



merlin standard

2018

**SEETEC BUSINESS
TECHNOLOGY CENTRE LTD**

COMPACT REPORT

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1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	12/07/2020
Assessment Dates	10/07/2018 – 12/07/2018
Lead Assessor's Name	LORNA BAINBRIDGE
Customer ID	C23375
Assessment Reference	PN103608

2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

OVERALL OUTCOME	73% Good
1. Design	70% Good
2. Procure	80% Good
3. Contract	70% Good
4. Fund	80% Good
5. Develop	73% Good
6. Performance Manage	74% Good
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	72% Good
8. Review and Close	68% Satisfactory

3. METHODOLOGY

Seetec Business Technology Centre Ltd (referred to as Seetec or the Organisation throughout the report) continues to be mandated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be accredited against the Merlin Standard due to being a delivery Partner (Prime) for the Work Programme and Work Choice contracts. Organisations are required to be re-accredited every two-years and consequently Seetec came forward for re-accreditation in line with the anniversary date.

The assessment team comprised of Lorna Bainbridge (Lead Assessor), Ruth Regan (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within Seetec. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in April 2018 to establish the scope and discuss the logistics of the assessment. The dates for the on-site were identified and a plan of action agreed.

A booking form was submitted to Assessment Services Limited along with a spread-sheet indicating a full list of Partners delivering a range of services funded by different commissioners; DWP, European Social Fund (ESF) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The list indicated past and present Supply Chain Partners delivering an end-to-end (tier 2) or specialist (tier 3) service.

In advance of the Assessment a survey was carried out of the Partners, all 30 were invited to participate. Responses were received from past and present Supply Chain Partners. The results of the survey informed the focus of interviews for the assessment team and contributed to the overall scoring.

The Lead Assessor was in regular contact with the coordinator prior to the on-site activity to review the schedule and logistics. All documentation required for the assessment; Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and schedule were shared to enable the assessment to take place as planned.

The assessment team spent a total of two days each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with Seetec staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. 46% of the current tier 2 end-to-end Supply Chain Partners were interviewed and two tier 3 Specialist providers. In addition, a number of potential Supply Chain Partners were interviewed covering bids for the Work and Health Programme, National Careers Service, Prison Education Framework and the National Citizen Service, as well as three past Supply Chain Partners. Consideration was made to past, present and potential irrespective of the commissioner.

The following report provides an indication of the findings against key criteria within the Merlin Standard, which was evidenced across all the supply chains referenced below, as well as areas of strength and areas to consider for development over the forthcoming two-years.

4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Seetec's main goal in 1984 was to deliver IT training to unemployed people in the local community over the past 34 years a commitment to improving lives has grown, and currently they deliver services to meet customer needs expanding across the skills, employment, justice and health sectors.

The vision for Seetec is *'to be the UK and Ireland's leading public and business services provider built on a reputation of trust, quality and delivering real social and economic value'*. Its mission is to *'every day inspire our service users to aspire to something better. We empower them to achieve and support them to sustain in employment on an Apprenticeship or a qualification, a lifestyle change, or a crime free life. We help them to continually advance and progress, allowing them to make real life changes for themselves, their families and the communities in which they live – we support Ambition'*.

The vision and mission are underpinned with a set of core values, which are;

'At our Core: Adding value - with people at the heart of every one of our services, we are driven by our overarching aim to empower lives and improve communities.

Our Company: Respect – We build our relationships on mutual respect; all employers, customer and partners receive the same high quality service.

Our Service: Transformational – Our commitment to providing effective and innovative service delivery enables us to have a positive impact on people's lives and improve communities.

Our Message: Aspirational – We empower and inspire our customers to take ownership of their lives by giving them the right tools, support and opportunities to break down barriers and achieve their goals."

In order to deliver the range of services Seetec gains funding from different commissioners, as previously stated these include: DWP, ESF and ESFA. Seetec recognises that the specialisms, skills and experience of Supply Chain Partners can only enhance its capability to meet varying customer needs rather than employing a direct delivery model and as a result has opted to work with a number of Supply Chain Partners. The following provides an overview of the current contracts, along with an indication of the percentage delivered by supply chains: Work Programme – 8% , Work Choice – 3%, Careers Guidance London – 85% and Employee Support in Skills – 90%. Whilst Seetec engaged with Supply Chain Partners to deliver the Apprenticeship Programme, currently delivery has been completed, but contact continues to be maintained with them.

At the time of the assessment the Work Programme and Work Choice contracts were starting to come to a close, and a number of the ESF funded contracts were due to close on 31st July 2018. Consequently, Seetec was experiencing extensive change in terms of staffing and their roles and responsibilities to ensure the contracts continued to be financially viable and Supply Chain Partners were provided with the appropriate support.

5. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH

A number of significant strengths were identified during the Assessment and these are described below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

A Partnership Opportunity Portal (POP) has been designed and subsequently all interested potential Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to register their interest and provide key information. Consequently, this has reduced the need for repetitive in-depth Expression of Interest (EOI) submissions, as they are now straight-forward and focusses on the requirements of the specific contract. Supply Chain Partners spoke of meetings prior to and throughout the submission of the EOI, as well as the support provided, if requested. Due diligence is viewed as robust, but fit for purpose and in some cases developmental for Supply Chain Partners, which a number of smaller providers have valued. (2.1)

Potential (unsuccessful) Supply Chain Partners spoke positively regarding their initial contact with Seetec; the communications and the support from the Partnership Development Manager, which has continued despite not entering into a formal contract at this stage. The current Supply Chain Partners consistently spoke of having one main contact for the contract; a Contract Manager and named personnel for other functions, for example, finance, compliance, etc. The current Seetec staff are viewed as accessible and responsive, knowledgeable and very supportive. Communication processes are embedded and effective, and include email, bulletins, telephone, face-to-face and access to a Partner Portal. The Partner Portal provides supply Chain Partners with access to a wide range of information and resources to support the delivery of the service, as well as updates to regulatory and legislative requirements, which is valued by a high proportion of the Supply Chain Partners. (6.1. 7.1)

Provider Enterprise (PE) is a system used by Seetec that provides real time reporting. It holds secure information which can be aggregated and reported upon in a variety of ways depending on the needs of Supply Chain Partners. This can be at delivery centre level, individual advisor, as well as customer; the latter includes the opportunity to track progression against milestones and the softer outcomes. Data is taken from PE and updated into the QlickView Management Information system which can then derive a number of reports on performance in line with contractual requirements. A high proportion of Supply Chain Partners spoke highly of the reports available and how it supports them to drive performance against the targets and monitor the performance of the advisors. (6.4)

Seetec provide timely communications to Supply Chain Partners relating to changes to the contracts, for example, the end of the DWP contracts and the ESF funding, which was consistently referenced by Supply Chain Partners as being open and honest. Subsequently, a clear plan is designed outlining the process of the contract closure / ending the contractual relationship, and Seetec have subsequently provided support. Supply Chain Partners spoke of the plan and the timescale for each activity; requirements of the delivery of service, weekly calls to ensure resources are managed effectively, full audits, archiving webinar to support final storage of records. Those that had already left the supply chain confirmed that once all activities had been completed final payment was made in a timely manner. Those Supply Chain Partners that had already exited, or coming to a close imminently confirmed that they would work with Seetec again, if the opportunity arose. (8.5)

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...we are discussing the details of how we are going to hand back our remaining clients – Seetec are fully supportive of our decision and working with us to make it work."

"...email from Seetec to explain the timeline for exiting the programme."

"...everything agreed and weekly calls to make sure we were on track."

"... a clear plan outlining what was expected – it was manageable."

"...we have a great partnership – we would love to work with them again."

An emerging strength is the development of robust quality and compliance practices to ensure the requirements of the commissioner are being met, as well as mitigating the risk to Supply Chain Partners and Seetec. In addition, the annual visits to Supply Chain Partners' delivery sites provides the opportunity to review policies and procedures, observe these practices and test the knowledge and understanding of delivery staff. An extensive report is completed and provided to the Supply Chain Partner, clearly indicating the RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating and actions to be taken within an agreed timescale. (7.2, 7.4)

Some Seetec staff comments included:

"...subject matter experts are available if additional support and guidance is needed."

"...safeguarding and prevent for example are tested through the compliance review process."

6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A number of areas where further development would be beneficial were identified during the Assessment. These are for the Organisation to consider as a contribution to continuous improvement. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

Seetec actively work with their Supply Chain Partners to ensure both parties are working towards the same goal and subsequently successful. There was also evidence of Seetec and a Supply Chain Partner working on a joint bid to gain additional funding. Whilst there was evidence of Supply Chain Partners working collaboratively, currently this tended to be as a result of their proactive approach, as opposed to Seetec encouraging such activity. Consequently, consideration could be made to identifying opportunities for Supply Chain Partners to work together, share resources more readily as well as share practices. Historically, the Partner Forums provided an ideal platform for Supply Chain Partners to engage in such activities. It is recognised that contracts are coming to a close and the perceived value of the Partner Forums is limited, however, consideration could be made to consulting with Supply Chain Partners to identify their needs and gain ideas, and if appropriate, alternative approaches adopted to share practices, for example, Skype for Business meeting. (1.3, 1.4, 6.6)

Supply Chain Partners spoke of the values of the two organisations being aligned, which was ascertained throughout initial meetings prior to submitting the EOI. Similarly, it was felt that there was strong commitment to equality and diversity, which was tested throughout the due diligence activities and subsequent annual compliance audits. However, there had been no further testing of the values and whether these had been upheld within the respective supply chain. In the future, Seetec may consider re-introducing the Supply Chain Charter whereby Supply Chain Partners discuss and mutually agree a set of core values / behaviours, which outline how the supply chain will operate. Over a period of time, further review and testing of the values could be undertaken to hold Seetec and the Supply Chain Partners to account and ensure the behaviours are upheld. (1.5)

The rationale for the allocation of the market share is based on many factors, predominantly, geography, location, expertise and performance. At the start of the contract a number of Supply Chain Partners were aware of the market share, including that of delivered via direct delivery, however, as market shift has taken place there is a level of uncertainty. In the future, consideration could be made to ensuring open communications regarding the market share allocation, which is revisited throughout the relationship. (2.3)

In line with the ESFA requirements, Seetec actively promote the management fee paid by Supply Chain Partners, and as a result there is a clear understanding of the value paid. Those Supply Chain Partners were also very clear what they received for the money. Whilst it is appreciated that the DWP contracts have been in place for many years, Supply Chain Partners failed to recollect the percentage paid. In addition, as the contract draws to a close and changes have been made to the practices, for example, frequency of Partner Forums and performance reviews, Supply Chain Partners were unclear what they gained for the payment of a management fee. Consequently, consideration could be made to reflect upon the management fee throughout the life of the contract and in the spirit of openness and transparency consideration could be made to promoting the management fees paid by all Supply Chain Partners, irrespective of the commissioner. (4.3)

A range of learning and development resources are available to Supply Chain Partners including access to ELVIS (Seetec Virtual Learning Environment) and the Partner Portal. The Partner Portal in particular consists of a broad range of learning and development resources, including e-learning modules, articles of interest, Learn and GO webinars, etc. however, it appears to be under-utilised by Supply Chain Partners. As a result, consideration could be made in the first instance to actively promoting specific topics, as well as undertaking a training needs analysis to identify the needs of delivery staff and tailor the platform to meet their needs. In addition, consideration could be made to evaluating the impact of learning and development on the performance of Supply Chain Partners and their staff to establish the return on investment. (5.3)

A Supply Chain Framework (SCF) outlines the practices to contribute to effective supply chain management from procurement and contracting through to exiting a contract. Reference is made to the performance management practices, which indicates the approach and frequency to reviewing the performance of the Supply Chain Partners. Throughout the reaccreditation review there was evidence that this approach failed to be consistently applied. Whilst it was recognised that contracts are drawing to a close and there is less focus on performance, some Supply Chain Partners inferred that these formal practices are beneficial and more frequent reviews would be valued. Consequently, consideration could be made to consulting with Supply Chain Partners their preferred approach to performance management at such times. (6.3)

Supply Chain Partners consistently made reference to the submission of their annual Self-Assessment Review (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), which was a requirement to contracting with Seetec. However, Supply Chain Partners were unaware how their QIP contributed to the SAR and QIP of the respective contract, as a result, consideration could be made to adopting a *'you said, we did'* approach to share this information. In addition, whilst the QIP is published on the Partner Portal very few Supply Chain Partners recollect awareness of the fact and as a result failed to review it. As a result, consideration could be made to promoting the document and / or reviewing throughout a Partner Forum. (6.7)

As indicated previously within section 5, an emerging strength is the quality and compliance practices and annual compliance review that incorporates an extensive appraisal of the content and understanding of the policies and procedures; health and safety, safeguarding, prevent, data security, environmental sustainability, etc. Seetec is encouraged in its plans to implement this practice annually as the approach was valued by the Supply Chain Partner and will ensure these key policies and practices remain current. (7.3, 7.4)

There is a clear strategy to ensure effective delivery of information, advice and guidance (IAG) by delivery staff across the ESFA contracts, for example, Supply Chain Partners are **matrix** accredited or working towards accreditation and observations of practice in place. The same robust approach was less apparent across the other contracts, as a result, consideration could be made to adopting a similar practice, or as a minimum undertake observation of practice to review effective delivery of the IAG Service. (7.3)

Seetec gain feedback as a result of Ofsted, ESF Compliance Monitoring Officer (CMO), DWP Provider Assurance Team (PAT), Merlin and **matrix** Standards, Investors in People, etc. inspections and audits with the aim of improving practices. Whilst some Supply Chain Partners were aware of these activities there was minimal awareness of the outcome, and as a result consideration could be made to raising Supply Chain Partners' awareness of the reports and planned actions. In addition, whilst feedback is gained from Supply Chain Partners in relation to the working practices, this tends to be informal. In the future, consideration could be made to undertaking an annual survey of Supply Chain Partners, and subsequently sharing the outcome along with action taken as a result – *'you said, we did'*. (8.1)

Supply Chain Partners provided many examples of the positive impact on the intended customer group, external stakeholders and the wider community, however, there was less confidence regarding the impact they had on the wider social objectives and / or the policy intent of the commissioner. Consequently, consideration could be made to promoting the wider social objectives and / or the policy intent of the commissioner and working with the respective supply chains to establish how the activities of the supply chain has impact at a wider level. (8.2)

As stated above, Supply Chain Partners provided many examples of the positive impact on different stakeholders and the wider community at an individual level. In the future, consideration could be made to assessing the impact of the supply chain in its entirety and sharing this with the Supply Chain Partners. (8.3)

There is a commitment to equality and diversity, which is actively promoted throughout the life of the contract, along with providing staff access to a range of learning and development activities. A strength of Seetec is the provision of reports to enable Supply Chain Partners to drive performance, this includes management information relating to equal opportunities. Whilst Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the data was collected a high proportion failed to analyse and use the data to inform changes or improvements to the delivery of the service. Consideration could be made to educating Supply Chain Partners on the value of using and analysing the data relating to equal opportunities to contribute to identifying trends, gaps in provision, etc. (8.4)

7. FINDINGS

The feedback below is reported against key criteria of the Merlin Standard, aligned with the “Plan-Do-Review” business cycle.

PLAN
<p>Through planning an effective supply chain, the range of Partners and how they are engaged ensures there is a group of organisations that cover a diverse range of providers that all understand the requirements of the contract and their contributions to achieving the desired outcomes.</p>
<p>Seetec gains a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the commissioner to ensure it contributes to its mission and vision, and that it is a viable and deliverable contract. This was evidenced through recent consideration for the Work and Health Programme, Prison Education Framework, National Careers Service and National Citizen Service.</p> <p>A designated team (comprising of Board and Business Development team members) scrutinise the contract specification and utilise both internal and external research through review of relevant data and industry engagement to clearly define the scope of the contract in question, the service to be delivered and the range and type of supply chain that will be required. Seetec opted not to proceed with the National Careers Service due to undertaking research which indicated it would not be a viable contract for them.</p> <p>In addition, engagement with potential Supply Chain Partners prior to bid submission is seen as critical to gain their knowledge of the local area and potential customer groups as well as establish their area of expertise to contribute to the aims and objectives of the commissioner.</p> <p>When considering the design of the Work and Health Programme, consideration was made to public, private and third sector organisations, as well as those of differing legal entities and sizes, and national, regional and local coverage with the aim of addressing and meeting customer needs.</p> <p>The current supply chains are predominantly made up organisations from the private sector and 14% from the third sector. However, it was evident that Seetec actively work with the public sector within its wider networking activities to identify gaps in service provision, as well as the general and / or specific needs of the local area. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the supply chain was made up of organisations that could contribute to the commissioner’s aims and objectives, and as a result was fit for purpose.</p>

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...it was clear from our initial discussion that Seetec had a strong understanding of what DWP wanted and were looking for organisations with a mix of skill sets to deliver." –

"...we have a local presence and outreach in London that Seetec do not have so they needed our input into the supply chain."

"...the supply chain has a good mix of relevant providers, some delivering apprenticeships, some qualification based, some IAG based..."

Seetec review the design of the respective supply chains and identify gaps in provision, for example in the past year four additional Supply Chain Partners have been procured. This was evidenced within the Employee Support in Skills whereby new Supply Chain Partners had been brought into provide specific services to the health and social care and the construction sectors.

In the event of a Supply Chain Partner leaving a supply chain the use of the POP provides access to a number of potential Supply Chain Partners that can be contacted to establish the level of interest in partnering with them. Subsequently, the EOI can be completed and submitted in a relatively short period of time as the initial fact finding and fit to Seetec has been undertaken.

If a Supply Chain Partner opts to leave the Work Programme or Work Choice contracts over the forthcoming months the strategy is that Seetec will take over the management of any customers left as opposed to procuring alternative Supply Chain Partners due to the limitations of any contract.

The Supply Chain Framework was designed in 2014, and in 2017 the ESF Supply Chain Framework was introduced. The aim was to outline systems, processes and practices expected of Seetec staff (and Supply Chain Partners) to ensure effective and consistent supply chain management practices throughout each stage of the relationship. This starts at procurement whereby it outlines the communication requirements and different activities, for example, registration on POP, informal meeting, completion of the EOI, further meetings through to due diligence, if successful.

Supply Chain Partners (potential and current) consistently cited each stage of the procurement; registration on POP, a number of initial exploratory conversations; more formal conversation to discuss the contract, timescales, delivery; request for the completion and submission of the EOI template, and if successful further meetings and a robust approach to due diligence.

Irrespective of whether potential Supply Chain Partners were successful or unsuccessful they confirmed that the communications were timely and ongoing throughout the process, there was an open and honest approach, support was readily available and feedback was provided to all those that submitted an EOI.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...we had a good picture of what would be involved in the contract right from the beginning."

"...we did not proceed due to the programme design – not because of Seetec as a Prime – they were excellent throughout."

"...they made me feel totally comfortable – they are nice people to do business with – I believe it is a true partnership we will be entering into."

*"...we went through due diligence – they wanted to know everything about us but were helpful in explaining what they needed from us – for example they explained **matrix** and what was required and why."*

"...they were quite transparent in what they shared."

Seetec have a strategy to support TUPE; Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of employment) regulations to ensure people are transferred in and out of the Organisation to meet the requirements of the commissioner's contracting requirements and legislation. There have been two occasions whereby the strategy was mobilised, and this was to transfer people into Seetec. The aim is to provide a positive and supportive experience for staff to ensure a smooth transition.

One staff comment included:

"...seamless process, not stressful, all straightforward. It was made very clear during the changeover that if I had any questions I should just get in touch with Seetec – it's been a positive experience."

Supply Chain Partners, including tier 3 clearly understood the performance expectations, due to the detailed conversations prior to and post the submission of the EOI. Subsequently these were further discussed and outlined throughout the contracting stage, and a written contract / service level agreement signed by both parties clearly indicates performance expectations. Tier 3 providers spoke of providing a number of activities each month with outcomes to be achieved, including 10% job outcomes. The performance review activities ensure Supply Chain Partners continue to understand the performance expectations.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...contract detailed the performance in terms of hours, and the number of face to face sessions per half day."

"...we did over achieve against profile and went back to Seetec for additional funds."

"...expectations were made very clear at the beginning."

"...performance was reviewed every month and so we knew what was expected."

A majority of the Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the funding and payment terms were fair and proportionate, and did not cause any undue financial risk. Some Supply Chain Partners made reference to the financial due diligence, which included a full review of their accounts, the range of services provided to ensure they were not going to be too reliant on Seetec and the impact of the contract with Seetec regarding staffing, infrastructure and other resources.

Variations in funding and payment terms were evidenced, which were confirmed by Supply Chain Partners.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...very generous compared to other contracts with other Primes."

"...fixed price offer based on what ESFA pay –believe the funding and payment arrangements more than fair and do not put them under any undue risk."

"...they factored admin time into the fee structure."

"...funding is fair – spreads the risk."

"...it was agreed £x00 per session, and a maximum of £25000 per month, which was fine."

DO

Supply Chain Partners are supported to develop their services to meet or exceed expected performance and quality assurance requirements.

Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the set-up of the contract met with their expectations, and that they received extensive support, for example:

- Advice and guidance to ensure policies and procedures were fit for purpose.
- Provision of guidance documents explaining the documentation requirements for the contract, as well as the systems and processes.
- Specific training, including that relating to PE, ELVIS and mandatory activities accessible on the Partner Portal.
- Support to implement quality and compliance requirements, etc.

Subsequently, additional support has been provided to Supply Chain Partners to ensure they remain viable and sustainable organisations, for example:

- Resources on Provider Enterprise to support with financial planning, marketing, ongoing learning and development, etc.
- Guidance and support to achieve an external accreditation, i.e. **matrix**.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...there is lots of resources on PE we can access if we needed to."

"...through the support of Seetec we have been able to increase our numbers 3-fold – they gave us the guidance on processes, paperwork etc. that ensured we had everything in place to enable us to grow."

A number of Supply Chain Partners spoke of being encouraged to build capacity and develop comprehensive services to enable them to grow and in some cases diversify. Some Supply Chain Partner made reference to notifications of bid opportunities through POP, emails and / or the Partnership Development Manager, which had resulted in gaining a new contract. Other Supply Chain Partners had experienced an increase in volumes based on performance and / or the ability to move into other areas to deliver the service.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...we identified through our employer base that learners needed maths and English so we have been able to access some AEB (Adult Education Budget) funding to deliver this."

"...I know that working with Seetec has contributed to our growth."

"...we started on Work Programme and then picked up an ESF contract due to our expertise."

"...we started in London and now moved to Kings Lynn, Ipswich on the ESF contract."

A high proportion of the interviews with Supply Chain Partners throughout the reaccreditation review were very positive regarding the culture generated by Seetec staff. Reference was made to the staff being honest, open, professional and supportive, accessible and responsive. Supply Chain Partners felt confident to request help, share concerns, issues and disappointments, for example, moving of ESFA funding, openly without it having a negative impact on the relationship.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...we were very surprised how open Seetec were and what they shared about the programme and its requirements right from the start."

"...it was a positive experience despite it not coming to fruition."

"...we can challenge and push back and they do listen and responded to what we suggest."

"...I emailed them last night with a query and had had a reply by 10am this morning."

"...good working relationship, it's a large organisation but not faceless."

"...X was very supportive and always supportive."

"...very professional in their approach."

The SCF provides Seetec staff and Supply Chain Partners with a structure to provide effective performance management, which includes weekly calls and monthly performance reviews, as well as informal conversations on a daily basis, if required. A high proportion of Supply Chain Partners confirmed that performance reviews were consistently undertaken throughout the key stages of the delivery of the service, however, they tended to reduce towards the end of the relationship. As a result, the opportunities to discuss challenges and issues, as well as successes and innovation, share practices, etc. reduced. Whilst this was proportionate to the delivery of the service Supply Chain Partners would welcome the opportunity to review performance on a more frequent basis and share challenges, issues and practices.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...we have achieved strong performance against the targets."

"...in the early days of our relationship we had difficult issues and they didn't act well or sympathetically - it was all about targets – now I think we would get a different, more positive response if we were struggling."

"...we have a visit and lots of phone calls."

"...we used to have weekly calls, but they have stopped due to the contract coming to a close."

"...they adopt a grown up approach, which is ideal for us."

"...innovation is limited at this stage, but there is a piece round re-engaging customers."

The PE is viewed as a strength by many of the Supply Chain Partners due to the reports available. These enable them to review the performance of the delivery against key deliverables through to monitoring and evaluating the performance of each Advisor. In addition, it acts as a CRM and tracking platform of individual customers to establish progression as well as outcomes. Supply Chain Partners that have been in the supply chain for an extensive period of time made reference to the platform evolving throughout the life of the contract.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...I use PE to pull off tailored reports – is helps manage contractual performance and I can use it to manage the advisors and support them with their case work."

"...we use PE daily to upload information and get reports about our own teams' performance."

"...can pull off reports, track the learner journey – it is a good management and auditing tool."

"...the management information is good, and they keep adding to it."

The Group Risk and Assurance (GRA) function provides an effective, flexible and scalable risk and assurance framework across all divisions of Seetec Group, using a 'three lines of defence' model. Supply Chain Partners described the range of activities undertaken to ensure compliance against the requirements of the commissioner and the quality of service including the customer experience. They confirmed that the activities are robust, findings are clearly reported and followed up within an agreed timescale.

Supply Chain Partners are aware of the risk rating and what this means in practice, and in the event of been rated red, confirmed that support and guidance was available from Seetec to address the issues and design internal practices. One Supply Chain Partner explained how they do a 10% check on all files, peer reviews at team meetings and until six months ago had quarterly compliance check visits. Subsequently, compliance and quality ratings have improved and Seetec request the Supply Chain Partner's reports as issues have been addressed and performance improved in this area.

Compliance Reviewers plan to visit Supply Chain Partners' premises on an annual basis (this is the plan) and undertake an extensive review of policies and procedures, including health and safety, safeguarding, data security, environmental sustainability, etc. Once again findings are reported and action identified and to be undertaken with an agreed timescale, which is subsequently followed up. One Supply Chain Partner was new to contracting and as a result was a high risk; Seetec shared their policies and procedures and signposted them to the Partner Portal to access specific resources to support them design appropriate policies and procedures and provide learning and development activities to staff.

Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...QA was by paperwork only – I assume they got feedback from the clients we had seen which confirmed we were doing a good job."

"...used to have monthly visits by Seetec to review paperwork – this is now just done through PE as the programme is ending."

"...visits included shadowing our advisors and giving them feedback on what had been observed."

"...we have had an observation visit by Seetec – all very positive and a helpful process."

"...compliance visits have reduced - they used to be every quarter as we were low risk but now the programme is near it's end we would only have a visit if we requested one or if there were problems with our paperwork."

"...the compliance visits include a full review of the policies and procedures, including staff been tested, so identifies further training needs."

REVIEW

Review and evaluation is used to demonstrate the impact of the services delivered and continuously improve service delivery.

Some Supply Chain Partners made reference to the impact they had on the wider social objectives and / or the policy intent of the commissioner, for example:

- Reduction in worklessness, reliance on benefit and gaining greater independence.
- Improved health and wellbeing across communities as a result of gaining employment, and educating customers on healthy eating and exercise.
- Increasing work experience and volunteering activities to provide customers with a sense of purpose and awareness.

One Supply Chain Partner inferred – *'Social impact seen as very strong – check confidence, social skills, learning needs at various stages throughout the learner journey and can evidence impact through outcome star 1 to 5 by improvements at individual customer level.'*

Supply Chain Partners spoke positively regarding the impact on the intended customer groups and examples were readily available as they are encouraged to prepare and submit case studies on a monthly basis. Some of the examples provided are indicated below:

- Individuals are able to do far more, for example; can get on a bus, buy the children a new football kit, go on holiday, etc.
- Enabled individuals to take control of their lives; turning people away from drugs / alcohol and gaining positive and long-lasting employment.
- Raised awareness of diabetes in Asian women and as a result a number have entered employment with the NHS.

One Supply Chain Partner comment included:

"...our case studies help the advisors understand the impact their work is having – it makes them feel better about themselves."

Similarly, Supply Chain Partners were able to provide examples of the impact on the commissioner's aims and objectives, and achievement of specific targets. In addition, reference was made to the impact on Local Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership priorities, for example, addressing issues in a specific ward and / or customer group.

Reference was also made to the impact on the wider community, for example., Some Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"...it was aimed at improving the local community in which the young people were in, by getting them into employment, etc. means they have money to spend in the community."

"...it's about changing lives, empowering people and the communities in which they live."

A number of Supply Chain Partners spoke of the impact on staff due to the increased knowledge and skills, as well as stable employment.

One Supply Chain Partner commented:

"...we work with a niche market – working with smaller companies that make a difference to staff and customers."

8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, this assessment provided the opportunity to review the practices of Seetec for the current contracts against the Merlin Standard. The senior leadership team should be mindful that any significant organisational or senior staff changes, and / or being awarded additional contracts using a significantly different supply chain may require a strategic review. Similarly, any decisions reached by the Merlin Mediation Service / Independent Complaints Examiner may also result in a strategic review being required to ensure the organisation continues to operate in line with the Merlin principles.

Holders of the Merlin Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their approach to Supply Chain Management.
- Cooperate with annual Reviews as required by Assessment Services Ltd
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd (merlin@assessmentservices.com) or their Lead Assessor if the key contact name or contact details change.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email:
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they gain additional contracts.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received from Supply Chain Partners.
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the Merlin Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- Only use the Merlin Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines.
- Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for Accreditation Review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the Merlin Standard Quality Mark, nor refer to being a former holder of the Merlin Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.
- Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the Merlin Standard at least 4 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment, completion of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 2 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.

ASSESSMENT SERVICES



PO Box 14,
Grantham,
Lincolnshire NG31 0EL

T: 0044 (0) 2038805059

E: merlin@assessmentservices.com

https://twitter.com/merlin_standard