

The Isle of Wight College



Table of Contents

Assessment Information.....	3
Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes.....	4
Strengths	8
Areas for Development	9
Methodology	11
Conditions of Accreditation	12

Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Kevin Smith
Visit Date	30/01 + 01-03/02/2023
Client ID	C10838
Assessment Reference	PN201645
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	02/02/2024
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	02/02/2025
Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	02/02/2026

Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

The Isle of Wight College (IOW College) is the only GFE on the island, on the outskirts of Newport, the principal town located some miles inland. The total student population is about 5,000, including the large number of adult learners over 19yrs old. With its mission to provide as many education and progression options as possible to islanders the college offers a full range of programmes: Level 1 to Level 3 courses including apprenticeships; T-levels have been smoothly introduced through attentive preparation; a University Centre offering HE and access courses; Distance-learning courses managed by a small team that in fact account for a larger number of students than attend either campus offering flexible learning including to local people. CECAMM since 2017 has become well-established as a special feature of IOW College, with 500 students pursuing engineering courses in close conjunction with local employers on the island, including apprenticeships. The facilities are expanding and the friendly, community-based experience that is common across IOW College is emphasised at the smaller site. The college uses AEB funds to deliver shorter traineeship projects e.g., Sector Based Work Academies for older learners, bolstering the adult education and community aspect of the college. The campus also includes a spacious Business Centre that is used to host college Open Days.

A notable feature of IOW College is that a significant proportion of its students have EHCPs – one of the highest rates in the country - and provision is strongly oriented towards SEND learners and meeting ALNs. The Pathways programme makes a significant contribution to higher needs learners on the island. Through differentiated versions of the programme, staff provide opportunities for progression to a full range of people with a full range of learning and sensory disability. An estimated 5% of Pathways students may progress to Foundation Learning which has a focus on Entry level modular courses with a particular concentration of learners with EHCPs and some who may be Looked After Children. Students on the programme acknowledged that while they may feel frustrated having to complete the Foundation step due to insufficient grades, it does allow them to explore their options, possibly change their ultimate choice of course, and experience further personal growth. English and maths are promoted within Foundation Learning programmes, and students said that they feel more engaged by these subjects than when at school. The provision for high needs students and the adult learning programmes were particular aspects which the last full Ofsted inspection found to be Outstanding.

The previous **matrix** assessment was undertaken shortly prior to the onset of the Covid pandemic. At that time the college was starting to trial Teams meetings for internal communication but then with lockdown made an agile switch to utilising IT to sustain a service to students, co-ordinated via the LRC. Distance Learning saw its number of enrolments peak at 3000. However, for Pathways and Foundation Learning students the impact of lockdown was marked, and a legacy of mental health issues has been the result. The Student Hub leads the college pastoral and wellbeing support service with an aim to raise aspiration, empower and safeguard students. As a student support service, it has been revamped and relocated to accessible offices close by Reception. Members of the Hub team, such as the Student Mentors, are not office-bound but will work in different parts of the college including CECAMM, and this is how they engage with most students. Students said they would be likely to approach a Mentor if they had any kind of issue with the college which their tutor could not resolve. New staff at IOW College are latterly issued with the IT necessary to enable them to work remotely.

A generic programme designed to promote mental health and wellbeing in the college has been introduced – Success 4 U – and is adapted by different curriculum departments to meet the needs of students. The weekly sessions at the end of the day were remarked upon by students interviewed

in different curriculum groups. Higher level students find the programme interesting and attend voluntarily but in other groups there was a greater antipathy towards the sessions.

The college website was redesigned last year, presenting an attractive and informative overview which is easy to navigate. A 'Support menu' includes a page for Careers Advice and Guidance. A news page and blog provide regular updates, such as recent intergenerational activities - promotion of opportunities beyond traditional school leavers to potential adult learners is a focus for marketing. Social and broadcast media (local radio) are harnessed to raise the college profile, along with networking and outreach. Regular events include the aforementioned Open Days (led by the new Principal) and an annual Careers Fayre in October supported by a range of stakeholders and the Job Centre Plus. Students can access the LRC resources online through a dedicated portal – however, managers are aware this resource is under-utilised, and students interviewed were rather dismissive – one apprentice quipped it was easier just to google what they need to know – which suggests the information may need to be promoted with more relevance to its intended audience.

Information advice and guidance (IAG) is a shared commitment across the college, with all staff appropriately describing their contribution to helping students throughout the learner journey navigate choice and progression. Course delivery is closely aligned with the world of work. Staff are primarily recruited for their aptitude and industry experience where relevant, and then supported to gain teaching qualifications. Staff tend to stay long-term working at IOW College and there were many examples of individuals gaining promotion and responsibility over the years. Whilst there is just the one Careers Adviser working full-time at the college, funding was obtained to train 4 other staff in IAG at Level 6, and these colleagues work in allied teams such as Admissions and Marketing. These staff say that studying IAG in such depth was both stimulating and challenging and has enriched their experience of their roles. One of those trained is the SUN Progression Mentor, the Office of Students initiative to promote access to HE from postcodes with low progression rates to university. The Mentor works closely with the Careers Adviser and uses the IAG qualification to provide additional careers advice in the absence of the Adviser. The SUN project works successfully at IOW College, although funding for trips to HE institutions has recently become more difficult. Staff manage to flex the terms of the SUN project to benefit students more widely and it was noted that compared to other south coast colleges with SUN mentors, there is more co-operation from curriculum tutors, typical of the close working relationship between departments.

The Careers Adviser is highly qualified and adept at smart working to maximise the offer to students and ensure careers education is embedded. Although the Assistant Principal line manager is nominated as the Careers Lead in keeping with Gatsby recommendations, in practice the service is managed by the Careers Adviser. The other IAG qualified staff provide an additional reservoir of capacity and could help with succession planning. The National Careers Service is also available to meet with 19+ students, but no age group is excluded from the option of meeting the college Careers Adviser. All students can access the Careers Adviser by appointment although most will plan their career goals and next steps in regular Progress Reviews with their tutor and expressed satisfaction with this system. In higher level courses, their tutors share the specialist knowledge of study options within their subjects and professional opportunities. If a student is looking to change from their course to something different, then a referral to the Careers Adviser follows. On apprenticeship, such as at CECAMM, the employer is also a person able to advise students (even if the impartiality of advice may be somewhat compromised). The Careers Adviser is able to sample action plans included by tutors on eTrackr to monitor consistency, in addition to the Quality team reinforcing best practice through managers.

A Statement of Service about IAG is written in the second person, speaking directly to the reader, that it is 'designed to help you to make an informed decision about your future options'. The Statement identifies the different recipients of IAG in and outside of the college with a commitment

to 'tailor our services to your needs' in a section outlining the respective expectations of the service and of students etc. The Statement cites the usual principles of a quality professional IAG service and explicitly relates the service to 'the importance of labour market information and skills shortages'. This is borne out by the Careers Programme 2022-23 which calendars the main events and activities during the academic year, the use of tools such as Careers Coach and UCAS deadlines. In the spring there is a focus on ensuring students with EHCPs and on Foundation Learning can receive advice and guidance to help with their progression. Examples of careers action plans by the Adviser were provided and these provide a comprehensive narrative account of the guidance provided to individuals.

A Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance Policy is reviewed every other year in line with government policy announcements and it functions as a strategic plan for the service. As such it interprets planned activity in line with the college Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024, which is refreshed under the new leadership at IOW provided by the Principal who joined in September last year. The current strategy has features that draw on successful IAG at the college, and are adapted within the CEIAG policy to implement the intent of the strategic direction.

- To grow each student's life opportunities
- To offer a dynamic, adaptable and rewarding curriculum
- To sustain purposeful, mutually beneficial and productive relationships with employers and the wider community
- To secure a vibrant and sustainable future

All departments in IOW College delivering a service to the students prepare an annual SAR and QIP against the strategic aims of objectives of the college, describing the investment, input and deployment of resources. An impressive feature of the Careers Advice and Guidance SAR is that progress and achievement is mapped against two key indicators of disadvantage: Free College Meals (FCM) and designated Higher Needs Students (HNS). This is a meaningful commitment to principles of inclusion and social justice. For example, in engineering which typically has particularly good progression rates, the number of FCM students sharing in that outcome has increased from 64% in 2019-20 to 83% the following year, with a predicted 100% improvement due in the current year. This analysis has been repeated for other curriculum areas such as Health & Social Care and Art & Design that had a discrepancy and all are now predicted to close gaps in destinations. Conversely an analysis of use of the website and online resources to access IAG has shown little improvement, and so this issue has migrated into the current QIP for attention. Learner survey feedback has confirmed that the number of students acknowledging awareness of their options for progression has remained consistent, at around 90%. Overall positive destinations have increased year on year for both work and study options, even if the number of UCAS applications has slightly fallen. HNS destinations have remained very high at IOW College (over 90%) with no appreciable gap in achievement. The SAR also notes the success in identifying work placement options for students including those qualifying as FCM and HNS.

One measure of progress that was less in evidence, at least in the Careers SAR, was an account of the considerable work undertaken by the college in respect of the 'critical skills' development of students (commonly referred to as 'soft' skills and outcomes). On programmes such as Foundation Learning there is an important focus on behaviours and self-management, one example provided was in helping a young person to change their sleep patterns so as to be more alert in the day-times. Much of this information is recorded on eTrackr and represents important personal development experienced by students at all levels. As the leadership acknowledges, these attributes are indeed

critical and fit within the relevant domains of the EIF. The Careers service has made full use of the Compass assessments to benchmark with Gatsby, and has now met all 8 benchmarks.

Individual destinations are recorded and followed up after leaving college to show outcomes attributable to IAG, and comparisons made of the actual progression against that predicted. Foundation and Pathways rely on RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) to demonstrate outcomes in relation to SEND students, tackling issues of low aspiration and indecision among some young people. One of the by-products of having many students with higher needs is that over half of all examination candidates request their special requirements to be accommodated before sitting exams. Staff in the small Exams team check the fine print of awarding bodies' terms to determine what allowances are permissible. There are some students who arrive for exams without a pen. Signposting is used to statutory mental health services (adolescent and adult) and Inclusion, for issues related to substance use. If a student leaves the college without a positive progression then the well-established partnership with Island Futures works with young people at risk of becoming NEET – but retention on course is overall very high, and it was remarked that withdrawals are fewer than from local VI Forms.

Consultation with students is well organised through Student Voice meetings attended by managers, regular surveys (even though students admitted they may not complete them) and dialogue with staff. One example of changes made in response is that the college stopped issuing vouchers for free college meals, instead using an electronic credit system which removed the stigma of FCM and resulted in an increased take-up. Applications for bursaries are compared with demographic data to monitor effectiveness.

For the important strategic relationship with employers, forums are convened at which consultation occurs. Major employers share in the strategic aim to build and retain skills on the island, and are happy with the good results obtained from apprenticeships and also like the focus on broader development offered by the college. Other places of learning spoke of the contribution of IOW College to widening participation. Partner organisations spoke of how responsive their contacts are in the college. *“We would be lost without the arrangement with the college, and would not achieve so much without them.”*

Students interviewed understood the concept of transferable skills and engaged realistically with their future options. There was a call for more information to be given around matters such as how taxes work, with a view to becoming self-employed. Others would like a better sense of their options for employment if they do not progress to a higher level study, but try to use e.g. a Level 2 in the jobs market as a 'fallback'. Although IOW College is not quite the only option for further education on the island, those interviewed compared it favourably to the alternatives for the way people relate to each other.

“The college helps us grow in confidence – it gives us personal freedom and autonomy. We can be ourselves here”.

“They do enough here but students are lazy and do not want to take the guidance around jobs and careers.”

“CECMM is probably the best option on the island for what I am looking to do in life.”

“Compared to school, I feel more grown-up here and prepared for life”.

Strengths

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

- The college is successfully becoming increasingly ‘outward facing’ based on effective systems for delivery and positive workplace culture. The values of community – both internally and wider afield – are a source of pride at IOW College. Keenly aware of the island’s economic and social environment managers exercise leadership over a motivated and cohesive staff team. The Board of Governors collect reports on performance from managers and provides scrutiny and oversight on behalf of stakeholders (including by student governors). IAG as an integral part of the responsibility of most staff is understood and implemented throughout the college. The 2021 – 24 Strategic Plan provides clear direction deriving from the benefits of effective IAG – ‘Grow each student’s life opportunities’ and building ‘beneficial and productive relationships with employers and the wider community’. This intent is finding various forms, from the development of CECAMM to the adoption of a Wellbeing Strategy, thereby strengthening the context in which learning and progression occur. [1.2, 4.8]
- The CEIAG service maximises its reach through providing a kind of ‘internal consultancy’ to co-ordinate careers and employability guidance across the college. Although the department consists of just one staff member, tutors are able to devise action plans with their students on eTrackr that are consistent with the standards set by the Careers Advisor, and through the database can be sampled and checked. Five other staff have been trained to Level 6 IAG qualification – a substantial investment in specialist IAG capability by the college – and this is an asset that can help both with succession planning and sharing in the demands on the service. [2.1, 2.2, 2.4].
- ETrackr is a user-friendly and comprehensive database, and it was said usage has improved. It provides an accessible tool for recording narrative entries to track the progression of students while controlling permissions to relevant parties. It can be programmed to select student reports according to profiles and even generate c.v.’s at the press of a button. [4.7]
- Safeguarding is thoroughly understood and promoted within the college. All students understood the duty of care of staff members, the implications for what they may disclose, and confirmed the safety of the college environment. The procedure for acting on concerns is compatible with systems used by other local authority agencies and informed by management training in police Level 5 Gold Standard Principles. Students described the video presented during induction on consent as “*brilliant*”. [1.4]
- At a strategic and operational level, the development of partnerships is a strength. Through its wide-ranging collaboration, e.g. with housing associations, IOW College is able to reach into the pockets of deprivation on the island that will customarily not consider entering further education. Within available resources, outreach work is undertaken to women’s centres etc to promote opportunities and, as with the best adult education services, ‘take the college into the community’. Important employers on the island support the retention and building of skills and employment options for the local community (such as at CECAMM, with input from the Solent LEP). There are strong links with universities off the island, and they actively enable students to travel to their campuses to raise their aspirations. [1.8, 3.5]

Areas for Development

Areas for development are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g., where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is, or to give insight into practices seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and areas for development. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in any way lacking. These will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) conducted twelve and twenty-four months from the date of this Assessment, along with any other notable developments. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- The Strategic Plan includes reference to developing an 'Employability Hub' for the island. This is a logical consolidation of the work developing critical skills and providing students with a c.v. as part of their preparation for the world of work. As well as relevant to CEIAG, such a hub could have synergy with the LRC and mirror the support with Wellbeing that is delivered by the Student Hub, to provide a 360 developmental offer to students of all ages – and could be particularly attractive to older learners as a gateway to upskilling and adapting to economic change. The Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP) offer accredited programmes that may usefully supplement the skills of staff involved - [The Institute Of Employability Professionals \(myiep.uk\)](http://myiep.uk) [3.5]
- The Student Hub has seen positive development in making the service accessible, and even if students do not visit the dedicated area close to Reception they will engage with mentors in other areas of the college. Students said the Hub was very welcoming, and were aware of it even if they had not used the service. Managers may wish to consider how to promote and broaden the relevance of the work of the Hub, for the benefit of the college community and wellbeing of all. [1.6]
- The loss of the student counsellor has, according to colleagues, left a gap in the service. Volunteer counsellors may be willing to provide the service at IOW college to help meet their BACP requirement to complete sufficient hours to qualify. There may be voluntary-sector organisations e.g., Carers Support on the island that could offer a link and be interested in collaborating. A secondary benefit may be to build support for young carers at the college, with care responsibilities a recognised barrier to engagement in further education and progression. Check www.carersiw.org.uk and also the IOW Youth Trust which offers counselling - www.iowyouthtrust.co.uk – both in Newport. [3.5]
- The college is developing a strategy for assessing digital skills among students. This is important as workplace IT skills have become recognised since the pandemic as a functional skill and may help future-proof employability and offer transferable critical skills. As discussion with a manager noted, even among young people, digital inclusion cannot be taken for granted – over the last 5 years the reliance on smartphone apps means that use of IT to communicate via email and manage information may have even regressed in the wider population. As noted at the last assessment, measurement of a range of critical skills remains a work in progress. [4.2, 4.7]
- There were references to using alumni in some departments and senior management is intent on developing this aspect across the college community. Such a development would fit with the culture and identity of IOW College and could help motivate students considering options such as apprenticeships for their progression. [1.5, 1.7]

The annual **matrix** Continuous Improvement Check will allow the organisation to demonstrate on an ongoing basis the developments they are continuing to make in order to support individuals. These may include the Areas for Development above. <https://matrixstandard.com/assessment-journey/continuous-improvement-checks/>

Please note that annual Continuous Improvement Checks are mandatory and non-completion within the required timescale will impact on your organisation's accreditation, please see the section Assessment Information for dates.

Methodology

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

The assessment was conducted through a combination of site visit to Newport and CECAMM campuses and remote interviews

32 Staff across both sites interviewed.

34 students participated in group interviews.

3 external partner representatives interviewed from employers, youth services and university.

The website and documentation were reviewed, including strategy and policy relating to IAG, materials, database records, career action plans, Careers SAR / QIP and surveys.

Conditions of Accreditation

Holders of the **matrix** Standard Accreditation must:

1. Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
2. Throughout the period of accreditation satisfy The Growth Company that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.
3. Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.
4. Inform The Growth Company or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.
5. Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the **matrix** Standard at least 3 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 3 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.
6. Inform The Growth Company of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrixStandard@growthco.uk.
7. Inform The Growth Company immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.
8. Inform The Growth Company of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).
9. Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause The Growth Company and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.
10. Only use the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines. For example, if a certain department is successfully **matrix** accredited, the Quality Mark can only be used on that department's letterhead or on that department's page on their internet homepage.
11. Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for accreditation review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by The Growth Company and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to be a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
12. Be aware that The Growth Company reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.