

**Commercial in Confidence**

**Guidance Accreditation Board Limited**

**matrix Assessment Report**

**for**

**ISG/PLUSS**

**Date Of Assessment:**

**28<sup>th</sup> September - 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004**

**Assessor: David Pym**

**GAB Provider Ref: 2147**

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## 1. Summary

This Assessment Report covers the services provided by ISG/PLUSS. This report includes a brief description of the organisation, the assessment methodology and an overview of how ISG/PLUSS demonstrated that it met the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services.

During the assessment the Registered **matrix** Assessor identified some areas of good practice. These included:

ISG/PLUSS exists to assist those with disabilities into paid employment. It is therefore sensitive to the needs of those with disabilities of all kinds and has developed processes that enable them to access the services offered with the minimum of difficulty.

The staff who deliver the IAG service are impartial, effective and professional. This approach enables them to put the needs of the client first irrespective of whether they are external or internal clients.

ISG/PLUSS is supportive of staff and ensures that individual competence is maintained and developed. This is seen as a responsibility of both managers and staff who are both expected to identify opportunities. The process works well and staff gave many examples of development activities that they had undertaken.

Although ISG/PLUSS demonstrated that it met the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services, the Assessor identified some continuous development areas that ISG/PLUSS may wish to consider when formulating its future improvement plan.

The various locations and the numerous sources from which information is obtained present a real problem for those who have responsibility for ensuring that information remains relevant and current. The current re-structuring provides ISG/PLUSS with an opportunity to develop an integrated system for managing information.

The system for supervising and supporting staff is inherently robust and generally works well. However, at the Torbay office the system is less effective and ISG/PLUSS may wish to investigate the reasons for this.

ISG/PLUSS recognises the value of gathering and acting upon feedback. However, the current system does not guarantee the collection and analysis of all informal feedback. ISG/PLUSS may wish to consider how to ensure that all such feedback is used effectively.

Accreditation to **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services is granted for the internal and external services provided by ISG/PLUSS.

## 2. Introduction

ISG/PLUSS is an organisation devoted to supporting people with disabilities of all kinds in order that they can reach their full potential. This may be in mainstream employment or, alternatively, in a supported employment environment.

Formerly known as the Industrial Services Group, the organisation is in the process of change to enable it to meet the challenges it faces more effectively and to be more responsive to opportunities. At present the Group is using an interim name, ISG/PLUSS, although it will be known solely as PLUSS when the change is complete. The target date for this is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005. Until that time the Group will continue to be run by the three local authorities, Plymouth, Devon and Torbay, a situation that dates from the last local government re-organisation. The Group has traditionally been organised on a geographical basis, that having been the best way to reflect the input of the three principals and their varying policies and procedures. That has now been changed to a functional basis and this will determine the final structure of PLUSS.

The information advice and guidance service is based at four locations across Devon although the service can be accessed at any of the Group's locations. The scope of this assessment is the both the external and internal information, advice and guidance service offered by ISG/PLUSS.

The external service is provided to clients who contact ISG/PLUSS, either of their own volition, or, more usually following a referral from another provider. Support and advice is also provided for employers who are willing to consider employing people with disabilities. The internal service is provided for members of the permanent staff and to those who are on sheltered employment programmes run by the Group. The support available includes:

- Identifying options for the future
- Self development analysis
- Psychometric testing
- CV building and interview training
- Skills review
- Work experience
- Support in employment

In addition, the internal service offers information on Group policies, practices and procedures and information and guidance on continuing personal development, development opportunities and career support.

The facilities at each location include private interview rooms, training and meeting rooms and access to IT provision and library resources.

ISG/PLUSS aims to be a leading player in the provision of employment opportunities for disabled people in Devon. This aim is being translated into action by the structural changes to the organisation and is supported by the Mission Statement:

*To enable the maximum number of people with disabilities to gain and sustain paid employment in the most cost effective manner possible. Ideally such employment should be in an open and integrated environment, but where this is not appropriate or immediately available, programmes will be developed to maximise potential and develop existing skills in a stimulating and supportive setting.*

Group business plans also support the overall ambition by identifying future options and opportunities. The aim requires the Group to retain existing contracts and acquire new contracts.

As described in the Mission Statement, ISG/PLUSS aims to help disabled people, who are ready for the challenge, to move into mainstream employment with the ultimate goal of working without support. The Group monitors the effectiveness of this aim by gathering client feedback, as well as feedback from employers, using both formal and informal processes. Feedback is positive from both groups.

Whilst feedback provides a means by which ISG/PLUSS is able to gauge the effectiveness of its programmes and services, accreditation to the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services will provide external confirmation that both internal and external services are provided in accordance with national quality framework.

The Registered **matrix** Assessor used a range of methods to gather evidence against the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services:

- Visits to locations at Exeter, Kingsteignton and Torbay.
- Formal interviews with 22 members of staff.
- Formal interviews with 35 clients.
- Formal interviews with 2 co-providers.
- Observation of premises, facilities and IT and paper based resources.
- A review of documents including business plans, promotional materials and key policies and procedures.

### 3. Areas of Good Practice

During the assessment, four areas of good practice were identified. These are outlined below. The numbers and letters in brackets refer to the relevant Elements and Criteria in the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services.

- The Mission Statement highlights the importance ISG/PLUSS places on helping people with disabilities to maximise their potential. The Group has created a culture that is sensitive to their needs and has developed processes that enable them to access the service and associated support. (1d)
- The recruitment and selection process has enabled the Group to recruit staff who are impartial, professional and effective whilst still retaining the client focus that is important in the context of the Mission Statement. This caring and supportive approach is evidenced by the positive comments received from clients. (5a, 5e)
- There is commitment to continuous service quality improvements. Robust processes exist to identify areas for improvement and this extends to providing staff with the opportunity to maintain and develop their skill base. (8b)
- Allied to the above commitment to staff is the identification and provision of development opportunities and providing the facility for staff to achieve maximum benefit from them. (8f)

#### 4. Potential Areas for Continuous Development

Although the service demonstrates that it meets the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services, there are three areas where further development may improve the quality of service. The numbers and letters in brackets refer to the relevant Elements and Criteria in the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services.

- The current tripartite responsibility that the local authorities bear for ISG/PLUSS, with staff employed by the Authority within whose geographic area they work, has resulted in the need to maintain three sets of policies and procedures. This, coupled with the geographical reach of ISG/PLUSS, presents significant difficulties in managing the information used by the Group, particularly the paper based information. ISG/PLUSS may wish to consider how best to provide an integrated system for information management across the Group to coincide with the introduction of the new structure. (4f)
- The Commitment of ISG/PLUSS to staff development is highlighted above. However, this is not mirrored by the supervision and support offered to staff at the Torbay office, where a specific weakness was identified during the assessment. ISG/PLUSS may wish to consider how best to tackle the local problem that has arisen at that location to bring it into line with the high standard that prevails across the rest of the Group. (8d)
- The important role that feedback provides in identifying opportunities for improvement is recognised by ISG/PLUSS. However, the process for gathering and evaluating informal feedback is not as robust as other systems and processes seen during the assessment. ISG/PLUSS may wish to consider revising the process to ensure that all informal comments are captured and used to best advantage. (9d)

## 5. Detailed Findings Against the matrix Standard

The following table shows how ISG/PLUSS demonstrated that it met the **matrix** quality standard for information advice and guidance services. It is a summary of the key findings against each Element and should be read in conjunction with the previous sections.

<p><b>1.</b></p> <p><b>People are made aware of and engage with the service</b></p>	<p>Potential users of the services are clearly identified. Users include external clients seeking information, advice and guidance, people employed by ISG/PLUSS and those attending courses aimed at improving their prospects of entering employment.</p> <p>Internal users of information, advice and guidance are ISG/PLUSS staff, whether they are in supported or unsupported roles, and include staff who are themselves involved in the delivery of information, advice and guidance.</p> <p>Employers are also provided with information about the potential disabled employees can offer their businesses.</p> <p>ISG/PLUSS use a variety of promotional methods including leaflets, posters and the website. Examples were also provided of attendance at job-fairs, seminars, personal contact and networking.</p> <p>Information about supported employment is available from a range of sources including Jobcentreplus and other service providers in the area.</p> <p>Information about the internal service is readily available at all locations used by the Group.</p> <p>ISG/PLUSS exists to offer assistance to those who are disabled and wish to work and therefore espouses the requirements of equality of opportunity and access and declares them in the Mission Statement. Information can be provided in other formats, notably large print and using symbols.</p>
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<p><b>2.</b></p> <p><b>People understand the nature of the service</b></p>	<p>ISG/PLUSS provide a variety of ways in which people can obtain a full description of what they can expect. For example, initial visits, taster sessions and the various publications, including the Employee Pack and Employer Pack, are used, either singly or in combination, to provide people with comprehensive information.</p> <p>Key policies such as those relating to equal opportunities are available and are promoted during the induction process. They are also explained verbally, this is particularly important given the range of abilities represented amongst the client group.</p> <p>Staff and clients confirmed the above at interview.</p> <p>Details of staff competence, although not provided as a matter of course, can be provided on request.</p>
<p><b>3.</b></p> <p><b>People's use of the service is agreed</b></p>	<p>Client needs are established during initial meetings and subsequent discussions with advisers. The Assessor was provided with information about the various assessment tools that are used including software packages designed to match people with job opportunities. Verbal feedback from clients confirmed that the primary objective was meeting their particular needs.</p> <p>Staff and supported employees have the opportunity to identify their needs at the various meetings they attend, during supervision meetings and at the six monthly staff review meetings.</p> <p>ISG/PLUSS has a wide range of information about other relevant services including specialist support organisations and welfare and benefits. All advisers could provide examples of signposting/referring people to other relevant services. This was confirmed by verbal feedback from clients seen during the assessment.</p> <p>During interview, advisers demonstrated an understanding of the limits of their role and could describe the circumstances in which they would consider referring or signposting people to other services.</p>

<b>4. People are provided with access to information</b>	<p>The information held or accessed by ISG/PLUSS is sufficient for and relevant to both internal and external services.</p> <p>The Assessor was shown information used by advisers and other members of staff for both the internal and external service. The information included publications, leaflets, fact sheets, information packs and specialist databases.</p> <p>Specified members of staff regularly update the information base. Those having specialist areas of knowledge are expected to collect, evaluate and manage information in order to keep up to date.</p> <p>Specialist databases are also regularly evaluated to ensure they are consistent with the provision of a quality service.</p> <p>Verbal feedback from clients and staff confirmed that they are satisfied with the level of information provided.</p> <p>Information is available in a range of formats: fact sheets, leaflets, packs, newsletters and on the website. Large print and symbols are used to assist those with disabilities.</p>
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<p><b>5.</b> <b>People are supported in exploring options and making choices</b></p>	<p>At interview all staff could describe the importance of ensuring that they provide impartial advice and guidance and where the limits of impartiality lie. They were clear that the focus is the clients and meeting their needs.</p> <p>They were also able to describe how people are offered choices aimed at meeting their needs and given time to consider and decide on them.</p> <p>Advisers demonstrated a good knowledge of other relevant services and organisations. Collectively, they provide a comprehensive knowledge base that is deployed for the benefit of clients. Advisers were able to give examples of referrals they had made and provide the reasons they done so.</p> <p>Verbal feedback from clients confirmed that some had been referred to other services. Those that had been referred were clear as to why this action had been taken and confirmed that they had agreed to it.</p> <p>Staff and supported employees confirmed that they are assisted to explore options and make choices through the review process and supervision meetings.</p>
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**6.  
Service delivery  
is planned and  
maintained**

ISG/PLUSS aim to be a leading player in the provision of assisting disabled people to gain and sustain paid employment. It is contained in the Mission Statement and reflected in the business plan and other documents.

At interview staff could describe in their own terms the aims and objectives of PLUSS in general and the employment division in particular.

The structure of the organisation provides clear lines of responsibility. All staff confirmed that clear direction is provided through the various management levels as appropriate. The current re-structuring exercise demonstrates clearly the open culture of the management process and highlights the way in which information is passed between the different areas and levels of ISG/PLUSS. The staff meetings, review processes and other development activities serve to reinforce the link between managers and other staff members.

ISG/PLUSS has defined policies and procedures that are at present those of the three local authorities that form the parent body. There is thus some variation across the organisation, although in all cases, the aim of the policies is the same. Staff confirmed that in practice this caused no problem and they were aware of the policies and how to access them.

ISG/PLUSS demonstrated that it conforms to relevant legislation and codes of practice. The nature of the business, which is concerned with disabled people, requires careful consideration of a number of requirements. These have been fully addressed.

ISG/PLUSS has established a number of partnerships and networks across Devon. These range from employers who offer opportunities to people with disabilities to voluntary agencies and other providers.

Staff confirmed that they are encouraged to contribute to service delivery and planning. Several methods are available to them: supervision meetings, performance reviews, staff meetings and one to one meetings.

The business planning process and the management system ensures that effectiveness is monitored against a range of targets and measures.

<p><b>7.</b> <b>Premises and Equipment are sufficient to deliver the service</b></p>	<p>Premises and facilities are to a good standard and are well managed and resourced. Equipment is well maintained and is updated as required.</p> <p>All staff have a responsibility for health and safety and confirmed that they have received appropriate training. In addition there are nominated members of staff who have special responsibilities in this connection.</p> <p>Staff have access to the equipment needed to deliver the service and confirmed at interview that support and training in the use of equipment had been received.</p>
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**8.****Staff competence and the support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service**

ISG/PLUSS has an induction process for new staff and for staff moving into a new role. This was confirmed by staff seen at interview who were positive about the process and felt it was tailored to their individual needs and that it was operated in a flexible manner.

The recruitment and induction process is robust and ensures that staff are fully prepared for their new role.

Staff competence to deliver the service is maintained and developed through the provision of training and development activities. Advisers have been trained in the use of software and are encouraged to improve their skills and to take professional qualifications. This was confirmed by staff seen at interview who believed that ISG/PLUSS has a strong commitment to personal development.

The culture of ISG/PLUSS is one of team working and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Staff seen at interview referred frequently to team membership and described how mutual support and assistance is a key aspect of service delivery. Individuals were aware of their own limitations and spoke positively about the support available to them.

A number of mechanisms are available to supervise and support staff. Six monthly review meetings, supervision meetings, team meetings and one to one contact are deployed in combination to ensure performance is maintained and developed.

The six monthly review meetings are part of a structured process for identifying training needs and discussing performance against personal goals. Staff seen at interview confirmed the process was positive for them and provided examples of training that had resulted from the meetings.

<b>9. Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained</b>	<p>ISG/PLUSS uses a number of mechanisms to gather feedback from clients and staff. These include questionnaires as well as verbal feedback. The latter is beneficial in eliciting comments from those whose basic skills are not high.</p> <p>A review of documentation revealed that questionnaires are used, verbal comment during interview confirmed that clients are aware of how to give feedback and that they are not inhibited from doing so.</p> <p>Feedback from employers and stakeholders is gathered both formally and informally through contract review meetings, personal contact and networking.</p> <p>At interview staff described how feedback is evaluated and acted upon. This is done at team meetings and between line managers and their staff. The provision of specialist information to employers is an example of feedback leading to additional services.</p> <p>The ways in which feedback is gathered, evaluated and acted upon ensures that ISG/PLUSS is continuously measuring and improving effectiveness across the range of the services it provides.</p>
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<p><b>10.</b> <b>Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring and action</b></p>	<p>ISG/PLUSS monitors the effectiveness of its services against a range of targets and measures. These enable progress to be monitored against contracts and other organisational goals.</p> <p>ISG/PLUSS involves clients, staff, and stakeholders in the evaluation of their services. This is achieved using a range of mechanisms including staff meetings, supervision and review meetings, networking, contract review meetings and formal evaluation.</p> <p>Staff were able to describe how ISG/PLUSS actively plans the future development of the service. For example, the re-structuring that is currently in progress is aimed at making the overall service more responsive and effective.</p> <p>A variety of systems exist to ensure that action is taken to improve services. These include the feedback processes through which comments are gathered, collated and analysed, the range of communication channels that facilitate evaluation and the staff meetings where effectiveness is regularly reviewed and action taken to improve service provision.</p>
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