

Commercial in Confidence



RELEASE POTENTIAL LIMITED



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1. Assessment Information

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Assessor's Name	ANGIE PEACOCK
Visit Date	3/12/2018 – 5/12/2018
Client ID	C11668
Assessment Reference	PN103802
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	4/12/2019
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	4/12/2020
Accreditation Review on-site visit to be conducted by	4/12/2021

2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes

Release Potential Limited (RPL) is an independent training provider and provides support to employers and both employed and unemployed learners. Based in Stocksfield, Northumberland, training/support is delivered predominately in the North East of England and increasingly across the whole of England. Its Vision is *“to eradicate ignorance through education and unemployment through training”* and Mission *“to engage and integrate our flexible and responsive learning expertise across a diverse range of public and private sector organisations with the aim of providing a seamless route to workforce-upskilling and world class quality education”*

There have been several changes since the previous review:

- The organisation continues to deliver Apprenticeships with Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding, in the areas of Health & Social Care, Hospitality, Business & Administration and Management. However, as a result of the Government reforms the major focus for the organisation with Apprenticeships has/is the changes with the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy and Apprenticeship Standards.
- In contrast to the previous review where the emphasis was on Apprenticeships, a key focus is now on the delivery of the ESFA Adult Education Budget. The organisation has developed the Returneeship programme, a unique programme of support for unemployed adults aged 40+, who are a distance from the job market to help them take positive steps towards gaining employment.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provided by RPL is clearly outlined within the Learner Handbook and is provided as part of the recruitment process for example to ensure that learners are engaged on the right programme, on an ongoing basis to ensure learners are progressing through the programme and as part of exit discussions to provide support with progression. An integral part of this is offering informed, comprehensive, information, advice and guidance to enable people to explore options and support them to access learning, training and employment opportunities that meet their individual needs.

“We help people change their lives – we give them that sense of worth” - staff.

“We’re all about changing people’s lives for the better” - staff

The Returneeship programme is delivered in a partnership approach with DWP. Staff are working with a vast number of Job Centre Plus offices across England who refer learners on a voluntary basis onto the programme. A typical Returneeship course is made up of two elements; a 2 week classroom based programme and a one or two-week work placement based within a company working in a sector of interest, which is organised by Job Centre Plus. RPL staff deliver the classroom element of the programme where learners work in teams to develop a business idea. Through working together and

covering aspects of setting up and running a business, learners achieve the following qualifications:

- Level 1 Employability and Personal Development skills – CV's, cover letters, money management, application forms and interview techniques.
- Level 1 ICT – publishing flyers, creating presentations and using e-mail software.
- Level 1 Customer Service – Health and Safety, customer complaints, employment rights and responsibilities, principles of customer service, personal performance and development, working with others and communication.

Support is provided to learners who can include the most vulnerable or excluded in society and are often those furthest removed from the labour market, to help increase their confidence, skills, well-being and employability. The challenge for staff is to engage with learners and help them to remove their barriers to learning and progressing in life and this is where the particularly unique element of the programme comes into its own. Prior to undertaking the classroom element of the programme, learners are involved in the production of an episode of The One Show, complete with television and production crew. Working as a team, learners get the opportunity to interview high profile individuals/employers/organisations in their local area and the process takes them out of their 'comfort zones' and helps to engage and motivate them.

Being mindful of the barriers faced by learners in relation to their confidence and anxiety levels, staff outlined how they build relationships and create trust with learners. Staff explore with learners their personal, learning and work goals which are developed into an Action Plan and Personal Profile Passport. A final exit discussion takes place, which helps the learner think about and be supported as appropriate when they undertake their work experience. Learners are supported with a range of services including:

- Confidence building, help with self-esteem and dealing with social exclusion.
- Skills including employment skills, enterprise, work experience and volunteering.
- Help with job search and preparation for voluntary work, or employment.
- Support with maths and English and IT skills.

The programme is further enhanced as following the learners work experience, a reunion is held with both RPL and JCP staff to look at how the work placement went and support learners to progress to other opportunities including further learning, training and volunteering and/or employment.

Apprenticeships remain part of the core offer of support with RPL. Predominately in Health and Social Care delivery takes place with their existing employer base, through staff making employer contacts and as a result of learners who have previously been supported by RPL. Staff provide support for potential learners through early engagement to ensure that the potential learner is making the right Apprenticeship selection and also to explore with employers that the appropriate qualification is going to be delivered. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) has been introduced which formally sets out responsibilities for all parties. As part of induction learners undertake an initial assessment and diagnostic for their English and Maths and support is provided by the Assessment staff who provide specialist support as required by the learner.

Support is provided throughout the qualification and Standard delivery with regular reviews to ensure progress not only on the qualification but as part of a learner's personal and social development. Towards the end of a programme IAG is provided to support those learners who would like to progress further, either internally with RPL or externally through signposting to another provider or college etc.

Learners could describe the difference the support had made to them through the interventions at differing points of their journey, from first point of contact through to exit.

"The support has been excellent – really helpful – always offering help"

"They got into my head, and helped me sort it out"

"They're organised, have time for people, it's been better than any other course I've been on and I've got a job out of it"

"They're good at listening to you and helping with your needs – It's helped with my morale and confidence"

The organisation works to a number of targets and success measures e.g.:

- 77% overall Apprenticeship success rate.
- 98% overall AEB achievement rate.
- 94% attendance rate.

Staff described how outcomes including the achievement of a qualification and gaining a job for learners are measures of success as part of targets and contracts. The organisation has achieved overall good success rates for its Apprenticeships in 2017/2018 of 77% and particularly noteworthy has been the achievement of Level 4 Apprenticeships at 90.9%. There have been ongoing reductions with Apprenticeship numbers which have been outside of the control of the organisation e.g. organisations having to move to central delivery, non-progression from Level 2 to Level 3, learners who leave and some organisations are waiting to see how Apprenticeship Standards unfold. However, it has been good to see that the organisation has acquired new employers and employers who have returned to RPL once they have been allowed to do so.

RPL have currently delivered 63 Returneeship programmes to approximately 1,600 people. They are achieving excellent results with classroom provision at 99.4% achievement and timely at 91.1%.

Other achievements include:

- ISO 1401:15 in May 2017.
- Leaders in Diversity in October 2017.
- UK Steering Group of the Year and Most Improved Organisation 2017, as part of the National Centre for Diversity Awards.
- Small Business of the Year 2018.
- Recognised as Disability Committed, Disability Confident and working towards Disability Confident Leader.

Although staff recognise the importance of achieving targets for contracts as this ensures that service delivery is sustained, they also articulated how the measures used helped to enable learners to make progress “in their lives” by reducing barriers to progression and helping them to develop skills that are needed for the workplace or seeking employment. Staff described how through their help and support, learners made progress towards their individual goals and it was the ‘softer’ outcomes that were more frequently described.

Staff variously described the difference that the help and support provided is intended to make to individuals, and the actual difference made. Ultimately this related to learners moving closer to the labour market, but other indicators included people engaging in learning, increasing confidence, and enabling progression. Staff monitor these successes through the on-going reviews with learners and monitoring their Action Plans, production of case studies to highlight the impact the service has made and through discussions in team meetings and reviews about learners’ progression. Motivational questionnaires are used for Returneeship learners to self-assess against a range of indicators.

The support is reviewed against its impact on targets and was acknowledged as contributing to figures relating to achievement, success and progression, through initial contact, initial assessment, induction, progress monitoring and performance review. Monitoring and review takes place including self-assessment and regular tracking. Feedback is obtained from learners, employers and staff.

Ongoing changes have continued to develop and other examples of changes that have been implemented included:

Restructures of the organisation have taken place to reflect changes in delivery. As there has been a reduction in the numbers of learners for Apprenticeships, there has been a reduction in the need for Assessors. However, this has been counterbalanced with the increased demand for the Returneeship and the new/increased staffing roles e.g. Recruitment Consultants, Returneeship Co-ordinators and Tutors. The changes in roles have also needed to reflect that delivery has expanded across the whole of England,

which means that staff can spend time working away from home. To attract the right calibre of person to these roles, RPL have changed their recruitment processes to include an initial presentation from the organisation to make clear the requirements of the roles and to give potential recruits the information needed for them to make an informed decision.

Further enhancements have been made to the organisational structure and the roles of Senior Learner Support and Senior Tutor have been introduced, to provide not only further progression opportunities for staff but to also recognise knowledge and experience of staff.

Although the programme was developed with the over 40+ in mind, there has also been requests by JCP to extend the age groups and work around the needs of particular learners. Examples were provided of pilot programmes being held on a part-time basis to allow learners who have personal restrictions, e.g. single parents to attend, also female only programmes and integrating younger age groups into some programmes.

Staff work closely with JCP staff to recruit learners onto the programme and this process has been strengthened with Recruitment Staff engaging with potential learners at JCP offices.

The logistics of planning each Returneeship programme are immense and specific timetables are produced for every step of the way. A process map has been produced to depict each element of the planning process, this is in addition to venue checklists and course content files, 'The Bible' with information, lesson plans etc.

Other examples included the ongoing improvements to communication and the introduction of the Update Newsletter to keep staff up to date with systems developments and key performance data. Including the introduction of e Tutor to replace the previous register system and enhancements to PICs to provide paperless form completions, which will be a more efficient process and assists RPLs drive towards being a paperless organisation.

Moving forward the organisation awaits the outcome of its request for additional funding with the ESFA and the opportunities this will create for Returneeship delivery, as there is a waiting list as the demand for the programme is so high. The organisation is also going to explore opportunities to deliver Apprenticeships in different sectors e.g. higher levels in management and accountancy.

3. Strengths

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

- There appears to be a unique positive culture within RPL with strong team work and camaraderie. Staff felt that a number of factors helped in its creation; a team who also socialise outside of work, strong leadership from the Directors who complement each other with a strategic, operations and quality focus. The ‘family feel’ remains and the *“personal touch from staff who genuinely care”*. Staff described how the culture at RPL encourages staff to deliver a service which enables everyone to achieve his or her best. All staff interviewed spoke positively about the support they received from the Directors, and this has helped to create an effective working environment, which in turn supports them to support learners. Work life balance also remains a priority and several examples were provided of the support provided, which they appreciated. (1.2)

“Brilliant – best company I’ve worked for, it’s like a family, everybody cares about each other”

“I love my job – I’ve been given the opportunity to show what I can do”

“I enjoy what I do and the difference we make”

“I love it here – it’s a good place to be, feel valued – work life balance is good, you’re not just an employee, you’re part of the family”

“Everyone is so passionate about what they do – everyone is aiming for the same thing – people work here because they want to support people”

“I can honestly say I know that we are all pulling together, have good staff morale, everyone brings something different, everyone bounces off each other – that’s what makes us work, we are one big melting pot”

- A particular strength of staff is their ability to convert the ‘mind set’ of learners, who have many barriers to learning. Staff have an ability to engage with learners and give them not only the motivation to learn whilst with the organisation, but also the drive to progress to further learning and employment. It was also clear to see that staff are very passionate about ensuring they deliver a quality service. They demonstrated a very flexible approach to engaging and enthusing learners and staff talked about how they help people to get ‘their mojo back’. It was continually emphasised by not only staff, but learners also, how the organisation is ‘learner centred’. Many examples were provided which highlighted how staff *“bend over backwards”* to support people. (3.2)

- The programme has been so successful in changing learners' confidence levels that DWP have brought in work psychologists to undertake a major evaluation of the programme to see why it is having such a positive impact upon learners. It is difficult to highlight one single factor that has made the programme so strong, but a number of areas highlighted include; its uniqueness, the blend of delivery, engagement of learners, the energy of staff and motivational delivery, team building, fun, whilst also addressing a gap in the market for support for 40+ age learners. (3.2, 4.3)
- Commitment to continuous improvement is embedded within the organisation and is apparent through standardisation, quality and observations, the sharing of good practice, audits and inspections. Staff involvement opportunities in reviewing and reflecting on quality and delivery also occur through communication processes including the Staff Development Days. Staff feel valued and appreciated for the work they do. This not only comes from the areas highlighted above but also the very effective support mechanisms, including performance management processes, commitment to CPD, career and progression opportunities, feedback and opportunities to be involved in decision making. This combination has led to high levels of staff morale. Great opportunities for progression within the organisation were highlighted, with many examples of staff commencing with RPL as part of their Returneeship work experience or as an Apprentice and progressing to achieving supervision and management positions. (1.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6,.4.8)
- Partners were extremely complimentary regarding the working relationship they have with RPL. They described how they had confidence in the work carried out by staff who have a good knowledge, excellent skills and continue to maintain the good reputation of the organisation. They gave examples how the Returneeship programme and staff energised learners and how they saw the positive changes in customers, some who they have worked with for several years. Specific examples included a gentleman who is in his late fifties and had never worked, however following the Returneeship and his work experience, he has not only improved his personal life but obtained employment. (1.8, 3.2, 3.4).

"They are so good at building relationships – we all have the same common goal"

"Great working relationship, we genuinely have – it's always positive – I know it's making a difference"

- Employers and Apprenticeship learners highlighted the commitment of staff who they feel give 100% effort in the support they provide for learners. They liked the tailored support provided and options provided to learners to support them with their preferred learning styles.

"We have such a close working relationship, it is seamless, they keep us up to date with everything and they work with integrity"

"They do what they say they are going to do – we have trust in them"

"Assessor is outstanding and always at the end of the phone if we need her"

“Highly supportive, extremely professional, very knowledgeable”

- Learners were very complimentary regarding the support they received from all staff involved. They appreciated the help that is provided to them in an environment that helps to break down their barriers to learning and is delivered in such a flexible way. They described how they develop good relationships with staff that are approachable. This supportive approach is highlighted in the following quotes. (3.2, 3.4, 3.5)

“I felt hostile about coming on the course, but they tapped into that, brought the best out in me, it’s made such a difference, they’re interested in you, I’ve never had that in a course before – they have really helped with my confidence – amazing people”

“I recommend it – they passionately care about learners - service is so good”

“I had no confidence or self-esteem – I felt very depressed – I’ve been on loads of courses, but never one as good as this and I’ve had loads of help - now I’ve got a job – it’s changed my life”

“I’ve been able to change my outlook on life and change my career – they treat you as equals – keep your confidence levels up – it’s that little extra they give you”

“I can’t praise them enough for the help I’ve had – you never feel alone or left out – they keep in touch – I can’t fault them – everyone is very very helpful”

“Absolutely amazing, I’d been on so many courses, but this one is 110% different to anything I’ve ever been on, I want to go on it again! I’ve recommended it to so many people. It’s boosted my confidence, I got into my head that I couldn’t do things, but it’s stopped me thinking like that, I’ve done things I would never do before”

4. Areas for Development

A number of areas for development were identified during the assessment which may develop or enhance the service delivered. These are detailed below and for the organisation to consider as part of its ongoing continuous quality improvement actions. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard. 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.

- A variety of feedback mechanisms are in place including informal and formal, during reviews and the use of feedback questionnaires. Staff highlighted how the use of the motivational questionnaires used for Returneeships provides a focus to highlight some of the softer, human centred changes that learners experience as a result of the support provided. Consideration could be given to developing something similar and in conjunction with employers as part of the Apprenticeship learner journey. This would help to highlight the added value learners achieve in addition to their qualifications/Standards, and also would be useful for RPL as part of marketing e.g. on social media including the website to highlight the support provided. (1.5, 4.3)
- Currently paper based feedback questionnaires are completed by learners and as part of improving learners digital knowledge, it may be timely to explore the opportunities to gather feedback electronically. This would not only reduce time for collating the information but also strengthen the support provided to learners and support the RPL paperless organisation approach. (4.2, 4.3, 4.7)
- Learners described how they use the electronic portfolio, e-Assessor as part of both Returneeships and Apprenticeships. Consideration could be given to developing some form of basic Learner Guide for the system, as although they highlighted that the system was introduced to them as part of induction, once they had completed their Returneeship they lost confidence on how to use the system and employer feedback suggested that it may encourage learners to make greater use of the system. (3.5, 4.7)
- The organisation could explore the greater use of posters on the training room walls or the use of portable boards to promote the outcomes achieved by the organisation. This could include good job outcomes, the support with maths and English achievements being obtained as well as the wealth of 'soft' outcomes achieved e.g. confidence, team work, job ready etc. Short snappy quotes from learners could also be added, to let new learners know the positive feedback that their predecessors have provided. Also, quotes from employers could be included to demonstrate the opportunities that may be open to learners as a result of successfully completing their programme. These could also be included on social media and enhance the 'talking heads' videos. (15,1.6, 4.7)

- With the potential of staff growth in the future, to enhance the induction process consideration could be given to inviting new staff to provide an initial pen picture including a photograph to send to all employees introducing themselves. This could strengthen the process as many staff are working on an outreach basis and may not get to see a new employee as part of initial induction. (2.5)

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 <http://matrixstandard.com/continuous-improvement-checks/>. These may include the Areas for Development above.

Please note that annual Continuous Improvement Checks are mandatory and noncompletion within the required timescale will impact on your organisation's accreditation, please see Section 1 for dates.

5. Methodology

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

- Visits to Stocksfield and Halifax.
- One-to-one, small group and telephone interviews were held with 14 staff.
- Group and telephone interviews were held with 24 learners.
- Informal interviews were held with 4 partner organisations.
- Review of documentation including plans, policies, procedures, evaluation questionnaires, website, action plans and promotional information.
- Feedback at the end of the Assessment with the CEO, Finance & Technical Director and Director of Operations.

Conditions of Accreditation

Holders of the **matrix** Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
- Throughout the period of accreditation satisfy Assessment Services Ltd that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.
- Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out 3 weeks either side of the accreditation anniversary date.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.
- 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.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrix@assessmentservices.com .
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- 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.
- 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 Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to being a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.

Whilst accredited the organisation will be signed up for IAGonline - a community website for all **matrix** holders. Once signed up, any employee of the organisation can join the community and access regular posts and join specialist interest groups for support and discussion.

	
PO Box 14, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 0EL	T: 0044 (0) 2038805059 E: matrix@AssessmentServices.com https://twitter.com/matrix_standard

