

Assessment Report

Nacro

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Rob Barlow (Lead) and Gill Moss-Waghorn (Team)
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	4/11/2024 – 22/11/2024 (10 days evidence collection)
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C18705 - PN202687
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	22/9/2027

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	A combination of Teams, telephone, virtual tours including the Departure Lounge. Location visits to the Education Centre in Longden, Step Forward housing provision in Hanley, CAS2 Referral Office and two CAS2 properties in Leeds.
Staff interviews	103 managers and staff members and 3 volunteers.
Recipient interviews	3 Service users, 5 residents and 15 students.
Partner interviews	7 partner representatives.

Document review	A broad range of individual information resources and system demonstration including a review of the Nacro website and social media channels, Nacro 'Our People, Our Future' Strategy 2022-2025; referral criteria and contract performance information, Nacro Position Statement May 2024, CAS2 Social Impact Report; a range of process documents supporting risk assessment, accommodation plan, and general support planning; student profile, GroFar online tool; Ofsted Inspection Report June 2024, QPR 24/25; Education Deep Dive September 2024, Compass Career Benchmark tool report July 2024, a range of surveys and feedback information; Destination information, Housing Support Grant Outcomes; Monthly News Letter, Let's Talk staff development programme, Training Calendar
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About the organisation

Nacro has come forwards for this successful **matrix** Accreditation Review demonstrating how it has been successfully navigating through its 'Our People, Our Future' Strategy 2022 – 2025, five core aims and underpinning key initiatives. As a leading social justice charity, they have been working with their Mission – 'We will work every day to give people the help they need and campaign non-stop to achieve our vision of a society where everyone has the chance to succeed'. They operate across England and Wales and are strong campaigners achieving positive outcomes and changes in government policy, e.g., 'Friday Early Release'.

Over the last three years there has been positive progress that has seen contract growth, e.g., Community Accommodation Service- Tier 2 (CAS2) provision in England and Wales doubling, and further significant demand currently being seen. They have successfully taken on and operated the large Ministry of Justice Probation Service (Dynamic Framework) contract advice and support for men leaving prison or under the supervision of Probation in a number of areas covering accommodation advice and support; wellbeing services as well as working in partnership to deliver finance and debt and advice for those on probation. They are also operating a number of other individual contracts include intensive mental health support for people in prison or transitioning into the community; Prison Departure Lounge outside HMP Doncaster; and a liaison and diversion service operating out of police custody and courts on the Isle of Wight. The Criminal Record Support Service (CRSS) helpline provides advice and advocacy support for individuals around employment, housing and education with criminal records.

The Recovery Near (RNY) service in Wolverhampton works in partnership with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust and Aquarius to deliver a confidential service to people impacted by or struggling with substance misuse.

The Step Forward Housing provision a non-commissioned service and supports those marginalised prison leavers, women, ex-service personnel and rough sleepers. In Wales there are also a number of supported services through Welsh Government Housing Support Grant. Young people support contracts are successful in Lincolnshire and Essex working closely with local authorities. The Nacro Education, Support and Transition (NEST) service provides supported housing for young people, including care leavers, who would otherwise be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Education has seen positive progress through its 14 training centres and the larger Totton College in England and achieved a 'Good' Ofsted rating across all areas in June 2024. They are supporting those at risk of being NEET, with special educational needs (including those with EHCPs), at risk of exclusion, those with complex needs and referrals from the criminal justice system. Following a recent restructure there are now new national posts responsible for Learner Experience,

Curriculum and Engagement along with national roles heading up Learner Services and SEND.

A new Directorate structure has been created including investment in new staff roles and a new salary structure has been established. Staff vacancy rates have dropped, and retention has improved. The membership of the Board of Trustees has been developed further and there is an increasing focus on the voice of the service user, staff wellbeing and Safeguarding.

The CEO leads an Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and there are new Director roles heading up Education and Skills, Advice and Support (a new role covering Housing and Justice), CAS2 and Property Management, a new role of People and Culture, and External Engagement.

There has been increased staff and service user engagement, a more devolved approach to each of the Directorates balanced with central sharing and development of effective practice. Successful Quality Performance Reviews (QPR) operating in Education have now been established in Housing. Safeguarding lead roles operate in Education, Housing, Justice and CAS2.

The commitment of the organisation to information, advice and guidance is central to their work and links as a 'golden thread' from the front line to the Nacro leadership and governance structure. The approaches developed across the organisation are underpinned by the Values and aims of the organisation. The areas that are 'working well' for Nacro are highlighted later in this report and reflect the joined up working that is increasingly operating across the organisation. They welcomed the feedback and in the closing meeting and the continuous improvement review next year will provide an opportunity to reflect further on their development and progress.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

IAG is embedded across their various provisions and is characterised through the following activities.

- The Nacro website is providing a range of information including criteria to enable partners to make referral, details of outcomes that can be achieved and the necessary contract specific requirements. Course and support service information, contact information and location details are presented for Education along with a specific website for Totton College reflecting the larger provision and breadth of courses and support services.
- CRSS are supporting telephone and email enquiries from people with criminal records, professionals and employers. Guides covering a number of supporting topics are published by the team on the website including Criminal Record Disclosure, Release on Temporary License Best Practice and Recruiting Safely and Fairly.
- Under the Dynamic Framework provision support is tailored for individuals to

either maintain or to find new accommodation to prevent homelessness. A central triage team are supporting initial contact through a secure system from Probation. They are contacting individuals by telephone and completing initial risk assessments by telephone. They are then allocating to support worker team caseloads across East Midlands, West Midlands, North Wales and South Yorkshire. Personal Wellbeing services are operating in Hertfordshire, Suffolk and Northamptonshire offering one to one and group-based activities to help with social inclusion, emotional wellbeing, engagement with family and support to build positive lifestyles. Community Engagement Officers and volunteers (some with lived experience) are working alongside Intensive Support Workers with a range of workshops and activities. Examples included a book club, wellbeing workshops, and several one-to-one sessions that includes initial assessment. They are working with local partners to support family reengagement, and provide finance, debt and money advice

- The grant funded Departure Lounge outside the gate at HMP Doncaster is offering a welcome space on leaving prison with the opportunity to access for example a clothing bank, information pack, food for the day, toiletries, provision of mobile phones and sim cards. Family members are supported in meeting with the prison leavers. Community Engagement Officers working with volunteers in East Yorkshire are developing information and resources through networking and donations, e.g. regional foodbanks, a stock of winter boots.
- The Liaison and Diversion team on the Isle of Wight are supporting those with unmet health needs on avoiding or entering the criminal justice system. They include mental health, substance misuse and learning disabilities. And are part of an overall service provision offered through NHS Primary Care in Berkshire & Hampshire. Meeting with the individual in their cell or a separate office they can understand needs such as access to a GP or to claim benefits and provide support to other agencies offering appropriate support. They can also help in referring to emergency housing subject to bail conditions.
- Funded by Oxleas NHS Trust Intensive health resettlement is offered for those with medium to high mental health needs in prison and into the community at Wandsworth and Greenwich Prisons. Offering one-to-one support to aid with accommodation, financial support, accessing health care, and developing a positive network in the community.
- The East Riding of Yorkshire team work closely with the NHS Hubs and Probation offering one-to-one support for those with challenges around substance misuse. They are working to change behaviour and complete an early assessment to understand motivation to change offering weekly support for up to six months with a range of referral and signposting along with help in for example securing accommodation.

- RNY delivering a confidential service to people impacted by or struggling with substance misuse. Providing a single point of contact (SPOC) triage service by telephone and email people are engaged in a programme of recovery support that includes clinical treatment, a programme of support pathways including one-to-one support, group based sessions. There are dedicated services for families and young people and a range of events and activities.
- Housing offers a range of housing support and IAG delivery.

The NEST projects are supporting young people aged 16- 21 who otherwise would be homeless or at risk of homelessness. Initial meetings identify if the project is the right one for the individual. Support for residents is provided one-to-one by a Transition Worker helping develop life skills, budgeting, access to benefits, medical access with GP and a dentist and personal issues. Support and next step plans can include help in overcoming a range of personal barriers to move-on as well as next steps such as going to college. Early 'Getting to know you' meetings, service agreements, and use of outcomes stars and ongoing support meetings are shaping the IAG delivery. Support is provided to move into the next accommodation.

Step Forward services offer initial interviews with prospective tenants face to face or by telephone if still in prison. A risk assessment is carried out ensuring that the accommodation is suitable, and that low level support is appropriate. They are providing intensive housing support based around a Tenancy Agreement and regular one reviews of the property are carried out on a regular basis. Along with maintaining an action plan for maintaining direct debits such as for energy. They assist is supporting residents to access GPs and dentists, and referral to other support agencies including DWP regarding benefits and employment, Shaw Trust for help with PIP forms, and MIND regarding mental health support.

Bespoke contracts in Wales with local authorities are offering a range of housing support projects that include helping people to live independently with their own tenancy. Referrals are received from Probation, Social Service and local authorities. Ongoing regular weekly contact and follow up reviews with residents are completed on the housing and personal support plans that may for example include help in finding work. Floating support is offered with moving on.

- IAG is embedded throughout the student journey within Education with a focus on engagement on the right course for them, support in progressing and completing and enabling successful progress to a positive destination. Referral is for example through local feeder schools, colleges, social services. Totton College has their own website that outlines the breadth of programme provision including apprenticeships. Welcome days offer opportunities for transition and open day offer talks about courses. The Careers Adviser at Totton College provides information for students and will have an interview

with every student by the end of the academic year. Priority is given to those students with an EHCP Annual Review coming up and those Level 3 students leaving the college at the end of the year, to support them with UKAS, employment or apprenticeship applications. Careers Advisor attends EHCP Annual Reviews. Helps students make choices e.g. use of spider chart/choice maps “know students really well.” Work experience is also included in the offer, and includes visits, talks and experience with employers.

Considerable effort is placed on supporting careers development within the Centres with a strong emphasis placed on supporting Careers Week with in-house workshops and external employer visits and a number of guest speakers.

Get Set vocational specific programmes include a vocational subject, English and or maths, work placement, employability and enrichment. The focus is on the Skills Builder Framework and many examples were provided of positive encounters with employers. It was evident that there is strong holistic approach to developing life and workplace skills and support is provided to explore career options and ideas. Early assessment includes risk assessment, BSKB as well as discussing early career aspirations. EHCPs are a basis for planning in many cases and reflecting on progress. Tutors and centre managers play a positive role in supporting informally as well as through the regular ILP actions and outcomes process.

LAG is embedded in provision – an hour a week with tutors using Skills Builder. There are also opportunities for visits to employers such as the links Middlesborough Centre offering Landscape maintenance through a SLA with Stockton Borough Council to provide work experience. The Council provides projects and tutors teach students on site for the one year course.

Work experience for SEND students includes a weekly online session. Examples of work experience included designing a McDonalds sustainable building and supported internship were offered with such as Marriot Hotel Gateshead and ASDA Sheffield.

- CAS2 provides housing for people who do not have a suitable address for the term of their licence or Bail Order. Accommodation and support are provided for the duration of their Bail Order or Home Detention Curfew (HDC) licence period. A central referral team are carrying out early risk assessment and identifying an appropriate property with availability. Support Workers are providing an early introduction and settling in session often at short notice after prisoners have been released. A full induction is completed that includes a further review of the risk assessment, housing support plan and agreement. Weekly visits and reviews are completed that cover a range of topics including the move on plan, access to discretionary funding, personal finance, medication, work training or employment – particularly jobs that can fit around the curfew times. Signposting is part of the service to support engagement

with Probation as well as researching the local area. Smart phones are provided.

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

IAG can be seen across the organisation either as discrete provision such as through the work of the CRSS and individual Support Workers in Housing, Justice, Health and CAS2 or embedded within the student journey within Education. Across the organisation it was clear that managers and staff were able to describe the intended impact for the organisation and the measures established for their IAG to achieve. Overall, the Strategy of the organisation has a clear picture of its ambitions across its five core aims.

Aim 1 describes 'Growing what we do well – help people find and keep the home they need to thrive, guide prison leavers through the maze that they meet when they leave, work with young people and adults to get the qualifications they need, support people on their pathway to recovery'. High level measures of success are highlighted that relate to contract success in key areas, service user and learners thriving and telling the story of their success, and more service users being engaged at every level and employed by the organisation.

Across all areas of delivery there are metrics in place that are helping the teams to track and monitor the organisational impact of their IAG work and the contribution it is making.

Within Education they are focused on ensuring that the programme of learning and support is the right one for the individual; they are supported to engage in the learning and personal development; are achieving vocational qualifications as well as maths and English; are exploring career options and choices; and are progressing to a positive destination. Attendance rates for the student cohort are an important indicator, particularly if there is a poor record of engaging in previously in education. Retention, achievement rates and destination are also key measures of success. Managers and staff were able to describe high levels of progression (90%) which has increased year on year. Achievement rates for Apprenticeships at Totton were 74% and above the national average. Overall, there had been a positive improvement in the achievement of maths and English qualifications.

Within CAS2 there is a compliance focus on the HMPSS contract based KPIs that are a combination of activity measures and service standards such as those related to regular weekly reviews with Support Workers as well as individual property standards. Operationally they are aiming to reduce vacant rooms (Voids) and maximise Move On rates with a target in the contract of 80% which is challenging. They are working to maximise engagement with residents and support move on rates, working to develop their networks and partnerships. This is particularly important as they are currently tasked with significant expansion in bed spaces and mobilisation of staff to support the increase in early prison releases.

In Step Forward Housing and other housing provision they are also focused on Voids and Move On rates and are working often to find intermediate solutions supporting with floating support. In some cases, CRSS are tracking the increasing number of enquiries and successful case closures alongside ensuring high levels of feedback satisfaction.

Some commissioners do not insist on targets, instead looking at generalised provision of support for systems and processes. However, outcomes are still internally monitored by Nacro and reported back to them, including case studies. Intensive health resettlement reported that 95% gain secure accommodation, 70% are abstaining from substances. Within RNY they are assessing the levels of engagement and successful programme completions and have a high level of success in their work. Some projects are using assessment tools such as the Rehabilitation Outcomes Star.

Within the Justice Dynamic Framework provision, the metrics for delivery of the contract are very much input and output based and referral is determined through selection of outcomes by Probation. The team though have developed their own self-assessment of needs and outcomes around wellbeing on entry and exit from the service. They are tracking their performance across a range of categories and comparing through quarterly reporting to national data.

Commissioned service housing for young people through local authority contracts is providing a range of delivered support services from floating to intensive support and can include housing management support through a more holistic programme of personal development and progression support.

Within Education there are a range of helpful tools and approaches to support the development of individual outcomes that include the initial assessment for maths and English, PAGS for those with SEND needs to support EHCP, development of and Individual Learning Plan, Progress Checks. Distance travelled and personal growth are equally important as achievement of qualifications. Positive Postcards are used to highlight and celebrate good attendance.

There are broad range of approaches being taken across the organisation to support the evaluation of organisational and contract performance alongside the quality of their provision. Examples included the successful QPRs, peer based quality and compliance audits, team meetings and high levels of reflective practice. Contract reviews, sharing of effective practice sessions and the overall management processes are focused evaluation of quality outcomes alongside performance. Service user, student and resident feedback alongside that from other key stakeholder plays an important role in shaping service.

Throughout the assessment students, residents and service users were able to highlight the outcomes that they had and were achieving. Here are small number of comments.

“They helped me understand about jobs and I feel more confident.” (Student)

“It was difficult on my first day, but I actually enjoyed it.” (Student)

“Small place – don’t feel awkward coming in as less people.” (Student)

“Staff are non-judgemental – I really appreciate this.” (Resident)

“Helping me get health relationships sorted.” (Young Resident)

“I am comfortable in this house and getting help from the Support Worker – I trust her to give me the right stuff and it’s working.” (Resident)

“I was given options about the support options - after the one-to-one and the group sessions my confidence was up. I am coming away from alcohol and building up my work here as a volunteer now as well as my career with my employer. (Dynamic Framework service user)

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.

- The Values base of the organisation is driving realistic and meaningful understanding of needs, pathways available and impact of choices for service users, learners and residents. There were many examples of positive challenge, support in exploring and taking action to improve lives.

They included CAS2 Realistic housing options and responsibilities related to homelessness, Tagging rules and referrals; Move On capability in Housing, developing holistic understanding in NEST, local knowledge and understanding of the teams; in Education overcoming barriers, help with initial steps and holistic development (Life skills); Justice examples of realistic information and understanding of responsibilities for housing and homelessness; Wellbeing services with a strong focus on holistic rehabilitation; and overall ‘going over and above’. (2.4, 4.2, 4.3)

- There is underpinning knowledge and understanding across the Directorates gathered through strong network and partnership working as well as the research and development activity of the CRS, Policy, and planned development. Working with very relevant and accurate information is seen to be key to effective IAG across the organisation at a local, regional and national level which is driving referrals in, service delivery, signposting and onward referral.

Some practical examples included Team partnership working in Health/Justice - Wolverhampton, IOW, East Riding working closely in shared provision; Community Engagement – networks and events, understanding support agencies; Building Community Knowledge in CAS2 to develop alongside significant mobilisation programme; Departure Lounge

connectivity/multiagency day; Education developing strong vocational employer engagement/work experience opportunities and guest speakers; and in Housing effective relationships with local funders (Essex and Lincolnshire) that is supporting understanding and local action. (3.2, 4.4, 4.7)

- Strategic leadership in the organisation is bringing greater clarity and priority to action, investment and understanding. There are strong communications 'up and down' and a sense of "feeling like the organisation is listening to staff" in the shaping and development of their IAG services. The framework of management and staff development has been enhanced and continues to be further developed both centrally but more importantly is being tailored within each Directorate. Cross working groups are generating meaningful actions – "It feels more collaborative". (1.1)
- The Service User Involvement strategy across the organisation has developed into a strong approach that is evident within the framework of each provision (service users, residents and learners), surveys, proactive semi-independent focus groups, involvement of trustees, partner feedback and evaluation. (7.1)
- Safeguarding and the wellbeing of staff and service users/learners/residents has continued to be a major focus of their work generated by the high levels of disclosure. Nacro has refocused their approach to governance and brought a Directorate approach to support, incident review and continuous improvement. This is driving the development of staff competence, highlighting clear areas of improvement. Investment in new staff roles to support practice development around key topics such as substance misuse and Naxolone training in CAS2 and clinical understanding in Health, and a functional focus such as SEND in Education. They have also developed responses to staff reflection and support after major incidents (Debrief), themed Safeguarding review days, along with planned systems developments which reflect a strong approach to professional practice development. There is clear involvement from a senior level and a commitment to ensuring the extension of staff competence. (1.3,1.4, 2.5)
- The Volunteer programme has developed and is well structured with effective processes and practice standards that include 1:1 support and review, access to training and development, development of support resources and communications, along with an organisational review and reflection through quarterly reporting. It is providing a useful promotion of the organisation for those wanting to join and experience working in the sector, extending the staff resources to support services, as well as providing an effective recruitment pipeline and including supporting those with lived experience to progress into staff roles. (2.2, 2.3, 2.6)

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 organisation recognises the importance of supporting the development and competence of front line management and staff and has working groups in place to support this. They have also demonstrated positive examples of developments such as in Education with the programme and regional structure change as well as changes to reflect demands on Service Leads in CAS2 and Justice. The current People Management 'reset', trial of new approaches to the 1:1 meeting structure in Lincolnshire with a greater focus on staff welfare, and the launch of the new Apraisd performance management software tool system were all noted.

As they move forward it will be important with the developments underway that they are mindful of the particular challenges of field based staff working within the challenging contract regulation requirements of CAS2 and Justice in allocating effective time to ensure that 1:1 meetings are effective and happening. (1.4, 2.3, 2.5)

- Positive examples of effective 1:1 meetings and team management working were identified across the organisation and in some cases the recently introduced debrief reflective practice approach had been embraced further to support and develop new teams in CAS2 and Housing. Working in this way can be seen as a useful approach to develop team culture, and staff development as they move forward.
- The organisation has been more able to recently update its technology and access to phones, laptops and WIFI. Properties in Housing and Cas2 now had access to more effective WIFI, and work continues in some areas such as Education to complete the role out of hardware. Whilst staff generally reported being able to use the organisation's intranet One Space a few in CAS2 where there is a high level contract security found it harder to access. Whilst a 'work round' had been established it may be helpful to consider how access could possibly be improved and staff supported to use it. (2.8)
- There is an extensive platform of learning resources available for staff to access through the learning management system with an improved calendar

of 'live learning' sessions. There is direct access to a range of effective management modules and courses supporting the quality and compliance of delivery as well as personal wellbeing. It may help the Learning and Development team to possibly explore how access to funded level 2 IAG qualifications within the portfolio could be helpful in supporting the development of effective triage and signposting activities in some roles. (2.2, 2.5)

- Social Impact reporting such as in CAS2 is being used now to shape the service provision, plans and intended outcomes. It may be helpful to explore how measuring social impact be developed further working alongside the work already completed by their funders such as the Ministry of Justice. Reflecting on the work in the area completed by Housing Associations or working closely with a university research team may add value. This could be about Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach, to calculators that have evolved to meet the needs of specific sectors, such as the HACT Value Calculator for social housing providers. (5.2, 7.1)
- The commitment from the organisation now taking place to systems development and investment was noted including a new housing support and case management system, building on the IMS Safeguarding incident system to enhance the overall evaluation and reporting through approaches in each directorate. C-POMS is to be introduced in Education and enhanced approaches to recording using the EBS system are being trialled. Opportunities are significant in removing older paperwork systems, increasing accuracy, and reporting internally and externally. Ambitions exist to better understand individual outcomes being achieved and the analysis of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The **matrix** annual CIC process will provide an opportunity to reflect further on progress being made in this area. (2.8, 5.2, 7.1)

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.
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.
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