

**Commercial in Confidence**

**matrix Accreditation Review Report**

**for**

**LEEK COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION  
AND SCHOOL OF ART**

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**On behalf of EMQC LTD**

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## 1. Executive Summary

Having carried out the Accreditation Review in accordance with the guidelines provided, Leek College of Further Education and School of Art has demonstrated that it continues to meet the matrix quality standard for information advice and guidance services. Continued Accreditation to the matrix Standard is granted for the external services provided by Leek College of Further Education and School of Art.

This Accreditation Review Report details the services provided by Leek College of Further Education and School of Art and includes a brief description of the organisation, the Assessment methodology and an overview of how Leek College of Further Education and School of Art demonstrated that it continues to meet the matrix Standard.

## 2. Introduction

Leek College is a small further education college that provides a range of vocational education and training with a strong community focus. The College is progressive and has a reputation for quality, innovation and responsiveness to the needs of its community, which extends over the greater part of the Staffordshire Moorlands including the towns of Biddulph and Cheadle.

The College's mission statement is "Everyday, inspiring success through inclusive learning". Their vision, which is clearly set out in their Governance documents and in their website is "Leek College is committed to providing the highest quality standards of education, training and recreational opportunities through programmes based on individual recognition, attainment, equality of access, flexibility and relevance. At Leek College every individual is considered vital to success. We are committed to the spirit of partnership as a means of ensuring that the skills base of our community matches national standards".

The College has a student clientele of over 3,000 people each year. These students can access a wide range of full-time vocational courses that meet a number of qualification levels, up to and including Foundation Degree. Part-time courses run during the day and of an evening within the week and also on Saturday mornings. There are in the region of 290 staff at the College, some working full-time and some part-time.

The College responds positively to diversity and equality issues. This is reflected clearly in the operation of the Honeycomb Centre at Longnor, which provides a base for work-based learning provision for students who have learning difficulties.

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services are offered in an embedded fashion and people would encounter services in a number of ways. This would start initially at the time of a person's initial enquiries with the Reception team, would continue as part of the Admissions and induction process and be maintained during College life from members of staff who are designated as Learning Guidance Advisors (LGAs).

The College is recognised as an Investors in People organisation; it has been awarded a Charter Mark and has also achieved Centre of Vocational Excellence status (CoVE) in terms of its Information Technology and Computing provision.

Since the last Assessment the College has had a new Principal and has also had two extensive building programmes. Interviews with members of staff showed that the new Principal, who had previously been the Vice-Principal, has had a significant positive impact on the College in a number of ways. These include restructuring the senior management team; reviewing the staff's pay and grading arrangements; giving a clear emphasis to the College's role in responding to the economic needs of the area and developing a strong partnership with Staffordshire University. A typical comment from staff was "he has put a lot of new energy into the College".

The partnership with the University has complemented the previous partnership links with the Moorlands 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre and other local schools. The extended partnership arrangements now offer students access to vocational and academic programmes at a range of levels, thus providing the potential for people to address many of their educational and training needs within their locality.

The two building programmes have provided a new building within the College campus, which now houses the main reception area, the Learning Resources Centre and the Health and Beauty area. It also houses a lift which has remedied the disabled access problems that had existed in that part of the College. The building work also included a range of adaptations and renovations in other parts of the College's buildings providing a "fresh face" to students and providing facilities such as automatic entrance doors.

One of the College's objectives for this Review Assessment was to review its IAG services against the nationally recognised quality standard and to use the outcomes of the Assessment as part of their ongoing quality improvement process. Accreditation to the matrix Standard is also linked to the College's participation in the Learning and Skills Council's Train to Gain initiatives.

### 3. Methodology

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

- The College's main site at Leek was visited as was the Honeycomb Centre at Longnor.
- Seventeen members of staff and thirty two students were interviewed at the main site.
  - The members of staff included the College Principal, The Director of Quality and Marketing, Curriculum managers, Course Co-ordinators, Learning Guidance Advisors, the manager of the Learning Resources Centre, an Adult IAG Advisor, the Admissions Officer and a Receptionist.
  - The students were interviewed in three groups. One group comprised first year Art and Design students, another group were second year Travel and Tourism students and the third group were adult students pursuing a Teaching Assistant's qualification.
- At the Honeycomb Centre, the Director of Student Services and two members of the Centre's staff were interviewed; two students were also interviewed.
- The College's Student Governor was interviewed.
- Representatives from three partner organisations were interviewed using the telephone. These organisations being the Moorlands 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre, Staffordshire University and the Connexions Service.
- A range of information materials were reviewed including the College Charter, full-time and part-time prospectuses, the Student Planner handbook, and careers materials in the LRC.
- A number of operational documents and reports were reviewed including student survey questionnaires and associated analysis reports, an Employer Engagement survey, the annual Marketing Plan and the College's Self Assessment Review for 2007-08 and the associated Improvement Plan.
- The College's website and their intranet site were also reviewed.

## 4. Strengths

During the Accreditation Review, it was seen that the eight areas of good practice identified at the previous Assessment had been maintained and in many ways extended. These are outlined below. The numbers and letters in brackets refer to the relevant elements and criteria in the matrix Standard.

- All of the students and staff that were interviewed commented that the College's culture and operations were welcoming and friendly and that this generated a "family-based" approach that makes a positive contribution to people's learning and work experiences (1c, 2a, 3, 4)
- There is a clear emphasis on the provision of information, advice and guidance services in an impartial manner, for example the provision of a 100% money back guarantee if a course proved to be unsuitable (1d, 4)
- The college has a positive approach to equality of opportunity and diversity issues. This is shown by the prominent display of their corporate policy statements within the College and the ongoing development of the Honeycomb Centre for students that have learning difficulties (5e, 5f).
- The annual Marketing Plan provides a comprehensive analysis of the College's corporate objectives, the needs of the Staffordshire Moorlands catchment area, the strengths and weaknesses of the various providers in the area and an assessment of the main stakeholders and their potential expectations for the next few years. The plan then provides a framework for the College's publicity and promotional activities (1, 5a).
- External feedback is obtained in a number of ways. Students are asked to complete questionnaires at regular intervals, this feedback is analysed and responded to in a positive way. Individual informal feedback from students is obtained through ongoing discussions between students and their Learning Guidance Advisers. Other surveys have also been conducted recently, including a skills analysis with local employers and a life-style survey with students (7, 8b).
- Arrangements for internal feedback include the College's "Its Our Business" meetings. These provide staff with the opportunity discuss issues with the Principal on an informal basis at regular intervals. There are also weekly staff forums every Friday afternoon and these provide the opportunity for staff to be briefed on and to comment about policy and operational matters (6f, 8b).
- The walls and stairways continue to be used as an information medium. College policies and practices are clearly displayed, as is information regarding the college's achievements, especially on quality issues. A large number of photographs of students are also prominently displayed and these provide a good visual platform for demonstrating the successes achieved by the students. Positive feedback comments from students about the support they had received while they were at the College are also displayed (1b).

- The College has extended its partnership links with other providers in the area. At the last Assessment the main links were with the Moorlands 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre, Cheadle High School and Painsley Catholic High School. These links allow people to consider a range of locally provided academic-based and vocational courses in an impartial way. The members of the partnership operate in a joined-up way in terms of promoting services and the recruitment of students. These partnership arrangements have been extended with links with Staffordshire University. This enables students consider a wider range of courses, including those at Foundation Degree level (5g, 8d).

## 5. Areas for Continuous Improvement

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

Most of the areas for continuous improvement that were noted at the previous Assessment have been addressed. For example the materials in the Careers Library within the LRC are now reviewed regularly and any out of date but still useful resources are clearly labelled as such. Also it had been recognised that there are potential benefits in strengthening the skills and competencies of the main front-line customer care staff by supporting them to pursue a relevant IAG qualification, such as an NVQ at Level 3 and the aim is to meet these training needs in the current year.

The three areas with potential for further development are:

- The Careers Library within the LRC contains a number of lever-arch folders that contain careers information listed in alphabetical order. These folders are updated as part of a subscription contract with an outside body. However, it appears that the information in the present materials might not be as up to date as they might be. For example the materials on careers in the environmental area were last updated by the outside body in 2006. There may be benefits in reviewing the present subscription and identifying what alternative materials might be available from other suppliers. It might be useful to discuss this matter with the Connexions Service and with other College's so as to identify the materials used by other organisations that provide IAG services (3a, 3b, 3c).
- The LRC staff have developed a number of Subject Guides for students and these are displayed and available in the quiet area within the LRC. There might be benefits in developing a guide that focuses on careers and employment issues and this could link to the materials in the Careers Library and the use of web-sites such as Fast-Tomato. The LRC staff might find it useful to have discussions with the recently appointed Adult IAG Advisors about the contents of such a guide (3d).
- At the last Assessment it was mentioned that within its partnership arrangements, it may be beneficial if the College was to encourage its partners to demonstrate that their IAG services could match the quality of those offered by the College. The aim would be to ensure the provision of a consistent and seamless approach regardless of the point of contact used by prospective students. This matter was raised with the Director of the Moorlands 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre during this Accreditation Review and he said that he would be interested in considering Accreditation to the matrix Standard. The College might find it useful to discuss this issue with the Director and to explain the benefits it has gained from its matrix journey (4a, 4e, 5g).

## 6. Detailed Findings against the matrix Standard

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

### Element 1.

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

Marketing and promotional activities and materials are driven by the annual Marketing Plan. This provides a clear picture of the needs of the College, local employers and the communities in the Staffordshire Moorlands area. The plan then identifies a number of objectives and sets out an action.

The College's courses and services continue to be promoted through its prospectuses and course guides, publicity in the local media, the distribution of leaflets and posters in libraries and other local community venues and through events such as the College's Open Evenings that are held at regular intervals during the year.

There are effective network links with other providers in the Staffordshire Moorlands area, especially other colleges and secondary schools. These links are used as part of the promotional activities by ensuring that all of the network partners have a good knowledge about the College's courses and services. The College also participates in open evenings held by its partner schools.

Since the last Assessment the College's prospectuses and information materials have been rebranded so as to give a clearer emphasis to the College's vocational focus within the partnership. Information is now colour coded with the College mainly using green within its elements and the Moorlands 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre using blue. This helps to provide a clear picture to prospective students and their parents of the different outcomes and paths for students from the different organisations.

The College's website provides access to a wide range of information regarding the courses and facilities that are available. Reference is also made to the IAG that are available to prospective students. The website is well laid out, easy to use and is set in clear language.

Word of mouth is an important publicity and awareness vehicle within the local community. Many of the students that were interviewed said that a friend had recommended the College to them. Other informal promotional activities include sending "good luck" cards to pre-GCSE students and "have a wonderful summer" cards to school leavers.

Equality of access to services is facilitated in a number of ways. Support can be provided to people who have visual impairments through the production of large print materials, people with hearing impairment can be supported by the use of sign language and a range of support can be provided for people who have dyslexia. The recent provision of a lift in the College's new building means that all areas of the College are now accessible by wheelchair users.

## **Element 2.**

### **People's use of the service is defined and understood**

The college's promotional materials make it clear that impartial IAG services are available and that the College's main aim is to meet the needs of the individual students.

Copies of the Student Charter are available in the reception area. The Charter provides a clear explanation of the services that are provided, the limitations of the service and the competencies of the staff.

The nature of the services that are available are also explained to people at the initial interview and admission stage. This process has been reviewed in recent years and students will now be interviewed initially in small groups and this will then be followed up by short individual interviews. The group sessions provide people with a clear picture of the content and requirements of a course. The individual interview allows them to ascertain whether the course is the right one for them, based on their individual aims.

If it turns out that the College is not able to meet a person's needs then the member of staff or a colleague will identify an organisation that is able to meet those needs and will provide the person with appropriate signposting information.

The Student Planner provides a clear explanation of the various services that are available for students. It also provides information on the role of the LGAs, the student's Individual Learning Plan and the College's key policies on issues such as grievances, appeals and discipline.

There is a specific section in the Student Planner on Careers and Progression. This provides information which may be helpful to a student when they come to consider their next steps, making reference to issues such as the Careers Library, the Fast-Tomato website, the availability of courses under the Staffordshire University links and some basic information regarding the UCAS process. The Student Planner also gives information on the role of the Connexions Service and their availability within the College.

The reception team take a clear ownership of telephone and personal enquiries and they ensure that they provide people with their names in case the people have a need to contact them again.

Enquiries are handled in a confidential way and there is scope for meetings to be held privately in a separate room. The College plans to provide two new meeting rooms in the Reception area during the year. One room will provide a base for the Connexions Service's Personal Advisers and the Connexions logo and associated materials will be clearly displayed in that area.

The College's diversity policy is clearly displayed in the public areas.

**Element 3.****People are provided with access to information and support in using it**

A comprehensive admissions and progression manual has been produced and this is used by all relevant members of staff. This manual includes an explanation of the enrolment and admissions process, including appropriate flow charts. Copies of the admission forms and the relevant letters for students are also enclosed.

The initial interviews with potential students enable the staff to identify a person's skills, experience and aims. This information is discussed with people as part of the work in identifying suitable learning options for them.

People will discuss their various options with a member of staff and one or more courses of study will be identified and discussed. People's acceptance to any particular learning options is demonstrated by asking them to co-sign a Learning Plan with the member of staff. This document also covers the use of any personal information in any signposting, referral or networking arrangements.

People are not expected to make final decisions regarding enrolment during their initial interview and the staff will often ask them to consider options for a few days and will contact them in due course to finalise their action plan. Further interviews are arranged when necessary.

Taster events can be organised if necessary. These are designed to help people to obtain hands-on experience regarding the content and style of the courses that have been discussed with them.

After the enrolment stage the College's IAG services are mainly delivered by the LGAs. Their role is clearly explained in the Student Planner and students are encouraged to maintain contact with their LGA throughout the year and to let them know if the student has any concerns regarding their course or with any other elements of College life.

If it is felt that the College is not in a position to provide a course that meets a person's needs then that person will be signposted or referred to another suitable organisation. The Reception and Admissions staff have a good knowledge of the other training providers in the Staffordshire Moorlands area and they also have access to the prospectuses of other Colleges and schools as well as access to internet based information.

**Element 4.****People are supported in exploring options and making choices**

The Reception and Admissions staff use the College's prospectuses as a key element of their information resources. This is complemented by a sound knowledge of the services that are provided by the College's other partners and a good awareness of the services that are available from other organisations in the area. Internet based information can also be accessed.

The Careers Library provides a wide range of materials relating to learning, training and jobs. Some of these are in hard-copy materials such as prospectuses, reference books and magazines and some are available through computer based materials. The hard copy materials are reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

A number of Subject Guides have been produced by the staff in the LRC. These cover the main academic and vocational programmes, are on A5 sized format and contain a range of useful information regarding the materials that are held in the centre and a list of useful websites.

The internet is a valuable source for information and staff will either obtain information for individuals or will provide appropriate support to them if they wish to use the college's computers. On the wall of the LRC, close to the entrance, there is a large diagram that explains the key issues that people need to consider when using the internet to ensure that they are accessing sites that meet their needs and that provide meaningful information.

If it is identified that people have any disabilities or have any communication difficulties then the Student Services team would be asked to identify and to provide the support that the person might need to help them to access the services that they require.

The College has a clear focus on the provision of impartial IAG services. Students are offered the opportunity to experience taster sessions if they have any doubts about enrolling on a particular course. A further example of impartiality is the college's "100% money back" arrangement. This means that if a part-time student finds that they have enrolled on a course that does not meet their needs and if they decide to leave the course after a number of classes, then they will receive a refund of their enrolment fees.

When students are preparing to leave the College they are provided with destination information in a number of ways. The Careers Library has an up to date collection of university and college prospectuses as well as information on a wide range of vocational activities. Internet facilities can be used by students, for example the [www.fasttomato.com](http://www.fasttomato.com) website and support will be provided by staff if this is required. The Connexions service can also provide support to 14-18 year old students.

## **Element 5.**

### **Service delivery is planned and maintained**

The Principal and the senior managers that were interviewed had a clear understanding of the role and purpose of the IAG services and the benefits that they provide for people and for the College. This understanding is also communicated effectively to the rest of the staff through the work of the LGAs and through the College's internal information and communication processes.

The College utilises a self-assessment process as part of its business plan arrangements. This sets out key performance indicators for the various services. The outcomes from service user feedback and from the complaints process are also considered as part of the self-assessment process and are felt to be an important measure of the college's performance regarding its IAG services.

The College also measures the effectiveness of its IAG services by looking at student retention levels, achievement rates and student successes. The figures in the Self Assessment Report for 2007-08 showed that in terms of the relevant benchmark comparators, retention levels were 6 to 10% above the benchmark, achievement rates were 1% above and success rates were 8 to 17 % above. It was felt that effective IAG and "making sure that we have the right people on the right course" were key factors in what was felt to be excellent performance.

The College's corporate policies and practises are set out in a staff handbook and they are also available on the intranet. The College's ethos and its operational policies and practices incorporate the main principles established by the National IAG Board.

The views from staff are taken account of in a number of ways. For example there are regular team meetings and also the Principal has continued to run the "Its Our Business" meetings that allow staff members to discuss issues with him in an informal and constructive way. Also there are weekly Staff Forum meetings which can be attended by all members of staff. These provide the opportunity for the Principal and other senior managers to brief staff on policy and operational matters and for staff to respond to these.

The College has formal partnership arrangements with the Connexions Service and two Personal Advisers attend the College at certain times during the week. The availability of these services is publicised in the Student Planner.

The partnership links that have been established with other schools and colleges in the area facilitates a shared understanding with the various organisations of the needs of students and provides the basis for a co-ordinated approach to the provision of IAG services.

The College has also established a partnership with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. This has had benefits in terms of identifying and responding to the needs of the local economy on a joint basis and in the sharing of resources. For example the College has been able to use the facilities offered by the Council's one-stop-shops and the Council has been able to make use of the College's computing facilities.

## Element 6.

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

A comprehensive induction process takes place for all new staff. This starts with the provision of information at the College-wide level and is followed by team or location based information, with appropriate support from the relevant manager or team leader.

The college operates an annual professional development and appraisal process. This provides the staff with an opportunity to discuss their jobs, their performance and future development issues with their manager. The outcomes from these individual reviews feed into the service development plans for each of the services and these service plans then feed into the College's overall development plan.

The identification of the training needs of staff is a key element of the appraisal process. Members of staff commented that the College had a positive attitude towards ongoing training and development. For example at their last appraisals the Admissions Officer and a member of the Reception team had discussed their IAG roles and it had been decided that there were benefits in them pursuing a formal qualification, such as an NVQ at level 3 in Advice and Guidance. Arrangements are being made for these studies to start this year.

All of the members of staff that were spoken to stated that they felt that the various teams worked in a close and supportive way and that there was close liaison between them. Their aim was to present a seamless service to the public as part of the College's overall objective of identifying peoples training needs and guiding and supporting them in achieving these. Most of the staff commented that the College's culture was based on a family-based approach and this was felt to be a major factor in the high level of morale and commitment demonstrated by the staff.

The members of staff that were interviewed also stated that they received strong support and clear guidance from their managers. The friendly and family-based approach was commented on favourably by all of the staff and students that were interviewed .... *"the College is a business and it's run like a business but it's really people friendly"* .... *"all of the staff are friendly and supportive – it goes all through the College"* .... *"I would not have worked here for so long if it hadn't been such a friendly place"*.

## **Element 7.**

### **Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained**

The college's complaint's process is publicised in the Student Planner and during the induction meetings that are held for students. All of the students that were interviewed were aware of the complaints procedure although none had needed to use it.

Feedback is gathered in a number of ways. Since the last Assessment there have been annual satisfaction surveys with the students, a student life-style survey, a survey specifically for NVQ students and a jointly funded employer needs survey that was mainly aimed at shaping actions relating to the Train to Gain initiative.

Feedback cards are displayed and available at the Reception desk and these can be posted anonymously into a feedback box. This is emptied on a regular basis and the comments on the cards are reviewed and responded to as required. The LRC also displays comments cards and these underline the message that student's comments are welcomed in the College.

The feedback from the student surveys gives very positive outcomes in terms of their satisfaction with IAG related services. For example 95% of students were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their pre-enrolment advice.

Informal feedback is obtained in an ongoing way from discussions between the students and their LGAs. This may be done in group meetings or through individual discussions if confidentiality is necessary. The most recent student survey showed that 88% of the students were satisfied or very satisfied about the level of support they had received from their LGA.

The outcomes of the feedback and complaints are analysed and considered by the College's management and any necessary action is taken to resolve relevant issues. However, many feedback issues relate to an individual student's learning and development programme and these are dealt with as an ongoing part of the regular reviews that take place regarding of a student's progress.

Members of staff can provide feedback and comments in a number of ways, including at team meetings, at "It's Our Business" sessions and at the weekly Staff Forum meetings.

**Element 8.****Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring, evaluation and action**

The College uses a self-assessment process as part of its performance review and business-planning framework. This provides effective links between the individual development plans that are identified through the annual review process, the annual plan for each service and the College's overall development plans and budget.

The Self Assessment Report for 2007-08 reviewed the college's performance in meeting the targets set in recent years. It then identified a number of target improvements for the year ahead. These were set in a framework that looked at leadership and management issues as well as aspects of the individual academic and learning programmes. The report shows that the various service targets that were identified in the previous year are being tackled in a positive way.

The Self Assessment Report generates an Improvement Plan for the year ahead. The plan for 2007-08 includes a number of aims that relate to IAG services, these being:

- The provision of improved access to IAG services for adult learners
- Development of more extensive support arrangements between LGAs and Adult Education staff.
- Widening participation in the Cheadle and Biddulph areas, linked with actions by the Moorlands 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre.

The action points noted above show that the College responds positively to service-user feedback. The most recent survey of part-time adult students showed that 30% of respondents said that they had not received any information regarding other courses at the College. A detailed examination of the data showed that this issue was more evident in certain geographical areas, particularly in Cheadle and Biddulph. In response to this, the College has recruited two part-time Adult IAG Advisers who are focussing their actions in these two areas. However, the funding for these two posts is short-term and will cease in April 2008. It is hoped that longer-term funding for this work can be identified before that time.