

Matrix Report

2024



Assessment Report

Release Potential Ltd

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Dr. Sue Newberry
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	03/12/2024 – 05/12/2024
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C11668 - PN202634
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	04/12/2027

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	03/12/2024 & 05/12/24 remote by ZOOM or telephone calls 04/12/2024 onsite
Staff interviews	10
Recipient interviews	23
Partner interviews	6
Document review	Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboard, analysis of equal opportunities data, learner handbook, marketing materials, promotional events calendar, quality improvement plans, Internal Quality Audit Summary report, learner feedback, case studies, session plans, various policies, observation form and associated development plan, staff development logs and staff qualifications overview. A demonstration of data management systems.

About the organisation

Release Potential Ltd (RP) is a private training provider based in Northumberland. RP have held the matrix accreditation for over 15 years and the whole organisation is in scope for this assessment. Current programmes include Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) to support applications for careers in the Civil Service and attaining a Level 2 Certificate in Customer Service, a Level 3 Certificate or Diploma in Coaching and Mentoring as well as Employability skills.

RP deliver Returneeships (for recipients over 50 years of age) and Startships (for 19 – 29-year-olds). These programmes include IAG and are designed to develop employability skills for job seekers including specific sector-based skills and competencies. Both programmes include group work activities as well as one-to-one support, employer visits and job fairs.

RP is well established and works hard to develop strong partnerships with a range of organisations to support and add value to their services. Partnerships are initiated and developed by the CEO who works closely with partners to identify their needs and develop solutions with senior managers. Hence many programmes are tailored to the needs of local employers and partners such as a recent Returneeship programme for hospitality.

“Their key strength is the ability to flex. They can identify needs and put the right support in place quickly.” [Partner]

RP develop close working relationships with Jobcentre Plus colleagues. Managers provide detailed information about referrals, enrolment, successes and liaise closely to support recipients. Jobcentre Plus managers value the regular updates about successful recipients – Jobcentre Plus staff find this particularly motivating. Some Jobcentre Plus staff are successful “graduates” of RP’s programmes themselves and hence act as role models to potential recipients.

Leaders are well networked and proactively strive to ensure that they are not only up to date but “ahead of the game” as far as possible with regards to changes in policy and plans that may impact on RP’s work. For example, the CEO attends the Work, Health and Labour Market Thematic Panel (West Midlands Combined Authority) and works closely with the 50+ Groups and Youth Champion teams.

Partners respect RP, their efforts to support the needs of the local community and acknowledge the quality of their provision. RP’s performance, outcomes and impact have helped them to grow their provision most recently in the West Midlands area and win new contracts.

“Their performance was excellent. It just works so well.”

“There is a genuine progression path that is ahead of other contractors.”

“One of the best providers in terms of progression routes.”

Leaders and team members are passionate about creating a quality experience for recipients. As one manager said, “We’re giving people what they want and things

that will benefit them and their journey. It's about quality rather than quantity." Staff consistently described what quality IAG looks like including a clear understanding of what the recipient needs to be working on and what actions are required to support progression. Partners also recognise the company's commitment to living their values and quality.

"It's their passion – it's not all about the money for them. They just have such pride in getting people into work."

"This company are properly committed. I've never met a provider with so much dedication."

"They make a difference to people's lives."

"As a team, they're fantastic. They genuinely want to help people to achieve and every learner is important."

"We know when we refer to them, they will be safe and well supported. The confidence building is amazing."

The organisation works conscientiously to engage with hard-to-reach groups. This work is respected and supported by partners such as the Compass' Social Hub, that provide a guaranteed interview to any recipient from a disadvantaged area.

There is a clear staffing structure and clearly defined roles in place to support IAG. The CEO leads on development work with existing and potential partners. A Partnership and Customer Experience Manager and Officers deliver initial IAG and recruit learners. A Recruitment Manager oversees the promotion of programmes and liaison with partners such as Jobcentre Plus. A Curriculum Manager oversees the design and review of training programmes and content, including the embedding of IAG. IAG and contact time with learners is optimised by having both Tutors and Learner Support staff in all face-to-face sessions and having a dedicated resource, an independent marker, to mark assignments remotely. Day-to-day operations are overseen by the Operations Director and a Technical Support team is available to for both recipients and staff.

There are regular weekly meetings and a KPI dashboard is shared with the team to help focus resources and IAG on priority areas. The open and transparent culture encourages personal leadership and initiative amongst team members. The team collaborate to continuously evolve their processes and services, supported by different working groups such as those focussed on environmental and mental health and wellbeing issues.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Led by the CEO, the team work hard to promote their services and reach a diverse range of potential recipients including close working with Jobcentre Plus colleagues. They invest resources to deliver a varied events calendar comprising job fairs, community events, SWAP events and specialist initiatives such as working with

Wolverhampton Migrant Centre, Green Lane Mosque, graduate events, and Walsall Works Expo at Walsall College.

New electronic flyers include QR codes and provide direct access to course details. PR's brochures have been enhanced to provide detailed IAG about the course content, structure and helps manage expectations about the course. Recipients confirmed a range of methods through which they learned of RP and their programmes including word-of-mouth, events, listening to presentations, as well as via their job coaches at the job centre.

RP take a holistic view of each recipient and invest time to get to know each person. The level of support provided is recognised by partners as well as the recipients themselves.

"They invest time not just as a work coach but as a life coach they keep in contact. It's like a lifetime service." [Recipient]

"They provide quality time with someone who wants to help you." [Recipient]

Team members' previous life experiences, vocational experience and health conditions add considerable value to the recipients experience on programme and helps them to connect with recipients. As one member of staff said, "That connection, that trust, is important to me...It's important that you understand where they've been".

IAG is embedded throughout all programmes at RP and IAG is tailored to the needs of the group and the individual's needs. For example, IAG is embedded in lesson plans and for programmes such as Returneeships and Startships, IAG is designed to address higher-level barriers to employment and progression. Such barriers include low levels of confidence, additional learning need, health issues including mental health conditions so additional staffing, IAG resources and IAG sessions are therefore provided.

Specific IAG sessions are provided at enrolment, at the midpoint and towards the end of each programme. Additional IAG is tailored to the needs of the individual and is flexibly provided throughout their programme and beyond.

RP sets its own standards for customer service to ensure effective and efficient engagement with potential recipients to facilitate initial IAG. For example, team members aim to respond to Jobcentre enquiries within one hour. Initial IAG focusses on getting to know the person and help them relax and engage with the team.

"I was a bit scared at the beginning but from the first phone call, they made me feel comfortable."

From initial contact recipients are supported through to an enrolment process through a phased IAG process. In Phase 1 initial IAG involves information gathering undertaken on the phone, via Zoom or face to face in the job centre. This IAG includes checking eligibility, prior experience and education as well as identifying potential barriers. Care is taken at this point to make sure the programme is right for

them at this time. As one manager said, "We want to make sure it's going to benefit them."

Phase 2 involves providing detailed IAG about the programme and enables the recipient to make an informed decision about the options available. Options discussed at this stage may include referrals or signposting to other forms of support or alternative provision. Phase 2 includes completing enrolment paperwork and logging recipients on the PICS system. IAG at Phase 2 also covers the Wrap Around Support (WAS) comprising one to one IAG and support, a rolling programme of evening Master Classes and Day In the Life Of (DILO) events where employers describe their organisation, different types of jobs available and potential career pathways.

Recipients consistently noted how quickly they were progressed onto programmes from first contact. One said, "Following the phone call, I was enrolled quite quickly and then the following week I started the course."

The team are proactive in identifying and removing potential barriers to participation not just on an individual level but also in how courses are structured. For example, for recipients engaged in remote courses they can be provided with loan laptops should the Job Centre be unable to help. RP also ensure that their courses do not start on a Monday as this can prove intimidating. To help reduce anxiety and get to know other recipients, RP often arranges for recipients to meet in small groups before starting the course together.

Taster session sessions have recently been introduced to provide more detailed IAG about the programme and supported to learn about Zoom to facilitate their learning, IAG sessions and access to the Zoom channel through which live job opportunities are promoted.

Pen Portraits of recipients help pull together important information, such as additional learning needs or mental health conditions, that help brief tutors and enable them to tailor training sessions and IAG support. At the beginning of the course recipients undertake initial assessments, such as Basic Key Skills Builder (BKSB) assessments. Key topics including safeguarding, Prevent, British Values and how to stay safe online are included in the induction.

The team work hard to deliver quality IAG in an appropriate manner that optimises recipient engagement and retention. For example, at the beginning of Returneeship and Startship programmes recipients engage in an extended, specialist icebreaker activity to prepare a 30-minute TV show. Recipients undertake all roles associated with the production of the show, including acting as interviewer, participant, filming and editing. This icebreaker activity was greatly valued by recipients and its impact is also recognised by funders. As one partner observed, "After that they are on a high - so applying for a job after that it's a piece of cake!"

Recipients recognise that the approach of the organisation and atmosphere created helps them relax and feel comfortable.

“It was not like tutors and students - there was a more friendly atmosphere.”

“They understand you and they are really friendly. I didn’t expect that.”

“It was more like a family to be honest.”

For those recipients with additional needs, including mental health and confidence issues, the approach was particularly valued.

“I really enjoyed the course. Looking back, it was not very stressful at all.”

“They were respectful, motivational – they really boosted my confidence.”

The IAG embedded within courses addressed topics including writing personal statements, behaviour statements, tailoring CVs for different job applications and preparing for interviews. Different resources were harnessed to enhance the experience for recipients. For example, team members supported applicants on the Civil Service programme to understand the STAR (situation, task, action and result) method to answer interview questions; psychometric testing was used to build personal profiles and videos were provided on various topics such as professional behaviours. Recipients were introduced to different techniques to manage their job search activities such as the importance of completing a Jobs Log. For Startship and Returneeship recipients CEIAG one to one sessions begin in earnest in week 2.

Recipients valued the additional activities including DILO presentations which help widen recipients’ understanding of potential jobs and career opportunities but also provided recipients with role models.

“There were presentations by different civil service departments describing the ups and downs in their own lives. It was very motivational to see how you can overcome things if you have setbacks.”

Recipients also appreciated the presentations by potential employers and the opportunity to ask them questions.

“The employer session was excellent.”

Wrap Around Support (WAS) IAG addresses personal issues such as referring recipients to Smart Works to access interview clothing and local food banks to overcome financial difficulties. A wide range of organisations and their contact details are described in the Safeguarding and Learner Handbooks. Recipients valued the team’s flexibility and ability to access additional support when required.

“There was an open desk policy and they were very good at supporting me when things were getting on top of me.”

“The coach was willing to give me extra time - helping with cover letters and providing me with template CVs as well as links to other job openings.”

Feedback and IAG is provided throughout the course. Feedback is provided at the end of each assignment and at various stages as learners progress through their workbooks. An independent marker liaises closely with tutors to facilitate bespoke IAG concerning assignments. Feedback from the marker enables the tutor to focus

on actions needed to address any issues raised. Formal progress reviews are carried out at the midpoint of each programme and IAG provided to plan and encourage the next steps, including setting SMART goals to be achieved by the next milestone.

Exit reviews, including IAG, are conducted at the end of each programme. At the end of each face-to-face course there are also special events that help recipients reflect on their achievements and celebrate progress. At such events there is also time allocated for individuals to receive additional IAG and plan their next steps. Some recipients received prizes comprising a chilli plant kit – the symbolism is not lost on the recipients. (The logo of RP is a chilli and as the CEO explained if the plant is nurtured, it bears fruit and then the chilli can be cooked and its full potential released.)

RP makes a clear commitment to provide ongoing support to their recipients. As one manager said, "We have a saying here, 'Once an RP learner, always an RP learner'". IAG, Master classes and live job opportunities are available to learners after their training programmes have ended - this ongoing support is very much valued by recipients.

"They gave us a lot and it's all still accessible now, which is great."

"There's a group chat and they still post jobs - I still look at those jobs regularly."

"The course has finished but they are still in touch with you. It's not like you have finished and they say goodbye."

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

The objectives for IAG are clearly defined in the organisation's CEIAG Policy and includes objectives such as "To help learners to recognise any individual barriers they have and develop realistic action plans to address and manage those identified" and "To help learners understand what skills and qualities are needed to help them achieve their goals and raise learner aspirations." CEIAG outcomes listed in the policy include progression to self-employment, employment, work experience, volunteering and further learning.

RP supports a range of recipients and hence the aims of IAG are tailored to their needs. For people who have been unemployed for a long time IAG aims to enhance motivation, confidence and self-esteem to enter or return to employment. At the beginning of programmes recipients are asked to complete a motivational questionnaire which is repeated on exit to indicate distance travelled against certain criteria. For example. "How would you describe your confidence levels?" and whether recipients "Believed in themselves and their capabilities." Changes in individual scores demonstrate considerable distance travelled.

A key outcome of initial IAG recognised by staff and recipients is to support individuals to identify and celebrate their previous achievements, learning and experience. One team member explained, "There is a genuine element of care in everything we do. You see recipients relax after the (initial) IAG. We've addressed

their doubts but we point out their past history, recognise their skills and reflect them back to them. It's very powerful."

Recipients very much valued this approach and its impact.

"They helped me to realise what skills I've got. I didn't realise I had those skills. With a simple conversation they saw in me something that I didn't see myself."

"It takes someone else to see your potential. The whole team have been brilliant."

"I've done a lot of courses in my life, but hands down, RP are genuine. They want you to do well, to get through the course, and to have an awareness of your own potential and own it."

Many long-term unemployed recipients consistently mentioned other positive outcomes - how nice it was to get out of the house, meet other people in the same position as themselves and get back into the routine of working hours. The bespoke, extended ice-breaker activity to produce a film is highly effective and helps new cohorts gel quickly, make friends and develop effective teamwork as well as start to develop a sense of community.

"I was in a slump and it helped me get into a routine again."

"Doing the course, you learn from other people too. You realise you're not on your own and the other people are in the same situation."

For most recipients, RP's programmes exceeded their expectations.

"It was better than I expected."

"It exceeded my expectations."

"It was better. I've been on other courses via the job centre and I've found them time wasting and useless. With RP they have turned the tables on learning - they actually do what they say on the tin!"

Recipients described a wide range of positive mental health outcomes achieved.

"They had a session on well-being. It was all about eating well and exercise. It was really useful for me."

"Mental health wise the whole course has lifted my personal view of myself. I was thinking I wasn't good enough."

"When I had my onboarding, I said I had a lot of anxiety and they gave me a lot of advice which was really helpful."

"It as life changing to be honest. When you move into adulthood it can be very lonely. I would recommend the course 100%."

Confidence building was a common outcome mentioned by many recipients.

"I didn't believe I could improve my confidence. They pushed me to go over my limits."

"I would definitely recommend the course with all my heart. It's something you will not regret. On the first day you can't imagine that by the end you will be someone completely different."

"This whole thing, it's really built my confidence."

Recipients described a range of positive outcomes including learning how to write effective CVs, cover letters and prepare better for interviews.

"The CV building was the best bit - they helped me to tailor my CV to the application."

Many interviewees completing their programmes had already secured employment and with a wide range of employers. This reflects the bespoke support provided to individuals and IAG offered to support their applications.

"They've helped me to get the job I'm in now and financially I'm a lot better off."

At the programme level RAG rated trackers monitor the performance of recipients and additional IAG and tailored support is provided as necessary. At an organisational level the weekly dashboards help focus RP's resources on priority areas. RP achieves good results against its contract targets. For example, a recent summary report shows that for the academic year 23/24 overall attendance across all programmes is 94.0% and the overall achievement rate is 94.4%. Although early days for destinations the West Midlands Combined Authority 4-week Employment Skills destinations are 71.2% positive with 69.5% moving into employment.

In addition to performance against target monitoring RP captures a range of other monitoring information to help evaluate its IAG offer. A Quality and Compliance Schedule carries out regular internal audits of learner records. Observations of IAG sessions focus on how the staff support recipients and personalise IAG. Weekly CPD sessions address issues arising and support ongoing skills development. Learner Fora capture feedback directly from recipients as well as learner surveys – any issues are actioned quickly to understand and address any dips in customer satisfaction.

Monitoring and evaluation findings are harnessed to inform monthly IQA Summary Reports and quality improvement plans that drive continuous improvement. Such IQA Summary Reports include quantitative and qualitative data as well as quotations. For example, distance travelled across the five learner motivation measures shows an overall average increase of 17.24% from the start to the end of the course.

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.

- [1.1] Senior leaders are passionate about providing quality IAG and support for a wide range of recipients. This has been described as “infectious” and inspires other team members as well as partners and recipients themselves. This results in a strong commitment and personal leadership at all levels of the organisation to deliver quality IAG that is tailored, flexible and effective in meeting the recipient’s needs.
- [1.4] The health and wellbeing of recipients and staff is a top priority at RP. Innovative icebreaker activities help recipients settle in quickly, make friends and help create a sense of community. Tailored IAG and additional support, as well as master classes on health and wellbeing, helped recipients to gain confidence and self belief. Staff are well supported through an open and transparent culture and proactive efforts by managers to create a feeling of “one team” for staff working across different locations. Leaders are mindful of variations in workload and ensure staff get time off as compensation. The impact of these measures is that both recipients and staff said RP felt more like a “family” where people were nurtured to achieve, or exceed, their personal goals.
- [2.3] Initial support, shadowing and reviews are effective in supporting new team members and help inform tailored CPD. RAG rating of staff performance against specific competencies pertinent to their role and IQA processes, including feedback and observations, help inform ongoing personal development and continuous improvement.
- [2.7] Leaders and staff work hard to establish and build strong working relationships with partners, including employers and statutory partners such as DWP. Partners view RP as a trusted partner who “deliver what they promise”. RP is respected as an innovative partner who can adapt their services and “flex” to meet new needs. Positive results, good communication and ongoing feedback to partners about recipient’ successes fuels ongoing referrals, enhances RP’s reputation amongst partners and provides a sound evidence base to support future funding opportunities.
- [3.2] The team are proactive in their efforts to reach their target audiences. They undertake outreach work at a range of events, job fairs and at DWP premises. The team collaborate with partners to engage with ‘hard to reach’ community groups, especially where those populations are more diverse. RP works in partnership with specialist local organisations such as St Basils (a charity supporting young people at risk of homelessness) through which they engage different age groups. New improved, detailed brochures help remove

potential barriers by clarifying expectations, the types of work and timescales involved as well as the range of support and IAG available to support recipients. This means that RP engages and successfully supports a wide range of recipients that reflect the diversity of the communities they support.

- [4.2] RP invest time and resources to get to know each recipient, to understand their wishes and needs. Recipients consistently commented on the team's work to help them appreciate their own existing skills and to value their previous experiences. This is particularly valued by more vulnerable recipients with a lived experience and/or who have experienced setbacks and overcome them. This approach to recognise a recipient's skills, assets and resilience helps to boost confidence and self-esteem and raise personal aspirations and motivation towards employment and progression.
- [4.6] RP provides flexible, tailored IAG and support throughout the recipient's journey and beyond. This 'going the extra mile' and the caring, supportive approach of RP is also recognised and respected by partners. The ability to access ongoing support after the course has ended together with the continued access to resources and job information was greatly appreciated by recipients. This ongoing support helps capture further job outcomes and success stories for RP but also helps recipients achieve their personal goals and make further progress in their career pathways.
- [7.2] RP employ a range of monitoring methods to evaluate IAG including learner surveys, observations of CEIAG sessions and internal audits of recipient records. The team collate and review quantitative and qualitative data on an ongoing, frequent basis to identify and celebrate areas of strength as well as inform quality improvement plans. This strategy helps RP to be an effective "learning organisation" that takes an evidence-based approach to continuously improve its services.

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.

- [1.2] As the organisation continues to grow its reputation and volume of learners it will be important to continue to build on its work around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). An EDI Steering Group could oversee this work and include members that bring different perspectives and their own life experiences. This Steering Group could address wider aspects of EDI concerning staff, recipients and partner organisations. This work could include continuing to analyse performance data for different groups, engaging with role models/employers as part of DILO as well as staff recruitment and progression. Resources concerning EDI issues could be collated and shared with recipients, such as videos of different role models and how they overcame any challenges and barriers. The new role of Ward Champion, identified in the QIP, should help to build stronger relationships at community level and help overcome barriers to initial engagement.
- [5.2] RP have identified some recipient outcome measures captured as “motivation evaluation questions”. For example, “How would you describe your confidence levels?” This approach provides some evidence of distance travelled but perhaps undervalues the wider range of positive outcomes experienced consistently by recipients. It may be useful to consider other criteria such as those identified in specific Outcomes Stars to expand on the current measures. By broadening the criteria used RP would have a more detailed evidence base of individual distance travelled and organisational impact. It may also help RP evidence trends over time. The experienced team at RP may also like to consider developing their own Radar chart using tailored criteria perhaps co-designed with successful recipients who have left their training programme. Such tools would enable recipients and team members to measure and celebrate distance travelled and to evidence their journey towards independence after leaving RP.

Conditions of Accreditation

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

1. Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
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.
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.



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