



matrix Assessment Report

For

PROFOUND SERVICES LTD.

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On behalf of EMQC LTD.

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1. Executive Summary.

Having carried out the Assessment in accordance with the guidelines provided Profound Services Ltd. has demonstrated that it meets the **matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services**. Accreditation to the **matrix Standard** is granted for the internal and external services provided by Profound Services Ltd.

This Assessment Report covers the services provided by Profound Services Ltd. and includes a brief description of the organisation, the Assessment methodology and an overview of how Profound Services Ltd. demonstrated that it met the **matrix Standard**.

2. Introduction.

The focus of the assessment was on the external and internal **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)** service provided by Profound Services Ltd. (hereafter referred to as Profound Services) to candidates that enrol for NVQ training, primarily those in the transport industry (private hire and hackney carriage drivers).

The focus of the assessment was on the training provided to candidates and the scope of the assessment included the suitability of the premises where staff are based and, from where the service is delivered; the internal processes for delivering the IAG service; the extent and suitability of the service provided; the effectiveness of partnership working; the effective delivery of IAG by those delivering the service; the overall management of the service and the outcomes experienced by candidates having received the service.

Profound Services is a Training and Recruitment company based in the North East on the outskirts of Peterlee, County Durham. Established a little over three years ago by the Managing Director as a home based company supporting foreign nationals, mainly Eastern Europeans, arriving in the UK seeking accommodation, training and employment. Grant funding for the service was initially provided by the European Social Fund (ESF). As a result of ongoing success the company has experienced rapid growth and expansion. From the one person originally to two or three who became involved in the initiative to today where eight full time Assessors are employed with another eight qualified Associate Assessors, working on a freelance basis helping the company meet peaks in demand depending on the number of candidates who enrol and the number of courses operating.

The service provided has now evolved to one where Profound Services receives Learning & Skills Council (LSC) funding as a 'Type 'B' provider' for NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) and VRQ (Vocationally Related Qualifications) training supporting the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage industry. Profound Services provides a bespoke taxi driver training package for self employed taxi drivers as well

as taxi companies who want their employees to gain a nationally recognised qualification. The training provision is supported by 'GoSkills the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for passenger transport. Licensed by the Government, GoSkills work with employers to improve the skills of individuals to improve the performance of staff within the passenger transport employment sector.

Profound Services has plans to develop its training portfolio to provide accredited training (Certificate in Professional Competence (CPC)) to bus and coach drivers and, as from September this year, when it becomes mandatory, to employees in the haulage industry.

The company Directors have a desire to expand the company in terms of its geographical reach and offer training opportunities UK wide. Assessors working for the company are currently providing training solutions in Leeds, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Leicester. In addition to being an approved LSC NVQ provider the company also offers, on a commercial basis (full cost provision), a training portfolio that contains Leadership and Management, First Aid, Interview and Report Writing skills, Motivation and Presentation Skills, Problem Solving and Decision Making Communication and Performance Management training amongst others.

The Managing Director is supported in the delivery of the service by two family member Company Directors, a Project Manager, NVQ Assessor Manager, NVQ Operational Manager and Quality Manager along with a number of additional full time staff, Assessors and Associate Assessors.

The 'business drivers' are very much the focus for all activity within the company, the aim being to fulfil the company's contractual obligations. The company philosophy is to provide candidates with the best possible service to meet their needs and expectations. Quality assurance (QA) is a key part of the process for delivering a consistently good service with QA policies and practices evident at key stages throughout the processes. Quality Assurance procedures and quality control measures are the 'threads' running through all that the company does so it provides a high standard of service to individuals and corporate clients. The company Quality Policy Statement states, 'The aim of the training arm of Profound Services Ltd. is to provide high quality training to a high standard that will meet the needs and requirements of local businesses and all our customers.'

The Assessor found a highly motivated, enthusiastic workforce led by the Directors and other senior managers all having a keen desire to succeed by building and expanding the company. One of the aims is to diversify and 'future proof' the business in case the economic recession or other external influences have an adverse affect. Members of staff are committed to the provision of a professional Information, Advice and Guidance service. The Assessors and other members of staff are developing a good understanding of the significance of IAG for individuals when planning their future and for making decisions. The needs of candidates are an important consideration. Members of staff provide support and encouragement to individuals in respect to their learning and possible career changes / choices. Several Assessors now employed by Profound Services are former taxi drivers who

have brought an added level of credibility to the industry specific training offered by the company.

Accreditation to the Standard is considered important not only because it is a mandatory contractual requirement imposed by the LSC to access grant funding but also because the Standard is a nationally recognised quality framework that can be used by managers and staff to help achieve company aspirations to provide all candidates with a high quality service that, where possible, exceeds their expectations.

The agreed objectives for the assessment were; to assess the extent of the IAG service provided; to raise the awareness of candidates about the IAG service available; to review the quality of the IAG service provided; to assess whether suitable systems and procedures are in place to support an effective and efficient IAG service and to identify service strengths and make recommendations about possible improvements to the service.

3. Strengths.

During the Assessment three strengths were identified. These are outlined below. The numbers and letters in brackets refer to the relevant elements and criteria in the **matrix** Standard.

External Service.

- The NVQ Level 2 for Road Passenger Vehicle Driving has been developed specifically by Profound Services for the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage industry. The training provided has found favour with candidates who regard it as a credible course and qualification to achieve. Because of the company's approach to deliver the training in a flexible, professional and responsive fashion candidates are highly complimentary about the course and the staff who deliver it (1a, 2d, 3d, 4e).
- Profound Services has established what is known as the 'Profound Action Team' (PAT) to which managers and staff delivering the service can submit their views, suggestions and ideas. The team, consisting of members of staff, has a remit to develop and introduce improvements / enhancements to the service and are able to do so in a less bureaucratic fashion to achieve outcomes more quickly when deemed appropriate and / or required. The meeting structure and consultation process within the company is able to address in 'slow time' issues where managers and staff need time to consider and reflect. The recent introduction of the PAT is helping to reinvigorate the attitude of staff to develop the service when and where the need is identified (5c, 7d, 8c, 8d).

Internal Service

- Profound Service has a genuine commitment towards staff development. The mentoring process for new Assessors is a key feature for their personal development to ensure company standards are recognised and maintained. Staff development is seen as an important ingredient to the future success of the company allowing individuals to grow as the business develops and expands whilst providing candidates with a consistent service (6b, 6d, 6e).

4. Detailed Findings against the matrix Standard.

The following information is a summary of the findings against each element and should be read in conjunction with the previous sections.

1. People are made aware of the service and how to engage with it.

Profound Services provide a range of learning and training programmes on a commercial or 'full cost provision' basis that individuals and / or organisations fund. The company is willing to undertake an Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) to identify the training needs of employees if requested. In addition, the company provides grant funded training opportunities where individuals / companies have access to specific funding for training in line with the beneficiaries aims and objectives, such as the accredited training (Train2Gain) funded by the LSC which relates to vocational work based learning. NVQ accredited training provided by the company also includes Leadership and Management and Health & Safety. Government (grant) funded training accounts for the majority of the work undertaken by staff employed by Profound Services i.e. NVQ Level 2 in Road Passenger Vehicle Driving. The Train2Gain contract awarded to the company incorporates a requirement to provide candidates and prospective candidates with an IAG service.

The company website provides introductory details about Profound Services, the range of services available, including the provision of accredited and non accredited training e.g. Team Leader Development, Interview Skills, Report Writing, Appraisal Skills, Time Management, Presentation Skills, Understanding and Managing Conflict, Effective Coaching, Understanding the Mentors Role and much more together with a recruitment service. A lot of relevant and important information is available via the company website. The site is well organised, looks professional and is easy to navigate. Candidates who had referred to the company website had found it helpful and categorised it as a very good website compared to those of other training providers they had used.

Although still a young company Profound Services has established a credible training product for the private hire and hackney carriage industry. Candidates involved in the assessment process were all satisfied customers having completed their training. The member of staff responsible for Sales & Marketing is active in taking information about the company and the courses on offer to existing and prospective new candidates. A proportion of the training undertaken is repeat business with some new candidates having had Profound Services recommended to them by word of mouth. The company is quickly gaining its reputation through the good standard of service it provides.

Literature produced by the company to advertise and promote EDexcel BTEC, NVQ and other training includes leaflets and posters. The quality of these is to a good standard projecting a professional company and an alternative training product.

The company has written Equal Opportunities and Quality policies to which managers and staff operate to. Managers and staff are also aware of the need to provide an 'all inclusive' service having given support in the past to candidates who have special needs such as dyslexia or require time and opportunity to complete their studies, as not all individuals progress at the same rate together, so Assessors will give additional support to individuals when it is required.

2. People's use of the service is defined and understood.

A detailed explanation of what individuals can expect from the service is provided to candidates by staff during their course induction. Details, including photographs and a pen picture about those involved in the delivery of the service can be accessed via the company website along with contact details for the company. There is also the facility for candidates and potential candidates to submit queries and ask questions via the company website.

The company has published its IAG Aims and Objectives setting out the company's commitment as an employer, as a training provider and as a recruitment agency to its customers / candidates. Evaluation of the aims and objectives takes place via management and staff meetings, candidate feedback, standardisation meetings, External Verifier reports, SAR and audits of the service.

All candidates receive at enrolment a 'Candidate Pack' that includes a copy of Profound Services 'Candidate Handbook.' Within this publication are details of contact addresses and telephone numbers along with details about their NVQ programme, details of their NVQ Assessor and Internal Verifier, a brief explanation about the different NVQ Units and statements about IAG, Health & Safety, Equal Opportunities, appeal procedures and how to make a complaint.

Candidates that enrol are asked to complete a 'Skills Scan' to assess the level of knowledge concerning driving, the Highway Code, driving legislation and personal attitudes and practices they display. A vehicle Health & Safety written assessment is also completed using the candidates' replies to set questions.

Details of the Company confidentiality and diversity policies are made known to candidates during the induction process who confirmed that they had been told that their personal details will be held securely. Candidate details are input onto the Company's data base that is password protected. Paper files are securely stored in lockable cabinets within the company offices.

Candidates seen as part of the assessment process were complimentary about the opportunities provided to explore the suitability of the services available. The company promotes the fact they are willing to be flexible about how the WBL is delivered and how a more bespoke training programme can be made available to fit the needs of candidates and transport companies.

Newly enrolled candidates attend a full induction session following which a scheduled meeting with their Assessor is arranged. This initial meeting between an Assessor and a new candidate provides the opportunity for staff delivering the service to fully discuss the needs of individuals. Candidates confirmed this to be the case. A great deal of effort is made to ensure candidates undertake the right training at the right level and are provided with a good level of support to minimise the chances of individuals withdrawing from their course. The fact that they have the option to withdraw

demonstrates the opportunity they have to explore the suitability of the training offered.

A close level of liaison takes place with employers to determine the kind of training they would like delivered for the benefit of their employees. Profound Services is willing to 'tailor' the delivery of training to meet the needs of employers and employees alike.

One candidate commented, "*I have done courses and courses, Profound Services is one of the best courses I have been on.*"

Profound Services does occasionally have to refer or signpost a candidate to other training providers e.g. local colleges or other training providers such as the Open University if they want to access more specialised training.

3. People are provided with access to information and support in using it.

All information seen and examined during the assessment was found to be up-to-date and relevant to the service offered. The company's website contains a lot of information and this too was found to be current. The website provides a helpful description of the different courses available as well as details about the company, comments from Assessors and comments from recent successful candidates.

Examination of company notices, policies and other information displayed confirmed the information to be current and relevant to the service being provided. Information is managed by managers and staff to ensure nothing is displayed which is unsuitable or inappropriate.

Candidates seen by the Assessor explained how they had been supported in understanding the information made available. Candidates were complimentary about the efforts of staff and Assessors to explain matters which they had not fully understood and keeping them informed of ongoing developments. Candidates are provided with course literature relating to the course they enrol for. Candidates reported receiving information in a managed way and not being overwhelmed with too much course detail at any one time however a number mentioned the form filling at initial registration along with the information provided to be a difficult part of the process to cope with.

One candidate stated, *"They (Profound Services) treat you with respect, you are not just another statistic, I was able to phone my Assessor, they are very flexible and work with you to solve any problems."* Another commented *"(Name of Assessor) did the course, it was very professional."*

It was reported by candidates that Profound Services does support individuals with special needs, one example quoted involved an adult candidate who suffers from dyslexia being supported having discussed the different options available with his Assessor.

Candidates involved with NVQ studies are provided with contact details of their Assessor so if they have difficulties with their studies they are able to seek support or clarification. Assessors visit places of employment to carry out their observations of candidates and to gather evidence. These visits also provide candidates with the opportunity to consult their Assessor on a one-to-one basis. Managers promote an open and transparent management style and actively encourage staff to develop their work, personal skills and take the initiative for improving the service. Assessors are responsible for maintaining and managing information to ensure it remains relevant to the service they provide.

4. People are supported in exploring options and making choices.

Candidates were able to explain how they satisfied themselves about the Information and Advice they had received to be impartial and objective. This is based on the fact they had been given a number of options and the opportunity to consider whether the training being offered is exactly what they wanted to commit to.

Once an employer has expressed interest in allowing their staff to participate in NVQ training the Managing Director or Sales and Marketing person explains the extent of the service offered. Employers and candidates have the opportunity to discuss details on a one-to-one basis with an Assessor to obtain further clarification, if required, when the Assessors visit the candidate's place of work. One candidate explained how the different options to obtain suitable experience and the right qualifications had been outlined, enabling him to better understand the commitment required on his part.

Another example of the kind of support provided involved an Assessor using another candidate to interpret for a driver whose first language is not English. The company has appointed two full time Asian speaking Assessors to help address any language problems and the need for interpreters.

Several candidates commented about not having obtained any qualifications when at school. After the Assessors had explained how NVQ training is delivered and what is involved they felt confident enough to undertake the training. The fact that they had been able to clarify their concerns and put questions to the Assessor had been a big influence on the decision they had made.

One candidate commented, *"When I didn't understand I would approach (Name of Assessor) who explained everything.....I would give them (Profound Services) eleven out of ten for not being a nuisance at any time for me, members of my staff and for my business in the way they work."*

All candidates are subject to an enrolment procedure when Assessors explain the limitations of the service available. The Candidate Handbook provided to all candidates explains in detail the extent of the service staff at Profound Services aim to provide to all individuals.

Candidates discuss their needs with their Assessor and an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is prepared and agreed with the candidate.

Candidates involved in the assessment process hold the view that they have received adequate levels of support, good Information and Advice allowing them to make their own decisions regarding learning and work opportunities.

Another candidate said, *"We are told about other courses, nothing is pushed onto us and no incentives given. The course is well done so I decided to give it a go."*

5. Service delivery is planned and maintained.

Measurement of the service is largely based on the contract requirements notified by the funding provider (LSC). Performance against candidate targets is closely monitored by the Directors and senior managers on a weekly and monthly basis. Assessors are allocated targets for completed candidate portfolios and achievement can trigger salary bonus payments.

The delivery of the service is aligned to the Managing Director's desire geared towards expanding the business, providing a more embedded IAG service and achieving successful outcomes for candidates. Towards the end of 2008 the Managing Director arranged for a full staff away-day off site to brief everyone about the future plans for the business and how he sees the company developing in the short to medium term.

Measures to maintain the consistency and quality of the service include candidate reviews, standardisation meetings involving Assessors & Internal Verifiers (IV), External Verifiers (EV) and the company's Self Assessment Report (SAR).

The meeting structure plays an important part to ensure staff have a clear understanding of work priorities. Standardisation meetings are held to maintain consistency regarding the delivery of the service and identify areas for improvement. Full staff meetings and regular Heads of Department meetings provide the opportunity for staff to make suggestions, plan the service and introduce change. Examination of the minutes of staff meetings confirmed this to be the case. Staff reported that they feel their voice is heard within the company and that they are listened to, should they wish to make a suggestion or put forward their views.

For the managers and staff at Profound Services the IAG service is seen as an implicit part of the contractual requirements and forms part of the activities staff undertake to provide an effective service. Resources are linked to available funding and therefore staff and other resources have to be used effectively. In the main staff are appointed on full time contracts with some

Assessors working as self employed for their initial three months so they can determine whether they like the role. The Directors are currently reviewing the structure of the company to cater for the future expansion of the service over a wider geographical area.

Profound Services is one of a number of tenants who share the occupancy of business premises in Peterlee where the landlord is responsible for maintaining the building e.g. security and legislative requirements such as access into the building and fire alarm systems. Fire exits are clearly marked and fire extinguishers made available for use. The Managing Director confirmed that Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) had taken place as it was a requirement of the tenancy. Members of staff have a working knowledge of Health & Safety legislation and relevant issues. Candidate files are stored securely.

Profound Services operates to a number of established policies that include Health & Safety, Equal Opportunities, Lone Worker and IAG. The National IAG Board Principles are reflected in the company's policies and feature as part of the candidate induction process and candidate Handbook.

Profound Services has established non formal working partnerships with different organisations these include, Premium People, Focus, Local Authorities and colleges. More formal (contracted) partnership working exists with the LSC in respect to the funded services that the company provides.

6. Staff competence and support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service.

Staff at Profound Services reported having received a formal induction into their role and the company. An induction 'check list' is used to achieve consistency. One member of staff explained how after he commenced with the company the kind of support provided to him to access and use the company data base and other office equipment such as the printers, photocopier etc. In the past when new Assessors have been appointed they have been allocated a mentor from within the company to help, guide and support them. An example of induction support provided to staff includes the opportunity for new Assessors to shadow existing staff to learn the administration procedures appertaining to candidates.

A number of examples provided demonstrate how Profound Services maintains the competence of staff in their roles. Training opportunities have included Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) and Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), A1 Assessor Awards, disability awareness and Health & Safety.

Using scenario based questions the Assessor was able to determine at what point staff delivering the service recognise their limitations and the boundaries of their role before having to refer candidates or seek appropriate support.

Staff expressed satisfaction regarding the level of support provided in the use of equipment and the provision of any specialist equipment to enable them to fully undertake their responsibilities. A number of staff have been allocated lap-top computers; Assessors have all been allocated hand held recording devices and mobile telephones. Mutual support is provided to team members at all levels whilst individuals maintain a clear understanding regarding the staff / management structure of the company. Members of staff generally regard their immediate line manager as the person who provides them with help and support if it is required. Managers in the company undertake observation of teaching and learning involving the Assessors to determine whether an accurate and consistent service is being delivered.

One member of staff commented, *"The back-up and support you get from Profound Services and the training they provide is very good."* Another said, *"Profound Services is a caring company."*

Examples provided relating to the internal IAG service include a member of staff being allowed paternity leave very soon after being employed by the company and the provision of a Staff handbook containing copies of relevant company policies. The company is able to access external professional Human Resource (HR) services which it pays for.

In support of the internal service Profound Services does not operate formal written assessment procedures however, regular supervision meetings take

place between staff and their line manager to assess performance and identify personal developmental needs.

One member of staff cited, *“The culture of the company is that they care about people and are very flexible towards staff and candidates to get the best from them.”*

5. Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained.

Candidates confirmed that during their induction they had been made aware of the formal procedures should they wish to raise a grievance or make a complaint. Details about what action to take if a candidate wishes to compliment the service or has a complaint is explained in the Candidate Handbook. Candidates who wish to make suggestions to improve the service also have the opportunity to make details known during their 'review' meetings with their Assessor. Feedback can also be provided using the company website.

Examination of the complaints received and recorded by Profound Services confirmed there is a written audit trail showing decision making associated with each complaint to successfully resolve the problem(s) encountered by candidates.

Evaluation of the service takes place at different times during the 'candidate journey.' Evaluation forms are used at the start after a candidate's initial induction, at a mid course point and when the candidate completes their course. The views of employers are also sought to establish whether they are satisfied with the service provided. Any subsequent action that is required is discussed at team / Heads of Department meetings.

The contracted service requires Profound Services to collate and submit statistical returns regarding performance against set targets to the LSC in order to access payment. Such data reflects ongoing performance concerning enrolments, retention and course withdrawals forming part of the quantitative data returns submitted on a monthly basis.

During the assessment the details contained within the company draft Self Assessment Report (SAR) for 2008 were noted.

6. Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring, evaluation and action.

Regular meetings provide the Directors, managers and staff with the opportunity to review performance against the contract requirements. Performance statistics for the key candidate outcomes are collated and recorded on a weekly and monthly basis.

Quality measures are also used to assess performance that include periodic observation events of Assessors delivering the IAG service.

Self assessment is a process used by the company to review activity and identify areas where improvements can be made. External audits and inspections of Profound Services are undertaken by the LSC who quality assures the service being provided along with external verifiers and Awarding Bodies. One of the goals identified by the company for 2008/9 is to become accredited to the **matrix** Standard.

Those organisations that Profound Services works in partnership with operate their own monitoring and evaluation procedures to satisfy themselves regarding the quality and level of service provided. Complimentary remarks were received from partner organisations regarding the candidate experience and the outcomes that staff at the company has achieved.

The company has established a Profound Action Team to help identify improvements to the service. Examples of the work the group has undertaken include an information sheet explaining in greater detail 'Skills for Life,' what the term means and how activity is designed to help and support individuals including those whose first language may not be English. The PAT has produced a simple 'Ideas Form' so managers and staff can submit their proposals for consideration. The team is also exploring the possibility of creating a formal certificate of some kind that private hire and hackney carriage drivers can display in their cab for the information of fare paying customers. The responsibility for candidate files has been allocated to a member of staff to improve the quality of the records maintained and consideration is being given to providing Assessors with their own identity badges.

Future development of the service is aimed at the expansion and growth of the company by identifying additional / alternative sources of funding. One area the company hopes to develop is in relation to extending its involvement in the provision of training through the Governments Train2Gain initiative. Aimed at employers the scheme is designed to help them improve their productivity and competitiveness by ensuring that employees have the right skills to do the best job. Another important aim for staff within the company is to increase the provision of commercially run (full cost provision) courses to generate additional income. The company's transport training provision is

now being delivered in Leeds, Bradford, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Leicester.