



matrix[®]
quality standard for information
advice and guidance services

Assessment Report

C&K CAREERS



The matrix Standard is delivered by The Growth Company on
behalf of the Department for Education
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ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Assessment Review
Assessor's Decision	Maintaining Accreditation
Assessor's Name	Steve Jackson
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	27/01/2024 – 29/01/2025
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C11147 PN202668
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	15 January 2028

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	Onsite at Huddersfield and by MS Teams and phone
Staff interviews	30
Recipient interviews	14
Partner interviews	12
Document review	Strategic Plan, Contract Schedule, IAG Policy and Strategy, Project example documentation, Termly reports for schools, Example Contracts/Service Delivery Agreements with schools, Case Studies, Sample documentation from Nexus Project, website and social media

About the organisation

C&K Careers (Calderdale & Kirklees Careers) is a not for profit Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service for young people 11-18 and up to 25 for young people with additional needs and adult guidance service. The services provided are delivered by professionals from Careers IAG disciplines and some staff with youth work and teaching qualifications. C&K Careers was created over 30 years ago and has established an enviable reputation for creative solutions and strong community-focused delivery. C&K Careers is largely funded through commissioned work from Calderdale and Kirklees Councils (so-called Core contracts) with NEETS young people and workless adults and a traded CEIAG service to schools and colleges.

The company is owned jointly by Calderdale Council and Kirklees Council with the University of Huddersfield a major partner. Despite this ownership councils are generally scrupulous about ensuring C&K Careers is subject to the same tendering processes as any other provider. Governance is clear and transparent with a Board of Trustees accountable for the responsibilities of a charitable organisation. The flexibility and structure of the organisation means that C&K Careers can operate commercially and has considerable ability to bid for funding beyond local authority sources. These include the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and DWP programmes with Connect2Work a live example.

Although funders can frame the aims and objectives for C&K Careers there are specific values of integrity and client-centredness which underpin its priorities. The focus is early intervention which has the effect of reducing later costs of specialist provision. This is achieved by employing professionally qualified (L4/L6/L7IAG) Careers Guidance advisers working flexibly with partners to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable young people. Since the last **matrix** Standard Accreditation Review held remotely in 2022, C&K Careers has developed a more targeted service with specific groups of vulnerable young people, such as those in the looked after system, to ensure this focus is translated into greater impact.

The traded service to schools has also improved. This comprises CEIAG and personal development which is still being delivered successfully to around 60 schools because of C&K Careers' focus on school priorities and enabling schools and colleges to provide strong responses to meeting Gatsby Benchmarks and NEET reduction targets. The use of digital solutions has meant that access to high quality information is improved.

The scope of the **matrix** Standard Accreditation Review in 2025 was agreed to be the services provided to schools and colleges through the Traded Service, vulnerable young people with particular reference to the services to young people with additional needs and those with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, and services to adults. C&K Careers is a sub-contractor for EDT for the delivery of the National Careers Service.

The range of services has improved such that C&K Careers is a truly an all-age Guidance service and there is 'no wrong door' for users of its services. The **matrix** Assessment Review provided the opportunity to explore the way in which the operation of high quality IAG services provide better outcomes and significant impact.

As may be expected the definition of vulnerable young people can produce a long list of characteristics but is necessary to aid the effective deployment of limited resources and to make the best use of the skills of professional staff. The priorities for C&K Careers include: Children Looked after (CLA) and Care Leavers (CL), LGTB+, BAME young people, young people in the Youth Justice system, those with special educational needs and those with emotional and mental health needs, young people who are not engaged with school including those missing from education

(CME) and those electively home educated (EHE). Stereotypically any young person from these groups could be said to be at risk of becoming NEET and none will present with exclusive characteristics from these priorities. Indeed C&K Careers is very aware of the need to avoid labelling and providing 'off the shelf' solutions. C&K Careers staff must use their professional judgement to determine how best to remove perceived and actual barriers to progression and ensure that referral to other partners is carried out within agreed professional standards and agreement from young people and their parents/carers.

To enable C&K Careers to achieve its aims there is clear and positive direction from senior leaders, which is very well communicated to elected LA members and LA senior staff and to partners. Robust reporting ensures that decision makers are aware of what C&K Careers has achieved and the added value these services bring. This is set against a backdrop of considerable financial constraints. Indeed during the year 2023/24 £2 million was removed from the C&K Careers Core Services budgets which led to reductions in services and aggregate but balanced increases in traded services charges. C&K Careers was able to bid successfully for replacement funding from a variety of other sources to replace much of this reduced funding. It is recognised that the cost of managing a wider range of contracts adds additional monitoring, administrative and reporting burdens as well as the need to scan for funding opportunities. C&K Careers Business Development staff have created robust networks to be alert to such opportunities and possess considerable expertise in bidding. C&K Careers accepts that it faces significant competition from other much larger organisations but it is able to 'punch above its weight' and its collective contract performance and impact adds a competitive edge that many are unable to match or promise.

There was no evidence that representatives of partners interviewed did not understand the positive impact of having a dedicated and focused careers IAG service. One senior LA leader interviewed described the difficulties and additional costs that would accrue without C&K Careers, with none of the coherent partnership working C&K Careers has created. It takes years to build such capacity and trust. As a result of its effectiveness C&K Careers enjoys a strong reputation for the integrity of its services, which schools are happy to buy and other partners recognise in an organisation they are very pleased to work with and now see as vital for their own success. There was evidence of enhanced reputations for partners by association with C&K Careers. The IAG provided to partners and to employers is as significant as that provided to young people and jobseekers, and is, perhaps, under-appreciated. Partners derive confidence and assurance by being partnered with C&K Careers, and clearly their own performance is enhanced and augmented by C&K Careers.

As a careers organisation managing the contradictions of a careers market that is dysfunctional nationally, at a time when careers services and their interventions are generally recognised and needed, C&K Careers continues to be among the best

careers companies available and it is clearly the hard work and commitment of C&K Careers staff that has kept it at the top of the careers profession.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

The IAG service provided by C&K Careers continues to evolve very well recognising the priorities of funding and the needs of the sub-region and communities. Indeed it should be stressed that C&K Careers has established a significant community based service that delivers close to points of referral. By virtue of the work with families and individuals staff encounter in the communities there is a strong identification with ward-level or district level activity. Although services are delivered by professionals using 'traditional' methodology such as 1:1 interviews and group work for Careers Advisers and in effect detached youth work, C&K Careers is clear that its staff need to continue to refine and innovate to meet the often complex needs of young people. Work around NEET prevention requires in-depth individual IAG and to improve outcomes for vulnerable people involves bespoke approaches. Such work needs time and some activities may not succeed. C&K Careers staff showed considerable tenacity and dedication to help young people and adults progress and to take increasing ownership of their lives. Moving beyond the 'traditional methodologies' has led to more project work being undertaken in responding to funders' priorities.

There are some operational factors that give C&K Careers an edge over comparable services. For example C&K Careers has developed the use of digital platforms to give access to high quality current careers and employability information. The use of the MyDirections platform provides young people in schools and colleges with high quality careers information to help them make informed decisions. The site includes CV Builder that guides them through the process of creating a CV while the provision of virtual work experience with virtual World of Work (WOW) programme which includes preparation activities. JED (Job Explorer Database) suggests careers pathways and includes over 340 video case studies, pictures, quizzes, 'top tens', career facts of the day, and text. These are particularly effective with young people with additional needs.

C&K maintains a visible town centre office in Huddersfield and operates in key districts at community centres and on other partners' premises to ensure young people and adults have good access to services provided. There is an excellent range of projects and targeted services that seek to meet the needs of specific vulnerable groups and a variety of differently timed activities. Financial support is available on some contracts such as help with transport for those in greatest need, and referral to food banks is increasing. Support for workless young people and adults is characterised by close family working and home visits and strong referral networks that give access to services that vulnerable people may not think they have access to. The brokerage role of C&K Careers staff operate is key to many of the outcomes described by recipients of C&K Careers services. The speed of access and response and effectiveness of personal IAG support is frequently beyond the scope of other services.

One of the main aims of C&K Careers is to move young people from being NEET or at risk of becoming NEET to EET and C&K Careers sets out a clear Core NEET Offer supported by a number of projects and programmes targeted at vulnerable groups. The Core Offer includes CEIAG, Employability Skills, interview preparation, named staff and physical access to a safe point of contact and IAG. Priority vulnerable groups such as young people with SEND, care-experienced young people and care leavers receive enhanced offers of support such as experiences of work, support to use social media platforms and a single point of contact, The latter is particularly important since most young people in the vulnerable groups will reflect on experience of discontinuity of support and to them, broken promises of support. The difficulty of navigating the SEND system is well known and a single point of contact can help restore trust as well as enable better outcomes from the system.

One of the many challenges faced when working with young people with additional needs is to ensure that there is an expectation of work and of independent living. Parents and carers sometimes need to be convinced of this and young people too. To help realise these opportunities C&K Careers has created programmes designed to move on young people who are NEET and have an EHC Plan. One of these programmes is Supported Internships (SI). C&K Careers has created a number of excellent opportunities for SI with employers in the private as well as public sectors and it is hoped to expand this programme. Other programmes are differentiated by access to alternative kinds of support such as Bootcamps and Pathways to Progress which has additional work experience placements, support with basic skills and in-depth IAG. A Green Pilot Programme includes a short course that helps participants understand sustainability and where to look for job roles, green skills in construction and mock interviews with so-called 'green employers'. All these programmes are delivered with IAG embedded in the activities so that either 1:1 or in groups there are discussions that encourage progression.

The Traded Service delivered to schools covers about 60 schools and colleges some out of area in Bradford, Leeds and Wakefield. Service levels are determined by negotiation with schools and recorded in an annual Service Delivery Agreement (SDA). Although schools are offered different activities they tend to buy in 1:1 careers IAG for Y10/11 and Y12/Y13 where appropriate. School Careers Leaders' time and resources vary considerably as well as seniority. Interviews with senior leaders and careers leaders demonstrated considerable confidence and enthusiasm for C&K Careers emphasising the value of the partnership and how C&K Careers staff helped to improve outcomes for the students. Comments made included 'fantastic staff', 'brilliant careers advisers' and 'amazing support'.

Innovative solutions featured greatly with a variety of activities that explored how to encourage students to overcome difficulties and progress. An excellent example is the Nexus Project which provides a programme of tailored curriculum activities, often a reduced GCSE programme up to three days a week and two days' work placement/experience of work. Participants are from y10/y11 and C&K Careers provide mentors to give personal and careers support to the participants. Staff are

fulfilling the Personal Adviser role that was prevalent in Connexions' activities with the added benefit of close cooperation with school staff and other agencies. The provision showed what can be achieved with young people who are often 'written off' and the C&K Careers enabling IAG role supported the school to achieve more and create trust. Employers are contributing additional support and some young people have been offered apprenticeships at the end of Y11. Parents of two participants highlighted the positive change that Nexus had created and the significant benefits to the quality of life for the family. Senior school staff noted the considerable benefit of not having to manage the poor behaviour and attitudes of young people who previously had taken up disproportionate teacher time and disrupted other students' progress.

Similarly the NEET to EET offer delivered through the Core contracts gave rise to innovative solutions and an interview with one partner showed how complementary approaches maximised the opportunities for better outcomes. It is clear that embedding such skills in partnership work leads to impressive results and builds strong links between C&K Careers and education and training organisations.

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

C&K Careers works to Quality Assurance standards that identify how managers and staff monitor effectiveness and demonstrate value for money. C&K Careers recognises the need to provide measures that report on outcomes, impact and value for money. Not only do these measures need to build and maintain a robust evidence base but capture soft skill development and be consistent with accepted performance measures. For example, for employability activity current measures include numbers of contacts and attendance, numbers of vulnerable young people engaging with C&K Careers, feedback and annual survey, annual SEND survey, case studies and feedback from events and feedback through the website.

Measurement of soft skills development is critical to the Nexus programme and this is achieved through the use of Placement Journals that aid reflection and development. The use of the Spider Web of Self-Reflection captures thoughts and feelings through mentoring about personal development. This is an established tool that captures personal and social development, and its use provides consistency. Since young people are helped to identify changes this begins to raise awareness of self and build confidence.

As part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of professional practice and to understand the quality of IAG C&K Careers uses a variety of activities to ensure the quality of professional Practice. Regular Observations of Practice and more recently Peer Observations, have raised the level of good practice sharing and implementation. C&K Careers staff know they need to try different solutions for each case and ensure these are shared. Six-weekly sessions with line managers help to build a climate of supervision and ensures appropriate 'risk-taking' is considered.

C&K Careers also uses Case Studies to identify individual success. The Case Study approach identifies the difference the IAG support has made and what outcomes

have been achieved. This can include wider and continued engagement with C&K Careers as well as referral to other partners or agencies. Resilience, ambition and positive attitudes were all mentioned by staff interviewed and they were aware of the importance of supporting these in their IAG work.

C&K Careers has built an array of activities to capture the voice of the learner that provides authentic evidence of views and feedback from recipients of the IAG services available from C&K Careers. There is an ethos of engaging with young people to ensure that a variety of access methods are used to listen to young people's views. Advocacy for young people with Special needs have been established. C&K Careers has also established the value of using young people who are experts by experience (in Leaving Care work for example) and this development is to be encouraged.

Interviews with young people were very helpful in establishing how IAG and projects are helping young people to progress. One young person on an Employment Hub project said that he would be just sitting at home without the support of his careers adviser. School students interviewed said that guidance interviews had helped them get their ideas sorted and would help achieve career goals. In many ways the interventions provided by C&K Careers make a difference to young people's self-belief and confidence. Another young person said "they don't judge you, they take you for whatever reason you've turned up and just move things on without you realising it. I'm at college and C&K Careers has got me into a much better place."

For schools buying the traded service the regular review process provided very positive feedback and clarified what schools liked most about the services provided. These reviews are overwhelmingly positive confirming feedback from school students about their CEIAG interviews and other activities provided by C&K Careers. Termly reports demonstrated the impact and the use of case studies reinforced how behavioural and attitudinal changes were being achieved through C&K Careers' interventions. The work done by C&K Careers around NEETs work was clearly effective in reducing not knowns and NEETs as a whole. Colleges are good at informing C&K Careers about students that withdraw so that C&K Careers staff can intervene early to arrange alternatives including NEET to EET projects.

It was interesting to reflect on the impact of the IAG work being carried out with young people 18-24 registered with the Job Centre and referred by Job Coaches. Job Centre commissioners saw the advantage of the time spent by the C&K Careers staff as being important as well as the IAG skills deployed. Job Coaches seem to value the skillset of the C&K Careers staff especially in working with young people with additional or complex needs – skills Job Coaches do not possess and certainly with 10 minute contact slots cannot hope to help move on.

The C&K Careers service being purchased is seen as different to the NCS offer which appears to be seen as an employability specialism. That said the NCS contract operated with EDT is very focused on one hour 1:1 IAG interviews resulting in an action plan and further resources provided after the interview. Performance

reviews with EDT showed that C&K Careers is one of the top achievers on contract and frequently the number one achiever of targets and sustainability of outcomes.

With every IAG recipient contact and every partner interview confirmation was given of the impact of the IAG provided by C&K Careers. The difference made was clear at every level from the personal journey described by young people, the importance of projects and the ability to use detached work to build trust, the value of the work-related learning provided to the essential work carried out to ensure that young people with additional needs and EHC plans progress and the value of the Traded Service to schools.

C&K Careers gives considerable confidence that it is effective in its work with young people and that its model is one that provides clear evidence of impact. This is a model that will work elsewhere. The hard work and the consistently high performance of C&K Careers shows how great a difference can be made, and C&K Careers has the opportunity to continue to evolve the model to improve outcomes for young people and adults and show the way forward for IAG services as a whole.

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.

- C&K Careers continues to provide clear leadership and effective management support to staff with very good direction, communication, and decision making. Teamworking in the organisation is excellent and C&K Careers effectively discharges its responsibilities. Managers provide very good line management support. Overall professionalism has helped focus staff effectively on delivering high quality IAG services to young people and other key stakeholders. (1.1, 2.1)
- C&K Careers staff including careers advisers give young people a sense of being individuals and valued. Young people's confidence and self-belief are consistently noted by schools and community partners as major positive changes through C&K Careers support. Young people interviewed all noted the confidence gained through encounters with C&K Careers staff. The energy and enthusiasm displayed by all staff interviewed is a key element of C&K Careers success and a significant part of the reputation of the organisation which should not be underestimated. (2.8, 3.2)
- The positioning of C&K Careers as the 'manager' of the CEIAG agenda through the Careers Hub, NEETs and Post 16 SEND activity for the two councils provides considerable advantages at several levels. This enables a strategic view of the direction of CEIAG in schools and where C&K Careers has impact and can add value. A further benefit is understanding how RONI and NEETs prevention can be improved and refined. (2.6, 2.7, 7.2)

- Partners interviewed consistently praised the quality of delivery and the high standard of IAG and delivery performance. Staff were noted by partners for their professionalism and enthusiasm, while all staff were mentioned for their 'can do' attitude. C&K Careers emphasises the bespoke nature of its offer depending upon the nature of the contract while contextualising within the school's locality and local labour market. Differences between job opportunities in Halifax and Huddersfield and the smaller towns in the sub-region make such context important providing assurance to schools buying the traded service that they are not being offered off-the-shelf solutions, which may be inappropriate. Professionalism and quality assurance are embedded in the offer and delivery to schools. (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.8)
- The commitment to continuous improvement is embedded in all activities in delivery and reinforced by C&K Careers' values. The role of careers adviser gives a strong operational basis for supporting school staff and community partners and enables them to be at the centre of operational delivery and monitoring and reporting. Professional observations, peer observations and the surrounding support for these is well-established and provides much confidence that professional standards are being maintained. The feedback loop is managed well through schools and partners who appear to provide reliable feedback from their students and clients. Evidence from staff and partners demonstrates C&K Careers' commitment to review and continuous improvement. Partners are reliant on the services provided by C&K Careers and recognise they are integral to high quality delivery. (2.3, 6.1, 6.2,)
- Good internal CPD and sharing of good practice gives C&K Careers an edge in determining what works well. Shared values and a determination to help young people progress well enhances delivery. C&K Careers provides excellent opportunities for staff to acquire new skills and experiences. (2.5, 2.6)
- Targets and outcomes are robustly monitored, and outcomes evaluated. Projects are used well to target vulnerable groups and augment the evidence base and demonstrate greater impact. The effectiveness of IAG activity and the impact on the users of its services is clear in evidence presented and observed during the **matrix** Assessment Review. (5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2)

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