

# Assessment Report

Waltham Forest College

| ASSESSMENT INFORMATION                  |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| Assessment Type                         | Accreditation Review      |
| Assessor's Decision                     | Maintaining Accreditation |
| Assessor's Name                         | Aly Jackson               |
| Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s    | 02/05/25 – 09/05/25       |
| Client ID and Assessment Reference      | C11601 PN202956           |
| Accreditation Review to be conducted by | 12/05/28                  |

| METHODOLOGY          |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Evidence gathering   | 1 Remote day 2/05/25 plus 4 onsite days 06/05/25 – 09/05/25  |
| Staff interviews     | 72   |
| Recipient interviews | 38   |
| Partner interviews   | 9  |
| Document review      | Wide range of information including policies, planning and evaluation reports. LRC resources, digital platform, CRM, case studies, presentations, the website, social media. |

## About the organisation

Waltham Forest College is a long established medium sized general further education (GFE) establishment which has grown and developed to provide 'Outstanding' (Ofsted 2024) education for its learners. Situated on a single campus, the college provides a wide range of learning to meet the needs of a diverse learner population, offering provision from pre-entry to Level 3, with some Level 5 teaching qualifications as well as apprenticeships, 'T' Levels, Access courses and from September 2025, 'A' Levels.

Waltham Forest College supports over 7000 learners, of which over 2600 are aged between 16 and 18 years of age. Achievement rates for learners are well above the national average and the College is ranked in the top performing 5% of GFE colleges

nationally for learner outcomes, with 95.3% of learners progressing to a positive destination.

Waltham Forest College is an anchor institution, employing over 400 staff and is very well integrated into the local community. There is a commitment to understanding local and regional skills development needs, and the college is outward facing both strategically and operationally in its aim to ensure that learning is fit for purpose, particularly in regard to fast moving industries and future proofing.

There are extensive, productive relationships with employers, industry and commercial sectors, universities, support services job centres and Local Authorities. These relationships are developed from the highest level to ensure the college has an integral role in collaborative work which is innovative and creative, supporting learners and the community.

The Values of Waltham Forest College are Integrity, Inclusion and Excellence. These are lived and breathed across the college, with staff and students taking pride in their environment, welcoming visitors and supporting one another. This positive culture is apparent from first contact with the college reception area and extends across all contact with both students and staff. The welcome is exemplary and students are polite, helpful and friendly.

Inclusion is demonstrated both in terms of the diverse range of learners and staff from all backgrounds and ethnicities – there are over 90 languages spoken across the college - and the breadth of opportunities for learning from pre-entry to Level 5. All learners are welcomed and there are progression pathways from any starting point, with numerous positive narratives shared, where people have worked through various levels of learning to achieve their goals.

The commitment to high quality, impactful careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is apparent from Board level and this commitment is shared across all staff. Achievement of 'whole organisation' accreditation to the **matrix** Standard is testament to the excellent leadership team, who continuously drive improvements to the service with enthusiasm, encouraging staff and students to seek the best possible outcomes. Learners are all aware of the importance of looking forward and setting aspirational goals for their future. This is not limited to those who have a clear career pathway, such as learners completing vocational studies, but is embedded into the planning for all learners, regardless of their starting point.

Senior leadership commitment to IAG is also apparent through significant investment into systems and key staff roles. For example, the Navigate platform now enables staff and managers to track activity around work placements and other non-academic experiences in great detail, providing immediate clarity on both cohort and individual progress in skills development, work experience and self-assessment which measures distance travelled.

Wellbeing for staff and learners is exceptional, delivered through a bespoke team of highly effective staff who are easily accessible, proactive and responsive. This team supports the embedded IAG delivery through identifying and breaking down barriers

to moving forward. From professional counselling to daily games and activities, the team provides a sanctuary where learners can find a calm environment, someone to chat to, new activities to try, and where needed, referral to other services.

Over the past five years, and particularly since the Covid lockdowns, strategic and operational measures have been implemented which have strengthened the positive culture of the college, instilled a sense of belonging and pride, recognised the need for greater pastoral support, encouraged high aspirations and provided a springboard for the outstanding achievement and progression results currently in place.

## The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) are fully embedded across all curriculum areas and for all students. There is an inclusive and holistic approach to ensuring all students have the information and support they need to make decisions about their next steps as well as their longer term career goals.

IAG begins with the extensive promotion of the college through the website, social media and a wide variety of events. Information is concise and relevant, providing a taster for follow up enquiries. There are established links to local schools, including effective working relationships with special schools, which support positive transition visits and introductions to the college. Community links are also in place which encourage adult learners to consider improving their skills. Within the diverse community, ESOL is a popular choice for adult learners and college staff work to provide tasters and conversation groups to encourage people to consider more formal learning.

A warm welcome to open evenings and other events encourages potential learners to find out about provision in a friendly, open environment. Steps are also taken to meet the needs of SEN learners who may require a bespoke introduction to the college with fewer people in attendance.

Although key central staff, such as Learner Services and Welfare and Wellbeing provide an overview and planning of many events, all staff are involved in welcoming potential learners to college, and are in attendance to talk through any aspects of a course, links to employers, university applications and progression pathways.

Student induction is comprehensive and includes a checklist for all tutors to ensure all aspects of college life are covered within the first few weeks of the academic year. Students are introduced to all relevant teams and are given tasks to do which take them to all parts of the college and its resources.

From the beginning of the student journey, IAG is a key component of their ability to map their progress and seek support where needed. Teachers, tutors, technicians, learning support and the SEND teams are all involved in target setting and progress reviews, all of which include elements of short and longer term career goals. Learner Services and the Careers Team provide individualised impartial advice and guidance

and there are specialist teams to deliver work placement support, apprenticeships, employability, resources and academic learning support, such as essay writing, referencing and application for higher education.

Extensive use is made of the many external network partners for delivery of IAG. For example, employers are involved in presentations, mock interviews, workplace visits and placements. Live briefs have been successful in bringing industry standard activities to learners within vocational areas, resulting in extended collaborative work and employment opportunities.

The IAG offer is comprehensive, encompassing numerous activities aligned to business needs, the current employment climate and the individual guidance needs of learners wishing to explore their options post college.

Across the whole Assessment, feedback from all parties described a highly effective, inclusive and sometimes life changing range of opportunities, which supported the growth and development of individuals. So many testimonies, including those gathered informally from walking around and speaking to learners during breaks, demonstrated the importance of the service and how it had impacted on their progress. Comments from learners across all levels included the following:

“I could not speak English three years ago and I wanted to be better. I have come here and learned so much. The staff are perfect and I have so much gratitude to them for believing I could do it.”

“This is a great place to learn. Everyone is helpful and there is always someone to ask about anything at all. All of the staff will help you and you don’t stop – just keep doing more and finding out what you are capable of.”

“If I want to talk about my future, I can talk to any teacher or learner services or the Be Safe Team. They are all there to listen and it is never a problem.”

“I was bullied at school and I am so happy that there is zero tolerance for bullying and bad behaviour here. I feel safe here and that’s why I come.”

“I didn’t think I would ever consider university, but with all the encouragement and the help to apply I have now been offered a place and I am hoping to go to uni in September. I could not have got there without all the support I have had.”

“What is best about our college is that everybody cares about you. If you are down, someone notices and speaks to you. You don’t feel alone.”

“It’s cool. We know we will get help to think about careers. Work placements are a big thing and we have to do them – which is good. Being in a workplace is real and it gets us ready for getting the right job.”

“I have had so much help with applying for uni and I have been back to ask many more questions. They are never mad to see you again. They are saints.”

Partners were impressed with the commitment of staff at all levels and also made numerous comments about the preparedness of students when attending visits and placements. Comments included:

“I have had first years from Waltham Forest College come here whose behaviour and interest far exceeded people from other settings at the end of their courses. Students from the college are very well prepared and are mature.”

“After some initial issues with communication, I gave feedback and asked for improvements. This past year has been fantastic, with the right team in place. We have worked closely with the college and had excellent students who are a credit to themselves and the college.”

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

IAG is completely embedded into the student journey from initial contact with the college, therefore is integral to the success and impact for students in relation to achievement, progression and careers related measures. Recognising the importance of CEIAG and incorporating it into both curriculum and pastoral areas has resulted in successful achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks, 99% of learners accessing work placements, excellent, ongoing relationships with employers who provide employment and apprenticeship outcomes for learners.

The recently developed Navigate platform has enhanced understanding of the wide range of non-academic activity undertaken by learners. Information is available ‘at a glance’ providing staff with detailed information at individual and cohort level on the breadth of work related activity, self-assessment against a range of skills and any arising issues. It is anticipated that this platform will support ongoing evaluation and future planning of work related activity.

The college is also recognised as an exemplar of good practice in relation to collaboration with external partners, in particular the willingness to adjust schemes of work to reflect industry developments and reflect business needs. The college are in constant communication with a range of partners to ensure they are improving the offer to students and providing meaningful opportunities which will translate into future careers.

Feedback from partners, staff and learners is systematically gathered and actioned. Comments and suggestions are taken seriously and information is shared on what changes have been made in response to feedback. Students have a range of methods of sharing concerns, including surveys, advocacy and focus groups, and a ‘You Said, We Did’ approach ensures that feedback and actions are shared.

The Principal delivers a weekly email to all staff which is valued as a means of understanding key issues as well as sharing positive stories and coming events.

The quality cycle across strategic and operational activities is robust and includes all staff in the ongoing evaluation of the service. Nothing is static and steps are taken to continuously review and improve all aspects of college life for learners, partners and staff. Numerous changes have been made since the previous Accreditation Review including extensive works to improve the premises, such as the recently completed



pool area, changes to staff conditions, enabling them to access paid CPD opportunities, digital developments and greater external collaborations.

Waltham Forest College exemplifies whole college commitment to and delivery of exceptional CEIAG which provides learners with the support to develop themselves, set aspirational goals and develop resilience.

## 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.

- CEIAG is embedded across the whole college, with commitment from the Board and Senior Leadership Team. This flows through to all staff and is apparent to students, who see the importance and value of high quality IAG to support their future plans and development. (1.1)
- The college lives and breathes its values of Integrity, Inclusion and Excellence. First class achievement and work placement rates, inclusive recruitment of staff and learners, sharing of language skills, step by step progression with a 'no wrong door' approach, all reflect the values which are shared by staff and learners. The values are apparent when visiting the college through the friendliness and excellent behaviour and helpfulness of the whole college community. (1.2)
- Collaboration with partners has resulted in numerous examples of high impact results for students. From events and information sessions, to in depth workshops, work experiences and collaborative use of premises, the college has developed and honed partnerships and networks to provide highly effective services for students and employers. (2.7)
- Employers play a large part in all aspects of college life and these contacts have been nurtured to encompass a wide-ranging offer to students. Information sessions, interview skills, workplace visits, work placements and other developments support the needs of students to have a meaningful and realistic understanding of the world of work. There is a commitment to ensuring all students have access to work placements and this has resulted in 99% accessing this provision. Curriculum and vocational staff are encouraged and supported to build their knowledge of the employment landscape through visits and ongoing communication. This approach has had an extremely positive impact on successful employment opportunities for students, who are well-prepared through learning developed in conjunction with industry needs. (2.6, 2.7, 7.2)
- The college has numerous positive role models for students in teaching and non-teaching roles. Many of the staff have themselves been students of the college and wanted to give something back to the community. Staff

demonstrated pride in their personal experiences and wished to instill this culture and ethos in their work with students. Staff model the behaviours they wish to see from students and this is apparent across the college. Having access to positive role models enables students to explore their aspirations, speak to staff who have had similar experiences and feel more able to believe in themselves. (1.2, 1.4, 2.2)

- The integration of the Skills Builder Framework has significantly enhanced student employability by embedding essential transferable skills into the curriculum. This commitment to skills development has been recognised through the prestigious Skills Builder Silver Award and the AoC Beacon Award for Excellence in Careers and Enterprise. Through industry talks, expert-led workshops, and strong employer partnerships, the College continues to lead in preparing students for long-term career success. There has been excellent use of Navigate, a comprehensive work placement and enrichment platform, to provide a robust system for non-academic activity, which is user friendly for both staff and students. Evolving the platform along with the developer has resulted in greater clarity regarding activities as well as a live report of success against agreed organisational, departmental and individual targets. The system has significantly impacted on the percentage of learners accessing work placements, as all staff and students are involved in the input and review. The platform also supports the building of skills over time and learners are able to see the distance they have travelled in terms of non-academic skills development. (6.1, 6.2)
- Wellbeing is an extremely important aspect of the whole college, with both students and staff having access to excellent levels of support to ensure they are safe and happy. The range of activities and support is extensive and can be added to or changed to meet peoples' needs. The team is both proactive and reactive, providing an enthusiastic and intuitive service which students value greatly. (1.4)
- The college celebrates diversity. There is a willingness to share skills, such as the multiple languages spoken by the staff team, to support translation for applicants and current students. There is pride in the range of backgrounds that students come to college from, and people are encouraged to be positive about their identity. (1.2)

## Development suggestions

Development suggestions are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g. where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is, or to give insight into practices seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and development suggestions. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and



guidance service is in any way lacking. These 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 work with partners is highly effective and a collaborative approach ensures that students are offered comprehensive services which extend beyond the college. For those partners where there is extensive and diverse collaboration across a number of events/projects, it would be beneficial to draw together all of the work across the year through a partner review, including a summative report, covering data, as well as narrative stories of student successes, transitions and distance travelled. This is in place with some partners, however the review process is more formal in some cases than others. (2.7)
- CEIAG is embedded across the curriculum and there are numerous ways in which students can access support, including some external guidance through the National Careers Service. There is not currently a full time operational Level 6 qualified Careers Adviser within the delivery team. The current Adviser, along with other team members, is undertaking Level 4, which is a positive development, however, it would benefit the college and its students to have Level 6 Advisers available, particularly for students where in depth guidance may be necessary for support with choice, decision making and career coaching. It may also be useful to consider stand-alone CPD for Careers staff covering in depth guidance skills such as Motivational Interviewing and Careers Coaching. (2.5, 2.6)
- It will be useful to review developments with the Navigate platform during the Continuous Improvement Check (CIC) process, to consider what it can provide in terms of growing knowledge of the platform and how student data can contribute to college improvement monitoring and outcomes. (7.1, 7.2)
- Information and knowledge about Apprenticeships as an option is not universally understood. Some students are fully informed, whereas others do not know what apprenticeships are or how to access them. This is particularly evident where students do not have English and Maths at GCSE grade 4 or above. There are already events specifically to look at Apprenticeship pathways and it is suggested that these continue, using examples from previous students, of the pathways into employment through the apprenticeship route. (4.4)

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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.
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