

# NEWCASTLE CITY LEARNING



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## Assessment Information

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## Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Newcastle City Learning (hereafter NCL) is the Adult Learning Service of Newcastle City Council. NCL is based in the Children, Education and Skills Directorate and operates as a Council service, subject to the usual layers of accountability to elected members and scrutiny by them. Learning opportunities are delivered at two main sites called Westgate College and The Heaton Centre (also known as the Heaton Community Complex). There is also provision based in various smaller venues throughout the city with Gosforth Library and Learning Centre being the main access point.

NCL provides a curriculum offer within the three main strands of adult education: vocational, foundation learning and community learning. Significantly NCL has expanded, and has created Programmes for Young People (PYP) for 16-19, and for both young people and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD), including those eligible for High Needs funding through an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Furthermore NCL operates apprenticeship provision supporting the Council to deliver its objective of offering apprenticeship vacancies to Newcastle residents and providing opportunities for employment and development within the city. Currently there are 90 apprentices and NCL also works with employers in providing apprenticeship opportunities in leadership and management, business administration, customer service, health care practitioner and early years practitioner.

The scope of the **matrix** Accreditation Review was the full range of delivery. The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Service is embedded in tutor support augmented by the Gateway Team (qualified at L2 IAG and the Gateway Supervisor qualified to L4). The Careers Coordinator provides IAG and support for work placements and is working towards L6. The National Careers Service (NCS) also provides regular L6 support to learners. Together they form a Careers Team operating under a separate Careers IAG Policy and a Learner Entitlement Statement that describes the careers IAG on offer and access to a range of workshop opportunities centred around employability activity and events such as Careers Fairs. Learners are helped to obtain work experience and volunteering opportunities locally as well as have support for HE applications and further courses either at NCL or other colleges. ESOL learners are also referred to specialist IAG provision and partner, Jet North.

In 2019 the role of Pastoral Care Officer (PCO) was introduced and there are now four operating providing in-depth support for young people on PYP. This role appears invaluable as an interface with tutors and learners, providing support to learners around a number of key issues. These include attendance, mental health, behaviour, and support to vulnerable groups. The PCO provides many roles: alternative parent, IAG adviser, coach and advocate. Importantly the PCOs interviewed were well aware of the need to maintain professional boundaries and received regular supervision to discuss cases as well as informal discussions within the team. Most frequent issues were personal relationship problems, difficulties with money and housing and inability to settle in. Carefully tailored support appeared to be producing good results.

PCOs provide the IAG support for care-experienced young people, LLDD, and those in offending behaviour. Increasingly schools were referring students at risk of becoming NEET. Given the wide variety of backgrounds of learners on PYP a new programme called KEEP (Knowledge, Education, Enrichment Programme) has been created which appears more appropriate for learners who would not cope with a conventional Study Programme. KEEP provides alternative curriculum focused on developing positive attitudes, placements in work or volunteering and building self-esteem and confidence. This has also led to a pilot pre-apprenticeship strand with six learners following Maths, English and Customer Services spending three days at work in the City Council's Parking Services department and two days at Westgate College. Participants are paid a living wage and it is intended that they progress into an apprenticeship. Obviously this could be a model for other Council services.

Creative learning activity was found in all areas of NCL and tutors are encouraged to think of alternative ways of delivery to try and break the cycle of low expectation, low achievement. Another 'alternative' project is Dream, Discover, Do which is designed to enable adults to 'get back' – either their lives, their career and their ambitions. Provision includes life skills including wellbeing, welfare benefits and budgeting, IT, maths and English, first aid and employability units such as timekeeping and team-working. Work placements are provided at the end of the course.

Crucially the teaching and IAG approach is different and is based on the Four Interpretations of Social Capital (relationships, social network support, civic engagement and trust and cooperation norms.) Additionally tutors use emotional freedom techniques and this appears to be working well. These courses are designed to be provided in community settings which are hopefully unthreatening and accessible. The results of these courses after three groups could suggest further courses and more innovative approaches. Evaluation of learner's experiences would help planning and delivery.

Throughout NCL's activities it was reassuring to see IAG and progression feature strongly and IAG is integral to all learning. Learners interviewed all noted that course sessions include some form of information about progression and advice about how learning can be applied in the workplace or day to day life. The importance of social contact for ESOL learners and adult learners and vulnerable young people generally cannot be underestimated. Similarly delivery from community venues is essential. An informal chat with a learner at Heaton was interesting in that he declared he would not have gone back to learning if it had not been held at Heaton, having been referred by the Job Centre and reluctantly turned up. The welcome and positivity from NCL staff helped overcome his doubts.

The NCL Mission/Purpose is "Providing opportunities in Newcastle for all to learn, improve and grow". This is backed up by four Key Objectives (2021-2022) two of which imply IAG provision:

- To continue to provide a relevant curriculum to meet the needs of adults, young people and employers' training needs from within the city of Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- To continue to offer high-quality educational experiences and support to allow the residents, both young and old, to improve their knowledge, skills and confidence to realise better life chances moving forward.

There are also ten priorities derived from the Children, Education and Skill Directorate and four relate directly to NCL and the provision of high quality IAG support: Improve educational progress for all, and support vulnerable pupils, including those with SEND, to achieve; Improve children and young people's social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing; Help all young people into adulthood, to develop life skills and be ready for work; Ensure opportunities for lifelong learning.

These set the framework for NCL's activities and NCL operational objectives including IAG and are derived from the Key objectives and contracts which determine the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). NCL continues to receive funding through the Adult Education Budget, 16-18 Study Programme, the Apprenticeship levy, Advanced Learning Loans and some full cost delivery. AEB funding is derived from the North Tyneside Combined Authority and NCL is one of the largest contract holders to be funded by AEB in the Combined Authority. Achievement, retention, and progression are the three main drivers for KPIs, with attendance monitored as an overarching contributor to the three drivers. NCL managers support tutors to manage targets and outcomes. Outcomes are sensitive to the type of learner engaged who respond well to the access and quality of IAG which is recognised as being vital to learners' progression. The role of PCOs must certainly impact on outcomes. For example home visits are routinely carried out as part of the IAG process and this enables PCOs to interact with other family members and give confidence to attend 'at college' and create a more supportive environment in the home setting.

Tutors ensure information is provided that will help NCL learners better access other opportunities and aid progression which is a principal aim. Enrolment into learning is managed by the Gateway Team, and all learners receive initial IAG to ensure they are aware of the provision and the progression opportunities. Course aspirations are determined and agreement is reached on learners' objectives to ensure clarity about personal and clear goals and recorded on Individual Learning Plans. Learners are reviewed regularly to determine satisfaction and what had gone well. Tutors ask learners informally at the end of every learning event for feedback and learners interviewed appeared to be extremely satisfied.

Comments made by learners interviewed included:

*'Knowing I have my course once a week was something to look forward to and I get lots of encouragement from my tutor and I feel more confident.'*

*'I've struggled with poor mental health for years and the lockdowns made it worse. Going on a course was a big step for me but when I rang up NCL about it they were really good at making me feel I could do the course; there was no pressure. The other students were great in helping me. The tutor was fantastic – really encouraged me to get over any worries I had. I can't wait for the next course!'*

*'My anxiety could have been a problem but my tutor is always there to help me and give me reassurance. At the beginning of my course I was really nervous but now I am confident thanks to the help I've had from my tutor just by her listening and making me realise I wasn't alone.'*

These comments were typical of those encountered during the **matrix** Accreditation either through interviews or testimonials and feedback from learners. They demonstrate the quality of IAG support from NCL. The sincerity of learners about life-changing experiences that can challenge cultural norms and stereotypes was telling and gives much confidence in the support provided.

Examples of monitoring such progress included an analysis of Adult KPIs for 20/21. Out of around 5,000 learners the Retention rate was 95.1% which demonstrates the value of delivering online, the Pass rate of 97.4% which was similar to 18/19 and the Achievement rate was 92.6%. These are excellent given the difficulties of Covid and show how hard tutors and IAG staff worked to provide support for progression. There were 514 young 16-19 on PAYP and out of these there was a Retention rate of 81.3%, a Pass rate of 89.2% and an Achievement rate of 72.6%. NCL had achieved 90% attendance which represented excellent progress given the difficulties of lockdowns and the problems faced by this group of vulnerable young people. Many learners, both young people and adults are operating at entry level and are ESOL learners, so these figures represent excellent progress and it is hoped that there will be a continued upward trend in 21/22.

Apprenticeship provision had reduced in the post-Covid period. During 20/21 there were around 400 apprentices while currently there are around 90. Nevertheless there is cause for optimism, despite additional concerns about national funding levels. The adoption of a 'Recruit with Integrity' approach is commendable in a somewhat unpredictable and nervous employer market. There are many opportunities available but the competitive nature of the apprenticeship market in the Newcastle area means that employers are tempted by what may appear the best marketing. However NCL should not underestimate its reputation, the fact it is local and 'not going anywhere', and the quality of IAG support provided to employers and to apprentices. These are equally important in attracting new business. One example is the Association of Accounting Technicians Apprenticeship Standard where there was identified room for growth that could appeal to young people, and adults returning to the market. There were also untapped areas in other public bodies in the city. Since Newcastle is the regional capital for most activity, commercial and public service, there could be more targeting of these centres. Apprenticeships has the biggest potential of all NCL's offer for growth.

NCL makes very good use of its resources, and its talented and experienced staff. Marketing and social media including the website has improved considerably since the last **matrix** Assessment Review in 2019. Excellent team-working featured strongly in the organisation as may be expected, and this is a very important element of the NCL's success. IT support has increased considerably, and the introduction of online learning and IAG had gone well. Learners and apprentices interviewed confirmed that working on-line was managed well by NCL. Examples were given of high quality information provided to learners and apprentices through website referral, particularly to reputable organisations, such as colleges and helplines. It is recognised how important high quality IAG is to achievement and there is appropriate emphasis on 'front-end' support.

NCL provides staff with access to an impressive range of training and CPD opportunities either directly or through the City Council. Standardisation meetings include good practice sharing. NCL recognises the need to address mental health issues and some staff have taken the Mental Health First Aid course and additional wellbeing courses. Prevent, British Values, Safeguarding and Health and Safety are all revisited annually. There is significant potential for enhancing online provision through webinars, blogs, podcasts and sharing of learning and IAG materials. There could be further resources developed around self-employment and enterprise for learners to encourage business ideas and entrepreneurship.

As mentioned earlier NCL carries out regular feedback activities among learners and achieves excellent satisfaction rates. NCL always receives positive feedback. Learners confirmed they are always asked about progress and whether learning sessions have been effective for them. Apprentices interviewed 'loved going to college' and 'could not fault NCL for their help and support'. Tracking of destinations is carried out by an independent organisation, JR Research, and this provides verifiable trails of outcomes for Ofsted a, the City Council and other funders.

Partners interviewed were equally positive about NCL and were very pleased to be associated with the organisation. Partners such as Jet North are particularly valuable given the focus on ESOL learners for pastoral and careers support and the organisation recognises that NCL enables it to achieve its targets so mutual cooperation is essential.

There is an effective quality assurance approach taken to IAG that demonstrates how the **matrix** Standard has been used positively to improve the IAG service and provide clarity about service expectations. Management control is strong but relaxed. The Quality Assurance processes and procedures are robust, and processes appeared comprehensive and appropriate. Being derived from the City Council there is an annual review and updating process as well as oversight from the Advisory Board which provides much confidence in independent scrutiny.

During the **matrix** Assessment Review it was evident that at an individual and strategic level NCL has in place very effective approaches to continuous quality improvement. This allows NCL to deliver successfully. Partners and learners commented on the way that NCL is always looking to improve, and it is suggested that continuing joint activity could develop with partners around the demand for adult skills training and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET. Obviously these will be dependent on funding and successful bidding but NCL's model remains effective and is critical to bringing individuals and communities into education and training that otherwise would have very little access. Similarly the apprenticeship offer has the potential to grow considerably based on the commitment to high quality. Funding is tight but the type of apprenticeships provided could demonstrate good practice and become a model that works well.

NCL can be confident it is in a very good place to continue to provide a valued and valuable learning service to the people of Newcastle and potentially a wider geographic and demographic area.



## 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.

- NCL provides clear leadership for its staff with very good direction, communication, and decision making. Managers felt they had autonomy and flexibility to be creative within a clear set of values and accountability. NCL has an excellent reputation for delivery and very good learner outcomes. (1.1,1.2)
- Partners interviewed consistently praised the quality of delivery and the high standard of support for learners. Partners cited the professionalism and enthusiasm of staff and their positive attitude. (1.8, 3.2)
- Learners value many aspects of NCL's delivery and it is very clear that NCL's role in communities and its commitment to making a difference give it credibility and a 'brand' that learners identify closely with. (1.1, 2.1,3.2)
- There is a strong compliance and quality culture. NCL maintains a robust Quality Assurance system well maintained by Supervisors and Managers. The commitment to continuous improvement through the **matrix** Standard is embedded in all activities in delivery and reinforced by NCL values. (4.2, 4.3, 4.8)
- NCL responsibilities are discharged effectively and consistently with regard to safeguarding and health and safety. NCL's approach to the coronavirus lockdown demonstrated absolute commitment to safe working practices and procedures that ensured risks were minimised and learners would feel safe and be safe. Learners interviewed confirmed they felt safe in learning environments as they returned to the classroom. (1.4)
- NCL has established a very sensible approach to apprenticeship provision in a difficult market. 'Recruit with integrity' is an excellent strapline and creates the ethos for building trust and cooperation. This will prove to be an effective basis for work with employers and benefit potential apprentices. (2.1, 3.2)
- IAG is well embedded in curriculum activities. For example the maths offer is increasingly creative and practical with courses such as the bespoke ESOL Maths course. This focuses on teaching maths with less English language so tutors can assess the mathematical abilities of ESOL learners, and 'Music of Maths', effective with LLDD, demonstrate the value of freeing up tutors and their managers to build 'what works'. IAG is provided on choice and the right pathway to choose from such courses more naturally than bolt on IAG. (2,1. 3.2)
- Since the last **matrix** Accreditation Review NCL has improved its reputation for being an excellent place to learn. The prevalence of good practice gives the NCL Offer reputational edge. Shared values and a commitment to help learners progress well enhances delivery. (2.1)
- Learners commented that NCL compared very well to other learning providers. While comparisons are very personal and often anecdotal this contributes well to 'word of mouth' recommendation in the communities served. (1,4, 2.1, 3.2)



## 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.

- The wider use of social media is a very welcome development. The website could celebrate success of learners more overtly by using Talking Heads and video particularly for learners from groups and geographic areas where there is low expectation and aspiration. These could be carried on social media and especially You Tube to demonstrate how learners from 'socially deprived' areas or non-traditional backgrounds can succeed. Learners could be willing to create blogs or be the subject of Talking Heads to share their back-story and hopefully inspire others to try courses they might otherwise have assumed was not for them. Getting the social media messages right is essential for recruitment. (1.6, 2.1, 3.2)
- There was evidence of using former learners' experience for promotion to provide inspirational evidence that learners from NCL can and do succeed, perhaps unexpectedly. It is suggested that NCL adopt a more consistent approach by creating an 'Alumni Strategy' that harnesses the talents and loyalty of former learners to add impetus to acquiring career management skills and help raise aspirations, especially for those learners from 'socially deprived' areas. NCL could explore using blogs and podcasts to share these experiences. (1.6, 2.1, 3.2)
- The development of a more dedicated coaching approach may be viable for learners' outcomes such as volunteering to encourage progression. The L3 Coaching qualification could help establish whether this could go further and act as an incentive to volunteering and participation in courses. (1.2, 2.4, 4.1)
- The National Careers Service (NCS) had previously provided L6 Careers IAG before lockdown. This service appears to have become under-used and a review with the local NCS Manager/NCS Careers Adviser is strongly suggested to continue to secure L6 IAG access. A service level agreement may help to clarify what NCL is entitled to, the frequency and nature of the service and help improve communications. ESOL students should be a priority for NCS and given groups sessions on labour market information and one to one IAG offered across the two main sites and key courses. It is further suggested that there should be stronger links with the Careers Coordinator and the Gateway Team to help with referrals and build curriculum links. A review meeting would help secure future action and aid communication especially with tutors. (1.8, 2.1, 3.2)
- The Careers Coordinator had begun training for L6 IAG but this was disrupted by Covid and the postholder taking on the role of Exams Officer. It is suggested that the postholder be enabled to re-commence training at least in September to ensure NCL is working towards achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks. The Careers Coordinator should be the designated Careers Lead and be suitably qualified. (2.1, 2.4, 3.2)

- ESOL provision is widely respected and NCL enjoys a very good reputation. It is suggested NCL explores a paid contract with Job Centre Plus. ESOL provision is important to local Job Centres, and NCL should become a preferred supplier and be paid for its work. Although the procurement process is difficult and long it should be persevered with: there appears to be significant support from the Job Centre to suggest this is well worth the effort. (1.8, 2.1, 3.2)
- Tutors mentioned that they talked to learners about self-employment and starting a business. It is suggested more online materials are sourced—perhaps even create an online unit or use existing materials to refer learners to. (2.1, 3.2)
- Partners interviewed were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about NCL but suggested that the success of NCL was not widely known nor promoted enough. It is suggested this is not a marketing issue as such but a need to raise awareness relentlessly among funders about impact and value for money. It is also suggested that the City Council does not support NCL as well as other local authorities their equivalent service, and does not promote NCL effectively. An internal awareness campaign in the Council may help. The advent of a new Director in the Children, Education and Skills Directorate may give impetus to this and NCL needs senior leadership backing from the Council to be more overt and positive. (1.8, 4.1)
- Building upon this point it is suggested that there is much more scope in the Council to provide apprenticeships, compared to other City Councils, and scope too for expansion with more employers, perhaps those who have had disappointing service from other providers and may be attracted by the Council ethos, and NCL staff's expertise. The KEEP pilot should be evaluated and its (presumed) success used to promote NCL's offer in the rest of the Council. (1.8, 2.1, 3.2, 4.1)
- Work experience is provided for most programmes but was significantly reduced, inevitably, during Covid. As relations with employers are rebuilt it is suggested that more challenging placements are sought as well as less stereotypical placements to encourage learners into more stimulating environments. (2.1, 3.2)
- Adult Learning Services use their Advisory Boards in various ways. One effective means of engagement is to define a Careers Champion role or Student Support Champion and this is strongly suggested. This gives the opportunity for focus and better reporting mechanisms as well as giving a Board member the chance to get to know the Service better, and ensure equity in Board discussions. There is also the opportunity to be more engaged in Learner Voice activity and help raise awareness of issues. Such appointments should not be seen as having potential to circumvent managers and leaders but to act as a support to them and staff. (1.2, 1.7, 2.1, 3.2)

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

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

## Methodology

The following methods were used to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard during the assessment process. All interviews were carried out at NCL Westgate College and in community venues – Gosforth Library & Learning Centre and Heaton Community Complex.

Initial discussions with the Careers Coordinator to identify scope

Interviews with:

Service Manager

Careers Coordinator

Senior Gateway and Funding Manager

Adult and Skills Manager (Community Learning)

Adult and Skills Manager (Vocational Learning)

Adult and Skills Manager (Apprenticeships)

Adult Learning and Skills Manager (ESOL, English and Maths, Family Learning and LDD)

Adult and Skills Manager (LDD)

Adult Learning and Skills Manager (Functional Skills)

Curriculum Quality Lead – Young People and LDD

Community Outreach Officer

Two Adult Skills Tutors including Curriculum Lead for Accountancy

Two Pastoral Care Officers

Learning Support Assistant responsible for Work Placements

Supported Employment Officer

Gateway Supervisor and one Gateway Adviser

Fifteen learners including three apprentices and informal discussions with two adult learners

Six Delivery Partners

Closing meeting with the Careers Coordinator

Desk research including Self-Assessment Review 2022, Quality Improvement Plan 19-21, City Council Policies including Safeguarding, Health & Safety, Prevent, Careers IAG, Case studies, Learner correspondence with guest speaker, Website, Social media including Face Book.

## 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](mailto: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.