

HOPWOOD HALL COLLEGE:

Careers, Student & College Services, Employer Services and Schools Engagement



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Assessment Information

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Organisation – Background, Introduction and Overview

Hopwood Hall College (HHC) operates on two campuses of Middleton and Rochdale to the north-east of Manchester. The college offers a broad range of vocational programmes including full-time 16-19 Study Programme, T-Levels, Access to HE¹, Apprenticeships, part-time Adult courses and Community Learning courses and a relatively small HE provision at its University Centre. Programmes span Art, Building Trades and Engineering, Business, Travel & Tourism, Accounting, Creative Media/Games Design/Graphic Design, Dental Nursing, Education & Childcare, Hair & Beauty, Health & Social Care, Hospitality & Catering, IT & Computer Science, Performing Arts, Science & Animal Management, Sport, Teacher Training and Uniformed Public Services.

At the time of Assessment there were approximately 8,500 students enrolled- 3,300 in full-time Study Programme, 2,200 in Adult provision, 2,000 in Community Learning, 600 Apprentices, 300 in Access and ESOL² provision and 120 in HE.

This accreditation covers a discreet range of services which has been extended since the last Assessment to now include Schools Engagement team, part of the Marketing & Communications Directorate. The IAG³ services now accredited are the Careers and Employability Team (known collectively as Careers), Student & College Services (SCS), Employer Services and Schools Engagement. Other areas and teams that provide IAG remain excluded and are not accredited to the Standard, these are the support provided by Progress Tutors, Retention and Improvement Officers, curriculum teaching staff (who carry out admissions interviews) and the Apprenticeship Team.

In more detail, the four accredited services across which 35 staff manage and deliver the IAG services are:

The Careers Team now managed within the re-named Student Experience department, includes a Careers and Employability Lead, a Careers Adviser and a Careers and Employability Officer. The Team is accessible at both campuses and provides group and one to one support to potential students (for example attending open days and enrolment events) and to students on all programmes, particularly to those considering a course change and to those approaching UCAS⁴ application windows. The Careers Team deliver presentations and workshops to support curriculum areas and provide a range of career-related resources accessible via the *Its Learning* VLE⁵ platform. The Team also work with employers to provide work placements and to bring employers into college to present to students on employment related matters. HHC's CEIAG⁶ Policy is managed within Student Experience and is having a unifying effect in the delivery of IAG throughout all areas of the college. Since the last Assessment, the role of Work Experience Development Officer has evolved into a new role of Careers and Employability Officer, giving more emphasis to the importance of careers development support.

¹ Higher Education

² English for Speakers of Other Languages

³ Information, advice and guidance

⁴ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

⁵ Virtual Learning Environment

⁶ Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance

SCS provides “front of house” services for both campuses and all programmes, and this includes staffing of reception areas and handling of incoming enquiries. Under the direction of an Executive Director, the SCS Manager has a team of 11 plus a further three Apprentice roles who are involved in the delivery of IAG, including a Senior Assistant, an Admissions & Enrolments Officer, SMT⁷ Support Assistant and eight SCS Assistants.

This team organises admissions interviews and act as hosts for many events as well as being the first point of contact for applications, emails, telephone, text and walk-in enquiries. Enquiries about admissions, eligibility for funding, course funding advice and one to one careers appointments are all dealt with by SCS.

Employer Services is a small team within the Business Development Directorate, in which the Work and Skills Officer and an Apprentice Recruitment and Engagement Advisor and a team of four Employer Skills Consultants. The Work and Skills Officer provides initial face to face support for unemployed candidates considering Apprenticeships, and the Apprentice Recruitment and Engagement Advisor recruits and “signs up” Apprentices, which includes support with CVs and explaining the Apprenticeship programme. Employer Skills Consultants provide advice and information to employers and to their employed Apprentices, and carry out an account management role during Apprentices’ programmes.

The Schools Engagement activity is delivered under the Marketing and Communications Manager by the Schools and Community Engagement Officer, a new role created in a team restructure in 2020. Activities in Schools Engagement, as well as wider college operations, are supported by others in the team including a Marketing Officer and Digital development roles. Schools Engagement involves developing relationships with local feeder schools and raising awareness of pathways available at HHC. This includes attending schools events such as parents evenings and presenting at assemblies, and supporting students’ transition into college by hosting visits and providing one to one support to students during application support sessions.

⁷ Senior Management Team

Strengths

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

- (1.1, 4.1, 3.2) The use of KPIs⁸ remains a strength. Managers are directly involved in the design and setting of KPIs, and their involvement in the annual review and planning process keeps them close to organisational objectives and strategic intentions. KPIs are monitored monthly and termly and the interrogation and understanding of data contributes strongly to annual service evaluation and improvement planning.
- (1.2) Strength in leadership and direction is being maintained. Managers continue to make decisions within their own departments, and work collaboratively with their peers across other departments. The CEIAG strategy is now embedded and penetrating curriculum areas, and has become a common focus encouraging and facilitating greater levels of collaboration between departments.
- (1.3) Equality and diversity continues to be a high priority for all staff, and inclusivity is embedded at all levels. This is not only recognised by students from ethnic or minority backgrounds, but by students generally. Alongside high standards in professional conduct and managing confidentiality, these attributes help generate considerable respect for the college by students and partners.
- (1.7) The engagement of staff and consultation with stakeholders in the design and development of services has further developed, and now innovation can be clearly seen as a theme running through many resulting changes. Staff and managers are enthusiastic and passionate about developing and improving and do not shy away from making an input.
- (1.8) A new strength was identified in this Assessment in the engagement of external partners. Significant proactive efforts are being made, with success, in engaging employer organisations to support CEIAG by for example visiting to make presentations to students, mentoring students with an emphasis on employability skills, and to providing meaningful work placements. Students' views and aspirations around employment are enhanced as a result.
- (2.4) The quality and accessibility of CPD⁹ activity remains a strength. CPD maintains a high profile within people management processes, and managers place importance in ensuring all staff engage. Staff are satisfied by their experience of CPD, and for many this helps prepare or position them for progression opportunities. These factors contribute to the retention of staff and to levels of motivation.
- (3.3) A lack of bias in all aspects of IAG delivery continues, and students recognise this. Students in all cohorts feel encouraged to come forward for support because they know staff always advise and guide in the students' best interests.

⁸ Key Performance Indicators

⁹ Continuing Professional Development

- (4.5) The roll out of departmental SAR¹⁰ and QIP¹¹ approach is providing more ownership of responsibility for quality locally, and this is now recognised as a strength. Managers are more conscious of the quality of their services and are managing quality effectively with the support of quality specialists. Alongside the effective use of KPIs, this creates a positive culture in which performance, efficiency and effectiveness are well balanced.

¹⁰ Self-Assessment Report

¹¹ Quality Improvement Plan

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 Accreditation anniversary, along with any other notable developments. The numbers in brackets refer to the elements and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- (1.6) Those delivering IAG services make frequent and effective use of video calling across a range of staff communications needs, and occasionally may deliver IAG support using this channel. There may be more opportunity to use *Teams* when supporting some students (albeit not all students may have access to suitable devices), and this could have particular relevance or appeal across digital skills programmes or for part-time adult students who are often not on campus. It may be that by more proactive promotion of remote video as an option to in-person or telephone support more students would choose this approach.
- (2.3) IAG qualifications are required in some roles, and some staff have undertaken IAG qualifications above current requirements. Management may wish to consider the roll-out of IAG-specific qualifications across all IAG roles. An appropriate baseline qualification could be defined, with higher levels defined for selected roles. More benefit could also be gained from further developing the “essential/ desirable” options within Person Specifications. This may help improve flexibility for covering other roles on a temporary basis, as well as reinforcing a common language to foster and encourage sharing of practice.
- (3.1) The accredited services are a selection of IAG services available to students and potential students, although management have expressed commitment in previous years to gaining whole college accreditation. Accreditation does not yet cover the whole college, and some key support such as the Apprenticeship Team, Progress Tutor support and pre-entry admissions interviews are not in scope. Leaders may wish to reflect on ESFA's¹² guidance on the **matrix** Standard.
- (4.7) HHC responded rapidly to pandemic lockdowns and have embraced and embedded various technology platforms. There is an appetite for appropriate use and further exploitation of technology to support IAG. There may be further opportunity to exploit emerging AI¹³ solutions as a triage during high seasonal demand for some services (maybe particularly attractive or appropriate on digital campus), and there could be opportunities to explore externally among peer establishments around procurement collaboration.

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.

¹² Education and Skills Funding Agency

¹³ Artificial Intelligence

Methodology

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

- Individual online video interviews with eight staff, four clients and seven partners
- Group online video interviews with 11 staff, 20 clients and one internal partner team
- Informal reviews of documentation introduced by staff
- Verbal feedback was provided to management during the Assessment.

The Assessment took place over 2½ days and was conducted remotely. Staff were drawn from all levels of the organisation including the Principal. Clients were students drawn from a representative range of programmes, and partners included referral organisations, feeder schools and employers, as well as internal partners from curriculum areas. *Teams* was used for online video interviews, this being the system of choice already in use across the organisation.

Documents reviewed included: Strategic Plan 2021-25, selection of Job Descriptions, Adult Welcome Leaflet, Student Welcome Leaflet, High-level and Departmental SARs and QIPs, Destinations Reports, Work Placement Policy, Student Survey Analyses, “Learning Ladder” (Strategic Templates) documents, CEIAG Policy, Careers Strategy 2022-23.

Detailed Findings

1. Leadership and Management

The way in which the organisation is led and managed to develop an effective service.

(1.1) The cross-college KPI framework includes the departments and services providing IAG services, and involves an annual process in which top level KPIs are cascaded to progressively more detailed KPIs at lower levels. In this way, KPIs set at all levels support the overall college objectives relating to retention and achievement rates.

Careers activities contribute to the overall objective of achieving 90% retention across the college through their support during the “Talk don’t walk” campaign during the first six weeks of Study Programme courses, and to the number of students moving into positive destinations through the group and individual guidance and UCAS support. The team also makes significant impact in supporting work placements, enabling many students to gain valuable experiences.

SCS KPIs include: Overall service feedback through SCS surveys; Financial Support appeals heard and responded to within 10 working days; Financial Support applications processed within 20 working days (40 during enrolment); Kit orders ready to collect within 20 working days.

Employer Services designed KPIs covering: Retention of Apprentices at engagement stage; Increase income from Apprenticeship Levy payers; Improve external Apprenticeship employment outcomes.

KPIs of relevance in Schools Engagement are focussed on feeder schools’ engagement data, in particular the numbers of enrolments compared to the number of leavers per school.

Each KPI identifies how it will be measured, and a grading scale is defined to indicate the outcome, graded from 1 to 4 (Outstanding to Inadequate). For example, SCS measure their overall service feedback through Microsoft Forms by reference to the proportion of feedback that is graded by students as outstanding or very good: A performance of 100%-95% would be graded Outstanding, 94% to 90% would be Good, 89%-85% Requires Improvement and 84% or below Inadequate.

(1.2) Staff in all service areas assessed are clear about what is expected of them and they understand their team and individual targets. There is clear engagement with the college vision and values. Communications and meetings are well managed and have prepared agenda, effective and valuable to all attendees, with many now using Teams routinely to enable easier and more inclusive attendance. Changes in some line management positions have been well communicated and hence accepted by staff without resistance or disengagement. A “Careers Coalition” has been established, chaired by the Assistant Principal in their capacity as Careers Lead, with internal and external members; this group is driving the careers agenda cross college in line with the ambition of the Careers Strategy.

(1.3) Staff have good awareness of policies that relate to their delivery of IAG, and policies are positively impacting upon confidentiality, equality and diversity and professional integrity. Integrity is one of five specific values, asserting a learner-centred approach and “doing the right thing”; staff are strongly engaged with this. Equality and diversity practice is considerate and inclusive, and is given due weight through mandatory staff training programmes and reinforced in team meetings. For staff in Careers, the CDI¹⁴ Code of Practice was found to be particularly well recognised, and the Gatsby benchmarks all have good recognition among staff in all the services.

“Their communication is great, hosting is great. Nothing is too much trouble” -Partner

¹⁴ Career Development Institute

(1.4) Nominated members of the SLT¹⁵ and managers sit on boards or attend external meetings with peers and local authority staff relating to careers, Gatsby and FE provision more generally, and these contacts in addition to government email alert services and the HR managers' networks enable HHC to stay abreast of legislative changes.

(1.5) Among the defined outcomes related to IAG is the achievement of a positive destination by students, and this remains a key outcome, with robust monitoring outsourced to an external agency. All managers are keenly aware of the high levels of positive destinations reported. Although other teams not included in the scope of accreditation make arguably more contribution to the achievement of destinations, Careers, SCS and Employer Services make important contributions too. In addition to destination and progression, the IAG services result in other outcomes including applying for university places, being confident in choosing an appropriate course at college, improving self-confidence and relieving pressure, finding and completing placements, remaining on course when at risk of dropping out.

"We want our Apprentices to progress within their employer organisations, don't want to drive them away" -Staff

(1.6) College internal communications are effective in promoting IAG support to students, including through the use physical signage and branding at access points including the *iLearn* hubs and of display screens on both campuses, promotional highlights on the *Its Learning* platform, through publicly accessible content on the main college website and specifically in talks and briefings during student induction. Staff from Careers also promote their services when attending tutorials, and Progress Tutors particularly promote central support services, and often refer students to them. Students interviewed have a high level of awareness of the services they can access.

(1.7) All staff feel they have a strong voice and that managers listen attentively to their views, and many are proactive in putting forward innovative ideas for change and improvement. There is a culture in which managers constantly seek suggestions from their teams. The views of students are represented by staff, and managers directly solicit opinion from students on drop-ins and during events. The extent to which staff and student voice is considered has strengthened since the last Assessment. It was also found that staff and managers are receptive to feedback and suggestions from partner organisations.

"We were surprised how open they are to our ideas" -Partner

(1.8) External partners are engaged in many different ways and enhance the student experience considerably. Staff have continued to engage a local provider of targeted career guidance services, have introduced some employers to not only the provision of work placements, but additionally accessing volunteers to mentor students. Significant relationships with employers have been built, enabling access to lengthy work placements for the rising number of T-Level students, and increasing the attendance of employers at Careers Fairs and in giving talks to students. Internal partnerships are good, and the Careers team in particular support and influence the implementation of CEIAG in curriculum areas by providing valuable resources accessible by staff who deliver tutorials and the PACE¹⁶ programme, and forging close links with Progress Tutors and Programme Heads. The use of Careers team members to carry out observations and feed back on the quality of admissions interviews by curriculum staff is but one activity that helps drive implementation of the CEIAG policy and positions the team prominently within college operations.

¹⁵ Senior Leadership Team

¹⁶ Progress, Achievement, Careers and Employability

2. Resources

The assets invested and applied in providing an effective service.

(2.1) There has been further investment in staffing levels with a restructuring of Careers roles in 2022 and the filling of three Apprentice positions in SCS. Physical and digital resources are of good quality, and include a Careers Zone located at both campuses (in the *ILearn* Centre at Rochdale and on the Henry West main corridor at Middleton). Both locations have good visibility and are suitably equipped for “casual browsing” and for private meetings. Digital resources are accessible on a Careers Zone page on *Its Learning*. Among the recent resources developed are a set of “Learning Ladders” which graphically represent the learning and career pathways relevant to specific subject areas of study.

“We’re better at planning now” -Staff

(2.2) Information resources including the content on *Its Learning* and within a wide range of information leaflets is accurate and in date. No students had found information that was out of date or inaccurate. Information is often available in printed as well as digital format, with digital now becoming the default preference for sustainability reasons. Video content including animations are used extensively, in particular to help explain Apprenticeship programmes. The college website remains a key reference resource for SCS in responding to course enquiries, and work is well in hand to develop a new website by the next academic year start.

“I’ve never had any problem getting information from them. They are so helpful” -Client

(2.3) The specific competencies, skills, knowledge and qualifications required in each role are formally documented in a Person Specification appended to Job Descriptions. These have been carefully prepared and are referred to when recruiting and at other times by managers, for example when considering potential restructure or job expansion, or when reflecting on CPD plans. Some, but not all roles, require IAG related qualifications, and it may be that this is a relatively under-developed part of some Person Specifications. The use of essential and desirable attributes is better used in some roles than others, leaving opportunity for further consideration of desirable attributes that could be beneficial in supporting staff development once the essential requirements are met.

(2.4) Staff CPD remains prolific and engaging, and a wide range of development activities were described during the Assessment contributing and, in many cases, exceeding the college’s requirement of at least 20 hours CPD annually for support staff. Mental health awareness has increased in value, and most staff say they have seen an increase in need for support among students in recent years. One of the managers was undertaking a Level 6 Advice and Guidance qualification at the time of assessment, other staff had completed a Level 6 Careers Lead course, one was shadowing professional web developers to build skills in website design and management, a member of SCS was studying an Award in Education and Training which would improve competence and confidence in delivering information sessions and presentations during admissions events, another had been shadowing colleagues to build up skills in hosting visitors. Some staff in Employer Services have completed Advice and Guidance qualifications at Levels 3 and 4, and attended college courses to improve product knowledge on climate change among other subjects.

(2.5) Staff induction is effective and engaging and follows a college-wide approach which is centrally monitored. The structured programme includes initial introductions to senior leaders, briefings on the college including values and mission, introductions to key staff and colleagues, familiarisation with policies and procedures and work equipment. Many topics are delivered through information videos or as formal online training modules. There are ample opportunities for work shadowing with experienced colleagues, and staff feel they were well prepared for their new roles. It was noted that some staff who had experienced induction during the pandemic period felt their induction was effective, despite some restrictions on face to face meetings, suggesting that the process had adapted well to increased remote support.

3. Service Delivery

The way in which the service is delivered effectively.

(3.1) Students are introduced to the support services available during their induction sessions, and there is outline information about the range of support available within Welcome leaflets. On engaging with any service, a full explanation is given. Most students were able to recall the expectations they had following their initial engagement with support. Information provided on the VLE, on the public website, within service leaflets, presentations and in verbal explanations all help students understand what could be achieved by engaging in the discreet IAG services. It is noted that only four defined services have to date been accredited despite managements' previous assurances that they were committed to accreditation of all IAG across the college.

(3.2) All departmental managers are involved in a service evaluation as part of the annual college review and planning process. Managers analyse and present data and their evaluations, being challenged and supported by SLT¹⁷ and Quality Team representatives ("Support, Challenge and Intervention"). KPIs are graded and validated as part of this process, and this feeds into the production of departmental SARs and QIPs. The evaluation of last year's performance showed that the Talk Don't Walk campaign remained effective, with Careers making significant input in providing one-to-one support to students who were not confident in their choice of programme Schools Engagement work with 15 feeder schools had resulted in a significantly higher number of engagements compared to the previous year, and this was largely due to increased schools visits and presentations. Digitising the enrolment process by SCS is likely to have been a contributor, having speeded up the overall timeline and eliminated paperwork. Managers also consider that the improved and increased use of systems and automation has created more time for staff to focus on the "human interventions", enabling more time to be focussed on individual student and applicant needs. It was noted in the latest SAR that the number of referrals to Careers had increased, with 980 students attending one-to-one guidance interviews in 2021/22.

(3.3) No bias was found in any aspect of service delivery. Information resources both in printed and digital form are written factually and have a neutral inference, without making any recommendation of choices for readers. The advice and guidance provided by staff is always made in the best interests of individual students, and although recommendations are made in many cases, this is always independent of any interests other than those of the student. Students and internal partners recognise this impartiality, and as a result feel comfortable in recommending the IAG support to friends and fellow learners and to students respectively.

"It's really clear they truly care about the students. Because of that, we've given more" -Partner

(3.4) Staff consistently present options rather than directing students' choices or decisions. Students say they feel more in control in this way- for example by being shown how to manage and update their CVs instead of a member of staff doing it for them. Some students who had already made their decisions about progressing into Apprenticeships in the next year had welcomed presentations on University study options, saying that this had reinforced their decisions and made them more confident in the route they were planning. Others had changed their minds about their next steps having met with a Careers Advisor. Students had been appreciative of the SCS team in highlighting the availability of bursaries, and valued the help they received on request in completing applications. All students gave accounts of options and support being offered without any pressure to make certain decisions or choices.

¹⁷ Senior Leadership Team

“The ladies in the Careers Zone explained why I was being turned down by Universities. With their help I now have a place that I’ve accepted”- Client

(3.5) Students receive appropriate guidance whenever required or requested, in order to make best use of the resources available to them. Everyone interviewed said they had been shown how to navigate the *Its Learning* platform during their induction and in Tutorials (not within scope of the accredited services), and some had been coached specifically and guided to particular content on a one to one basis in Careers. Some students appreciated the patience and friendly manner of SCS reception staff in finding their way around college campuses in their early days and weeks as a student. Others described how Careers staff had given them tips on how to research university provision and Work Placements.

“The transition support is great, it really helps our least confident leavers settle in and get the most from their early days and weeks” -Partner

(3.6) There was ample evidence of signposting and referral of students and applicants, and in all cases described by students and by staff, this is appropriate and effective. Staff at admissions stage have good knowledge of other provision and for some applicants where an offer could not be made, it is normal practice for SCS and Employer Services staff to suggest alternatives. For students on programme, Careers staff have signposted and referred students to other curriculum support, and to online resources of Universities and to external careers advisers based on campus. Internal signposting is also effective, and in some cases it was found that Progress Tutors would accompany their least confident students to Careers appointments on request of the student. At some times in the year, SCS and Careers staff signpost students to topical events, such as employer talks and Careers Fairs. All ESOL learners are encouraged to engage with National Careers Service and request individual appointments.

4. Continuous Quality Improvement

The way in which the service provided is reviewed and improved on an ongoing basis.

(4.1) Data is recorded and analysed in different ways including within and exported from the PICS learner management system, *Pro Monitor* progress monitoring system and bespoke spreadsheets for more localised data. Schools Engagement data shows that the number of students enrolled from Rochdale feeder schools has increased annually from 747 to 786 to 942 in 2022/23, against corresponding numbers of total applications of 1,553, 2,251 and 1,884 respectively. Conversion rates were 48% in 2020/21, 35% in 2021/22 and 50% in 2022/23. Early in 2021/22 during “Talk Don’t Walk”, Careers provided advice to 147 students and identified alternative courses that were accepted by students; this reduced withdrawals by 2% on the previous year. During “Stepping Up Month”, 240 students were supported by Careers in deciding on their next steps. During an extended UCAS preparation period (conversations are now begun at the end of the year before the year in which applications are to be made) 408 students were advised on their options and supported in making applications.

(4.2) Progressing into meaningful destinations is defined by management as the key outcome for students of IAG support, and this is robustly measured annually through an independently commissioned Report. According to the J2R¹⁸ Destinations Report and 86.8% of all students progressed to a meaningful destination over 85% of young students progressed to another HHC course. 90% of Apprentices said in the QDP¹⁹ survey 2022 that they were aware of what they could do following their programme, and over 97% moved into a positive destination. 411 students submitted University applications (representing sustained increases year on year since 2019-20). Softer outcomes including developing self-confidence, raising career aspirations and establishing career goals are recognised by delivery staff, and in some cases can be monitored through notes on *Pro Monitor* and within ILPs²⁰.

“I went on an industry visit to consider work placements, and that was definitely a good trip, really relevant to us” -Client

(4.3) Feedback on IAG services is gathered using different channels, including internal and external student surveys, informal comments made to staff and through observations of delivery. QDP survey results are analysed termly and benchmarked against peer providers. These surveys include pertinent questions relating directly or partially to the accredited services, for example in summer term 2021/22 88% said they have had the help needed to decide what to do next, 84% said they were prepared and confident to take their next steps and 91% said they were aware of what they could do after their course ends. There are a number of local surveys in use that provide more targeted feedback on specific services, and SCS are an exemplar of good practice in this respect. SCS has devised a survey facilitated through Google Forms and which is periodically analysed by the service Manager. The latest results show that over 90% of respondents rated the overall SCS service as outstanding or very good, and similar rates were returned for how useful the information and advice they received was and for how highly they rated the staff dealing with them. In Careers surveys, 100% of respondents said they had received support and found it useful, 96% said they had achieved something positive as a result of the help and 94% felt more confident about their next steps.

¹⁸ J2 Research Limited

¹⁹ QDP Services Ltd

²⁰ Individual Learning Plans

(4.4) External service providers are evaluated on their contributions through a formal review, incorporated within contracts or service level agreements. With other partnerships evaluation is informal, and managers and Lead practitioners have a good understanding of which relationships are strong and identify and work to improve those which are less effective. Formal reviews take place with employers to evaluate their contributions, particularly support for students, and this is secured through a formal agreement for each placement and Apprenticeship, with Employer Skills Consultants account managing employers.

(4.5) Quality assurance arrangements have evolved since the last Assessment and departmental managers now have more accountability for the quality of their services. There has been some realignment of the quality function with a change of leadership. Careers staff have been used to good effect to observe and feed back on the quality of admissions interviews (carried out by curriculum staff, so not in scope of this Assessment) and presentations and hosting skills of SCS staff. The use of departmental QARs and QIPs is now embedded, and all managers are fully engaged in the process, benefiting from both SLT challenge and quality specialists' support. Observations by line managers, supervisory discussions, reviews of student records, student feedback and complaints all contribute to giving management visibility of the quality of delivery. Actions either addressed or in progress in the current QIPs include development of a new website which is nearing completion, the increased use of adult role models/ case studies which is roughly 25% complete, to improve staff survey ratings of Student Experience team (inclusive of Careers) to more than 73%, actions included appointment of new post achieved in November 2022. In Careers, plans to involve parents more in young students' career discussions are being pursued.

"The team are really supportive to me, the best careers team I've experienced in four colleges" -Staff

(4.6) The Professional Development Review (PDR) process encourages staff to take responsibility for their own development within specified guidelines for CPD and with input from line managers to prepare for progression opportunities and improve knowledge and competence year on year. A formal PDR meeting is scheduled annually, when data and individuals' performance against KPIs is referenced and considered. Individual goals and targets are agreed in these meetings, and monitored and supported by line managers in monthly one-to-one meetings. Staff say there is value in the PDR process, and that it encourages them to research and engage in CPD activities and to achieve their personal performance goals.

(4.7) Good use is being made of online technology for the distribution of information resources, such as the college website and *It's Learning* platform. There has been significant development in digitising the admissions process, and a near-paperless process has been achieved, resulting in less manual administration and more time for value-adding activity such as liaison with curriculum interviewers and hosting visitors. Teams is now used regularly for team and management meetings, minimising travel time and enabling higher attendance levels. Some AI products (*Bodyswaps VR*- a soft skills development tool) and *Career Chat*- a personalised chatbot application designed for adults and young people) are being piloted, and the potential for future roll-out is being recognised, albeit there is currently no financial budget to support procurement of solutions.

(4.8) The plan-do-review cycle is embraced as a default management approach at HHC, and departmental managers apply good practice in continuous improvement; there is a healthy balance between supporting innovative ideas and managing risk. Piloting of AI product, the testing and introduction of digital signing solution and testing of the new website are all examples of applying the plan-do-review approach.

"The careers team are unbelievable, always at the forefront. Innovation is the key word" -Internal Partner

Conclusion

It was interesting to see that the rapid response to the coronavirus pandemic restrictions has resulted in sustained and effective use of more technology to enhance the experience of students and increase efficiency of operations. The college has slightly extended the scope of the services that are accredited, and it is hoped that leaders and managers will be able to go ahead with their longstanding commitment to gain whole college accreditation.

Continued accreditation is subject to annual Continuous Improvement Checks at twelve- and twenty-four-months following assessment and three-yearly on-site accreditation reviews. If checks and reviews are not undertaken in a timely way this will have an impact upon the organisation's accreditation.

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.