



**matrix**<sup>®</sup>  
quality standard for information  
advice and guidance services

# Assessment Report

Realise Futures CIC - Learning,  
Coaching and Advice - Peer Support IAG



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

<b>ASSESSMENT INFORMATION</b>	
<b>Assessment Type</b>	Accreditation Review
<b>Assessor's Decision</b>	Standard Met
<b>Assessor's Name</b>	Andrew Davey
<b>Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s</b>	14/04/26 – 16/04/26
<b>Client ID and Assessment Reference</b>	C20876; PN203395
<b>Accreditation Review to be conducted by</b>	26/04/2029

<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	
<b>Evidence gathering</b>	14/04/26 & 15/04/26 on site. Face to face, group and remote interviews via video conference and phone.  16/04/26 Remote interviews via video conference and phone
<b>Staff interviews</b>	32
<b>Recipient interviews</b>	16
<b>Partner interviews</b>	3
<b>Document review</b>	Realise Futures Strategy; Realise Futures SAR 2024 – 2025; Learning Coaching and Advice Quality Framework; CEIAG Strategy; LCA Quality Improvement Plan; SBF Triage flowchart; SBF Visual Coaching Model v2; SBF Coaching record; SBF Feedback Form; Case studies; Learner Evaluation long courses; Learner End of Course Review and Evaluation; CEIAG My Action Plan; LMI data resources; Performance reports; CEIAG Presentation for Learners; Soft Touch Register; CEIAG Contact Sheet; Realise Futures Website; Learner Destination and Progression (LDP) Report; My Direction workbook; Ofsted Report 2024.

## About the organisation

Realise Futures CIC is located in Suffolk with its head office in Ipswich. Realise Futures' core mission is to 'enhance the life prospects of individuals within their communities by developing skills for employment, supporting mental health and well-being to enable personal progression, and assisting families in their children's learning journey'. The organisation 'prides itself on being the bridge that helps learners move forward, whether through small steps or through significant leaps, toward achieving their goals.

Realise Futures works closely in partnership with Suffolk County Council to deliver their services so as to contribute to the Council priorities and identified needs within Suffolk and the areas they are funded to support.

The organisation defines their primary aim as being 'To improve and promote the economic and social well-being of those who are disadvantaged and/or disabled, across Suffolk'.

Realise Futures is organised into three divisions, 'Learning, Coaching & Advice', 'Employment', and 'RF Works'. This assessment focuses on the IAG and CEIAG delivery within Learning, Coaching & Advice, and also includes the IAG elements of the Peer Support programme which is within the Employment division. At the time of the organisation's previous Accreditation Review (assessment) against the **matrix** Standard in 2023, the IAG element of the Peer Support programme was also included under Learning, Coaching & Advice. From here on throughout this report, the acronyms RF shall be used to collectively denote the parts of the organisation who are in scope for this assessment, with LCA referring to Learning, Coaching & Advice, and SBF referring to Suffolk Bright Futures.

Suffolk County Council (SCC) deliver adult learning through a subcontract model, with RF's LCA, being the major partner delivering Adult Learning for the county. LCA delivers 68% of SCC's adult learning accredited qualifications, and 90% of SCC's nonaccredited qualifications.

In line with RF's aims, they focus on delivering lower-level qualifications from Entry-level through to Level 2. They deliver to small groups/classes of between 8 to 12 which learners commented on positively. They also deliver tailored learning courses to help people return to the classroom to reignite their learning journey and experience in the classroom. Due to this model of delivery LCA attracts many learners with learning disabilities and/or barriers to learning. Working closely with partner organisations such as the local FE College, LCA enable learners to start their learning journey and then progress to a more formal traditional style of delivery at a local college geographically located near to the learner.

Included in the above, LCA also delivers work skills courses, with the focus on supporting learners to move closer to employment or into employment. This often results in a journey involving many planned small steps for the learners which may start in the classroom and continue through volunteering before reaching employment.

RF is delivering a one-year pilot project, Suffolk Bright Futures (SBF), that grew out of the Multiply programme and responds to learner needs identified during review and analysis of the Multiply programme. This too is funded by SCC and delivers a coaching service to support adult learners who apply to LCA. Coaching is often provided by SBF at the beginning of the adult learner journey with LCA, most likely when the learner is unclear about their needs or direction of travel. To be eligible for SBF coaching support learners must be to demonstrate an employment or career development goal. The SBF service supports learners to explore opportunities and pathways in line with their aspirations, and act as a bridging service to agencies and charities that offer services to help learners overcome learning and employment barriers. The SBF programme provides each learner up to a maximum of 10 hours advice and support.

The Peer Support IAG provision is for customers who are aged 19+ and who have a learning disability and/or autism. This is a service that is commissioned by SCC, with the aim of reducing reliance on statutory services. The IAG provision often links to the Peer Support programme which is for people who have a learning disability and/or autism who wish to meet people in their local area by engaging in social groups with like-minded people. The social groups are supported with dedicated trained staff from Realise Futures in attendance. The IAG provision supports customers with any need that they may have, for example with relation to filling out forms, assisting with reading letters, help with housing, benefits, safety, travel, employment, and so forth. This dedicated IAG support is available to eligible customers by appointment.

The commitment from senior management to delivering high quality IAG was clearly evident throughout this assessment. To support their cohorts of learners and customers, RF management recognise that quality IAG that is tailored to each individual, and delivered by qualified staff, is vital to be able to effectively support learners on their journey. The purpose of the IAG delivery is to support both RF's and their funders aims and priorities. Thus, the IAG is tailored for each learner and customer in a way that contributes to achieving the objectives of the funding which in turn is linked to the needs within the county.

The assessment identified a communication and delivery model that is well-defined and flows throughout the organisation in a manner that makes effective use of resources. This enables individual staff to keep up to date with information relating to their provision and learners, and to be able to record progress, while relying on their colleagues to support them with data management and analysis.

All staff at RF are deeply committed to supporting learners and customers in overcoming barriers and progressing on their journey at a pace that is right for them. A visit to the Ipswich head office, where the organisation's social enterprise operates, clearly demonstrates this ethos. The positive, caring environment created by staff who support individuals facing barriers to employment and who take pride in their work, reflects the organisation's genuine commitment to providing a supportive and empowering experience.

## The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Many learners and customers are referred to RF by partner organisations. RF work with partners such as the DWP, local colleges, community groups, GP surgeries, and other organisations where their potential learners are likely to be found. Speaking to learners on the LCA programmes revealed strong links to the DWP, attending job fairs, and receiving word-of-mouth recommendations. Customers on the Peer Support programme who had benefited from the IAG sessions explained how they had been referred by their doctor's surgery, social worker or community hub, often being provided with a flyer or other printed information. RF's website also provides good guidance around the training options available, along with the support from the SBF and Peer IAG provision.

The IAG provision is embedded throughout each learner's and customer's involvement with RF. As soon as a learner contacts RF the staff supporting reception and the contact points, often a Centre Administrator or Learning Administrator, discuss with the learner their reasons for calling or visiting the organisation, the course they would like to attend, and as appropriate how this links to their aspirations and further progress. The responses can be quite varied because some learners will be interested in an accredited course, while others may be interested in a nonaccredited course such as 'Confidence in Using a Slow Cooker'.

During their initial engagement, if the Centre Administrator identifies that a learner is unsure if the course is right for them, or they are not clear on why they have chosen a particular course, they are referred to an SBF Coach who supports them with robust IAG and CEIAG to plan their pathway. A 'Running Record' which also acts as an action plan is created each learner and identifies their next steps, tailored learning requirements, and progress towards their training and as appropriate employment goals. This information is held on a protected SharePoint site accessible by authorised staff, who use this information along with other records to monitor individual learner's progress and at organisational levels to inform impact on development within the service. The SBF coaching follows a 'Coaching Model' with detailed guidance available to staff which helps to standardise delivery during the learners initial session, subsequent session(s) and their final session which includes next steps, signposting and bridging activity.

The SBF programme manager holds a level 6 qualification in delivering advice and guidance, as do some of the coaches. All staff receive training in delivering CEIAG with three yearly refreshers which is overseen by RF's qualified Careers Adviser. Advisers delivering the Peer IAG sessions hold level 4 qualifications in delivering advice and guidance. This focus on using trained and qualified staff helps to ensure a high standard and quality of IAG/CEIAG is delivered to learners and customers.

Once enrolled on their training course, learners receive ongoing IAG and support from tutors in line with their aspirations, an aspect which often develops during discussions within the classroom. Each aspect of IAG, support, and signposting/bridging, is recorded in a Soft Touch CEIAG Register. This records all aspects of delivery that are outside of the course curriculum, enabling further

understanding of learner development, and an evidence base that can be used for developing the delivery programme.

Adult learning courses fall into three categories. Workshops which may be just a few hours, short courses which are up to 15 hours, and long courses which exceed fifteen hours.

Learners enrolled on workshops, which often act to provide a taste of longer courses with LCA, receive a 'CEIAG contact sheet' which guides the learner about the careers and progression support available at RF and also provides contact details for the National Careers Service locations around Suffolk.

Learners enrolled on short courses have a scheduled CEIAG session with their tutor. Learners enrolled on long courses have a CEIAG session delivered by RF's Career Adviser, or the NCS Adviser who visits their class. In both long and short courses a PowerPoint presentation is used by RF staff to support the delivery of the CEIAG session. For the long courses RF may arrange for a work experience opportunity, or a professional from local industry to present during the class session. RF also endeavour to support learners by bringing into the CEIAG session individuals who have progressed through the RF training journey and achieved employment or continued to university, so that they can share their journey and helped to inspire the learners.

Following their training course, learners are offered the opportunity to have a two-hour one-to-one CEIAG workshop called 'My Direction' with the Careers Adviser. This is also being delivered as a group session of maximum six learners following successful trials.

The IAG session on the Peer programme is usually a single session to support customers with their individual needs and help to put in place ongoing support that will help them improve their economic and social well-being.

## The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

The impact and outcomes that the IAG and CEIAG delivery has a significant influence on are evidenced in multiple ways. The adult learning and SBF funding include quantifiable targets that link to the Council's priorities and needs within the county. An important aspect of the impact of the service provided is the outcome for individual learners. To capture this RF produce case studies demonstrating successful learner journeys relating how they have overcome barriers and step-by-step achieved their goals. They also capture each learner's progress in their ILP, Soft Touch Registers, Coaching Records, support documents related to each learner, My Direction programme records, and learner development and progress (LDP) monitoring which takes place following completion of a training programme. These records are used to identify the impact for learners and are provided to SCC to review and analyse. The feedback to RF is in the form of an impact report which is used by management to review the service, identify best practice, and inform development.

RF's funding partner identified that they are successful and there is good reason why Realise Futures are their main provider. RF are very learner focused, support the counties priorities and meet the many KPIs that contribute to achieving the defined needs within the Council and the county.

Some quantifiable examples demonstrating impact were:

For the SBF programme there is a KPI to receive 70 referrals a month equating to 840 in the year. At the end of March they had received 576 referrals, 69% of overall target, and in line with expectations.

Target 50% of referrals to receive coaching. This is currently at 45%.

Target 55% of the 50% to transition from coaching to learning. This is currently at 38%.

Target 10% of the 50% to transition to employment. This is currently at 36%.

Each SBF coach provides one impact case study per month, which is on target.

The adult learning work skills courses have good results with retention at 93%, pass rates at 98% and achievement at 91%.

Accredited learning courses have a retention rate of 81%, a pass rate of 86% and achievement rate of 70%.

RF also capture lots of data through feedback surveys from learners, with the CEIAG delivery and support for learners to help them progress rated very highly.

LCA have in their quality improvement plan (QIP) a section that focuses on the delivery of CEIAG. The overarching aim is that the CEIAG offer is consistent and enriched with processes in place to measure the impact.

The aim in the QIP is to ensure that the CEIAG is helping learners to make informed choices, helping them to articulate their next steps, move to positive destinations, and in line with SCC and Ofsted recommendations, ensure that learners have an awareness that they have received CEIAG.

Completed actions on the QIP indicate that the actions are either completed or near completion. This concurs with responses from learners and feedback responses on recently redesigned surveys. The new CEIAG Boards were also observed and seen to include high levels of CEIAG, signposting to careers information, and the SBF offer.

In addition to the above measures and focus on CEIAG, the whole organisation is focused on continuous improvement. To achieve this, they collect data relating to learner and customer performance, all of which is fed back to SCC as well as reviewed by themselves. Some developments include:

- Reviewing outcomes from the Multiply programme, it was identified that learner outcomes were not only maths based but significantly centred around soft skills such as CV writing, interview skills, and overcoming barriers to enable progression. Funding was provided as part of a one-year pilot for a programme to

be developed. Suffolk Bright Futures was born with the focus of helping adult learners move into or nearer to employment, volunteering, training courses or to be connected to a service that meets their needs. These aims are being achieved using a robust coaching model, that provides coaching interventions at the most appropriate stage of the learner's engagement with Adult Learning, most often at the start of their journey. As such, SBF provides a holistic service to their adult learners.

- RF are re-developing and starting to schedule learner forums at the end of their courses. Presently posters are being used to promote the forums and tutors are promoting with their learners. The aim is to explore the learner experience to gather feedback and use it to develop the programme and learner experience.
- Reviewing trends with maths, English and ESOL delivery it was identified that the learners exhibited a gap in their knowledge regarding living in the UK. RF developed a training unit 'Steps to Success' which focuses on living and working in the UK. This unit also includes activities, one such being a trip to experience and learn about Parliament in London.

To support learners with their maths and English it was noted that learners for whom English was not their first language, were struggling at Level 2 maths which is now more aligned with GCSE. Learners were not understanding the language used in maths questions. RF are now teaching 'maths language' so the learners will understand the questions to be able to apply the maths.

RF demonstrate a continuous improvement ethos following a plan, do, review approach. There were many examples provided by staff throughout the assessment of reviews of performance and delivery being carried out that resulted in improvements of varying magnitudes. Examples included changing the quality improvement meetings from taking place quarterly to monthly to maintain a live focus on performance; identifying learners needs for help regarding benefits so training was provided by the DWP regarding benefit changes which was then cascaded to other teams; and, responding to feedback such as that provided by SCC and Ofsted where recommendations were made to help all learners understand the term CEIAG to aid recognition when receiving their ongoing careers guidance embedded in RF programmes.

## 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.

- Effective links are made with others that enhance the IAG offer. (2.7)

RF demonstrates strong partnership working, building effective relationships that enhance service delivery and create meaningful progression opportunities for learners and customers. Collaboration with the NCS provides learners with

insight into services available across the UK and, in some areas, offers additional qualified support for CEIAG delivery. Close engagement with NCS and other partners ensures that labour market information remains current and accessible.

RF also signposts learners to resources such as the DWP Padlet, broadening their awareness and reach. Partnerships with employers who understand the needs of RF learners create valuable work experience and volunteering opportunities, leading to employment for some. In addition, collaboration with the local FE college supports the delivery of training programmes that enable smooth progression onto higher level courses.

- The skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications are established for each role delivering IAG. (2.2)

RF focuses on continually supporting their staff to develop their knowledge through CPD and refresher courses. They also focus on the skills and experience of their staff ensuring that they are able to support their specific cohorts of learners and customers appropriately. Some staff working for RF have lived experience, having been through the journey that their learners and customers are currently experiencing. Throughout the assessment it was clearly visible that all staff are passionate about supporting learners to succeed and move on with their learning journey and to employment as appropriate. It was demonstrated how staff really understand the needs of their learners and customers. A typical example of this related to a very nervous learner with multiple barriers to learning including an eating disorder. RF's staff identified the need to use the SBF programme for additional support prior to enrolling on a training programme. The learner described how they were invited to meet at a coffee shop which was just the right level in relation to her eating disorder at that time. This progressed to the learner enrolling on a slow cooker course which they described as further supporting their development and progression in dealing with their personal barrier. The learner related how they were then supported to join a course that would help them gain the necessary skills for their next career move.

- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are valued in dealing with recipients. (1.2)

Throughout the assessment many examples were provided of how staff provided support and peer IAG from their own experience thus engaging in an empathetic manner which enabled the learners and customers to reciprocate and benefit from the provision being offered. This was clear to see with the SBF programme where specific needs of learners were effectively identified and they were helped personally through tailored provision. The many examples experienced during the assessment clearly identified that RF are delivering in a way that provides their learners and customers with the opportunity for parity of outcomes with their contemporaries.

- The organisation uses its resources effectively to deliver IAG. (2.8)

RF provides a wide range of high-quality resources to support learners and customers. The use of external services, such as the NCS, further extends reach and supports consistent, high-quality delivery across multiple locations. The organisation also ensures that information is accessible and tailored to the needs of diverse learner groups.

This includes well-designed printed materials, such as concise booklets offering comprehensive signposting to support services. One example included an indexed guide covering a broad range of areas—such as health, legal advice, finance, disabilities, mental health, housing, and family support—while another focuses on individuals seeking a new direction, outlining training opportunities, pathways to employment, and skills development. These resources are complemented by online access, with QR codes on CEIAG Boards in each centre, enabling easy and immediate access to up-to-date information.

- Actual outcomes are monitored and evaluated, providing an evidence base to further evaluate and improve the service. (5.2, 7.1)

During observations of teaching and learning Senior Tutors also monitor the distance travelled by learners in relation to their softer outcomes such as confidence and communication skills. To achieve this effectively the Senior Tutors review records relating to each learner within the group that they will be observing. They note the learner's original ability and skills at the beginning of their programme along with records relating to their development which are captured by their tutors. As such the observations not only monitor the quality of teaching and learning but also provides in-depth understanding of the 'distance travelled' by learners and provides information that can inform future development opportunities.

- Activities are in place to provide understanding and knowledge. (4.1)

The Careers Adviser visits classes to deliver scheduled CEIAG sessions. Tutors described how preceding the CEIAG session, and to enable learners to gain the most from the CEIAG session, they prepare their learners by encouraging the class to think about their career progression and aspirations. In the Digital Skills class, the tutor helps the learners to become confident in using the Internet prior to their CEIAG session so that the demonstrations regarding job searching and other use of the Internet will be meaningful and more effective. With the tutors preparing their learners for their CEIAG session in this manner results in increased understanding and engagement during the session, leading to enhanced outcomes for each learner.

## 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.

- There is an openly available description of the IAG on offer. (3.1)

RF help learners and customers to understand their IAG and support offer once they engage with their service. On their website LCA, SBF, and External Services pages, RF provide a large amount of information about their offer. However, the offer of CEIAG, what it includes and its expected impact are not on the website but is provided in an internal document that clearly defines the CEIAG service. Some learners identified that they only found out about CEIAG if they had a session during their programme, with other learners saying that they did not recognise CEIAG until they had their 'My Direction' session. RF may wish to review **matrix** Standard criterion 3.1 and its sub criteria and focus on explaining more about CEIAG on their website and during the induction to each course. The benefit of this may be that learners will understand what CEIAG is and the benefits to expect from receiving it.

- Staff competencies are established to meet the requirements of the IAG delivery. (2.3)

All staff have been trained in delivering IAG which is reviewed by the qualified Careers Adviser. During the CEIAG sessions delivered by the Careers Adviser a PowerPoint presentation is used to help facilitate understanding and engagement within the class. It was noted that the PowerPoint is also used by tutors in their short courses to deliver a session on CEIAG. Some tutors had not been trained in the use of the presentation, and its underpinning aims and knowledge. RF may wish to review how all tutors could be trained to use the PowerPoint presentation prior to incorporating it into their delivery. PowerPoint notes, (which are not visible to the audience), could be added to support retention, and delivery of the presentation to be included in observations by the Careers Adviser. The benefit of the above approach may result in increased effectiveness and engagement from the learners during delivery of the CEIAG session.

- The impact of the IAG is measured and evaluated and clearly linked to the purpose of the organisation and the needs analysis within the county used to develop their offer. (6.1, 1.1)

RF maintains a clear focus on performance and impact in its service reviews and conducts an annual Social Value audit, the results of which are published on its website. While some funding awards include more robust outcome and performance measures than others, RF could further strengthen its approach by developing clearer, measurable links between its impact and community needs, such as reductions in reliance on statutory services, and aligning these with county priorities. Doing so would help ensure that staff at all levels understand how their work contributes to broader objectives, and that the organisation can demonstrate outcomes in a way that is recognised by SCC and HM Treasury, thereby supporting future funding applications.

## 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](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.



© 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](http://www.matrixstandard.com)