matrix®
quality standard for information advice and guidance services

Assessment Report

The Inspire and Achieve Foundation

The Growth Company

The matrix Standard is delivered by The Growth Company on behalf of the Department for Education
E: matrixStandard@growthco.uk **T:** 01423 229 665

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Maintaining Accreditation
Assessors	Aly Jackson & Steve Jackson
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Dates	29/10/26 – 30/10/26
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C35025 - PN203585
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	07/10/29

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	Onsite and remote Accreditation
Staff interviews	11
Recipient interviews	10
Partner interviews	3
Document review	Range of information including impact reports for 24/25 and 23/24, Delivery Brochure, policies, social media, website, evaluative reports, marketing reviews and strategies.

About the organisation

The Inspire and Achieve Foundation (IAF) supports approximately 350 young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) each year across Mansfield and Ashfield districts and shortly into Bassetlaw. Established in 2009, the service exists to inspire and empower young people to achieve their best, regardless of their background, recognising that every young person has something unique to offer. Through a range of personalised programmes, IAF helps young people overcome barriers, develop confidence and practical skills, improve their wellbeing, and access opportunities in education, employment and training.

IAF's approach is rooted in inclusion, empathy and the belief that disadvantage or personal circumstances should not limit a young person's potential. Its provision ranges from bespoke one-to-one mentoring and the 12-week King's Trust Team programme to anxiety-friendly services, alternative provision for learners aged 16

© The Growth Company Limited

and over with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), youth activities, virtual safe spaces and dedicated youth hubs. These services provide accessible, tailored support that recognises young people's individual circumstances, including mental health challenges, additional needs and a lack of consistent support in their lives.

IAF places significant emphasis on building trusting relationships and providing consistent support throughout each young person's journey. Staff take the time to listen, build confidence and respond to individual needs, helping young people navigate transitions into education, employment or training without losing momentum or confidence. Support can continue beyond these transitions, offering continuity of help as circumstances change. Through collaboration with families, colleges, local authorities and community partners, IAF connects young people with opportunities and services that support their longer-term progress.

The service's impact extends beyond individual outcomes to the wider community. In 2025–2026, 67% of the NEET young people supported progressed into education, employment or training. Young people have also contributed more than 5,000 hours to community projects through volunteering and social action, demonstrating their capacity to make a positive contribution to their local areas.

Senior leadership commitment to equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing is fundamental to sustaining this approach. It requires a culture in which young people are valued, barriers to participation are actively addressed, individual needs are recognised, and services are designed to enable everyone to participate and achieve. IAF's values and delivery model provide a foundation for examining how this commitment is embedded in practice and how leadership decisions support positive, inclusive and sustainable outcomes for young people.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

IAG is delivered through tailored one-to-one mentoring and personalised action planning, helping young people identify their strengths, interests, aspirations and barriers to progression. Support includes careers guidance, local labour market information, CV writing, job searching, application support, interview preparation and guidance on education, training and employment pathways. Young people are supported to explore options such as college courses, apprenticeships, skills bootcamps, qualifications and employment, with referrals and introductions to relevant providers where appropriate.

Positive collaborative partnership working with local guidance services, education and training providers, employers and community organisations is central to the approach. These partnerships support effective referrals into IAF programmes, helping young people access the most appropriate provision for their needs, while facilitating onward transitions into external opportunities and services when they complete their programme. Through coordinated support, shared knowledge and established local connections, IAF helps young people navigate available pathways,

© The Growth Company Limited

access specialist guidance and maintain momentum towards their goals beyond the Hub.

The Hub provides practical opportunities to develop employability and transferable skills through group workshops, IT access, mock interviews, work experience, volunteering, employer visits, careers talks and social action activities. The King's Trust TEAM Programme offers an additional structured opportunity for young people to build confidence, develop teamwork and communication skills, and gain practical experience through collaborative activities and challenges. The programme supports young people to develop problem-solving, leadership, organisation and interpersonal skills while working towards shared goals. It also provides opportunities to gain qualifications and strengthen CVs through work experience and volunteering. For young people who need additional time to build their confidence and social skills before entering employment or further education, TEAM provides a supportive stepping stone towards progression. IAF supports young people to access the programme as part of their wider development journey, including onward progression into further training and sector-specific opportunities.

IAG is underpinned by a person-centred, strengths-based approach that builds trusting relationships and supports young people to develop confidence, self-esteem, communication, resilience, decision-making and independence. The Hub offers a safe, inclusive environment, with adapted provision for neurodivergent young people and those with learning difficulties or additional needs. Mentors also help young people address wider barriers affecting progression, including mental health, housing instability, financial hardship and limited support networks, working collaboratively with specialist services and community partners to provide appropriate referrals and ongoing support.

Feedback from young people was very positive and some of their comments were:

‘IAF was great in helping me settle and look forward. My Mentor helps me to know how I am doing and I can share things with her that I've never been able to before. I want to go further after the Kings Trust programme, which is great. My tutor has talked to me about my confidence and how to speak up for myself. IAF is ideal for me - the mentor is amazing, and they’re always making the courses interesting and it’s great the way its related to real work situations.’

‘I've got special needs and I used to think I was thick, until these guys made me realise I can do things and I will be able to work in future. I've got some possible work experience and the guys here help me cope better with the Job Centre and benefits too.'

‘Right from the first contact IAF was friendly and helpful. I had not thought about what I wanted to do but the careers adviser was really helpful and gave me advice I'd not had in school or really at the Job Centre either. IAF suits me and has helped me to enjoy the learning side which I never did at school. I can be more relaxed and focused at the Hub.'

© The Growth Company Limited

‘I get anxiety problems easily but they have been great in giving ways of dealing with it. I've made real friends here and I think it’s given me hope for the future - I used to be shy and didn't like to go out. I feel like I matter. I get more respect from the staff and I’m determine to get qualified and that is down to them encouraging me.’

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

The creation of the Youth Hub has helped young people move from uncertainty, disengagement and personal barriers towards clearer goals, increased confidence and positive destinations. Through consistent mentoring and tailored IAG, young people develop a better understanding of their strengths, recognise their potential and become more equipped to make informed decisions about their futures. The impact report records improvements in confidence, emotional resilience, communication and employability, alongside increased motivation, social connections and independence. Average confidence scores increased from 3.6 at programme start to 4.3 at exit, emotional resilience improved from 3.7 to 4.3, communication increased from 3.8 to 4.6, and employability scores rose from 3.8 to 4.9.

This personal development translates into tangible progression towards education, employment and training. Over 70% of young people exiting the programme progressed into positive education, employment or training (EET) destinations, with 55% entering employment. A further 23% progressed into volunteering, providing opportunities to gain experience, develop transferable skills and build readiness for future employment. The programme also achieved an 82% retention rate across its 13 weeks, reflecting the value of an accessible and supportive environment for young people with complex needs.

Collaborative partnership working strengthens these outcomes by connecting young people with appropriate specialist support, education and training providers, and employers. This helps address barriers that might otherwise prevent participation and creates clearer routes into and beyond IAF provision. Individual case studies demonstrate young people securing employment, gaining relevant qualifications, accessing work experience, progressing towards university and exploring longer-term career goals. Participation in The King's Trust TEAM Programme also offers opportunities to strengthen teamwork, communication and social skills, gain qualifications and build experience, supporting further progression for those who need additional preparation before entering employment or education.

Formal partnership arrangements with DWP began in January 26 with a nominal target of 20% into work across the year. This figure has already reached 38% and is expected to rise further as the year completes. Feedback is excellent and cites the Hub as a positive venue with supportive staff.

The impact extends beyond securing an immediate destination. By helping young people address barriers such as poor mental health, learning difficulties, housing

© The Growth Company Limited

insecurity and limited work experience, the Hub enables them to engage more effectively with opportunities they may previously have felt unable or unprepared to pursue. Overall, IAG supports young people to build the skills, confidence, resilience and practical experience needed to take greater control of their futures, access positive opportunities and move towards sustained participation in education, employment and training.

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.

- The development of the Youth Hub has created an exceptional space for young people to receive the support they need to work towards education, work and training. Since collaboration with DWP in January 2026, the Hub has significantly exceeded targets for young people who are NEET to move into employment, but more than this, the Hub has provided a space where Mentors can support the personal and social issues faced by young people, such as lack of confidence and self-belief. Young People see the building as their own safe space and it is significant that there have been no random acts of vandalism or damage to the building since it opened (4.1, 4.2)
- IAF continues to provide clear performance management with very good direction, communication, and decision making. Teamworking in the organisation is excellent. The emphasis on Quality is very clear. Leaders and managers provide very good line management support. Overall professionalism has helped focus staff effectively on delivering high quality IAG services to service users and participants on the KT programme. (1.1, 2.1)
- Mentors and tutors on the KT programme give learners a sense of being individuals and being valued. Confidence and self-belief are consistently noted as major positive changes by learners and employability participants through IAFs support. The energy and enthusiasm displayed by all staff is a key element of IAFs success. Mentors provide consistently high quality support to learners and are key to the success they experience. The mentoring model is working very well and has raised the standard of IAG. (2.8, 3.2)
- Partners interviewed consistently praised the quality of delivery and the high standard of support for learners' achievement. IAF staff were noted for their professionalism and enthusiasm, while all partners mentioned their 'can do' attitude. IAF emphasises the bespoke nature of their offer depending upon the individual and time taken to support a mentee is not conventionally counted nor influenced by targets. Professionalism is embedded in the offer and

© The Growth Company Limited

delivery to all young people. The approach to enrichment ensures that young people are learning relevant content with IAG based upon current knowledge and skills. (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.8)

- Relationships with partners are particularly effective in IAF. Trust has been built well and IAF is a major 'go to' organisation for vulnerable young people especially when compared to other larger training providers. (2.1, 2.2)
- The commitment to continuous improvement is embedded in all activities in delivery and reinforced by IAFs values. Professional observations and the surrounding support for these is well-established and provides much confidence that staff are meeting expected standards and exceeding these. Quality Assurance is managed effectively and enhances performance management well.. (2.3, 6.1, 6.2)

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 along with any other notable developments will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) which will be conducted at both the twelve and twenty-four months points, to coincide with the original anniversary date of the accreditation. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- Relationships with funding partners especially EMCA, appear transactional and we discussed the lack of 'punch' that the voluntary sector seems to be characterised by. Although this is frustrating it is strongly suggested that the evidence base built by IAF should be made more robust with robust examples of added value and impact on 'downstream costs', especially in welfare costs. The Impact Reports seen are excellent and rightly describe social return on investment. It is further suggested that enhanced tracking of sustained impact on individuals could be helpful and enhanced use of the Lamplight database could demonstrate how IAFs activities divert young people to positive behaviours and employment attributes. (2.1, 2.2, 6.1, 6.2)
- Careers IAG is particularly effective in supporting learners but it was agreed that the Careers Leader could provide more in-depth support with more capacity available. This would also enable more support to mentoring. IAF are to be commended for their careers IAG approach which could also give more impetus to preventive career work or pre-NEETs work with schools (4.1, 4.2)

© The Growth Company Limited

- Continuing that theme it is suggested that the Careers Leader could create a local network of alternative providers given that EMCA is excluding IAF from the careers hub activity. This would help improve understanding and communications as well as benefit learners from more sensitive referral. Additionally it may be valuable to explore alternative access points and the possibility of an outreach model, especially as IAFs work will extend into very rural areas in the north of the county. (4.1,4.2)
- While not part of IAFs work currently it is suggested that more targeted work with schools should be explored. Young People should not have to 'fail' to use the services. Schools should be using a new Risk of NEET tool shortly developed by the CEC which could suggest potential users of IAF. Early intervention and referral is an obvious 'win' for all and should be 'standard'. (4.1, 4.2)
- During the interview with mentors it is clear that developing closer relations with employers would help improve the learner journey and help mentors advocate for their mentees. This is not a 'permission' issue but more about the natural development of the role and would help build employer awareness of the IAFs effectiveness. (2.5, 4.1, 4.2)
- Interviews with learners and users of the Hub were very positive and gave much assurance that the provision was effective and relevant. When asked about 'learner voice' there was little awareness of the Youth Panel or the use of the representative role developed. It is suggested this could be further enhanced by better feedback loops, and a simple 'You Said, We Did (or Did not) model advertised around the Hub. (7.1, 7.2)
- Learners and users of the Hub said they much enjoyed the activities and appreciated the work of the staff in the Hub. The only improvement they could suggest is being open at weekends and evenings. Clearly this is dependent on funding and brings a set of health and safety issues but could be explored with funders. It may also give access to new potential users. (4.1, 4.2)
- The I & A website is very good but would benefit from more up to date news and more case studies. As funding allows the use of videos and talking heads would add impact to the site. (3.1, 4.1)

© The Growth Company Limited

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.

© The Growth Company Limited



© The Growth Company Limited

The **matrix** Standard logo and all intellectual property rights in it are Crown property.

The **matrix** Standard logo is a registered trademark of the Secretary of State for Education.

www.matrixstandard.com