

Assessment Report

STAFF SELECT LTD T/A NOVA TRAINING

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Andrew Heydeman
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	7/4/2025 - 10/4/2025
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C10860 / PN202843
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	14/4/2028

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	All remote (using Google Meet and phone)
Staff interviews	43
Recipient interviews	19
Partner interviews	3
Document review	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy; IAG Statement and Policy; Safeguarding newsletters (12/24 and 2/25); Learner Survey Evidence; Health and Safety Policy; Anti-Bullying Policy; Complaints Policy; Behaviour Management Policy; Safeguarding Child Protection Policy; Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Management Plan; Effective Practice for Safeguarding and Prevent; Health and Wellbeing Policy for Learners; Whistleblowing Policy; Sexual Harassment Policy; Progression data.

About the organisation

Nova Training was established as a private and independent training provider in September 1992 and celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2022, delivering and offering a wide range of youth and adult training programmes and apprenticeships.

The company's head office is in Willenhall town centre in the West Midlands, within the Walsall Local Authority area. Initially, the training provider focussed on the delivery of training programmes across all four Black Country Local Authority areas but has since expanded into other geographical areas, including notably the East of England. Nova Training now operates its provision from thirteen centres located in Birmingham, Cannock, Clacton-on-Sea, Colchester, Dereham, Dudley, Kidderminster, Oldbury, Walsall, Wellington, West Bromwich, Willenhall and Wolverhampton.

The programmes delivered now include those for 14-24-year olds; 16-18 study programmes with a strong focus on employability, pre-apprenticeships, provision for learners with high needs, apprenticeships and alternative provision for 14 to 16-year olds. Functional skills training is delivered in maths, English and ICT, in addition to vocational training and qualifications in a number of sectors and trades. These include motor vehicle service and maintenance, business administration, customer service, retail, management and the relatively recent introduction of e-sports. The company's apprenticeship programmes cover numerous different standards-based apprenticeships at different levels. As this apprenticeship activity includes work with a number of large national employers, some of the company's training and education is also delivered in different parts of the country.

Nova Training has a mission which is: "We will increase skills through the attainment of vocational and fundamental English and maths qualifications whilst improving learners' employability skills and life chances. We aim to increase employment levels, decrease NEET and meet the skills demands of the learners, Local Authorities, employers and LEP's that we serve." This is underpinned by values summarised as: "Maximising learner/customer success and achievement through innovative delivery to improve individual's life chances and/or employment opportunities, in a safe, secure and nurturing environment", fully supported by specific values of: **Respect, Honesty, Trust, Openness, and Equality of Opportunity for all.**

Alongside this mission and the specific values of the training provider, there is a published vision: "Through a socially inclusive approach, we will provide high-quality training and support to equip individuals with the skills for future employment, further development and/or Further Education. Nova is committed to delivering excellence, providing the best possible experience and effective CEIAG (**Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance**) for our learners and staff alike. With a strong emphasis on Equality and Diversity and a commitment to Safeguarding, we will ensure our learners feel safe and are safe. We aim to be a high-performing

organisation with a passion for learning and a dedication to becoming the training provider of choice.”

The company’s top-level commitment to the importance of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is confirmed and demonstrated by this specific and explicit reference to IAG in its vision statement quoted above. As the Managing Director summarised: “We put all of our IAG at the top of a pedestal” as being of paramount importance in everything we do in supporting all of our learners and apprentices.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Nova Training has an annually reviewed and updated IAG Statement and Policy, which sets out its aims: “to deliver a high standard of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) to ensure that all our learners and any prospective learners can make a realistic and well-informed choice about their next steps in education, employment or training.” This support highlights the entitlement which each individual learner with the training provider has, to investigate a variety of learning and career opportunities; make informed judgements about learning and career options; understand how these choices will help achieve their aspirations; help to manage changes in their learning and career journey; develop aspirations through the guided use of an individual learning plan (ILP) and gain an understanding of the world of work and enterprise.

The IAG support provided to both learners and apprentices commences at the first point of contact with the organisation, when a detailed discussion takes place with the potential learner or apprentice to ascertain their career plans, and identify and assess their suitability for the wide range of programmes and opportunities on offer. This includes a requirement for the individual to visit one of the company’s centres so that they can get an idea about the learning environment in which they will be based. Given that the training provider targets learners with high needs and/or individuals who have frequently been disengaged with mainstream education, this initial stage is important because it gives an invaluable opportunity for the company’s learner recruitment consultants to identify any barriers to learning and/or other personal issues that an individual might have. Any prior qualifications obtained and previous learning experience including English and maths levels are all covered comprehensively in these preliminary discussions. A record of all of these IAG discussions is inputted into the company’s e-portfolio system, with the systems for storing and accessing this personal data explained to the individual learner.

External partners confirmed that on occasions, individuals referred to Nova Training are not taken on by the training provider, demonstrating that the IAG support provided is impartial. Examples were identified of learners whose career plans and aspirations didn’t match any Nova Training provision, but they were still given IAG support by Nova Training staff in being signposted to local colleges, training providers or other external agencies.

The induction process in place for all individual learners covers in detail what will be expected of them and what they will cover during their learning journey, and

additionally includes a tour of the centre they will be linked to during their training programme or apprenticeship. Incorporated into this initial phase is a personal SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of individual learners and apprentices which is then reviewed and discussed throughout their training programmes and apprenticeships. This includes an introduction to all of the Nova Training staff members that will be available to provide IAG support for them throughout their training, with the induction also outlining the IAG support on offer at all stages of their programme or apprenticeship. All of the information gathered about the individual during the recruitment stage can be accessed and is shared with the tutors, placement progression officers and apprenticeship coaches who will be supporting the learner throughout their learning journey. For apprentices, validation checks are carried out with all employers to ensure that they are clear about their responsibilities and the commitment and support that they will be required to provide to any apprentice that they take on.

This IAG support is available during initial contact with the centre, at recruitment, during programme induction, throughout the learners' programme via regular reviews of progress or on an appointment basis with learners who have left Nova Training who may want to contact the company for further advice. Support is additionally offered through presentations at local schools and colleges, and at a wide range of careers events, where Nova Training have an "engaging" and highly interactive stand to proactively communicate with potential learners and apprentices.

Health and well-being support is strong for both staff members and all learners and apprentices. All employees have access to an employee assistance programme which includes counselling support if needed, and checks are carried out regularly with all learners and apprentices. At all centres, contact details are advertised on noticeboards on how and who to contact in terms of Nova Training staff for any help and support needed. These support mechanisms in place are additionally communicated to individuals at all stages of their learning journeys. In addition, all learners and apprentices complete a one-day mental health qualification which learner feedback confirms helps to build their confidence levels. Both employees and learners and apprentices frequently referenced occasions when they had received positive health and well-being support from the training provider. Members of the company's senior leadership team have recently completed training as mental health leaders, which will help to inform and further develop the ongoing implementation of the training provider's health and well-being strategies and actions.

Nova Training employees are encouraged and supported to undertake a great deal of continuous professional development, and since the last **matrix** Standard Assessment three years ago, this has included additional IAG training and the achievement of specific IAG qualifications for several members of staff. Employees are often encouraged to complete the company's own apprenticeships in occupational areas relevant to their own job roles.

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

The company's most recent Ofsted inspection in June 2022, with an overall grade 2 rating of "Good" confirmed that "learners and apprentices speak highly of the support and care of tutors. Tutors support learners to go beyond the curriculum and develop their broader interests and involvement in the local community. Learners benefit from visits from external speakers, who talk on a variety of issues and topics. In addition, the Ofsted inspection identified that "many learners and apprentices make positive progress to their next steps, either with the provider or on to other training or employment. Learners feel well prepared to take their next steps." Additionally, Ofsted stated that: "Leaders work effectively with external partners to provide support to learners and apprentices in preparing for their future career progression. Most learners and apprentices receive appropriate careers advice on further education and employment opportunities."

This Ofsted inspection did also, however, identify areas where some apprentices needed extra support, and the training provider itself additionally identified that their apprenticeship programmes had higher "drop-out" rates than they wanted. As a consequence, more thorough and rigorous IAG support activities were introduced and carried out by the learner recruitment consultants at the "on-boarding" stage. This has helped to ensure that apprentices and their employers (through validation checks) have a more detailed working knowledge and understanding of exactly what their apprenticeship programme will entail, and exactly what is expected of them. As a result of these additional IAG discussions now taking place, the training provider's apprenticeship "drop-out" rates have reduced substantially by over 50%. In addition, the number of learners identified as "at risk" has also reduced dramatically as a direct result of the new IAG support discussions introduced.

Given that many of Nova Training's cohort of learners are "hard to reach" and presenting with "high needs" and often challenging personal circumstances and educational backgrounds, the company achieves positive progression rates close to 70%. This is attributed by external partners as being largely due to the "above and beyond" and high quality IAG support that Nova Training employees provide to their learners and apprentices throughout their training programmes and apprenticeships.

A great deal of feedback is gathered from both learners and apprentices to ascertain how they rate the IAG support they receive. This feedback is obtained through a variety of mechanisms including "Learner Voice" forums which individuals can volunteer to attend, and via learner surveys regularly conducted. In terms of feedback from learners and apprentices on the quality and impact of the IAG support they receive, over 84% of learners on the training provider's study programmes stated that they have been supported to identify what they would like to do for their next steps, and have been supported to achieve this. Over 94% of these learners felt that they were able to give views about things that affected them, and felt listened to. For apprentices, over 93% either agreed or strongly agreed that they had been well-

informed by Nova Training employees about the career choices available to them, and understood what they needed to do to succeed in their chosen career.

The company's quality management team carry out regular observations of IAG discussions carried out by individual members of staff with learners and apprentices to check out and validate the quality of IAG support provided. Constructive and developmental feedback is given as and when required. In addition, quality checks are implemented which review the IAG notes made by Nova Training staff after IAG discussions have taken place, with all of the exit interview notes for SEND learners and apprentices screened. These comprehensive and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms in place all help to monitor and evaluate the quality of the IAG support which the organisation provides to its learners and apprentices.

Feedback from external partners confirms that through its IAG support, Nova Training takes an effective "nurturing" role in proactively supporting all of its learners and apprentices, which positively impacts on their personal development and career progression.

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.

- Nova Training has well-established and positive relationships and partnerships in place with many employers and external partners in the area, achieving a positive reputation and high profile in the areas where the training provider has a presence. The extensive amount of "word of mouth" and repeat business that the training provider gains, is powerful evidence of the positive impact that its effective IAG has on the personal and career progression of its learners and apprentices. [Criteria 1.1/2.5/2.6/2.8]
- There is an extremely positive and supportive working culture in place throughout the training provider which recognises the importance of effectively supporting all learners and apprentices, notably through its IAG service. Staff are enthusiastic about and clearly enjoy their work, and demonstrate a profound commitment to supporting the positive progression and well-being of their learners and apprentices. One staff member commented: "I skip to work in the mornings...I enjoy my job so much", with another employee stating that: "We all support and help each other. It's a great place to work". Employees receive and undergo extensive continuous professional development, with many team members working towards or already possessing an IAG qualification. There is additionally a strong emphasis on supporting the health and well-being of both employees and learners, with many examples provided of effective support having been given to help with personal issues such as parenting. (1.3/1.4)

- An effective management model is in place to provide a high quality IAG service in each of the company's thirteen centres, through the roles of learner recruitment consultants (at the on-boarding and initial stage of the learner/apprentice journey), tutors, apprenticeship coaches and placement and progression officers. These roles all complement each other well with good teamwork in place which ensures effective handover and communication mechanisms are actioned to provide a "triangle of support" to each individual learner and apprentice. (2.1/2.6/2.8)
- The training provider has comprehensive and rigorous quality assurance processes in place to monitor and evaluate its IAG service, including regular observations by the quality management team of the 'one to one' IAG appointments and other sessions carried out by its team members. Constructive and developmental feedback is given to individual members of staff on their performance, and regular centre based meetings and case conferences are used to share examples of good practice and carry out 'problem-solving' discussions. (6.1/6.2/7.2)
- All of the Nova Training workforce consistently demonstrate a passionate and enthusiastic commitment to supporting their learners and apprentices. Numerous examples were provided of "personalised and individualised" impartial support being given to individuals, even when it had been identified through the training provider's IAG support that the potential learner or apprentice's personal and career plans meant that they were more suited to attending course or training provision at other educational or training establishments. (4.2/4.5/4.6)
- Numerous examples were evidenced of the organisation encouraging both staff and learner feedback, and positively acting on this. For instance, the positive changes and improvements made by making additions to the company's IAG "on-boarding" and recruitment processes (particularly for apprenticeships), was as a direct consequence of listening to and acting on both staff and learner, and external partner feedback. These changes have contributed positively to significant improvements in apprenticeship retention rates. (1.3/3.2/5.2)
- In terms of IAG support, even on sector-specific training and apprenticeship programmes such as e-sports, there is still a strong focus on the wider personal development of individuals which is not confined to opportunities available in the sector they are training in. This emphasis on making individuals aware of the transferable skills and knowledge they are developing, and the career and progression opportunities this opens up for them in a wide range of occupational sectors, is an integral and positive feature of the IAG support provided to learners and apprentices. (2.7/4.2/4.3)
- The organisation proactively follows up and contacts all learners and apprentices at regular intervals after they have completed their learning

journeys, to check on outcomes achieved and whether individuals need any further IAG support. A number of examples were identified of learners and apprentices seeking out Nova Training employees for IAG support long after they had completed their training and apprenticeship programmes. (4.6/5.2)

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.

- While the IAG support provided by Nova Training is highly valued and has substantial positive impact on both the personal and career progression of learners and apprentices, it is suggested that this could be further developed by supporting more staff members to undertake additional IAG training. Some employees already have higher level IAG qualifications but extending specific IAG training to additional members of staff, might further develop the skills, behaviours and knowledge of all staff in carrying out their IAG support for learners. There are numerous different levels of IAG courses available. [2.2/2.5]
- Benefits to both learners/apprentices and employers have already been experienced as a result of the strong employer involvement and engagement with learners and apprentices on many of the training and apprenticeship programmes being delivered in the geographical areas served by the company. For these reasons, it is worth continuing with the 'work in progress' to extend this greater employer engagement to enable more work placements to be found in occupational areas of particular interest to individual learners. In addition, in growth sectors such as e-sports, it is particularly important for Nova Training to ensure it keeps up to date with the rapidly changing marketplace. Doing this will help to ensure that the IAG support provided to learners and apprentices continues to be relevant and up to date. (1.4/2.7/3.1/3.2)
- Observation of IAG sessions and discussions being carried out already takes place but it is suggested it might be beneficial to increase the level of this quality assurance activity further. This might assist in helping to inform further improvements to the high-quality IAG service already in place, and is already a 'work in progress' which can be taken forward by the Level 6 qualified IAG

adviser due to join the company shortly. (5.1/5.2/6.1/6.2)

- Nova Training has recently started to develop and strengthen the links between the company's study programmes and apprenticeship programme team members. Feedback from both staff and learners and apprentices has confirmed that while this is a 'work in progress' already underway, it should be beneficial for the potential career progression of study programme learners to make them and staff members fully aware of the relevant and realistic options available to them through the company's own apprenticeship programmes. (2.7/3.2/4.7)
- There is a comprehensive and thorough recording and capture of the IAG support and discussions provided to learners and apprentices but there still appears to be further potential for ensuring that even more of the IAG support provided is recorded and captured. Doing this would help to reinforce to all staff the importance of keeping records of any IAG support they provide and in addition, would help to inform and remind individuals of the IAG support they have received. Using the relevant benchmarks of the 'Gatsby benchmarks of good practice in careers guidance', might help to provide a useful framework for doing this and could benefit the company's learners and apprentices in further increasing the high quality IAG service and support which is currently offered. (2.7/4.6/5.1/5.2/7.1)

Further information can be found on these websites:

<https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/>

<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>

- Following the pandemic, more and more 'face to face' training has been carried out for employees, a notable example being the recent 'well-received' Centre Managers Away Day. While recognising and understanding both the cost and resource constraints in doing this, staff feedback confirmed that they would greatly value more opportunities for additional 'face to face' training. This could benefit employees by increasing the opportunities to share good practice and further improve communications through greater interaction between different staff members. (2.5)
- With a new delivery partner recently introduced on one of the training provider's main 'Adult Skills' contracts, for very good reasons, it has currently put "on hold" its delivery in this area of its provision until making a decision about whether continuing with this contract aligns effectively with its strategic priorities and values. One of the organisation's strengths is what one employee called its "carousel of learning", which enables the company to offer learning support to a wide range of its target group of 'hard to reach' and often disengaged young people and adults. If the decision is made to not continue with this particular contract, it might be worth the company considering bidding for alternative opportunities which would help to ensure there isn't a

significant gap in its current offering to its targeted group of adults.
(2.8/3.2/5.2)

- In some centres and for some training and apprenticeship programmes, individual learners and apprentices were given the opportunity to put forward suggestions on external guest speakers they wanted to meet and hear from. This approach appeared to be a little inconsistent in its application, and given that this offer was much valued by individuals, it might be beneficial in further increasing the IAG support for all learners and apprentices if this opportunity was offered to all learners and apprentices. (2.7/2.8/3.2/5.2)
- The development of more IAG resources, including particularly hard copy literature to be used when attending events and visiting schools and colleges, is a 'work in progress' but employee feedback identified increasing such resources as a priority area. Actioning this is likely to assist in raising awareness of the numerous training and apprenticeship programmes on offer to potential young people and adults, and might help increase recruitment. (2.8/4.4)
- Linked to the above development point, a great deal of promotional work and marketing activity is already in place to raise awareness of the Nova Training offer in the geographical areas in which they operate. While again recognising the staffing resource and capacity issues in addressing this, employee feedback suggested that there is untapped potential and a substantial opportunity to increase the levels of interaction with local schools and colleges. This might be beneficial in attracting greater numbers of its 'harder to reach' young people to engage with its programmes, by giving more opportunities to engage and interact with them. (2.7/2.8/3.2/5.2)

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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.
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