensuring that independence, health and well-being support is aligned to the learner's local area.

Staff and students confirmed that information, advice and guidance is delivered effectively and were able to describe examples of students becoming increasingly independent, developing employability and a range of other skills and moving into work placements and/or employment as a consequence of the embedded nature of the service. Examples of how enhancements to the service have an improved student experience include: the production of a series of posters to raise awareness of the information, advice and guidance service. Posters are differentiated to meet student and staff needs and both include a Makaton symbol developed to represent information, advice and guidance; the move to bring admissions and transition closer together has already reaped benefits in ensuring individual student support programmes are aligned to realistic work, learning and independent living outcomes; the information, advice and guidance provided to support independent travel, a key factor for students being able to access opportunities, has been enhanced to include travel to students local areas and to employers located outside the area local to the College. For example, students described how they have been supported to learn travel skills sufficient for them to travel from the College to Chester where they work at the Premier Inn.

The visit identified a number of strengths and suggestions for further improvement which are outlined below. Suggestions are a way for an Assessor to add value and are intended to support further development i.e. where the service is of a high quality suggestions are offered to help the service be even better than it already is. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and suggestions for improvement. Where suggestions are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in anyway lacking.

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.

- The College embodies the ethos of the **matrix** Standard in that it provides a needs-led, student-focussed service. Information, advice and guidance is seen by staff as fundamental to the way in which students are helped to engage in learning, work experience and social/personal skills development. The needs-led nature of the service is articulated in the Student Agreement and was evident not only through talking to staff but also from the positive feedback from students and partners. Of note, is the support to students to participate in skills competitions where students compete with students from other colleges and through which they practice and develop a range of vocational and social skills. (3.2)
- Of particular note, is the way in which the student progress tracking system provides a mechanism through which to monitor individual student progression against a range of hard and soft outcomes aligned to the individual's long term goal, individual learning goals and objectives. The A to E rating system is used to monitor individual distance travelled and also provides the means through which the College is able to monitor and evaluate the impact of information, advice and guidance on individual students. Since the review in 2015, the approach has been further improved by the introduction of bespoke targets that break down goals into simple steps which have proved to help students to understand what they need to do to achieve their goals. (1.5, 4.2)
- The Individual Learning Plan has been developed to include a wider range of information. Staff described how improved access to the information on the Plan has improved communication and led to a "*joined up*" approach to supporting students. (3.2)
- The review highlighted how the use of destination data has been improved since the visit in 2015. The analysis of data has been instrumental in informing key decisions such as the current restructuring, the reduction of vocational areas from 4 to 2 and the closer alignment of admissions and transition. (1.5, 4.2)
- The College has worked hard to develop an effective Learner Voice strategy the key strands of which are the Student Union Board, Student Union and a suite of student feedback surveys. Feedback from students on the work of the Student Union Board was overwhelmingly positive with students describing how the Student Union Board takes an active role in the College decision making process. Of particular note, is the way in which Student Union Board representatives are able to use the opportunity to gain experience and to develop a range of skills, for example, advocacy, presentation, managing meetings, decision making skills and the positive impact the experience has on individual's confidence and self-esteem. (4.2)

- There are effective internal processes to support staff and manage their development to ensure they are able to provide information, advice and guidance as well as being sufficiently skilled and flexible to fulfil a variety of roles. Of particular note, is the proportion of staff trained to undertake a multi-faceted role and the extent to which the College actively supports and enables individual's to progress their career. Staff were positive about the revised appraisal which they described as much easier to use. (2.3, 2.4 and 4.6)
- The College works extensively with partners to achieve its objectives. Feedback from those spoken to during the assessment was overwhelmingly positive and the assessor received many compliments about the high level of service provided by staff. The relationships with a range of other organisations mean that staff have a wealth of knowledge and information about services and agencies to whom to signpost and refer students where appropriate. When asked to describe the College, partners referred to the College as being proactive, open and professional where the emphasis is on two-way mutually beneficial relationship.(1.8)

4. Areas for Development

A number of areas for development were identified during the assessment which may develop or enhance the service delivered. These are detailed below and for the organisation to consider as part of its ongoing continuous quality improvement actions. 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.

The suggestions below are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement. Where the College meets the Standard there is no requirement to implement suggestions as long as the College is able to demonstrate that the information, advice and guidance service continues to be evaluated and improved as appropriate in order to meet the requirements of the CIC process. An Assessor is not able direct or advise that some suggestions are of a higher priority than others or that suggestions should be implemented. This is reflected in the language used when writing the suggestions.

- Consider the value of developing a strategy specific for the information, advice and guidance service to serve as a framework against which to review and plan the service. There is potential to develop the concept of the visual service posters that have proved successful in promoting and explaining the service to staff and students by producing an end to end visual map of the engagement and learning journey from initial contact and transition into College to transition out of College. This should help to identify where the service is delivered; the type of information and advice delivered at each stage, how the delivery of the service at each stage translates into outcomes; the appropriate points in the journey to invite feedback and to define the most helpful questions to ask; to identify how and where to quality assure the service (i.e. via observation, audit, feedback); the impact measures the service is intended to deliver and how impact is evaluated. The exercise could be used to identify where feedback and evaluation already happens with a view to rationalising the current approach and introducing a consistent approach across the College. (1.1, 1.5, 1.7, 4.5)
- As part of the above, consider how to develop the tracking process once students leave College not only to gather destination data but also to invite feedback on the effectiveness of transition information, advice and guidance. For example, ask students whether there was anything they would have found helpful to have known and/or what advice would they offer students progressing towards transition. (1.7, 4.2)
- The introduction of the Tribal system has proved effective in improving the self-assessment process against the Ofsted framework and CQC. It might be helpful to use the additional capability of Tribal to provide the same approach to self-assessment against the matrix Standard. This would seem to be the natural next step in the work done so far to raise staff awareness of the information, advice and guidance service, how the service impacts on student outcomes and progression and how all staff contribute in some way to providing the service to students. (1.2, 4.1)

- Consider how to continue the approach to defining and promoting the information, advice and guidance service using the service poster concept by developing a next steps and progression poster outlining the options and pathways available to students on transition. (3.1)
- Consider how to further develop the approach to the delivery of employability skills to ensure consistency across the College. For example, a review of CVs showed the variation in the way staff use the CV template particularly with regard to including a separate section to highlight skills and how they have been applied.

In addition, review how the skills and experience developed by students involved in the Students Union Board are captured and showcased in CVs. Including a review/evaluation of the impact of being involved with the Student Union Board within representative meetings might help students evaluate what they have learned. We discussed a simple approach based on capturing why students want to be a Student Union Board member, what they wanted to learn/do, what they did and what they learned/how it helped them. (1.5, 4.2)

- There is potential to build on the good work to develop the use of the Individual Learning Plan, perhaps by including a separate section to capture work experience to ensure full details of the impact of work experience is recorded consistently on all student Plans. (4.2)
- The following suggestions might be helpful as the College develops its approach to employer engagement: (1.8)
 - Maximise employer supply chains/customer networks by inviting current employers to act as ambassadors to promote the College and the benefits of involvement in work experience/placements
 - Develop employer case studies to promote the contribution of employers and to promote the benefits of employer involvement
 - Ensure feedback is sought from all employers, including those involved with the three satellites
- The following suggestions might be helpful as the College continues to look for opportunities for staff development opportunities: (2.4)
 - Consider the value of looking at how other organisations deliver employability skills outside of a college setting. For example, third sector organisations with a track record of delivering employability skills to hard-to-reach clients with learning difficulties might provide an opportunity to share effective practice
 - Consider membership of professional bodies such as the Institute of Employability Professionals or the Career Development Institute, both of which might provide access to a network of careers/employability professionals and a variety of development activities, resources and events

- A review of the appraisal format highlighted the potential to strengthen the link between individual, team and College performance objectives and the targets set for the information, advice and guidance service. The format of the documentation has potential to be further developed to encourage the setting of SMART objectives aligned to the relevant team objective, target or key performance indicator and ultimately College strategic objectives and targets. Similarly, the training and development plan section might be enhanced to show the link between the review of performance, individual targets and the development/training activities agreed to support performance and the delivery of targets.
- Consider how the format might be structured to help staff work through the thinking process associated to the learning/training cycle and assist staff to identify and agree clear links between the business plan objectives, department and individual objectives and learning objectives; how new skills and knowledge will be used in the work place; how performance will change as a result of the activity; how this will impact on objectives/targets; the impact measures to be used and how impact will be evaluated (e.g. through observation or other methods). (1.1, 4.6)

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.

5. Methodology

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

- Visit to Derwen College in Oswestry
- Interviews with staff – 30 in person and 1 by phone
- Interviews with students in small groups, total 20
- Telephone interviews with 3 partners
- Observation of website
- Review of documents: Strategic Plan, QIP; promotional literature, staff and appraisal; job descriptions; performance data; observation documentation; student documentation, student feedback.

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 3 weeks either side of 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@assessmentservices.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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