

**Merlin Standard Advisory Board  
Minutes of 18 April 2012**

**Attendees:**

Alan Cave (AC) (Chair)	DWP
Barry Clarke (BC)	DWP
Berni Mudie (BM)	DWP
Chris Higgs (CH)	DWP
Dave Allan (DA)	emqc Ltd
Ed Green (EG)	Cabinet Office
Fiona Grant (FG)	emqc Ltd
Fran Parry (FP)	Inclusion
Graeme Oram (GO)	Five Lamps
Hannah Wharton (HW)	Enable (Guest Speaker)
Jane Malbasa (JM)	DWP
Janette Faherty (JF)	TNG/Avanta
Kirsty McHugh (KM)	ERSA
Louise Capel-Cure (LCC)	Ingeus
Monya Ladipo (ML)	DWP (Note)
Ralph Michell (RM)	ACEVO
Steve Swan (SS)	Tomorrow's People

**Apologies:**

Terry Davies (TD)	Bradford Council
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**1. Welcome and Introductions**

- 1.1 AC welcomed attendees to the meeting, mentioning Hannah Wharton who had been invited to talk about her organisation's experience as a Work Programme (WP) subcontractor. This was followed by introductions.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the last meeting on 18 January 2012 were approved.

**3. Action Points**

- 3.1 **Action Point 03/Oct 11:** ACEVO to conduct follow up survey in February/March 2012.

**ACEVO has deferred the survey until later this year.**

- 3.2 **Action Point 01/Jan 12:** emqc Ltd to liaise with MAB members to arrange awareness raising visits to their organisations for all Merlin assessors as an integral part of their training.

**Cleared:** emqc Ltd is to arrange training with MAB members, as required.

- 3.3 **Action Point 02/Jan 12:** FG to devise process for collecting feedback from potential subcontractors not ultimately included in supply chain.

**Cleared:** emqc Ltd now has an open invitation on the website for feedback and requests for interview through the Merlin email address

- 3.4 **Action Point 03/Jan 12:** BM/FG to arrange pre and post assessment meetings between assessors and AMs.

**Ongoing:** There is open communication between emqc Ltd assessors and DWP account managers to support organisations with assessments.

- 3.5 **Action Point 04/Jan 12:** emqc Ltd to arrange separate meetings with MAB members to discuss Merlin issues.

**Ongoing:** Fiona has been engaging in discussions with MAB members.

- 3.6 **Action Point 05/Jan 12:** BM to provide a short brief on the informal telephone service for the Comms Strategy.

**Cleared:** emqc Ltd has set up a route for informal discussions/enquiries via a link to the Merlin email address. MAB agreed that this would be monitored and if necessary, DWP would provide a direct informal telephone service.

- 3.7 **Action Point 06/Jan 12:** FG to prepare a short paragraph on the proposed website comments service for the Comms Strategy.

**Cleared:** emqc Ltd have placed the “Compliments, Comments, Complaints and Appeals Procedure” on the Merlin website.

- 3.8 **Action Point 07/Jan 12:** BM to speak to David Smith about linking a Merlin Standard award to the CIPS.

**Ongoing:** Carried forward to next MAB meeting

- 3.9 **Action Point 08/Jan 12:** JM to liaise with Comms sub-group, emqc Ltd and DWP Internal Comms to come up with options for a launch event.

**Cleared:** The Merlin Standard Assessment and Accreditation was launched on 15 March. AC thanks all involved in making the launch a success.

- 3.10 **Action Point 09/Jan 12:** FP to organise MAB Communications Strategy sub-group.

**Cleared:** The first Comms sub-group meeting was held on 21 February.

#### **4 emqc Ltd progress report – Fiona Grant**

- 4.1 FG gave an update on Merlin activities since the last MAB, including efforts to raise awareness through the Merlin assessment and accreditation service launch, awareness events and Merlin presentations at workshops.
- 4.2 The Merlin website has been enhanced and made more generic for wider application. The Standard has been restructured and additions to the website, include the 'About Assessments' Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions, to support organisations seeking assessment. More substantial restructuring of the website may become necessary as Merlin expands.
- 4.3 The mock assessment was very useful with good feedback. FG and BC are working on a scoring sheet to improve consistency and clarity regarding scores against the Criteria, Elements, and Principles, and how these translate to the final percentages.
- 4.4 FG reassured MAB members that the scoring matrix is a tool for assessors to provide transparency in the decision making process. Members raised concerns about any proposal to change the overall scoring/outcome bands at this late stage from our published position. AC concluded that it was critical for the board to have ownership of the approach, and that the overall scoring bands should not be changed at this stage.

**Action Point 1: FG/BC to revisit the scoring matrix and reproduce the scoring sheet to be circulated to board members to test and feedback any concerns.**

- 4.5 FG circulated a draft MI summary template requesting comments from MAB members and requested good news stories for the first issue of the quarterly newsletter.

**Action Point 2: MAB members to send comments on the draft Summary MI template for Merlin reports to the board.**

**Action Point 3: MAB members to send good news stories to FP for the April – June 2012 Merlin quarterly newsletter.**

- 4.6 A DWP/assessor Standardisation Meeting will take place in July 2012 at the end of the WP assessments to review assessments, take feedback and produce assessment analysis/reports for MAB.

**Action Point 4: FG to provide further details of Standardisation meeting to DWP.**

**Action Point 5: FG to produce WP assessment overview report for MAB.**

## **5 View from a subcontractor – Hannah Wharton**

- 5.1 AC introduces Helen Wharton stating that Enable, was exactly the sort of organisation DWP needs on the WP.
- 5.2 HW described Enable as a small voluntary organisation, which received many offers from WP primes. However, completing several different EOI's was time consuming and a standard template for all applications would have been appreciated. Similarly, the facility to upload and store documents online, which could be updated for submission to primes when required, would have been helpful.
- 5.3 Partnership working with primes has been very good with an open relationship. The organisation has been getting more referrals but has not taken on any staff preferring to develop their subcontractors.
- 5.4 Enable found the multiple unfamiliar issues around TUPE, redundancy issues, IT, Legal and Communications as well as requests for substantial MI to tight deadlines challenging and had to adjust quickly to meet requirements.
- 5.5 RM recognised these issues as common to ACEVO members and members agreed that larger subcontractors experience similar problems on a greater scale. Members agreed that stability was needed in the market and hoped WP should continue for the full 5 years as providers have made substantial investments.
- 5.6 AC commented that organisations need to generate a list of issues to consider before joining a supply chain. FP offered to lead on producing guidance for prospective supply chain partners using the experience of Enable and other organisations.

**Action Point 6: FP to lead on production of guidance for would-be supply chain partners.**

## **6 Communications Strategy – Fran Parry**

- 6.1 FP confirmed that all material additions to the Merlin website are being advised to members by email. The Good Practice Guide being developed by ACEVO and ERSA will supersede supply chain management training courses. FP informed that a course on Supply Chain Management produced by WorkPays will shortly be available on the AdvanceW2W e-learning site.
- 6.2 FP is developing Prime and Supply Chain partners' presentations from emqc Ltd and DWP Merlin presentations and will circulate drafts of MAB members for comment in early May.

**Action Point 7: FP to circulate draft presentations for Primes and SCPs.**

- 6.3 The Communications Strategy states that an Informal Complaints/inquiries contact point would be set up by DWP for those needing to ascertain whether an issue is Merlin related. Members agreed that the facility for informal complaints set up on the Merlin website by emqc Ltd would be monitored and if this remained a concern, DWP would provide the Informal Communications service.

**Action Point 8: JM/FG to monitor effectiveness of Informal Communications facility and report to MAB in September.**

- 6.4 A Roundtable event is to be organised for Welfare to Work stakeholders to disseminate the Merlin message to subcontractors and the specialist provider community. The board set up a task & finish group comprising SS, RM, JM, FP and Ian Knibbs to meet and plan the Merlin event. RM mentioned that ACEVO is also organising a roundtable event with Cabinet Office on Supply Chain Management.

**Action Point 9: FP to lead on setting up task & finish group to plan Roundtable event.**

- 6.5 FP provided a list of Merlin Welfare to Work Stakeholders for members to review and advise any missing organisations: -

ERSA, ACEVO, BASE, NAVCA, NCVO, Social Enterprise UK, Social Firms UK, Volunteering England, Voice4Change England, Women's Resource Centre, Community Matters, Locality, Small Charities Coalition, Wales CVA, Scotland CVA, AELP, Clinks, T2, Homeless Link

**Action Point 10: MAB members to review list of organisations for Roundtable event and advise Fran of any missing names.**

- 6.6 FP invited views from MAB on the benefits and timing of a Good Practice Awards/celebration of success event.

**Action Point 11: MAB members are to forward ideas on a Good Practice Awards event to FP.**

**Action Point 12: SS, FP and JM to discuss possibilities for Good Practice Awards.**

- 6.7 emqc Ltd will be delivering a Merlin presentation at the W2W Convention and Ian Knibbs is to forward proposals for session to MAB members for review. Board members suggested themes for inclusion could be lessons learned, best practice and 'making it real'. JF suggested that the Merlin session should involve primes that have experienced assessment. It was acknowledged that some suggested themes would be appropriate for inclusion in emqc's presentation, and that further Merlin input may be appropriate. The board set up a

Welfare to Work convention task group to consider, comprising JM, FP BM, HW and Ian Knibbs.

**Action Point 13: FG to ask Ian to forward proposals for W2W Merlin session to MAB members for consideration.**

## **7 DWP Update & Discussion Paper: Issues Arising – Barry Clarke**

- 7.1 BC explained the need to define the scope of a Merlin assessment. The organisation, or legal entity, contracted by the commissioner would normally be assessed but it may not always be practical to assess a entire supply chain within the allocated 12 days but accrediting the whole organisation where only the supply chain for certain sector(s) have been assessed could undermine the credibility of Merlin.
- 7.2 MAB members commented that the paper contained some complex issues that needed to be considered. After considerable debate AC summed up that the normal expectation is that the scope of assessment will be organisation-wide, with initial assessments of organisations delivery for DWP having a sufficient focus on their DWP supply chains. MAB Members also acknowledged that assessment and accreditation be impacted by the structure of an organisation; agreeing that any vagaries/concerns would need to be addressed at the outset of the assessment process.
- 7.3 BC suggested that the interview sample size of 60% or 20 of subcontractors was restrictive and emqc Ltd could be allowed to manage the assessment process to maximise effective use of time. MAB agreed it was useful to have a guide to help organisations prepare.

**Action Point 14: FG to reword Merlin Guidance giving supply chain sample size upper limits as a guide.**

- 7.4 To alleviate MAB members' concern that there may be missed opportunities as some SCPs requesting interviews may not be included in the sample, BC explained that criticisms and complaints can be fed into the process through the website for emqc Ltd's investigation. FG provided assurance that while there is no guarantee that an organisation coming forward for interview will be selected, as far as possible, requests will be accommodated.
- 7.5 There was strong support for the standard EOI developed by KM and SS and MAB agreed that while it relates specifically to W2W contracts it may be deemed applicable to the Skills Funding Agency and Criminal Justice activity. The EOI is to be published on the website and other sector products will be considered separately as required.

- 7.6 The Mediation service has been put in place to handle complaints about DWP W2W provision. MAB agreed that this should extend to include complaints regarding other DWP primes for which Merlin is mandatory as well as applicant primes voluntarily working towards Merlin accreditation.

**Action Point 15: Merlin team and emqc to amend guidance, website etc. to reflect the Merlin Mediation service is relates DWP Primes**

- 7.7 EG commented that supply chain management is gaining recognition and there is a Cabinet Office led mystery shopper initiative that would enable subcontractors to complain about bad practice of primes of any Government contract and the facility could be made available to Merlin.

**Action Point 16: EG to investigate the possibility of promoting Merlin through Cabinet Office supply chain management activities.**

## **8 AOB**

- 8.1 FP raised the issue of MAB support for a Workpays bid which has to be submitted by tomorrow. AC suggested that FP should assume support unless MAB members feedback comments to the contrary by 4pm today.

**Action Point 17: Members to respond on whether, as individuals, they could support Workpay's bid by COP today, 18 April.**

- 8.2 AC invited thoughts for future agenda items to be sent to ML by 20/4/12

## **9 Close**

- 9.1 AC thanked the Board and closed the meeting.

***The next meeting of the Merlin Standard Advisory Board will be at 11am – 1.30pm on Wednesday 19 September 2012, in room 6.03 Caxton House.***