



HIT Training celebrates 10 years with the matrix Standard

“We consider matrix to be a golden thread throughout the apprenticeships”

Since 2006 Hospitality Industry Training (known as HIT Training) has supported 100,000 learners at over 22,000 employer sites across the country and is the leading specialist national training & apprenticeship provider for the hospitality, hotel and, catering sectors. HIT Training also offers apprenticeships for the Care and Early Years Sectors which are increasing in popularity. HIT Training has delivered apprenticeships for the last 16 years and has a passion for them and how they can positively impact on a person and on a business; *“apprenticeships improve an individual's skills and therefore their life chances, make businesses more efficient, and boost the economy”*. They take pride in helping people become the best that they can be and in order to do that they have to be the best learning provider and employer that they can be.

In 2012 HIT Training decided to adopt a quality standard, one that they could grow, evolve and excel with and they chose the **matrix** Standard and started on their journey to improve their Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) for both the learner and the company.

We spoke with Micaela Barlow Head of Quality at HIT Training who has been a part of their matrix Standard journey since the beginning.

“We are still improving, we are not there yet on everything, but the difference in 10 years is phenomenal”.

Understanding the benefits of a quality standard

Before HIT Training decided to adopt the **matrix** standard in 2012 there was no infrastructure for delivery of high-quality IAG, and it felt like it was just an add-on to what they were doing, a tick box exercise. They also realised that they had no way of measuring

their impacts on their learners or their staff. After deciding to do the **matrix** Standard and fully adopt the framework they got to work.

Firstly, they knew that the Standard was right for them because they could understand and interpret it for their organisation and could see how impactful and beneficial it could be. They realised how improving their IAG delivery could grow their business, because the Standard helps to put processes in place, and it helps you to continuously improve and evolve.

In the beginning, there were some inconsistencies with different regions' understanding of the Standard but now everyone who works with and for HIT Training is on the same page. They started to implement training staff, raising awareness of what IAG and careers are, what the **matrix** Standard stands for and, the framework they feel they must adhere to, to enable them to be successful. The Standard has given them a clear direction of what they need to be aware of as a training provider, how they need to work with their employer partners, what they need to consider for their learners, and what our responsibility is within the different sectors that they work with, building an established, robust, meaningful IAG processes.

“We consider matrix to be a golden thread throughout the apprenticeships rather than just something that's added onto the end.”

Strengthening partner relationships

HIT Training provides apprenticeships so it needs to have strong relationships with its partners. By using and adopting the **matrix** Standard framework, it has helped to strengthen those relationships. IAG has become a natural part of the conversation when speaking with partners and HIT Training is considering the partner in their business plans, because if the partner isn't considered then they can't provide the best apprenticeship to their learner. Before adopting the **matrix** Standard framework, the partners' relationship wasn't as strong as it should be, now after identifying this as an improvement HIT Training have robust and meaningful relationships with their partners.

As an impact of building this strong relationship and continuing to ensure IAG is the priority, the employers that HIT Training work with have improved their own learning programs, allowing staff to work in other departments and take courses to improve their personal development, and HIT Training is blown away by the commitment from the employers to individuals.

Developing and implementing new resources and measurements

Over the past 10 years HIT Training has been on “*a massive journey*” with the **matrix** Standard. It has helped them to improve their IAG and business immensely. They have developed new resources, new training courses for employers, learners, and internal staff, new processes, and new ways of measuring their impacts.

10 years ago, HIT Training had a learner intranet that had some links and a few resources that learners could use, but no support or guidance that learners could access when they needed it. Now they have developed their “hitranet” and it is structured by sector and updated every 3 months with case studies, personal stories, training guides, useful resources, and a directory of experts that can give specialist career advice. They have also recently identified a gap in their resources which was the direct result of doing a **matrix** Standard self-assessment. They realised they didn’t provide any advice on the next steps after completing an apprenticeship, for example, moving on to university or into work, now there is a section for this on the learner site, and is updated regularly.

During the pandemic HIT Training realised through self-evaluation that they needed to provide extra support and guidance to their learners and internal staff, and IAG became part of every conversation as it was now so intrinsic to each staff member and learner. They identified that topics like mental health and wellbeing needed to become an integral part of their everyday IAG. In the past, it had sat separately and was done via learning support as and when needed. To start to achieve this goal they put on webinars for internal staff and learners with specialist Mental Health First Aiders, implemented monthly checks as part of the standard process for a learner, and it is brought up regularly in staff team meetings. They are also organising refresher training sessions and improving resources for both internal staff and learners for the future.

HIT Training also developed new resources for internal staff as a result of the pandemic due to staff being forced to work differently or feeling unsettled about their work. Having the structure of the **matrix** Standard in place prior really helped HIT Training to identify that they needed to support their staff even more so and let staff know that they will be alright. They designed and implemented new training courses for staff which has now been endorsed, they have rapidly expanded the staff development program to include teacher training programs, coaching programs, and short courses. Throughout the pandemic HIT Training estimated that 4000 short courses were taken by staff, upskilling themselves to ensure they can provide the best service and IAG for their learners. As a direct result of the resources made and support given HIT Training did not make any redundancies during the pandemic.

The **matrix** Standard framework has allowed HIT Training to develop new ways to measure the impact they and the apprenticeships have on their learners, but also to measure internal staff satisfaction. For learners, they have developed leaver surveys so that they can monitor the impact on each individual learner in terms of their experience, what they've learned, and how they've applied their apprenticeship after completion. They also have a staff member who calls learners from 3 or 4 years ago to see if what they learned from a HIT Training apprenticeship has helped them to grow their career and if they have had a long-lasting effect. For 16 to 17 year olds, they have a safeguarding officer who works with them and their parents to ensure that they've got specialist that IAG because they recognise that not one size fits all, which then informs HIT Training if they are providing the correct IAG or if it needs amending.

For staff the continuous improvement checks (CICs) that **matrix** Standard implements have been invaluable for HIT Training as they use the CICs to feed into every part of the business and the business plan moving forward. They are also used in staff development which in turn makes everyone in the company on the same page and understand where the business is going in the future.

For apprenticeships specifically, the **matrix** Standard has enabled HIT Training to build a structure for the resources and training. It has improved their communication with employers, partners, and internal staff, and it has built processes to ensure they are up to date and responsive to the sector they operate in.

Recommending the matrix Standard to others

Micaela Barlow has been in education for 20 years and a part of HIT Training and the **matrix** Standard journey since the beginning. After speaking with her for this case study she expressed her passion and love for education and improving people's lives:

*"I love education, I think it is the most valuable gift and career that anybody can have, to actually help one person develop and then see them reach their career goal is incredible... Without the **matrix** Standard, we wouldn't be where we are and I wouldn't be where I am because I wouldn't have that focused understanding of what we need to do, to improve and it does make you drill down into every aspect... We work with 6 or 7 thousand learners, a couple of 100 trainers, and however many hundreds of employers, so actually getting something that's standardised, consistent, and meets the needs of every individual, every sector, and every employer, is an ongoing challenge but, we've got to a point now where we've got a good model that's working, and we just need to ensure that it's improved further".*

Micaela has also provided us with her thoughts on why another organisation should adopt the **matrix** Standard framework:

*"If I could describe our **matrix** Standard journey so far it would be inspirational, enjoyable, and rewarding... Organisations should do it because they improve the experience for every learner, it's part of our commitment as educators to provide the best IAG in careers, and ultimately it ensures that our workforce is upscaled and that we have continuous development after the world of apprenticeships... from our side, it is a completely unbiased person looking at your organisation and validating what we are doing... you can achieve the Standard in 3 years, but you then have to ask what do you want out of it. I want to ensure that the organization is the best because then we provide the best service... you might not be perfect in three years but that should not worry anybody that actually wants to be the best they can be, because you will continuously improve. And that's what matrix Standard forces you to do and guides you to make sure that you are continuously improving".*

Thank you to Micaela Barlow Head of Quality for sharing HIT Training and her journey with the matrix Standard over the past 10 years. It is great to hear that the framework has truly been embedded in the organisation with the “golden thread” and helped them to improve the lives of staff, employers, partners, and learners.

If you would like more information about starting your matrix Standard journey, book an appointment with one of our trusted advisors today.

