

INSPIRED TO ACHIEVE



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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Sue Harding
Visit Date	16/09/2020 – 17/09/2020
Client ID	C18882
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Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	29/06/2021
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	29/06/2022
Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	29/06/2023

Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Inspired to Achieve (referred to in this report as i2a) has, until this year been a wholly owned subsidiary of Yarlington Housing Group (YHG), offering employability support to both YHG tenants and to a wider community in Somerset, referred through sources including Job Centres, funders, other external agencies and some self-referrals. i2a also works with schools who come under the remit of i2a's funded projects, to provide independent careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). YHG has recently merged with the Radian Group to form a larger Community Services organisation – with a name still to be announced. i2a is now part of the Projects and People Directorate as a separate entity, and continues to offer its services to support people in line with its vision - *'to offer opportunities that empower people to fulfil their potential and progress into sustainable employment'*.

The merger has led to a new Group strategy to 2025 that has 3 Pillars – for Employment, Community Empowerment and Health and Wellbeing, respectively. i2a's provision sits under the Employment Pillar, and its objectives include those to – *'Develop new services including digital'*; *'Work with schools, Upskill, Apprenticeships, Career pathways'*; *'Build partnerships/develop networks'*. A key performance objective (KPI) is for i2a to get a further 750 people into employment by 2025, contributing to the overall organisation's KPI of 2000, and another to provide the best service, with a satisfaction rate of 100%.

The current projects of i2a, that all fit with its mantra of *'Changing Lives'* are Yarlington Opportunities funded through YHG and primarily for YHG tenants aiming for any job, better job, career (ABC); Employment Support to Somerset West and Taunton for their tenants and other referrals who meet the criteria; Positive People in partnership with Pluss as Lead Partner, and funded by the National Lottery and European Social Fund, supporting people 18 + who are unemployed or economically inactive, into employment, training, or job seeking; and a contract delivering CEIAG to schools, funded through the South Somerset 14 – 19 Partnership. Each contract has its own set of reporting KPIs and target outcomes, with numbers moving into employment being a common thread for 3 out of the 4 projects. There is also a Skill Up project that is focused around upskilling through apprenticeships.

The Head of i2a continues to lead, reporting to a small management Board, and supported by a dedicated team of staff. Their line manager is the Managing Director of the Community Services company. A robust performance monitoring system within i2a has continued, with a schedule of Board and management, staff, and team meetings to review performance against objectives and targets at all levels, and to identify and action any improvements required. A particular success has been the arrangements put in place due to restrictions from Covid-19, to ensure 'business as usual' was maintained using a virtual platform - Microsoft Teams and telephone contact, with schools and clients worked with. Although the pandemic led to a drop in referrals of 54%, and a 51% drop in job outcomes, the referral to conversion rate has been maintained. Staff talked about how communication during remote working has kept them well informed and connected, through emails, staff, and team meetings and as one person mentioned, *"10-minute video chats which have boosted morale"*. A monthly whole Directorate call provides people with the wider business picture.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) is embedded in i2a's provision. It is the service offered - from initial contact following referral to all the following stages of initial assessment, action planning and ongoing support to help people achieve their goals into or nearer to, employment. As one member of staff commented *"IAG runs through all elements of our work"*, while another said *"IAG runs through me like a stick of rock"*, before explaining it is in their enthusiasm, attitude and how they work with clients. The impartial service is delivered by employment and change coaches, who all hold Level 4 advice and guidance qualifications; and a team of qualified CEIAG advisors, who work with the 11

schools currently contracted with. These delivery staff are line managed by two lead employment coaches. Employability support covers a wide range including CVs, application forms, job search and whatever a client needs to enhance their opportunities for employment Advice on relevant training courses and qualifications, volunteering, and support to access funding for qualifications were also quoted. Signposting and referral to relevant resources and links for barriers to be overcome prior to employability support, are also provided, with MIND Navigator mentioned as one source of referral for mental health issues.

The IAG policy sets out the aims of the service, two of which are to - *'provide all customers with impartial, bespoke and responsive IAG which enables them to make informed decisions'* and *'make our customers aware of relevant services to support their journey to education, training and employment'*. Customer satisfaction surveys have maintained a 100% rating for the last four years. From April 2015 to February 2020 overall outcomes achieved included 2733 clients engaged, 1203 into employment, 567 into training and 132 into volunteering or work experience. The social value reported on to 2018 was £2.5 million. From April 2019 to 31 March 2020, 258 customers entered into employment against a target of 250, 88 people went into training and 390 were engaged with, but there were no overall targets for these two areas.

Target outcomes for each project are as defined in contracts, and members of staff interviewed were all familiar with what targets they need to achieve. For example, the YHG Opportunities project has the biggest into employment target at 215 a year, while the Somerset West target is for 120 into employment over 3 years. Members of staff described individual targets and how these link to KPIs. For example, KPIs for 5 customer satisfaction surveys a month and 1 case study, along with targets of 4 people into employment a month, and 50 into employment a year were described by one member of staff, although the latter target could be discussed due to Covid-19.

Individual outcomes such as increased confidence and increased knowledge and skills to apply for jobs, or to improve chances of employment, are collected and promoted via good news stories and comments displayed on the website and social media. One staff member commented *"you can see how you've affected someone's life"*. There were plans to collate and analyse data for these outcomes, but this has not yet been completed, and is a recommended area for development in this Report.

Contracts with schools are based on agreement with each school for the outputs it wants i2a advisors to deliver, and these may include assemblies, open evenings and career fairs attended, meetings with parents, group work sessions and one to one careers guidance. Provision is reviewed and agreed annually, and i2a supports schools' targets against the Gatsby Benchmarks ensuring that what they deliver meets the guidelines. One school noted the impact of buying in i2a's external CEIAG was that it was one of the best schools in Somerset for low early leavers from those students going on to college. Another impact for schools is the low number of leavers falling into the not in employment, education and training (NEETs) group, and the number of positive and varied destinations of pupils, that confirms the impartiality of CEIAG provided. For one school, the number of NEETs had decreased by 50%, from 6 down to 3 which they described as *"linked to the work X does"*.

Since the last **matrix** Assessment in 2017, work with schools has expanded again, including increase in amount of days delivered, work with Special Educational Needs (SEND) schools and with Pupil Referral Units in South Somerset. A supported pre-employment programme for SEND learners is being led by a member of the Careers team, and a mentoring programme has been developed supporting Pupil Premium students in one school. A new system was introduced internally – replacing the staff appraisal with 'Great Conversations', a system of monthly one to ones between staff and their line manager, to discuss work related and any other issues. This system was reported

as 'having gone down really well', and staff interviewed endorsed that, with comments including – *"Great Conversations works for me very well. I prefer it to an appraisal. It's definitely two-way"*. Another addition has been a Peakon staff survey, that invites feedback on different themes. This has had a 100% engagement rate, and again staff interviewed were positive about the concept and the purpose, and how they see feedback responded to. A Customer Charter was suggested at the last **matrix** Assessment, and this was initiated, and has since been re-designed to provide very clear information on what clients can expect, and what is expected of them in a user-friendly format. The digital project planned, has been delayed due to the merger but a member of i2a staff is a representative on the project.

Partners interviewed during the Accreditation Review were all very positive about their relationship with i2a, and particularly from schools about the impact of their partnership. Examples included the careers fair organised by i2a's careers advisor that brought in a wider variety of training providers and employers than previously; work done at one school supporting disadvantaged Pupil Premium students with mentoring and careers advice; and positive comments from Ofsted about the independent CEIAG provision.

Comments included - *"the partnership works really well. I2a are proactive, and have come up with a really good programme"*; *"student feedback is probably the best part of the whole process"*; *"really impressed with their constant evaluation and what they could improve on"*; *"to have the impartial, expert advice is invaluable"*; *"to have someone so competent is absolutely a blessing for me"*.

A range of clients from different projects were also spoken with, and while they had varied goals in seeking i2a's services, from help with CVs, application letters and interview support, to enhancing their job prospects with further training or volunteering experience, all were very satisfied with the support received, which in many cases exceeded their expectations. All confirmed how everything was explained at the start, how they had gone through an initial assessment and agreed an action plan, and how regular contact had been maintained while supporting them. Examples in clients own words included – *"everything was explained at the start. I had help with my CV, and they found me a job – a better job than before I was made redundant – I go home happy now"*; *"they talked through steps to a job and helped with my CV. I was given great support, found 2 jobs, and am now working"*; *"X opened the door for me. Has made me more confident and given me a flavour for what I really want to do, and steps to get there. I think they're a really good service"*; *"they've been a godsend – helped me to settle into a new area, introduced me to what they could do, and discussed steps I need to take to progress my goal. There's a lot of positivity in my life now"*.

One member of staff commented that *'i2a is an ever moving, ever evolving organisation – proud to say I work for them'*. This was borne out by findings during the Accreditation Review, including by clients who described *"the absolutely fantastic support"*, and partners proud to work with i2a.

Strengths

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

- Open communication from senior management about the changes within the organisation, and the aims and objectives from strategic to KPI level has ensured that people feel kept informed of progress, as well as what they are seeking to achieve in terms of targets to contribute to the wider goal – of *‘helping people to achieve their potential’*. One person commented that *“as it stands, how we’re progressing as a company – they’re doing everything they can”*. (1.2)
- i2a has been proactive in responding to the Covid-19 situation, and in providing services through virtual technology. Action included working with a partner organisation to produce guides to virtual platforms for staff, that were also sent out to clients, to enable continuous provision. Ongoing contact has been maintained with clients worked with, either virtually or by telephone. (1.2, 2.1, 2.2)
- i2a has worked to develop partnerships both to widen and enhance provision. One example being an increased number of schools worked with, and increased hours and provision with some schools following annual reviews. Partners spoken to were very positive about the service provided by i2a and the outcomes achieved. Regular programme reviews and annual reports ensure both parties reflect on what has been achieved together with any areas for further development or improvement. (1.8, 4.4)
- The two weekly Labour Market Information (LMI) meetings enable the team to share information on vacancies, redundancies, new businesses starting and any new training opportunities in their own areas, which keeps everyone up to date with key information to support their clients, and to ensure consistency in advice on current and appropriate possible opportunities. (2.1, 3.5)
- i2a’s provision continues to be delivered by a well-qualified team of careers advisors, employment and change coaches, who all display a passion for supporting their clients on a pathway that is right for them as an individual, and who share information on jobs and training to ensure all are up to date. As one client put it *“they really listen to what you want to do – and there is no pressure to do anything they suggest”*. *“Given the help to actually DO it – I couldn’t have done it on my own”*. Another client mentioned - *“I can’t express how impressed I was with the help I received, how X was so quick to act to get funding for the course I needed. They were very proactive in finding ways to fund the course and the materials that went with it. It will enhance my prospects of a job or self-employment”*. (2.3, 3.2)
- IAG delivered by i2a staff is truly Impartial. It is focused on facilitating what is best for the individual to meet their needs. This impartiality was well demonstrated, in conversations with staff and partners, and with examples to highlight this from clients. Clients described how information and advice was based around a range of options relevant to their identified goals. One member of staff commented *“we can go where we want for what we want, to meet our customers’ needs”*. (3.3)

Areas for Development

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

- i2a has a website that is informative, but possibly more geared to stakeholders than to potential clients. When the website is reviewed as part of the new structure, better promotion of IAG could be considered for inclusion, such as a link to the IAG policy, so that stakeholders can get an initial summary of this key aspect of i2a's service, and an explanation of IAG that clients can expect could be provided in user-friendly style. Another key omission to be considered, is a more up to date digital presence for Careers provision on the website, that could also include information for parents. (1.6, 3.1)
- There are already processes in place to co-ordinate Employment Services across East and West areas of the new organisation, and some sharing of practice through meetings is already taking place. Going forward, further methods to align Employment Services, share practice and ideas, and to adopt consistent processes where possible could be worked towards to enable a recognised quality to whole organisation employability provision. (1.2, 2.1)
- A number of clients spoken with who were YHG tenants were not aware of i2a until signposted by a YHG staff member. While recognising that i2a's provision has some limitations, consideration could be given to displaying posters in communal areas, and to a mail drop of flyers to tenants with i2a's details, to enable them to access i2a's services when they first need them, rather than wait to hear about them from YHG staff. (1.6, 2.2)
- Contract outcomes for numbers into training and employment, and information on wider social impact from YHG have been well promoted on the website and in the strategic plan in infographic format. Going forward if more data on individual outcomes – such as numbers reporting increased confidence in their skills and knowledge to find appropriate employment as a result of i2a's support, could be collated and promoted along with other infographic data, this too would demonstrate to stakeholders the impact of i2a's specialist IAG provision. (1.5, 4.2)
- A Digital platform was being worked on, and has been delayed because of the merger and Covid-19, but this was an area identified by staff as needing development to support efficient and effective ways of working – such as more delivery of services digitally for increased engagement with clients; and wider recognition by the organisation of the importance of IT resources for service provision. (4.7)
- Although social media is used to promote news and services, through an i2a Twitter account and staff's individual Twitter pages, this is another area that could be considered for development within the new organisation, to maximise on opportunities to inform and update stakeholders including clients utilising different channels. One example could be appointing someone to update social media and maximise its effectiveness. (1.6, 4.7)

- Going forward, when the new organisation has a name, and is fully operational as such, consideration could be given to widening the scope of **matrix** accreditation beyond i2a's provision. This could ensure an organisation-wide understanding of IAG and the **matrix** principles, and cohesion in the IAG services delivered. (4.8)

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

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

Methodology

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

A total of 28 people were interviewed during the 1.75 assessment days. Due to the current Coronavirus situation all interviews were conducted remotely, using a mix of Zoom, Microsoft Teams and telephone calls. The breakdown is given below:

12 staff including the Head of i2a and the Managing Director of Community Service Company, Employment and Change Coaches, Careers Advisors and Administrators interviewed in a mix of one to one and group interviews – all via Zoom except one using Microsoft Teams

3 partners, including 2 schools and one lead project partner – all by telephone

13 clients, including 1 school careers lead and 12 clients who had experienced i2a's service across different projects – all by telephone

The i2a website was reviewed prior to the assessment, and a range of documents were provided at the start and during the onsite time. These included the current strategic plan, the new community strategy; i2a customer charter; IAG policy; contract targets and performance; project reviews and reports and the completed **matrix** self-assessment tool.

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.