

The Western Vocational Progression Consortium (WVPC)



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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
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Assessor's Name	Janet Lewis-Jones
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Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

The Western Vocational Progression Consortium (WVPC) was established in 2011, emerging from the previous regional Lifelong Learning Network, with the aim of encouraging progression from vocational learning to higher education (HE).

The core, longstanding members of the WVPC are nine universities in the South West. More recently, other subscribers have joined the Consortium, for example UniConnect programmes and Career Hubs in the South of England region. All members contribute annual subscriptions to maintain the work of the WVPC. One of the members – the University of Bath – has hosted the WVPC providing office accommodation and line management, and employing the staff team. Actual delivery of programmes though has been determined by a Board of Directors.

Until March 2023, the WVPC Board, made up of representatives from the nine SW universities, was responsible for the management and strategic direction of the WVPC and its services. From 2023, the liabilities, management and ownership of the WVPC has transferred to the University of Bath.

The WVPC first achieved matrix Accreditation in 2014, and has held it continuously since then, this being the fourth assessment against the Standard.

The WVPC aims to increase the progression of adults and young people to higher level study through providing online, impartial information and support about all progression routes. Online support is provided through two, free to use websites: Lifepilot: aimed at adults (developed in 2008) and Careerpilot: aimed at 13–19-year-olds (developed in 2011).

Schools, colleges and other education or skills development providers can subscribe to the platforms in order to not only access a wider range of functions, but also to receive support and guidance from the WVPC team.

In addition, the WVPC is a delivery partner within the UniConnect funded Western Inspiration Network (WIN) and through this provides one to one careers guidance in a number of schools across the catchment area, and the full Careerpilot package. Part of implementing this programme has included providing level six careers guidance qualifications to schools-based careers advisors in the area. The programme was also then offered out to non-WIN schools on a fee-paying basis.

The provision of IAG within the WVPC's delivery is, therefore, through the two platforms and within the WIN contract. Careerpilot is the largest area of activity.

Careerpilot has three 'levels' of engagement. Anyone, anywhere can visit the site and access a range of information around education and career related topics from places to study, to apprenticeships, to money matters and volunteering. If the service user registers on the site, they then have access to tools with which to build their own personal portfolio, developing plans and recording material that will support applications and so on. If their school subscribes, they will then be able to take part in supported activities within the platform. At this level a much larger suite of functions opens up, including 'zones', with resources for advisors and parents. Most staff in the WVPC team are involved in ensuring that the platform is kept under constant review and is continually refreshed with up-to-date information and new resources.

Lifepilot operates in a similar way, though is presently more geared to individual engagement.

Within WIN, delivery of IAG via the WVPC's level six advisors is designed to complement other arrangements in schools. Usually the WVPC advisers meet with young people once a year from year 9 through to 13 and provide comprehensive careers based IAG, utilising Careerpilot resources and facilities. All advisors are level 6 qualified.

WVPC employs a small team comprising the Manager, 3 x IAG Officers, an administrator and a finance officer – all part time, plus a small team of 3 freelance advisors.

The efficacy of IAG delivery is considered largely through feedback from users and the growth of engagement with the platforms. With regard to WIN, it is considered as part of the overall impact evaluation conducted by WIN.

The most recent data shows engagement with Careerpilot has grown year on year - 550,000 users in 22/23, up 16% on previous year; 7.9 million page views, up 23%. In terms of feedback: 98% of users said the site was useful, 92% said it helped them understand more about their range of options, 82% found out more about HE, 63% said they felt more able to make choices after using the site, and 51% were feeling better about their future after using Careerpilot.

An annual survey of staff using Careerpilot in schools showed that: 97% found the information on jobs, which includes pathways into them useful; 100% agreed that Careerpilot: met its planned aim to provide young people with information about the full range of choices; provides information that is relevant; supports young people in developing an awareness of the link between academic achievement and options for future jobs/careers; provides 'Career Tool's that help young people learn about themselves, their options and support the decision-making process; 100% also felt that Careerpilot helps them meet the Gatsby Benchmarks in some way.

With Lifepilot, the challenge is to find ways to reach adult learners, non the less in 2021-22 the users grew by 25%, from 4223 to 5300. Their feedback showed: 96% finding the site was useful, 92% that it helped them understand more about their range of options, 74% said they learnt 'about the range of providers offering post16/18 courses, including at a higher level, 63% said they felt more able to make choices after using the site, 85% said they learnt that 'achieving the best qualifications will give me more choices in working life'.

With regard to WIN: 480 out of 500 sessions delivered in the past year. There was positive feedback in response to key questions: Did the guidance session help you discuss your career options? 4.5/5 average rating; Did the guidance session help you put a plan in place to help you move your career decisions forward? 4.2/5; Overall, how useful has the careers guidance session been to you? 4.2/5. Over 80% reported knowing what they needed to do next.

Young people interviewed were very positive about their engagement with Careerpilot. There was particular mention of the jobs pages, which not only provide information on role content, but also likely salaries, and of particular interest, whether or not such careers were increasing or decreasing in terms of demand. Young people also welcomed the opportunity to search by a variety of different parameters, in particular, and new within the last year, values – what job roles reflect the things that are important to them such as the environment. During the year, staff also launched a 'Green Jobs' initiative to showcase roles that contributed to environmental issues in response.

With regard to the guidance they received as part of the WIN programme, young people noted how their yearly sessions helped them explore their broader ambitions based on things they enjoyed and were interested in, and how this was then followed up on within the school, who explored specific next steps.

Going forward, there is an annual plan with detailed aims and objectives, at a governance level, these are linked to income generation, with the WVPC needing to achieve full cost recovery over the next year. There is also a team plan which includes aims and objectives such as 'Manage the review and development of Lifepilot, Careerpilot, Parent Zone, Pathway Planner, Reporting Zone to ensure currency and relevance of the sites and to ensure they provide accurate IAG for clients' and 'Engage users across the South West/SE and nationally in using the WVPC resources to support impartial

IAG, careers in schools and as tools to support Widening Participation and the work of the Uni Connects'. There are KPIs to measure achievement linked to engagement with and usage of the platforms, as well as continued though tapering delivery of WIN.

There are also some new initiatives planned including a new contract with WIN focussed on raising attainment of under-represented groups – in this case military families and refugees. Indeed the organisation will be promoting how the WVPC and Careerpilot can contribute to the raising attainment agenda as part of their marketing approach; as is the anonymised sharing of the vast amount of data WVPC has about the interests, values and aspirations of young people using Careerpilot. In relation to Lifepilot, the team researched the 50 nearest universities' APPs (Access & participation Plans) to identify which included targeting of adult learners, and have followed up with those who did not. Other projects under discussion include a service for home educated children. Employer sponsorship is another avenue that the WVPC is exploring and is in talks with a major national employer currently.

A small number of areas for development or improvement were identified at the last assessment – these have been progressed as follows:

- Funding – the landscape since the last assessment has changed dramatically, so this remains a key objective, and one that the current strategic plan is specifically designed to address.
- Lifepilot underpromoted/invested in – significantly addressed with allocation of two days a week staff member to review and develop the site. Although not as active as Careerpilot, number have increased substantially.
- Difference between the WVPC advisors and school-based HEA – as practice has evolved this is clearer, and pupils interviewed felt that they benefitted for both inputs.
- Develop the interface with Careerpilot so that it is more attractive to young people – the platform is constantly evolving, and at this assessment, pupils were complimentary about the platform.

The WVPC has once again demonstrated that the organisation's provision of IAG meets the criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

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.

- **Leadership & Management** is strong. Following a period of considerable turbulence, there is now a clear governance and management structure, and a tightly written forward plan for 2023/24. The previous Board have embraced the changes, and all have continued as the Steering Group, bringing a continuity of support and guidance to the Manager, and whole staff team. If plans develop as anticipated, this will strengthen further with the consortium more formally becoming part of the University of Bath. Staff are fully conversant with the changes and the context in which they were made, as well as the forward plan, meaning everyone is moving in the same direction (1.1, 1.2)
- **The staff team** themselves are a considerable strength. Many are long serving having been with WVPC since the beginning; all are highly qualified. They are fully involved in developing Careerpilot (and Lifepilot to an extent), and in supporting and improving WIN delivery. They meet regularly as a team and more generally provide peer support. There are peer observations of practice via recorded interviews, and an allowance within their contracts for undertaking CPD. This provides WVPC with a flexible, loyal and highly competent workforce (2.3, 2.4, 4.6)
- **Careerpilot itself is a quality product** that is continually updated with new information and resources, such as the latest LMI data. It is attractive and intuitive to navigate. The whole team, steering group, partners and other stakeholders inform content development so that it remains relevant and interesting to young people. For example the ability to focus by values, introduced over the last year reflecting the fact that young people are increasingly more interested in job roles and employers that reflect their values and beliefs. And the Green Jobs initiative which showcased careers that protect the environment and look after our natural resources. Young people and advisors commented on the 'Jobs' section, in particular the ability to look at salary range and the current trends in terms of whether the role is waxing or waning. Feedback from users shows exceptionally high levels of satisfaction (2.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 4.7)
- WVPC has a long history based on **partnership working** designed to ensure that its activities remain responsive to changing needs and that the organisation is able to exploit available resources and funding opportunities. In spite of recent changes, this ethos continues. This means that the team has access to a considerable font of knowledge, expertise and experience to inform practice. Close partnerships with schools and colleges also leads to a richer provision for pupils and students. The forward plans include growing further partnerships in order to develop access to Careerpilot in new areas. *"The one thing I really want to get across is 'trust'. You can have complete confidence in them. Complete trust,"* said a partner. (1.8, 4.4)

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 current KPIs appropriately and necessarily focus on income generation and sustainability. After this 'proving' phase is completed, it will be important to ensure that longer term plans and objectives reflect the organisation's more **young person focussed drivers**, making this a USP for WVPC in the marketplace. *"We must never become commercially driven, we must focus on the kids. Going forward, we need to make it clear we are not for profit, unlike some of the competitors. This should be highlighted as our unique selling point"* said one interviewee (1.1)
- As part of forward plans, it might also be appropriate to review the use of reference to WVPC/**Western Vocational Progression Consortium**, in order to avoid confusion and so as to present the organisation as nationwide. Most interviewees were much less familiar with 'WVPC', instead referring to the organisation as Careerpilot. Addressing this might form part of the organisation's marketing plan (3.1)
- A couple of partners expressed concern about **future capacity** to keep pace with the speed with which the labour market and other external factors are changing. *"I attended a LEP webinar about the future of employment and the speed of change, and the impact of this on qualifications needed. It is going to be a challenge for Careerpilot to stay on top of that"*. Resourcing to ensure capacity to keep on top of this will need including in forward planning. There were also comments in terms of keeping pace with investing in the technology that sits behind Careerpilot to keep as smooth an interface as possible (2.1, 2.2)

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 the 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.

Interviews with 6 members of the staff team.

Interview with chair of steering group, and a steering group member.

Interviews with 2 partners and 2 school based HEAs.

Interviews with 8 current students; a level 6 learner; and a testimonial from a Lifepilot user who was unable to make an interview slot.

Review of documentation including: WVPC Aims and outcomes, Strategic Plan 22-23, Strategic Plan 23-24, Annual report to Board, Careerpilot aims and objectives, Lifepilot aims and objectives, Lifepilot User Guide, WIN Project plan.

Links to various surveys undertaken.

A demonstration of Careerpilot.

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.