

Assessment Report

Education Training Collective (etc)

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor Names	Susan Smith / Janette Russon
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	23/10/2023 – 25/10/2023
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C12205 PN201978
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	02/10/2026

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	23/10/2023 – 25/10/2023 – all remote
Staff interviews	52 via Teams
Recipient interviews	22 via Teams
Partner interviews	3 via Teams
Document review	Full portfolio including strategic and operational plans, Self-Assessment Report, data, case studies, survey reports and analysis, promotional materials, and performance data.

About the organisation

Education Training Collective (Etc) is made up of three colleges and an independent training provider: Stockton Riverside College, Redcar and Cleveland College, Bede Sixth Form College and NETA Training. The Group was formed in August 2018 following the merger of Stockton Riverside College and Redcar and Cleveland College. Education Training Collective was inspected in May 2022 and was awarded good for overall effectiveness. As a group Etc is driven by the desire to be a regional leader in the economic, social, and cultural development of its communities through collaborative and transformational partnership working. The scope of the **matrix** Accreditation Review Assessment is the whole Group.

Redcar and Cleveland College serves a large and diverse geographical area: the urban communities of Redcar, Eston, Grangetown, South Bank and the rural communities of Skinningrove, Loftus, Brotton and Skelton. These Communities have been hit with high levels of unemployment since the demise of the Redcar steel industry in 2016. Within the borough, 26% of adults are economically inactive. Until recently Redcar and Cleveland had one of the highest 16-18 NEET populations in the North East. Redcar and Cleveland contains a number of secondary schools that have made significant improvement over recent years but are still pending Ofsted inspections. Unemployment is high at 6.7%, +2.3% above the national rate.

Stockton Riverside College provides high quality academic and vocational programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and provision for students with high needs. Some 35.3% of young people in Stockton-on-Tees are identified as 'disadvantaged' against a national average of 31.0%, so the college focuses on supporting students aged 14 upwards from a wide range of backgrounds and with a number of needs. A separate campus, The Skills Academy, provides bespoke programmes for young people who require a small, nurturing environment.

At Bede Sixth Form College, all students undertake an individual study programme that reflects their prior attainment, abilities, interests, and aspirations. Students are set challenging targets to stretch them and encourage behaviours to achieve to the very best of their abilities. Pathways of study consist of either A- Levels, Applied General Qualifications, GCSEs, Functional Skills or a combination of these qualification types.

NETA Training is an employer driven organisation. Leaders and managers work closely with employers to develop training, which helps to build a safe, professional, and qualified workforce. The curriculum offer at NETA is designed to give all learners the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to succeed in life, irrespective of their starting point. This ensures aspirational progression routes for students across the range of provision. Higher level skills training is a high priority in the Tees Valley and NETA is well placed to work with stakeholders to meet this increasing skills demand for the region. A recent curriculum development at NETA Engineering illustrates this: Engineering HNC/D programmes are offered by NETA in partnership

with Redcar & Cleveland College to support the development of higher-level engineering skills in line with the regional forecast for emerging low carbon economy job roles.

The Group's strategic focus has had considerable impact on the skills development of the region. For example, the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has predicted 25,000 new jobs across the Tees Valley with many of these jobs coming through the recently purchased steelworks site, now known as Teesworks, the largest industrial site in the UK and based in Redcar. To ensure the curriculum meets the requirements of this regional priority the Group worked closely with the Local Authority and other skills providers to create a local skills strategy. Indeed, the Group is central to regional skills strategies, and to the local Town Deals, through which the Group aligns its curriculum to meet current and future need. This has been underpinned through a clear investment strategy that is focused on the region's current and future skills needs. For example, leaders at the Group created a Logistics Academy with a focus on Rail, Shipping and HGV – working with local employers to develop bespoke employer-led provision to meet the ever-increasing demand across the Logistics Sector for a skilled workforce. Stockton Riverside College is now the biggest provider of Shipping qualifications outside of the Port of London. Stockton Riverside College has also recently signed a Skills Pledge with North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust to ensure sufficient industry placements for T Levels, as well as working to ensure that there is a skilled workforce to support the NHS and its allied sectors.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Through the Etc. Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) strategy, which is approved by Senior Managers and at Corporation level, the aim of the CEIAG is defined as “Aiming to ensure that, as a result of being equipped with the appropriate high quality, impartial CEIAG, all students and potential students are enabled to set clear aspirations for their own futures, identify their career pathway, develop skills which are aligned with the needs of employers and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), achieve their chosen qualifications and move into sustained positive destinations.”

The CEIAG strategy is aligned directly with 3 of the 6 Strategic Plan Objectives:

“SO3: To create long-term strategic partnerships, providing new opportunities for our communities and businesses, and delivering social mobility for all our learners.

SO4: To develop and enhance our exceptional education and training offer, designed with our employers, learners, and stakeholders.

SO5: To meet the skills needs of key industries and local people by creating engaging learning environments reflecting the real world of work.”

Hence, no course is offered at the Etc. colleges, without a local link to employment. This is reviewed using tools such as Vector and EMSI and is then tested through the Business Planning and Performance Review process.

The purpose of IAG is communicated to all team members frequently throughout the year at regular team meetings, at event pre-briefings, and via reporting.

Both an embedded and an explicit (specialist) CEIAG entitlement is clearly visible across all key stages of the learner journey for young people and adults. Comprising of extensive schools liaison, front line IAG delivery, tutor on programme support, specialist student support and tutorials, with the support with the support being firmly focused upon sustaining already high retention and achievement rates. IAG seeks to offer advice that recruits people on to the right course, to remove barriers to learning and to provide advice and support for progression to meet goals and aspirations. The objectives of the CEIAG service that support this are to ensure that all students receive clear, accurate, up-to-date, accessible, objective and impartial information before committing to a course and understand how a proposed course meets their needs with a specific link to future careers aspirations, receive on-programme support to remain on programme and succeed in achieving their qualification and access clear, accurate, up-to-date, accessible, objective and impartial IAG about progression opportunities. Pre-enrolment IAG that is provided across a number of engagements, traditionally including school visits, open evenings, interviews, tours, taster events and enrolment. Once enrolled, students benefit from IAG during one-to-one interviews, careers events and workshops, tutorials, and enrichment activities including service providers with information stands, student services drop ins, through College principal assemblies/ briefings who also advise on IAG provision / services within their own colleges. Additionally, when a student ends their study, they are included in the Sustained Destination monitoring that takes place, during which they are offered further IAG and regular contact to ensure that they have sustained their onward destination. Students who are completing their studies or who are in defined vulnerable groups are all offered one-to-one careers guidance with specialist staff.

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

Measuring outcomes starts with a baseline assessment of early intended destination, and then this can be followed and tracked along the student journey resulting in actual and then sustained destinations. This journey commences during the interview process, through conversations around career goals that begin at engagement events or open events. Curriculum staff discuss longer term career goals during the initial completion of the learning plan, and referrals can be made to specialist careers staff if the course will not meet the learner's longer term goals and they require guidance. Developmental work is completed to ensure students make informed choices through one-to-one careers interviews and group work, tutorials, employability sessions, progression week activities and exit interviews. Destinations are confirmed through telephone calls with students once they have completed their studies with the College group.

In addition, the students spoken with confirmed that they understood how IAG supports the achievement of 'soft' outcomes alongside the destinations focus. The overall impacts of the IAG are improved confidence or independence, building

resilience, having clearer goals, better health and wellbeing, moving closer to work and / or volunteering and being more active in the community. This is often captured in case studies that are widely shared.

The impact of the IAG across the whole group is measured through the Retention and Achievement rates. These remain on the whole well above national average and targets are set accordingly. There have been a number of different improvements made to initial IAG through improvements to taster and open days, to the admissions and enrolment process and to the on programme support which have resulted in improvements in overall retention. Similarly, achievement rates are affected by the quality of the whole college approach to CEIAG and the re-alignment of resources to provide additional and differentiated specialist support which has resulted in an overall improvement in achievement. For R14 of 2022 academic year, Etc is 7% above the overall Further Education benchmark. Specific areas also contributed evidence, for example Construction has an achievement rate that is 6.9% above national rate and alternative provision 11.2% above national rate. Achievement rates for high grade at GCSE for adults are also noteworthy in English and maths at 69.2% (national rate 39.9%) and maths 43.5% (national rate 32.9%). Bede College's 97% positive destination rate is 10% above average destination to university rate. Supporting this is comprehensive and effective initial IAG as a result of developments to the marketing and course information provision, as well as continuous improvements to taster and open days, to the enrolment process and by creating greater consistency of the tutorial programme support.

The **matrix** Accreditation Review Assessment once again noted the genuine commitment from staff to provide a quality person-centred approach to students in friendly and welcoming environments. Examples of continuous improvement found included:

- Increased employer engagement across the whole organisation.
- Developing ten career pathways provides access to relevant trips, such as Teesside Crown Court.
- Ensuring a minimum of two guest speakers per subject per year (most learners study three subjects).
- Introduction of Tutors' half-term meeting with the Principal to discuss vulnerable students.
- Care experience learners offered a separate tour of college facilities; following student feedback, this will be moved from June to April to avoid a clash with GCSE exams.
- Greater use of technology, for example, practicing welding using VR headsets.
- Following Covid-19, the decision to keep the Progress Coach role in supporting students with catchup sessions.

- Supporting recruitment has seen the introduction of the 'Your Future' workshop (in schools).
- Introduction of the 'About Me' proforma providing a holistic view of Knowledge Skills and Behaviours required for different career paths.
- New 'Careers In' blogs, a termly careers newsletter, 'Careers in Nutshell' videos and the re launch of The Girls' Network are all supporting the new CEIAG strategy.

The Assessors found that continuous improvement is at the centre of the approach and that staff feel confident in trying new approaches that benefit students.

What is working particularly well

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

- There is strong leadership and commitment to a clear IAG offer. Indeed, this is the CEIAG intent and fits the organisational forward looking strategy. Leaders and managers highlighted the care taken to ensure effective communication about the direction of the service and their strategies to deliver effective IAG. Staff consistently spoke about feeling *"trusted, supported and empowered"*. There is a strong commitment and student focus built on organisational values. All of the entities of Etc have made a public pledge of commitment to provide a stable careers programme. Working in partnership with TVCA and The Educational Development Trust (EDT), Etc is hoping to achieve the Quality in Careers Award. Additionally, the Gatsby benchmarks self-assessment has been audited by TVCA, and all were deemed to be met (1.1 / 1.2)
- Considerable measures have been put in place to ensure both staff and students feel safe throughout their interactions. For example, staff are provided with training to help them to support students, for example, creating a discussion around the subject of healthy relationships. Any students felt to be 'at risk' can be referred to the Safeguarding team by a member of staff or another student. This can also be conducted anonymously via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), or students can self-refer. In addition, if a student uses college equipment or Wi-Fi, specific monitoring systems are in place to capture negative language, such as self-harm, these are also flagged to the safeguarding team. Staff also have access to the 'Hub of Hope' APP, an NHS-backed application *'that connects you with local mental health support services in the United Kingdom'*. Staff also described an instant reaction to the current news feed on the harmful effects of VAPs, which was researched utilising credible sources to provide accurate IAG on which vapes should be avoided, etc. (1.3)

- The level of wellbeing support provided for staff was much more than might normally be expected. The senior leaders have worked tirelessly to make sure staff are supported. Examples range from physical wellbeing such as undertaking ergonomic assessments for home homeworking, as well as providing workplace wellbeing activities in an effort to address mental wellbeing. As a result, staff felt that their wellbeing ensured that they were in the best place to address issues of student wellbeing. In turn, students spoke of the “*caring and considerate*” nature of staff. Additionally, students can access a range of enrichment activities, such as football, table tennis, and board games. Both staff and students have access to a digital well-being course. And finally, Bede Sixth Form classes don’t start until 10am to support staff and student wellbeing, with only two lessons taught daily; however, the college still provides students with access to more than the minimum number of taught hours set by the Government. (1.4)
- The resources given to Continuing Professional Development are extensive. A comprehensive CPD calendar covers topics from induction and mandatory ‘core’ training such as health and safety and safeguarding, to professional qualifications and workshops as well as leadership and management courses. As a direct result staff commented on the benefits to them in their roles. For example, “*This is my first management role; I have felt one hundred percent supported; it has been amazing*”; “*We have access to fantastic training programmes, to support us to stay up to date*”; and “*The support and opportunity for continuous professional development has been phenomenal.*” Impartial CEIAG is provided by the Personal Progression Coordinators (PPC) who either already hold or are working towards IAG Level 6. In addition, all staff members are required to ensure they complete a minimum level of CPD, with staff confirming they complete back-to-floor days and read updates from a range of industry-relevant professional bodies. (2.5)
- Partners are well developed at strategic, operational and local level. They ensure that Etc can enrich its IAG offer to students; for example, a new co-designed scholarship with British Petroleum (BP) provides potential students with several opportunities to enhance their Knowledge Skills and Behaviours, whilst Fuji Film is supporting the development of a ‘T’ level qualification. A partnership with the National Careers Service supports students with access to job profile tools. Other partnerships encourage students to get involved with the local community, for example, working with supermarkets to support local food banks and deliver an element of social value. Employer partnerships provide students access to work experiences and, in some cases, guaranteed interviews leading to sustainable employment. (2.8)
- There has been significant investment in resources to effectively deliver IAG and Etc has remained in a positive financial position. Staff and students described below-average class sizes, with students able to access Course and Personal Tutors and access to financial and safeguarding teams, providing extensive monitoring of all ‘at-risk’ students, ensuring appropriate

support is available. Each campus is updated to keep it looking and feeling fresh, with investments being made to support students in accessing new technologies; for example, NETA students can use VR headsets to practice welding safely, and by working in partnership with Northern Gas Networks, an opportunity to get involved with the development of an Economic (Eco) hydrogen heated home. (2.8)

- There were numerous examples found of activities that are in place to reach potential new students. As a direct result, more people than ever are expressing interest in Etc courses and enrolling where it is the best option for them. During the assessment, staff described several methods to engage with potential new students, including a new bite-sized tool, 'Your Future', encouraging potential students to complete an 'About Me' proforma. In addition, in local schools, years nine and ten are encouraged to participate in fun activities linked to various career paths, such as a drug testing scenario linked to a sporting event. Potential students interested in Law and Criminality participate in a 'who done it' experience, whilst potential Business and Geography students have an opportunity to plan a sustainable event. (3.2)
- A wide range of IAG activities is delivered that supports both achievement and progression outcomes. Staff described a good mix of one-to-one, group, face-to-face, and online virtual IAG resources, such as the VLE. At Bede College, a bespoke in-house progress monitoring system is used that captures and rates each student's effort, current grade, the current level they are currently working at, and attendance record. During the academic year, students participate in five or six formal assessments, managed through an 'Assessment Wrapper' process that involves the student predicting a grade before the assessment and again immediately after. Once the assessment has been formally marked, any differences between the initial prediction and actual results are discussed. If necessary, an action plan is implemented, which may involve supervised study to support the student in getting back on track. (4.1)
- Evidence gathering to support continuous improvement is a routine activity. This starts from the top through effective governance and oversight providing suitable check and challenge and through the Business Planning Performance Review (BPPR) process. The overarching feedback strategy is now well developed and embedded and use of TVCA and other local Labour Market Intelligence drives decision making and IAG delivery. As a result, Etc is a learning organisation. (7.1)

Development suggestions

Development suggestions 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 development suggestions. 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.

- Whilst promotion of support available seeks to attract the right people to the right course at the right time, it is acknowledged that there are too few females represented on engineering provision (specifically at NETA). Etc acknowledges this and has plans in place to address it. This will be interesting to review at the CIC as described above. (1.2)
- In order to ensure staff training continues to support the objectives of CEIAG strategy, consideration might be given to IAG qualification types and levels for different job roles. This may include researching what is available, costs and entry requirements of full qualifications alongside identifying possible modular approaches where needs arise, for example, on careers theories or motivational interviewing. (2.2)
- Whilst there is an openly available description of the IAG of offer, more could be done to highlight feedback opportunities. Engagement rates vary and student recollection of this is low. Some organisations have used incentives to good effect to improve their engagement and consultation strategies. (3.1)
- In order to better monitor and evaluate 'soft' outcomes, Etc is encouraged to devise a process that measures distance travelled. Where this works well, consideration is given to the reflective discussion it prompts between the staff member and the student about their distance travelled across a range of self-selected outcomes. Individual level analysis can then be aggregated and information can be 'cut' to give a more meaningful overall analysis. (5.2)

Conditions of Accreditation

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2. During 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.
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