

TheLightBulb Ltd



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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Kevin Smith
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Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	1/9/21
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Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	1/9/23

Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Based in Basildon, Essex, TheLightBulb (TLB) is a leading provider of apprenticeships and other vocational learning across the large county. Since its founding in 2003, TLB has developed into its current position at the forefront of the training industry in the local area. It is a prime provider directly funded by the ESFA¹ and with a range of other courses offered. Apprenticeships are offered in popular areas such as Health & Social Care, Business Administration, Digital Marketing, Recruitment, Human Resources, and to become a Teaching Assistant. Traineeships have been offered in the past although changes to AEB² funding made them economically unviable. The withdrawal of AEB funding since the last review resulted in a significant reduction in staffing, emerging with a relatively flat structure. However, TLB is applying for a new funding stream which would see traineeships relaunched later in 2021. A number of specialist, shorter courses are offered in areas relating to employability, in partnership with another provider; and also, for Sector-Based Work Academies in partnership with Job Centre Plus.

A team of Learning Development Mentors (LDMs) deliver the courses, now mostly via Zoom but pre-pandemic by visits to the workplace, with additional delivery at the Basildon premises. The training rooms on site were reported as comfortable and well-equipped by the learners who attended. The LDMs are augmented by a Lead IQA and a Learner Recruitment Manager, with a Managing Director and Chief Executive in a senior leadership role. Recently, two Director-designates have been recruited from outside the industry to add leadership capacity and provide for future succession planning. One will take the lead for areas of compliance and the other for project management. A Board of Governance provides strategic oversight, chaired by a Non-executive Director who is recognised for her knowledge and experience in the further education and charity sectors. This Director also provides a connection to the board of AELP³ with which TLB networks, as well as the Essex Provider Network, Job Centres in the county, local authorities and SELEP⁴.

Coronavirus has had a major impact on TLB, especially for the leadership. However, nearly all staff were retained in position throughout the lockdown, and two new staff were recruited. Daily meetings were set up via internet to maintain communication and these became a model for LDMs to use with groups of learners, as 'Welfare Meetings' where discussion could be about anything besides the course. Interestingly, many learners and also LDMs report that communication and relationship-building strengthened during the lockdown. Learners experienced more contact from their LDM than when they were previously relying on workplace visits. TLB has developed health and safety and risk assessment guidance for employers in response to the coronavirus. Some limited face to face delivery has resumed where safe to do so. In Essex many employers are SMEs, and some have needed help with technical skills to work remotely. The QIP⁵ included an improvement action to review employers' understanding of Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity after learners commence on programme.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided to the approximately 300 current learners (about half the number are apprentices, the rest on short courses) takes place throughout the learner journey and beyond. The IAG is outlined on the website, by following either the 'Green' or 'Purple' routes the IAG for employers or learners can be followed. Learners are engaged by a series of direct question e.g., 'Would you like to learn and get paid?' and also asking about 'finding a career path'. When a subject box is entered details about the requirements and opportunity appear on

¹ Education & Skills Funding Agency

² Adult Education Budget

³ Association of Employment & Learning Providers

⁴ South-East Local Enterprise Partnership

⁵ Quality Improvement Plan

screen with a downloadable version also available. Application is often by recommendation through an employer although some learners say they responded to job adverts on Indeed or other websites (for apprenticeships). Learners attending the Sector-based Work Academies for positions in e.g., the NHS, were referred as part of claiming Universal Credit. Initial IAG is provided by the Recruitment Manager to help match potential learners to vacancies. TLB gave up on a previous 'boot camp' approach at early stage and now builds relationships with individuals using SkillScan as the basis for an initial assessment; similarly, for English and maths unless they have met minimum qualification levels. IAG is also used to build relationships with employers, e.g., by explaining the incentives available to take on apprentices, rules around furlough, providing contract templates and ACAS⁶ information.

The initial assessment becomes part of the handover to the LDMs once the learners are enrolled on programme and assigned an employer if a vacancy required. It is then the LDMs who provide the IAG throughout, now through phone calls and Zoom meetings, as part of and in addition to the course delivery. Learners frequently attested to the excellence of the support provided by LDMs, and hence have relied on them more to help when questions have arisen in relation to their current employers and perhaps changing jobs. Providing support that is more personable has become a larger part of the LDM role since coronavirus. A Guidance Policy has recently been revised at senior level and states that 'learners have a right to expect informed, impartial, supportive and timely guidance and counselling'. Monthly 'hot topics' are made part of the review meetings every 8 - 10 weeks, with learners given tasks to research in relation to the featured subjects. Progression is discussed and next steps discussed for after the programme ends. Usually, the goal on an apprenticeship is to be retained by the employer as a full employee, but if not, then the learner will be assisted to find an alternative position.

Strategic aims are captured in an Orbital Planning spreadsheet but specific Aims & Objectives relating IAG were outlined by the Managing Director. The Guidance Policy states that IAG is viewed as benefitting both the learner and the organisation. One measure of effective IAG is in the positive destinations recorded, with a 90% target for these. TLB has managed to track 100% of learner destinations for recent leavers, through a series of contacts made over 6 weeks. The data is broken down into several profile categories but overall destinations include 83% finding permanent, sustainable employment, a further 10% have education as a destination (mostly higher-level apprenticeships) and just 6% leave unemployed or without re-entering education, and 1% other category. It therefore achieves 93% positive destinations, above target. For the courses specifically aimed at the unemployed a different set of outcomes are targeted. These concern the building of soft skills and personal resilience, through improved confidence and interpersonal skills. These are assessed on the basis of the feedback received and assessment of progress on short term courses. Course Monitoring of Leadership and Management shows 100% in most cases gaining confidence in motivating teams, with some illustrative comments from feedback.

TLB has an aim to achieve high grades in its EPA for learners now on Standards. Besides the attention to quality of mentoring through the internal quality assurance process, IAG is used to help learners gain an understanding of helpful techniques through intense preparation at the gateway stage, e.g., mock exams conducted by an unfamiliar LDM for realism. The draft SAR⁷ reports that 90% of EPA candidates pass, 52% with distinction. Lastly, TLB aims to focus its IAG practice to be ready to take on the traineeship contracts currently pending for AEB funding to support the unemployed. TLB is already working with the DWP to run Sector-based Work Academies, and the feedback is positive, as demonstrated by the event arranged to tight deadlines to recruit for the NHS Covid Hub developed as part of the vaccination strategy. Three of the five candidates who applied

⁶ Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service

⁷ Self-Assessment Report

through TLB have been offered administrative roles in the NHS as a result. Among learners interviewed for this assessment were some of the successful candidates from these types of event: *“It was better than I expected. I was looking for something more stable than the work I had before redundancy, and TLB gave me all the background knowledge I needed. I’ve them to thank for my success in getting the job”*. Others who were previously unemployed said that attendance at employability workshops helped them to understand the workplace ‘norms’, indicating that TLB is well-placed to help learners who may enrol on traineeships.

An interim Ofsted visit in recent months upheld the self-assessment of TLB that it enables learners to achieve personal goals. Learners described working with their LDM on identifying first of all short-term goals (such as building confidence) and then later providing a focus on longer-term work-related goals. *“The course helped me to reflect on my strengths and gave me insight into the transferable skills I now have.”* The record of apprentice reviews contains a number of headings, such as IAG needs and next steps to achieve destinations. Assessor Caseload Reviews detail the support given with ‘social indicators’ such as anxiety and special needs such as dyslexia or ESOL⁸, and used for monitoring of progress. LDMs have the skills to support learners, through training such as in Mental Health First Aid. Employer Updates provide a record of progress and appropriate information on issues relating to their apprentices. Together, this provides TLB with management information for evaluating individual outcomes, which is collated in terms of the destination data referenced.

Several comments from learners interviewed highlight the value and meaning of their learning and developmental experience with TLB: -

“At college it was all about ‘university’ but several of us did not want that route. I never expected the possibilities that come with apprenticeships – it needs to get more representation at careers fairs as a viable option.”

“They seemed laid back around deadlines for submitting work (compared to other institutions) and they could be a bit sharper around that.”

“I felt so much more confidence in myself after 3 days, not only talking about work. They treated all participants equally and supported those seen to be struggling.”

“I think they taught us bundles in the time we had and they went over every detail they possibly could to help us get a job”.

“They are lovely people – so welcoming”

Partner agencies, including employers, describe the good quality communication as a particularly positive feature – *“They really do care – not just about doing the minimum. They want to make sure learners are happy in their role and will help resolve any concerns.”* Other partners respect that in a challenging labour market TLB ‘do what they say’ - *“They have a good track record – unlike some providers we have previously worked with”*

⁸ English Spoken as an Other Language

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.

- TLB draws on quality assured material that is relevant to its learners and also adapts information for use with different IAG audiences. An example of the latter is the information leaflet designed for employers that was devised by a LDM, mindful that specific guidance is required for the care sector. The investment in the EPA preparation at Gateway stage helps learners with the vital techniques to achieve results. The attractively designed website uses 'padlets' as a feature of its Hot Topics section, providing digestible chunks of multi-media information under headings of 'What to watch', 'What to read', and 'What to do'. Each month a separate topic is promoted and for learners on apprenticeship tasks are set as part of their programme. For the Homelessness and Poverty in UK topic from May, a YouTube clip about a local night shelter in Chelmsford was included, as were government policy factsheets. This innovative approach to enriching the learning process also assists with embedding subjects relevant to the areas that providers must comply with, such as Domestic Violence (for Safeguarding), Black History (for Equality & Diversity) and the Festivals You Celebrate (as an expression of British Values). [1.4, 2.2, 3.5]
- Staff involvement is a strong feature of TLB culture and that contributes to resilience and positive -morale among LDMs. This is illustrated by the monthly CPD meetings where LDMs are invited to take turns presenting on approaches that are relevant and of interest. The record from one of these meetings includes topics such as Neuro-diversity present by an LDM. There has traditionally been a flat hierarchy at TLB and good communication from the centre, which has been expanded during the pandemic. Leadership has persevered in the face of personal challenges to ensure a smooth continuation of service through lockdown and changing terms of engagement since. All of these factors benefit the learners by contributing to the sense of connection they experience with their LDM and minimum disruption to the service. The Board structure, with oversight and expertise provided by a Non-Executive Director, is helping TLB as it develops its senior management capacity to provide leadership in the future. [1.2, 1.7]
- Feedback is not only collected on a regular basis but is also analysed systematically to understand potential shortcomings for continuous improvement, and this is recorded as management information. For example, a survey of apprentices about their experience of support from LBH during the first lockdown. These contains graphic representation of the 93% approval of the support received and only 2% felt the quality of support was poor. On another page of the spreadsheet is an analysis of the responses, sorted between positive and negative comments. The latter highlighted the additional pressure on learners in some cases, and that increased reliance on technology (such as Zoom) can prove a difficulty. A poor experience of apprenticeship during lockdown was found to be because of factors beyond TLB's control, such as being furloughed. A later survey found that 100% of learners remained clear about what is expected of them on their course during coronavirus measures and all rated support over their welfare either Good or Excellent. [4.3, 4.8]

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.

- TLB has the potential to offer a progression route that could take someone from unemployment to a professional qualification in sustainable employment, via traineeships or Sector-based Work Academies, through apprenticeships and shorter specialist courses to an unfolding destination. In anticipation of relaunching its traineeship programme TLB could start to map the pathways that will connect the programmes it offers and include those as part of its IAG, perhaps as an addition to its generally informative website. This information could also be used by LDMs to provide individual pathway plans to learners as part of its Next Steps planning. It is also timely to reconsider the way IAG may need to be redefined to take into account the learners on traineeships, starting with the means to assess the barriers to finding work for unemployed learners. The measurable aims and objectives could be reframed and results evaluated in the SAR not only in terms of employment outcomes, but also soft skills development. Perhaps some form of distance-travelled scale could prove useful, capturing a baseline starting point and then hopefully an improved score at the end of the programme. This could put a measurement on a qualitative outcome, e.g., 'confidence or self-esteem has improved by X amount'. [1.1, 4.1]
- Detailed CPD records are kept and this included comprehensive inductions for recent joiners. Some staff in key roles have studied IAG qualifications and the support based upon excellent relationship-building was evidenced by the ethos in practice of TLB and confirmed by learners. Yet IAG in a formal sense could be given greater prominence. Concepts that are at the heart of IAG, such as impartiality of guidance to help make a choice from available options, or signposting to where further advice can be obtained, could gain in understanding if at least some LDMs were to study at Level 3 or beyond to champion this aspect. At present it seems most LDMs are qualifying to become IQAs as the main progression route which is understandable – but perhaps a Level 2 in IAG (online and often fairly brief in duration) could be treated as core training for all. If TLB develops its traineeship programmes, then IAG may need to become more focused in intensity to secure progression to next steps for learners. [2.3, 2.4]
- Leading on from the above point, some learners said they would appreciate access to dedicated careers advice towards the end of their programme. TLB once had a service from the National Careers Service but this was withdrawn. For many learners on Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeships the implied end goal is to successfully complete and be taken on as permanent staff by the employer, and this is the happy outcome for many. However, there are a few who may want to explore wider options and especially at higher levels (Level 5) wish to carefully consider their next steps for further study in the context of career aims. *"I had a good experience with them but I would really like to have had more discussion of the careers context [for my next steps]. It is overwhelming when you don't know where to go next..."*. It was mentioned that some fellow learners pay for private careers coaching. While this type of

provision may not be a strategic priority for TLB, perhaps more signposting resources could be identified. It was noted after giving this feedback that a similar point has already been identified within the QIP (under IAG), and for just this group. [3.4, 3.6]

- The learner voice could be strengthened through having a more systematic approach to acknowledging suggestions or constructive feedback from learners, in the form of a 'You Said...We Did' that posts the responses by managers. [4.7]

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

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

Methodology

The following methods were used to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard during the assessment process.

The assessment was conducted remotely.

11 TLB personnel were interviewed, including the Non-executive Director, Managing Director, Learner Recruitment Manager, Lead IQA, and 7x LDMs

13 learners interviewed, from across the range of TLB courses

3 partner agency representatives interviewed, including from 2 large employers and the Job Centre Plus

A large number of documents consulted, including SAR, QIP, learner records, planning materials, feedback records, and many items on the TLB website.

Conditions of Accreditation

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

1. Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
2. Throughout the period of accreditation satisfy The Growth Company that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.
3. Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.
4. Inform The Growth Company or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.
5. Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the **matrix** Standard at least 3 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 3 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.
6. Inform The Growth Company of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrixStandard@growthco.uk.
7. Inform The Growth Company immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.
8. Inform The Growth Company of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).
9. Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause The Growth Company and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.
10. Only use the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines. For example, if a certain department is successfully **matrix** accredited, the Quality Mark can only be used on that department's letterhead or on that department's page on their internet homepage.
11. Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for accreditation review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by The Growth Company and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to be a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
12. Be aware that The Growth Company reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.