

Wealden Works



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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Initial Assessment
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Stuart McRill
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Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	22/03/2023
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Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	22/03/2025

Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Wealden Works is a registered charity that was formed in 2017 and is located at the Heathfield Youth Centre, Wealden, East Sussex. Strategic steer is provided by five trustees to help realise the mission of *'bridging the gap between education and employment'*. The organisation provides a free Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service to young people aged 16-24 living within the Wealden area. The challenge of this rural area of East Sussex includes being one with limited larger employers but with pockets of small and medium sized enterprises that require more proactive job sourcing than would ordinarily be the case in urban localities.

The organisation is now into its fifth year of IAG delivery and through the grit, resilience and professionalism of its two founding managers, Wealden Works has established a reputation that extends beyond its locality. With clearly defined and distinctive roles, these two managers combine project tendering, monitoring and reporting management, alongside service coordination, implementation and providing a brokerage service that brings together local employers and young people.

The IAG delivery broadly follows a three step model of:

Initial entry IAG – this explores the young person's goals, aspirations and crucially their commitment to the *'Wealden Works Way'*. There is a clear emphasis placed upon expectations and some initial assessment which helps to shape an individual delivery pathway.

Core programme – this is a framework of IAG that is broad based and combines one to one and group support for up to ten weeks. Activities delivered are informed by the young people's needs and include: budget management, problem solving, team building and mental wellbeing activities; employability support around mock interviews and CV production; and workshops to enhance active citizenship skills. Signposting to professional counselling and therapists is embedded within the programme, with individual action plans with personal targets monitoring each young person's progress.

Brokerage support – for those young people seeing employment, there is focused one to one employability IAG that includes making links to employers and providing after care support to help with transition into the workplace and sustained employment.

An annual achievement event celebrates not only the young people's achievements but also acts as a platform that thanks the Wealden community's involvement, its donators, stakeholders and funders.

Wealden Works' delivery to date has been to support 40 young people per year. The service is bespoke and designed to make a difference to the needs of each young person's goals. The approach is therefore agile and responsive. For many young people, employment goals are the target and this extends to work experience, tasters and apprenticeships. For others, further and higher education are the intended goals. An overarching delivery approach is to deliver impartial IAG with progression outcomes focused upon ensuring that those young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) progress into an Education, Employment or Training (EET) destination.

Impact focused, the two managers are driven to make a difference to every young person that they caseload but accept that an 86% EET outcome is a realistic target. This milestone was clearly a significant challenge throughout the covid-19 pandemic when IAG delivery was entirely through technology platforms and the telephone. Limited employer recruitment during this period meant that progression outcomes were lower than the target. But, with 53% progression into employment and apprenticeships; 16% into volunteering and 8% into further education, an overall 77% EET outcome

is still very impressive. IAG throughout the pandemic focused upon health and wellbeing and welfare support for case loaded young people which was especially relevant given that 96% of the typical Wealden Works caseload struggle with their mental wellbeing.

Recent successful tendering submissions have meant that the organisation is now entering a new stage of phased growth. A Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contract may see the organisation's caseload increase significantly, with a goal here to provide IAG for up to 175 young people. Furthermore, the gaining of ICQ awarding body status now opens up the opportunity to provide some accredited learning in personal development and employability. The assessment noted an air of optimism within this small organisation and the recruitment of a part time project mentor is very much seen as the starting point for further staffing resources as part of growth plans.

For an organisation of this size, it is unusual to see the rigour of embedded client outcome-based evaluation practices. The Outcome Star is entrenched within the Wealden Works IAG journey with snapshots of students' attitudes, behaviours and skills captured at the beginning, mid-point and exit stages of their Wealden Works journey. A review of client individual action plans confirmed that the organisation is monitoring its impact on young people's: confidence; self-esteem; communication skills; decision making; self-motivation; self-awareness; and personal development. These soft outcomes are recorded for one year after programme progression.

Feedback from young people confirmed the impact that the organisation has had on them to date:

"The staff really understand young people and the group activities are really good fun and manage to take you out of your comfort zone";

"They gave me time, ideas and opportunities. Their approach is so refreshing, as they look at who you are as a person, not a statistic... the difference they have made to me includes anxiety coping strategies, self-belief and confidence, and as a result I got my first job";

"Wealden Works has equipped me to gain a level of financial freedom through a job that is hard to come by and one I truly love";

"Honestly the difference that they have made to me is immeasurable. They have helped me with feelings of isolation and loneliness and were there for me during some very difficult times- one word describes them - incredible!"

In summary, this Initial Assessment celebrated an organisation that is playing a crucial role in transforming the lives of young people in and around Wealden and equipping each with the attitudes, skills and approaches to create a pathway to a fulfilling future. Within the last 12 months the leadership team has returned to face to face delivery of IAG, gained approval to deliver accredited training and now met the national **matrix** Standard which celebrates the delivery of quality IAG.

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 '*Wealden Works Way*' is one that is underpinned with values of social mobility, equality, diversity and inclusivity, individual choice and making a difference. Managers are passionate about their work and strive to keep IAG relevant, accessible and enjoyable for young people. The result is that participants on the programme commented on being treated with respect and viewed their advisers as coaches and mentors whom they trust and can relate to. This '*Wealden Works Way*' is key to the organisation's success. (1.3, 3.1)
- IAG delivery is implemented with a 'best interests of the young person' mantra. It is this focused, bespoke and empowering approach that shapes the client's Wealden Works journey. Combining one to one and group approaches, staff skilfully combine realism and relevance to the individual's present scenario and the labour market with an underpinning aspiration raising approach. A review of action plans confirmed that IAG implementation adopts a building block scenario, with each intervention building upon the previous one. (3.2, 3.4)
- Effective and collaborative partnership practices are enabling increased access to employment and work-related learning and support for Wealden Works young people. Feedback from partners confirmed how the organisation is highly valued by employers for instilling job readiness skills and attitudes and how the organisation is increasingly viewed by local employers as an essential component of their talent pipeline. (1.8)

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 success of Wealden Works has been realised with modest resources and it is testament to the managers that the organisation's quality and impactful reputation is bringing about new funding contracts and progression prospects for its alumni. To widen impact still further the organisation is exploring locations and an investor to support with new premises. Success here would provide a foundation for continued growth and enhance the organisation's visibility, and identity in its own right having outgrown its current co-location. (2.1)
- Business planning activities are centred upon sustainability and year on year submissions for income streams. This approach is not to be underestimated with this small charity successfully weathering the global pandemic and now implementing its recovery plans. Looking ahead it makes sense to revisit the Business Plan (March 2020) to more accurately reflect the delivery approaches in 2022 and shape a plan of action for the coming years. Led by the board of trustees, such action would provide steer for the delivery managers and staff and shape the continued direction of travel. (1.2)
- Feedback from young people was consistently positive (as highlighted earlier within the report). Some though explained uncertainty at the initial entry stages and were unaware of what to expect from the service. To address this in part, Wealden Works is encouraged to develop an IAG charter or 'promise' type document that highlights the expectations of and for young people. This would clearly link to the website and might also be disseminated to transitional teams in local schools as well as parent/carers and other professional bodies. (1.6, 3.1)
- Keeping abreast of the wider employment and skills landscape including Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a challenge for such a small organisation. One consideration to help keep abreast of such developments is to explore membership of the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP). (1.8)
- The role of the project mentor is a new one for Wealden Works and is currently being shaped. This role is essentially one that is providing an information and signposting service. It is an IAG support role that could benefit from further defining and then developing. Embedded with this role is the need for foundation level IAG skills that could include training on coaching and mentoring models. Investing in a level 2 award in advice and guidance is worthy of researching here too. This investment would raise IAG competencies and help to maximise the role's impact on the organisation. (2.3, 2.4).
- The assessment highlighted how investing in IAG qualifications at level 4 and/or level 6 would accredit managers' current competencies as well as provide stretching and challenging IAG development goals. Additionally, as the two managers continue to successfully deliver advice and guidance through a bended delivery approach of face to face and digital platforms, accessing CPD on technology platforms would increase their confidence in delivering virtual group and one to one support. (2.4, 4.7)

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.

Zoom interviews with the leadership team (2)

Zoom interviews with delivery staff (1)

Telephone discussions with partners (2)

Zoom discussions with a sample of learners (7)

A review of documentation including the organisation's website, business plan, action plans, monitoring and evaluation reports, client exit reviews and the Outcome Star methodology.

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.