Matrix Report

2021

RELEASE POTENTIAL LIMITED

Compact Report V7
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The **matrix** Standard is delivered by The Growth Company
on behalf of the Department for Education.
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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Chris James
Visit Date	07/12/2021 – 09/12/2021 (2.5 days)
Client ID	C11668
Assessment Reference	PN201003
Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	04/12/2022
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	04/12/2023
Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	04/12/2024

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Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Release Potential Limited (the organisation) is a private training provider based in Northumberland. They deliver innovative and engaging programmes of support which aim to get people back into work or move them closer to the job market. They aim to provide what they describe as, *'A seamless route to workforce-upskilling and world class quality education'.*

The organisation previously delivered an apprenticeship programme which, due to changes in funding has now ceased and all apprentices have completed their programme. The main priority now for the organisation is the delivery of services which utilise the ESFA[1] Adult Education Budget, through partnerships with DWP[2], Job Centre Plus and Combined Authorities. The organisation's partnerships are strong and collaborative with many partners describing high levels of professionalism displayed by staff at all levels. Those accessing programmes (learners) represent a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, many having been out of work for some time, having multiple barriers to work, or both. Eligible learners can access structured programmes including:

- Traineeships - for those aged 16-19, providing a route into employment through a combination of classroom based learning and work experience

- Returneeships (a brand developed by the organisation) – for those aged 25+, 40+ and 50+ providing a route back into work for the long term unemployed

- Startships - for those aged 19-24 wanting to maximise their chances of being accepted onto a Kickstart Job Placement

- Hybrid Learning Courses - for those aged 19+ offering a wide variety of short courses in different sectors such as, Care, Retail and Hospitality. These have been developed to offer a greater level of flexibility to learners, providing classroom and online study methods to suit individual circumstances

- SWAP[3] - which helps prepare those receiving unemployment benefits to apply for jobs, an example of this is Civil Service jobs.

The organisation is led by the CEO supported day to day by the Director of Operations. A Team of around a dozen Tutors and Learner Support (LS) deliver learning programmes. Senior staff meet with DWP regularly to pull together plans for programmes of support which meet local needs. The Recruitment Team meet with Job Centre staff to promote the programmes through 'Comms Meetings' and the administration team take initial enquiries and provide essential 'back-office' functions including the provision of Management Information and processing certificates.

Regular team meetings keep everyone up to date with how the business is performing, any changes in legislation as well as an opportunity to keep staff motivated through team updates. Twice yearly Staff Development Days are a good opportunity for everyone to get together and without exception all those who were asked said they valued the time taken to attend. Morale is high and people like working for the organisation. *"It's the best place I've worked".*

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[1] Education & Skills Funding Agency
[2] Department for Work and Pensions
[3] Sector-based work academy programme

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Information, advice, and guidance (IAG or 'the service') is delivered through a range of provision and supports the organisation's Vision *"To eradicate ignorance through education and unemployment through training"*, and includes:

- Promotion of the service through presentations to Job Centre staff, directly to claimants, and via the organisation's website and social media posts

- An initial IAG session delivered either face to face, via telephone or videocall to ensure potential learners are eligible, and programmes are suited to their aspirations

- Enrolment which includes completion of essential paperwork and clarification of expectations

- Initial assessment which identifies the learners preferred job role, potential barriers and provides the foundation for any action planning including any additional support needs

- Support and guidance to consider the learners' starting point in terms of 'softer skills' such as self-belief

- Support and guidance to set up any digital resources for online learners such as Zoom, including training on how to make best use of the software

- Support to develop or refine a CV and the completion of job application forms to support learners with their employment aspirations

- Interview tips and techniques including mock interviews to ensure learners are fully prepared

- 'After Care' which offers post-programme support to those who need a little more help or preparation for interviews. This stage also provides valuable progression data.

The vast majority of learners access the service through a referral from their Work Coach. Following the referral learners are contacted by a member of the team who gather information to ensure the programme is suitable for them as well as gaining information about their employment aspirations. Learners are then formally enrolled and given start dates/times. Learner details are then uploaded to e-Assessor by a member of the administration team. The majority of learners have a couple of weeks' notice, although some said they were only told about the programme by their Work Coach the day before. All learners interviewed regardless of notice period described a thorough introduction to the programme and many appreciated the time and effort staff put in to ensuring they were aware and prepared. *"I only knew the day before, but it was fine, they went through everything with me".*

Learners are made aware that they will complete a 2-day project prior to the start of the programme, but crucially, not the exact nature of this. The first 2 days is intended to stretch & challenge learners (in a positive way) which builds their confidence, increases their motivation, develops team-building and communication skills. Traineeships, Startships and Returneeships all follow the same format, which ensures consistency of delivery. Day one begins with a task where learners are invited to produce a live episode of a thirty-minute magazine style television show (along the lines of The One Show). Learners are introduced to professional TV studio equipment and practices which includes sound recording, lighting, and editing equipment. Supported by Tutors and LS, learners are allocated specific roles such as presenting, photography, research, reporting, and set design & production. Programmes take account of the local community with for instance support agencies and employers acting as guests on the TV show. This gives learners the opportunity to show off their new found talents and confidence. Without exception learners described the 2-day project as the best part of the programme, using words such as creative and fun to describe it.

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SWAP follows the same process with the 2-day project being more appropriate to online delivery with Podcasts being developed rather than learners going out into the community to interview people. Learners then move into the classroom environment (either face to face or remotely depending on restrictions) where they are supported to achieve the Foundation Learning and Employability Skills qualification as well as others which are relevant to their chosen employment aspirations such as Customer Service, Marketing and IT. SWAP learners receive specific information which outlines the requirements of the role as well as support to produce behaviour statements; ERR[4] including relevant legislation; career pathways, and guidance on The Civil Service competency framework (STAR or CAR). They also have the opportunity to gain feedback from mock interviews which helps to lessen the levels of anxiety and prepare them for the next steps. A small number of learners commented that they expected the classroom element to be *"boring"* and were pleasantly surprised to find that the same level of creativity and fun was on show as the 2-day project. *"Once the 2 days were over, I thought oh no this will be where the boring stuff starts, but it was just as good as the 2 days"*. Tutors and LS provide relevant and realistic options for learners, particularly those who have little knowledge of the industry they wish to work in. *"It opened by mind to other options such as being freelance."*

Towards the middle of the programme, employers and learners meet through the 'Market Place' event. This allows employers to present the roles they have available and tell the learners a little more about their business through 'A day in the life of'. This also provides learners with valuable insights into the sector or role as well as dispelling any myths. In the vast majority of cases, employers represent the sector or role that learners are interested in, and all have live vacancies to present. On a small number of occasions, the learner's aspirations are a little niche and although the team try hard to get relevant employers along to the Market Place, it isn't always possible. One learner commented, *"The employers didn't really have the role I was after, but it didn't matter because I asked questions and tried out some of the skills I'd learnt during the programme"*. Next steps are also discussed which may include signposting or formal referrals to another organisation for additional or specialist support. The organisation has built up some strong relationships with local and National employers including NHS and West Midlands Metro which provides learners with a variety of roles at varying levels of responsibility. A final 'celebration event' takes place which is a chance for learners to really take stock of the journey they have been on and what they have achieved through a 'reflection' exercise.

The purpose of the service is to move learners closer to the job market, or as with SWAP, secure employment. Although employment is the key outcome for SWAP, partners have been reluctant to impose targets on the organisation, nevertheless, managers have their own expectations of what will be achieved both for SWAP and other programmes. All programmes are expected to have high attendance levels and a positive destination (employment or further learning). Attendance across all programmes is consistently good, ranging from 94% - 96%. All programmes have good employment outcomes although SWAP has the highest. This is due in part to the nature of the learners who in the majority of cases are that bit closer to the job market, and the targeted approach to the programme. Managers have set themselves an internal target of 75% employment outcomes (a partner commented that they would like *"A hand-full of job outcomes per cohort"*) and although success fluctuates between programmes throughout the region (Civil Service SWAP out-performs other programmes), the current average is 79%.

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[4] Employee rights and responsibilities

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Retention is also high (although there is no target for this) with the 2-day project being particularly effective at keeping learners motivated. A tutor commented, *"If we get them through the door on day one then they come back"*. The ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19 had an impact on outcomes last year and the team have worked hard to continue delivering the service *"as close to normal as possible"*. Continuous improvement continues to be embedded into delivery with additional programmes being developed in partnership with DWP to meet the ever-changing priorities of the regional economy. Startships has been developed specifically to support young people to take advantage of the Kickstart Job Placements initiative which follows the same outline as the already hugely successful Returneeships, and around 60% of learners have already found employment.

Learners improve their softer skills whilst on programme such as confidence, teamwork, and communication which they are then able to use within the workplace, or more generally through personal interactions. *"We did a lot of work on spreadsheets. I'd never done that before and I'm now using it for managing my household money"*. Part of the final celebration event (including the reflection) was observed during the Assessment via Zoom. During this, learners described how their confidence had improved as a result of the programme and many were visibly emotional as the reality of what they had achieved became apparent.

Surveys are conducted throughout the programme which capture learner feedback as well as soft skills development (distanced travelled). Feedback from learners is very positive with scores in the high 90's for all questions including 'The course has improved knowledge, skills & understanding', 'Advice and guidance on future personal development was provided', and 'Clear about expected achievements'. Feedback also captures 'Improved confidence and motivation' with 96.52% of learners confirming this. A Motivational Survey is completed at the start and end of the programme and captures progress against soft skills such as self-belief'. Data for this area shows an average of 66.52% at the start with 83.61% at the end. The use of technology has had a positive impact on the learner's experience where previously learners were completing paper-based workbooks and it a lot of cases sharing laptops. Learners now have access to e-Assessor for all their theory work with a loan scheme being put in place to support those who do not have access to equipment. Wellbeing is a major consideration both for staff and learners and the team now conduct wellbeing checks regularly with learners as well as 'support logs' which detail any intervention which can then be shared with appropriate others, providing a more complete picture of the support learners have received.

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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. Consideration has also been given to the revised version of the **matrix** Standard therefore this is noted where appropriate.

- The organisation's greatest strength is its people. Recruitment & selection is effective at attracting and retaining people with the right skills and attitude to deliver the service. Induction is thorough and provides the right balance of information giving and shadowing others. People have good career prospects, and many started as participants on programmes themselves. Staff described a supportive and encouraging environment where reporting lines are not a barrier to accessing management or others who can help. *"I don't necessarily need to go to my manager for help, everyone is available and happy to help each other".* This approach has the benefit of ensuring that the organisation's vision for supporting it learners and 'releasing their potential' continues to be delivered through enthusiastic, passionate, and competent people. It also goes a long way to ensuring performance indicators are met. (1.2, 2.4, 2.5)

- Learners consistently described the 2-day project at the start of their programme as the best thing about it. They are extremely complimentary about the way Tutors and LS engage with them and encourage them to go beyond what they thought they were capable of. *"If I'd known about the project first, I wouldn't have signed up. There's no way I'd have thought I could stand up in front of people".* The benefits to learners go beyond just the 2-day project. They develop skills that employers need and value such as teamwork as well as other skills which they can use in their daily lives. (3.2, 4.2)

- The organisation uses it resources well. The website has a wealth of information which helps learners to consider if programmes are right for them, for instance, *'You could be suitable for a Returneeship if you'.* (2.1, 3.4)

- Partnerships are a major factor in the success of programmes as they are developed with the aim of meeting local needs and filling gaps in provision elsewhere. This makes them hugely successful in meeting these needs. (This area around 'meeting defined needs' may be included within the revised version of the **matrix** Standard.) Senior staff have good contacts with a range of employers and learners with very specific (and often niche) aspirations have the opportunity to meet with employers and gain employment. (2.1, 4.1, 4.4)

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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. Consideration has also been given to the revised version of the **matrix** Standard; therefore, this is noted where appropriate.

- The CEIAG Strategic Plan sets out the aims of the service as well as how it links to the Gatsby Benchmarks. A detailed annexe to the plan also identifies the key stages through a flowchart. Whilst this more than satisfies the current version of the **matrix** Standard, it is likely that the revised version will require any policy to be much more explicit in the following areas

    o the nature of IAG available throughout the learner journey, and how this is tailored to their needs

    o who will be involved in delivering this and the skills/qualifications they posses

    o who is eligible for IAG and the intended benefits

    o any key partnerships/limitations to the service

    o any feedback mechanisms/complaints procedures

    o how the service will be monitored/quality assured.

    It may also be beneficial to consider aligning this document to the CDI[5] Code of Ethics which could provide an increased level of scrutiny when carrying out performance discussions with staff, as well as demonstrating to stakeholders the quality of provision. The code can be accessed here. (1.3)

- Data relevant to the development of soft skills is included in both surveys and shows very positive results. The first of the two Motivational Surveys are carried out after the learners have participated in the 2-day project and whilst this gives an indication of impact, it does not capture what could be the true extent of the difference the service is making. As learners cite the project as being the most beneficial in terms of 'difference', it may be more appropriate to bring forward the Motivational Survey to either the initial IAG session or enrolment which could show a more accurate starting point. A scoring system (perhaps 1-10) which is then re-scored at the end of the programme is likely to give a more accurate account of impact. (1.5, 4.2)

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[5] Career Development Institute

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- DfE[6] has produced a framework of good practice for remote education, including a scoring template used to self-assess the quality of online provision. As managers are already familiar with this concept, it may be useful to consider noting any actions as a result of the scoring within any quality plans which could ensure the online element of delivery continues to be delivered to the same high standard as face to face classes. This may also prove to be beneficial when considering the revised version of the **matrix** Standard as the use of technology is likely to be a greater consideration. (4.5, 4.7)

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.

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[6] Department for Education

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Methodology

The following methods were used to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard during the assessment process. In line with the Governments' Social Distancing Policy, the assessment was conducted remotely.

- Planning discussions with the Director of Operations

- Telephone interviews with 3 partners, 8 members of staff, and 8 learners

- Video conference interviews with 5 members of staff

- Observation (via Zoom) of learner presentations including a reflection exercise where around half a dozen learners described the difference the service had made to them

- Review of relevant policies such as, H&S[7] and Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion

- Review of relevant documentation including Strategic Plan, IQA[8] Monthly Summary, CEIAG[9] Strategic Plan, SAR[10] and Management Information Reports

- Review of the organisation's website

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[7] Health & Safety
[8] Internal Quality Assurance
[9] Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance
[10] Self-Assessment Report

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.