

European College of Law and Business Ltd.



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Assessment Information

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met (subject to deferred evidence gathering)
Assessor's Name	Andrew Davey
Visit Date	11/11/2020 – 12/11/2020 (1.25 days plus 0.25 day deferred to March 2021)
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Extended Continuous Improvement Check Year 1 due by	16/03/2021
Continuous Improvement Check Year 2 due by	16/03/2022
Accreditation Review onsite visit to be conducted by	16/03/2023

Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

The European College of Law and Business Ltd. (ECLB) was originally named the Ilford Training Academy Ltd. before changing to their current name in 2017. Originally, the organisation focused on providing higher education qualifications for international students. Over the years delivery has changed and in 2016 the college shifted its focus from higher education (HE) to providing further education (FE) courses for both UK and EU nationals.

ECLB initially gained accreditation to the **matrix** Standard in 2017. This report relates to their first Accreditation Review against the Standard.

Originally ECLB focused on their provision of accredited Law programmes. As they saw the need within industry and local businesses for business related qualifications, they included in their delivery BTEC Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma in Business, Level 3 Diploma in Business Administration, and other related qualifications. The organisation delivers these qualifications to adults over the age of 18 to enable them to improve their career prospects with their existing employer, to get a new job, or as a stepping stone onto higher qualifications in either FE or HE.

At the time of their Initial Assessment, the organisation was located in Ilford East London. Having strategically reviewed their situation and opportunities around the UK, ECLB moved to Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, where they have been delivering Business courses at level 3 until early 2020. In Mansfield the organisation has facilities comprising of five classrooms, a computer lab and a library with 16 computer terminals. These facilities enable them to accommodate 70 students at any one time, which enable them to support 210 students when organised into multiple cohorts. Further strategic reviews combined with discussions with Awarding Body partners, has resulted in ECLB reviewing options to move back to London where they hope to start delivering level 3 programmes at the start of 2021. The pause in delivery has resulted from the initial lockdown due to the Coronavirus in spring 2020, followed by concerns expressed by students around the risks associated with Coronavirus when delivery was due to recommence in October 2020.

ECLB are working in partnership with New London Educational Trust (NLET) to deliver training against a government funded project. When they move back to London they aim to deliver OTHM qualifications and plan to obtain Centre approval from Pearson, ATHE and NCFE, enabling them to offer level 3 to level 7 qualifications. Discussions with partners identified that relationships are progressing well with the Awarding Bodies interviewed.

When established in a geographical location, ECLB have been very successful recruiting students through word-of-mouth and local advertising. As they move into new areas they partner with recruitment organisations who are established within the FE and HE recruitment field. ECLB are very selective about the partners they engage with, to ensure that a partner has the same ethos as themselves of supporting students and looking out for students' needs. ECLB provide detail about their service and training programmes to their recruitment partner, who then provides initial IAG to prospective students as well as carrying out diagnostic tests with the students, prior to submitting their details to the college.

ECLB's service is well embedded within their promotion, induction and training programme delivery. When a prospective student applies to ECLB or is presented via their partner, each student is provided with detailed information, advice and guidance (IAG). The focus of this is to help the college understand the needs and aspirations of the student while at the same time supporting students to understand the options available at the college. The initial IAG covers a wide range that includes details about the college and its facilities, training course information, the structure of training programmes, and depending on the learners situation and aspirations, how the qualification will help them in their current job, on their journey to FE or HE, or to find a new job.

Where it is identified that the programmes delivered by ECLB are not suitable, are not at the correct level, or are not in the best interests of the student, the student is signposted to an appropriate organisation that meets their needs. When the college moved to Mansfield, they worked with the local authority and local colleges to identify suitable opportunities for students, for whom their own training programmes were not the best 'fit' for the student's needs.

There has been a low turnover of staff working at ECLB, which has resulted in what some members of staff described as *"a friendly close-knit working environment, in which you feel well supported by the directors, who encourage innovation and development through a team approach"*.

Staff demonstrated a passion to support students on their training courses to succeed. On occasions this meant 'going the extra mile' to support students with funding for their travel and additional facilities so that they could bring their children to the college while they trained.

ECLB have a strapline message to their potential students: *"We shape your education, you shape your life"*.

The college has as its overarching Aim, *"To provide further education to learners in achieving their desired qualifications, skills and entrepreneurial abilities for a positive career progression"*.

This overarching aim is further supported by six college objectives.

The 'Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Policy', has its own Aim and Objectives which in turn support the overarching college Aim. The IAG Policy aim is multifaceted and details the intent of the IAG service to support prospective students in making decisions about their study and career planning, based on their individual needs, circumstances and interests. It also focuses on supporting students who have enrolled in achieving their aspirations, skills and positive career progression.

The IAG Policy objectives identify five areas against which IAG will support students to achieve their goals and gain their outcomes.

Senior management within ECLB identified the important link between effective IAG and successful outcomes, both hard and soft, for their students. They discussed the combination of ensuring that the students are on the correct course for their abilities and academic level, as well as ensuring the training programme was appropriate for their developmental pathway to achieve their aspirations.

Two specific measures used by the college to determine the effectiveness of their IAG are the success rates for their training programmes and feedback satisfaction rates for their IAG provision.

The college sets the bar high for their success rates. They aim to achieve in excess of 98% on-time achievement. This was corroborated by their funding partner who explained how ECLB have an excellent track record in relation to their success rates, which in turn supports the funding partner's high success rates.

Over the past few years, the college report that they have maintained a 98% on-time achievement rate for their students. The cohort who enrolled in May 2019 and completed in February 2020 achieved a 100% on-time success rate.

The target for feedback is that 90% of feedback on the IAG service alone falls within the top two categories out of five which are, either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' against each of the 11 objectives of the IAG service.

Where feedback falls below 90% against any of the objectives in the survey, the organisation implements improvement by following a plan, do, review approach.

For the last cohort who completed in February 2020 a 100% rating ('Strongly Agree' or 'Agree') was achieved in all eleven categories identified on the IAG Service survey.

The college maintains a two-pronged approach to enhancing and developing their service. One element is identifying aspects of their IAG delivery that can be enhanced based on monitoring the needs and feedback from students. The second element is to support students with achieving their outcomes and thus contributing to their successfully developing their abilities. This leads to students maintaining positive progress to a successful completion of their qualification and progression on to FE, HE or employment. Supporting students with their outcomes is also an inherent part of achieving their objectives in relation to career progression and development.

Once ECLB identify an opportunity for development, they try to implement it rapidly, ideally over the following week's delivery. Some examples of continuous improvement identified during the assessment were:

- It was identified that the last cohort of learners needed support with their functional skill around academic writing. A writing workshop was introduced to enhance the student's ability. Each student's progress was monitored at their mid and end review. Reviews identified significant improvement in students' academic writing ability. Recognition of improvement in this area was further corroborated by the Awarding Body at the final exam. It is felt that this development further supported the achievement of the cohorts 100% pass rate.
- ECLB identify that a well laid out and attractive CV is vital to being successful in a competitive job market, as well as for students wanting to progress to a higher level with another training provider. To improve students' success with applications, they introduced a CV writing workshop and monitored students' skills in this area. At the end of the course, the students produced a CV to the satisfaction of prospective level 4 providers, who subsequently offered them a place.
- In addition to surveys focused on the IAG delivered, ECLB also have a monthly meeting with students which they describe as an informal 'family style' mode with refreshments available. During this meeting they discuss different aspects and benefits of the IAG the students have received. The students see it as an informal discussion, whereas staff structure the discussion to pick up on key elements that should have been imparted during the IAG session. In addition to the IAG delivery, they also use this opportunity to explore student needs. Where it is identified that improvement is needed, this is captured and implemented in the next IAG delivery session.

A typical example of recent improvement related to the wording and language that was used by staff. When discussing recruitment with the students, they changed from using the word 'ambassadors' to word-of-mouth. Some language used emanates from the organisations history in Law, while at the same time the staff are trying to raise the quality of the English language used by students.

Another example related to students wanting more information about their options and pathways post qualification. It has been proven by ECLB that where students gain a mix of qualifications such as Business and Healthcare, they have more success gaining employment. Based on this they have modified their IAG to show the benefits of combining Business qualifications with other qualifications.

Due to many of ECLB students coming from Europe, there is a thirst for knowledge and understanding around how Brexit will affect them as individuals and employment opportunities. ECLB brought in a solicitor to help them understand as an organisation the likely impact of Brexit on students. They simplified the information and added it into their IAG sessions. The IAG now includes information around immigration, and refers students to the relevant website and contact details for further information. They have also made access to their solicitor available. The impact of this has been a significant reduction in the number of queries and concerns raised by students about Brexit.

- Some students don't reveal all the information about themselves during the initial interviews and IAG session. Two examples cited related to a student with a baby, who was then unable to attend her training sessions because her husband was working. ECLB made provision within the Centre to accommodate children. Another student had mobility problems which meant they couldn't sit for long periods during training sessions. Once this was identified, ECLB made allowances both physically and in relation to the length of session to accommodate this learner. Both of these learners successfully passed their qualification.

The above areas were discussed with the Academic Committee within ECLB, and changes made to the initial IAG sessions to increase the focus on areas relating to attendance issues and health requirements. This has resulted in better understanding of student needs prior to them enrolling on their course.

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.

- The service is provided with clear leadership and direction (1.2)
As with many training providers, ECLB's IAG service is well embedded within the training process. However, ECLB focus on the delivery of IAG as a vital part and a discrete part of their service. This is evidenced by the Directors carrying out observations on IAG delivery which then leads to continuous professional development for staff. ECLB also carry out formal surveys to determine if their aims and objectives for their IAG service has been achieved, and analyse the feedback to identify areas for development. In addition to the above, led by senior management, the organisation arranges informal group reviews with students to determine their understanding and impact of specific aspects of IAG received during their early IAG sessions. This is identified as a strength because many training providers who embed IAG do not focus on this element in such a discrete manner and with so much attention.
- The service provided is impartial and objective. (3.3)
ECLB focuses closely on the needs of the students and meeting their individual needs. This was evident in the way they provided resources to help students with travel needs by providing finance towards travel, and those with family needs by providing resources to support students with children during training. This approach was especially evident in October 2020 during the Coronavirus when the college took the decision to close and not run their programmes due to students feeling unsure and being concerned about the risks to their health. This decision was taken despite other colleges and schools reopening. This aspect was also highlighted by ECLB's funding partner as a positive response to student feedback. Several examples were also provided and corroborated by partners, to show that where it is deemed better options are available with other organisations, ECLB signpost or refer the student to the more appropriate organisation. This is seen as a strength, because it demonstrates an impartial and objective service for students despite there being a significant negative financial impact on the organisation itself.

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.

- Students are provided with current and accurate information. (2.2)
ECLB have made some strategic changes over the past few years. At the time of their previous assessment against the **matrix** Standard, they were known as the European College of Law (ECL). They have strategically changed their delivery to include Business qualifications. This is reflected in their name, European College of Law and Business (ECLB). It is also the name registered at Companies House. ECLB's website does not reflect their new name, and their homepage still strongly provides prospective students with the idea that the organisation is focused on providing qualifications related to Law. Some other elements on the website were identified as being out of date, such as the IAG policy which is dated 2016, whereas the most recent version is dated November 2020. The organisation identified that this is an area that is already in hand and has been developed by an external contractor. ECLB may wish to ensure that their new website/revised website is in place ready for their 2021 student intake. The benefit of this may be that the website will give a true reflection of opportunities and options available to students. A review of the website may also ensure that any policies that relate to legislation have been uploaded from their current documentation files.
- The organisation measures and evaluates its services against its stated aims and objectives (4.1)
ECLB has an IAG policy that clearly identifies the objectives for their service. They use student feedback to monitor their success against objectives and outcomes. They have a measurable objective of 90% satisfaction for feedback against their IAG service. The organisation may wish to define a measurable link between their stated objectives and their IAG service. The benefit may be that all staff at the college will be able to understand what achieving each objective 'looks like' in practice and performance terms, while at the same time providing a framework for development opportunities.
- The organisation defines quality assurance approaches which are used to improve the service. (4.5)
ECLB has comprehensive and robust quality assurance approaches in place. These include scheduled and documented observations, informal reviews, and student feedback surveys. Areas identified for improvement are recorded in ECLB's quality improvement plan (QIP). Again the QIP is a positive element within their quality assurance system, and is constructed with headings that clearly show, the criteria to be developed, the expected impact, the action that will be taken, responsibility for the action, success measures (what success looks like), timescale, review dates, and progress notes. However, reviewing the QIP 2021, identified that against eight of the 13 criteria for improvement, the 'success measure' had not been entered, but rather the word 'ongoing' had been placed in this column. ECLB may wish to consider for each area for improvement, 'what success looks like' in relation to the defined impact.

One example of an area for development which did have a success criteria against it was identified as Careers Guidance, with the expected impact being, '*Increased motivation through careers guidance; Prepare students for job readiness through proper career guidance*'. The success criterion was identified as '*To know how many students receive the career guidance and have success*'. Although this may be a high level measure, ECLB may wish to review how, when broken down, this success criteria measures 'increased motivation' and 'job readiness'.

The benefit of clearly quantifying the success measure may be that all staff within the organisation will fully understand 'what success looks like' and thus their journey to achieving it. At the same time it will be clear when the desired impact has been achieved.

- Effective use is made of technology to improve the service. (4.7)
Due to the impact of the Coronavirus, many organisations have had to develop remote/virtual learning platforms and processes. This is a strategy that is clearly in the minds of senior staff at ECLB. However, due to their previous programme completing prior to Coronavirus lockdown, and a new programme not yet having started, it was not clear how remote and virtual delivery was being addressed. This was a focus from some staff and partner organisations for the organisation to consider in the months ahead. The organisation may wish to work with some of their partner organisations who have already been advising on best practice and success with using remote delivery methods. The benefit of this approach going forward, may be that ECLB will be able to provide a blended approach to delivering their IAG service. This may provide more options around access for potential students, while also supporting students who encounter problems in their life and may not be able to attend all scheduled face-to-face sessions.
- Coronavirus Assessment Guidance – deferred interviews.
Due to the Coronavirus inhibiting current delivery and availability of past students to take part in the organisation's assessment against the **matrix** Standard, the 'Coronavirus Changes to **matrix** Assessment Practice' as agreed with the Department for Education were implemented. As such interviews with students have been deferred until the organisations CIC1 in 2021. During the CIC1 in 2021, ECLB are requested to arrange interviews with a maximum of 15 and a minimum of 9 students. Because the outcome of the interviews are part of this assessment, evidence collected when talking to students in 2021 may potentially have an impact on the outcome of this assessment. At the time of this assessment, it is envisaged that remote interviewing will still be in place when ECLB's CIC1 Takes place in 2021.

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.

Organisation:	European College of Law and Business, 39B Westgate (1 st and 2 nd floors), Mansfield, NG18 1RX
Staff:	6 staff interviews, via phone.
Students:	Student interviews deferred to March 2021.
Partners:	4 partner interviews, via phone.
Documentation:	Documents reviewed included: ECLB Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025; ECLB Quality Improvement Plan 2021; Course evaluation report; IAG performance measure; IAG policy November 2020; IAG observation x 2; Key Job Responsibilities of ECLB staff; Learning Journey Flowchart; Student Feedback on IAG; Self Assessment Form ECLB; Tutor job responsibility; matrix 2018 CIC2 Review; Website.

The Coronavirus had affected the intake of students in 2020. The final cohort of students prior to this assessment completed their programme in February 2020. Due to the initial lockdown within the UK, combined with international students being supported by the organisation, a new cohort of students did not unroll for the summer term. As noted previously in this report, a decision was taken not to enrol students who had already received their initial IAG in October 2020 as previously planned. Due to this situation it was agreed that the Coronavirus Assessment Guidance would be followed and interviews with students would be deferred to the organisations CIC 1 in March 2021.

It was identified during the closing meeting of this assessment, that in March 2021, ECLB will be asked to schedule interviews with 15 students. These interviews will be conducted remotely, either on a one-to-one basis by phone, or in groups via videoconferencing. It is planned that in March 2021 the duration of the interviews and CIC1 combined will approximate 3.5 hours. 2 hours for interviews with students, 30 minutes for a review and outcome discussion regarding the findings from students, and up to 1 hour to conduct the CIC 1 review.

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.