



**merlin**

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report  
For

**WORKING LINKS**

**By Lorna Bainbridge**

**On behalf of emqc Ltd**

**Assessment Date: 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

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## About the Organisation

Working Links was formed in 2000. The organisation is made up of three shareholders from the private, public and third sector. These are Mission Australia (an Australian charity), and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions each own one-third of the share capital, with Manpower plc and CapGemini UK plc holding a sixth each. The three partners bring the private sector drive and commerciality, public sector ethos and voluntary ethics. The organisation operates across the Welfare to Work, skills and justice programmes.

Working Links was one of the original Welfare to Work providers, and currently one of the largest deliverers of Government programmes. The organisation has worked in some of the most deprived areas of the United Kingdom to address the challenges faced by people who are long-term unemployed. They have helped over 220,000 people to improve their lives through employment, training and skills development. In addition, they have supported thousands of employers to grow their business.

On behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Working Links have been providing the Work Programme in three Contract Package Areas (CPAs) since it went live in June 2011. The three CPAs are South West (CPA11), Wales (CPA13) and Scotland (CPA8).

Historically, Working Links have adopted a high proportion of internal delivery model for the different programmes they have been contracted to deliver. More recently, in order to meet the commissioner's objectives and the needs of the customers, the organisation has increased its focus on the design and development of supply chains. The organisation continues to grow the supply chain, reducing its internal delivery to meet the changing requirements of the customers and commissioner.

It is recognised that the Work Programme is a very different and complex programme in comparison to others operated within the Welfare to Work sector previously. In the first year Working Links has concentrated on the operational and performance requirements of the Programme, which has contributed to their success in achieving the Merlin Standard.

## Assessment Methodology

It is a requirement, by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that all providers (Primes) of the Work Programme undertake an assessment against the Merlin Standard before 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012, which includes Working Links. The assessment team comprised of Lorna Bainbridge (Lead Assessor) and two Assessors: Carole Fox and John Taylor, supported by two co-ordinators within Working Links.

The Lead Assessor met the key stakeholders of the Work Programme in March 2012, to gain an understanding of Working Links' business and discuss the logistics of the Merlin assessment. The dates for the on-site were identified, 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012, and a plan of action agreed.

Working Links provided a list of partners, tier two (end-to-end), tier three (national and regional specialist partners) and tier 4 (spot purchase) to the Lead Assessor prior to the on-site activity. A number of partners were selected for interview from each CPA and the different tiers. Working Links were keen to have the Assessors based in the CPAs, and where appropriate undertake face-to-face interviews.

The Lead Assessor met with the co-ordinators two-weeks prior to the on-site to review the schedule and logistics of the on-site activity. Prior to the on-site activity all documentation required for the assessment; Self Assessment Questionnaire and Pre-Assessment Notes, were uploaded to the Merlin Website by both parties, within the agreed time-scale.

The assessment team spent a total of 12 days on-site reviewing documentary evidence, IT systems and undertaking interviews with a total of 30 partners from within the supply chain, as well as key stakeholders involved in the delivery of the Work Programme from within Working Links.

## Assessment Outcome

Overall %	70%
Overall Outcome	Good
Supply Chain Design	Good
Commitment	Good
Conduct	Good
Review	Satisfactory

## Strengths

- ▲ Key stakeholders within Working Links had grasped a good understanding of the requirements of the Work Programme, and developed a strategic approach to designing a diverse and robust supply chain. (1a.1)
- ▲ Working Links undertook extensive research, which started 18 months prior to the contract being awarded. The 'black box' project was a live scenario and resulted in improvements in performance, identifying the customer journey and appropriate systems and processes, to support a programme of this nature. (1a.2) (2a.1)
- ▲ The supply chain partners recognise the good working relationships with the organisation and praised the organisation on its openness and honesty in all activities and communication. (2a.4) (2a.5) (3a.3) (3c.1)
- ▲ Working Links provides business support to all its supply chain partners to ensure they are equipped to deliver the Work Programme and build their capacity. (2b.2)
- ▲ Genuine interest is shown in the financial position of the partners, actively working to reduce any undue risk through the design of different funding models. (2c.2)
- ▲ Working Links demonstrate an enabling and flexible approach, working with their partners and facilitating negotiations effectively. (2c.6) (3c.1)
- ▲ Clear values underpin all activities within the organisation and the way in which Working Links work with their supply chain. People work together to achieve a common purpose, providing extensive support across the organisation and its supply chain. (3a.1)
- ▲ Working Links has effective procedures for monitoring partner quality, compliance and performance. Quality in Delivery (QiD) is the organisation quality standard for partners, which encompasses a number of standards the organisation is assessed against. (3b.1)
- ▲ There is a clear strategy for the security of data and assets, based around ISO27001, which is communicated to the supply chain partners. The partners receive extensive support, guidance and monitoring to ensure they are fully compliant. (3b.4)

## Areas for Improvement

- ▲ Further consult and elicit feedback from the supply chain partners to ensure communication activities, systems and processes currently used are effective and meet the needs of the partners. (2a.2)
- ▲ Consider undertaking further training needs analysis and identify the preferred learning styles of partners, to further develop people within the supply chain and to improve the service delivery. (2b.1) (2b.3)
- ▲ Consider following-up and providing support to partners to access appropriate, additional funding to continue to develop their capacity. (2b.2)
- ▲ Ensure partners understand what they receive as a result of paying the management fee, for example, learning and development, quality assurance, compliance, health and safety support, etc. (2c.8)
- ▲ Consider a more transparent approach to allocating the market-share ensuring partners understand the rationale, and what each partner 'brings to the table'. (2c.4)
- ▲ Consider streamlining the approach and reducing the number of communications that are sent out weekly regarding legislative, regulatory and contractual requirements. (3a.4)
- ▲ Develop, implement and embed a dynamic communication strategies to:
  - Cascade intelligent information down the supply chain, to avoid 'information overload'. (3b.2) (3d.4)
  - Advise stakeholders of the actions taken as a result of feedback through the surveys, inspections and audits. (4a.1)
- ▲ Further develop QiD, to inform and improve the service delivery, learning and development needs, and support the strategic development and monitoring of health and safety, safeguarding, environmental sustainability, etc. (3b.2)
- ▲ Consideration should be made to how the organisation plans to further develop, support and drive health and safety, safeguarding and environmental sustainability across the supply chain. (3b.5) (3b.6) (3b.7)
- ▲ Adopt a proactive approach to identify, share and monitor excellent practice across the supply chain network to develop consistency across the supply chain and improve service delivery. (3b.8)
- ▲ In future, consider a more transparent approach to sharing partners expectations (at the start of the contract), specifically with tier two and where appropriate tier three, to ensure all parties are aware of what is expected of each other. (3c.4)

- ▲ Further improve the extent of collaboration amongst partners to impact on the delivery of services to customers, the overall performance throughout the network and support the development of organisations within the supply chain. (3d.1)
- ▲ Develop an overarching forward-thinking strategy to manage equality and promote diversity across the supply chain. Ensure partners know how the data collected is used, how it informs improvements in service delivery and design of the supply chain and how it links to the wider objectives/policy intent. (3e.1) (3e.2) (3e.3)
- ▲ Establish clear objectives against the wider objectives/policy intent and measure the performance of Working Links and the partners. Communicate the achievements of the supply chain to all stakeholders and check understanding of how the supply chain has contributed to the commissioner's wider objectives/policy intent. (4a.3) (4a.4) (4a.6)
- ▲ Develop a streamlined approach to the development of the annual self-assessment report (SAR) to improve the effectiveness of the process and reduce the time undertaken to complete the documentation. (4a.2)
- ▲ Throughout the assessment it was recognised that there were some excellent practices within the CPAs, which if shared across the CPAs would benefit the supply chain network, contribute to achieving the commissioner's objectives, improve customer service and provide consistency.

## Areas Requiring Further Development

- ▲ None identified throughout this assessment.

## Assessment Findings

### 1 Supply Chain Design

#### 1a) Supply chain design

Working Links is focused on *Changing Lives, Creating Futures*, it was recognised that the Work Programme contributed to the underlying ethos of the organisation and as a result bid as a Prime. Equally, the organisation has had experience with previous Welfare to Work programmes, including Flexible New Deal (FND).

Historically, Working Links have strategically had a predominantly internal delivery model opting to have offices geographically spread across CPAs to meet the contractual requirements of programmes, and very few partners were used. When initially reviewing the commissioner's objectives for the Work Programme the senior team recognised that a heavily weighted internal delivery model would not provide the scope and variety required to achieve the objectives and meet the contractual requirements.

In order to meet the commissioner's objectives the supply chain had to consist of private, public and third sector organisations, which would be aligned to the make-up of Working Links, having the three partners from the different sectors.

A strategic approach was taken to designing the supply chain, which started prior to the contract being awarded. Research was undertaken to establish what a diverse, robust supply chain would consist of to deliver the Work Programme. This was in the form of a black box project, an office being set-up and fully operational in the East Midlands. This location was used due to the range of customer needs and demographics of the area. A supply chain was designed to meet the needs of the customers and objectives of the programme, which resulted in improvements in effectiveness and productivity, moving the office to the top of the league table.

Once the contract was awarded Working Links undertook further research. Market needs analysis was undertaken at local level through external groups, and information gained from current and potential organisations to identify the customer needs and the services required.

In addition, learning from and experiences of, developing previous supply chains were reflected upon to further contribute to the design of the supply chain for the Work Programme.

In order to design a robust, diverse supply chain it was recognised that whilst previous partners would be considered and could add value, there was a need to introduce new partners. To attract organisations to work with Working Links a range of promotional activities were used, which included the website, email blasts, direct emailing, etc.



The procurement process for a tier two (end-to-end) organisation was undertaken in two-stages, the first the Expression of Interest, the purpose was for an organisation to be accepted onto Working Links' framework. Clear criteria were established, which the organisation had to demonstrate, this included robust financial position, accredited with or working towards ISO27001 and proven track record of delivering services of this nature. Organisations that participated in this stage of the process believed it was fair and transparent, both the successful and unsuccessful.

*"It was very clear what was required to be accepted onto the framework."*

*"We were advised that we were unsuccessful, and had the option to gain specific feedback."*

The second stage, referred to as the verification process, requested further information specific to the requirements of the Work Programme. Potential supply chain partners were aware of the requirements and felt support was available throughout the process, if required, in the form of email support and/or one-to-one dialogue.

The second stage addressed due diligence, for example, insurance requirements, security plans, health and safety, safeguarding, etc. The specialist experts within Working Links were responsible for checking these documents to ensure they met the minimum requirements. A scoring system was applied, which rated a potential partner as red, amber or green against each requirement. Once again potential partners felt this was a fair and transparent process, and support was readily available, if required.

Similarly, tier three partners are commissioned following a planned process, dependent upon the value of the contract, which is clearly documented and communicated. Tier four, spot purchase organisations are commissioned following the submission of quotes, specific to the service to be delivered.

The outcome of the approach has resulted in a supply chain consisting of a diverse range of organisations, some having been involved in previous Welfare to Work programmes, whilst others were approaching the programme afresh. It was evident through recent activities in Wales that Working Links continues to increase its supply chain delivery, and reduce the internal, to achieve the commissioner's objectives and meet customer's needs.

Working Links have used national, regional and local partners in order to provide a holistic service to the different customer groups and demographics. There is also recognition by Working Links, at this point in time, of the need to explore further enrichment of the supply chain by bringing in additional partners with specialist skills; and this is being actively pursued with Service Level Agreements (SLA's) being discussed and finalised.

## 2 Commitment

### 2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

Throughout all stages of the procurement activity Working Links proactively and effectively communicated with its supply chain. Clear roles and responsibilities were established: the commissioning team being responsible for all pre-contract communications, and partnership managers responsible for post-contract award support and dialogue.

There were clear strategies for promoting the opportunities to tender, engaging potential partners and providing appropriate support in the initial stages. The website, email blasts and a central email system were all used at this stage, which, at the time potential partners felt were effective.

Following the contract being awarded a range of meetings; group and one-to-one were made available, and continue to be used to communicate with and support partners. In addition, email, letters, memos, contract reviews, telephone support, etc. are readily available for the partners.

The communication channels ensure that there is no ambiguity regarding the business relationship underpinning the supply chain arrangements. Partners confirmed that communication and support was available and effective throughout the early stages of procurement and continues to be the same. Partners believe the strength of the supply chain is that Working Links is open and honest in its communication, ensuring clarity of information, roles and responsibilities, expectations, etc.

Working Links are keen to ensure that they are communicating effectively and seek feedback from their partners through a survey, which informs improvements to the way they work with their supply chain partners.

The research undertaken prior to the contract being awarded to populate their black box approach, included consultation with the top ten consultants (Working Links) from six regions to identify key contributing requirements to make the Work Programme a success. As a result, the 'Customer Journey Experience' was developed and a number of tools, systems and processes to support the customer and assigned consultant.

Consultation in the early stages of the contract with partners was limited and tended to be on a one-to-one basis. Consideration was made to those partners with pre-existing, robust systems and processes, i.e. IT and quality, to minimise any additional burden at the point of going-live.

Meetings with partners at the start of the Work Programme centred round the delivery model and how the systems and processes, designed throughout the black box project, were to be implemented. It is evident that Working Links worked hard to ensure the systems and processes were fit for purpose and would meet the contractual and partner's requirements. It is fair to say that partners did not feel disadvantaged at this stage.

Subsequently, a further level of consultation is starting to take place to establish the effectiveness of the systems and processes, identifying what is working well and those that fail to deliver.

The implementation of the Work Programme has been a lengthy process and partners have understandably prioritised operational aspects of their delivery to ensure they meet the targets and contractual requirements. Working Links encourage collaborative working of its supply chain partners and a number of examples were identified throughout the assessment within the CPAs. Consideration should be made to encouraging wider collaboration across the supply chain network.

The development of the Working Links 'Support Catalogue', perhaps by encouraging partners to contribute from their own established relationships, will help to identify resources and encourage further collaboration in the future.

## **2b) Developing supply chain partners**

A full training needs analysis was undertaken by Working Links, which identified a broad range of activities, to meet 'the new ways of working', and as a result, programmes were designed and rolled out for both internal staff and the partners to access. Further training needs analysis is being undertaken, programmes are being designed, which will be available to partners, at cost. Consideration should be given to undertaking individual training needs analysis and identifying learning preferences of partners and their teams to ensure the training identified meets their needs and suits their learning style.

Partners were trained in the use of the IT systems and QA processes, including the QiD model. This was addressed through a range of activities including, induction, one-to-one support, the use of super users, coaching and sharing experiences. In addition, access to a range of mandatory learning and development activities through e-learning was available, and continues to be accessible; the completion of a learning style assessment would ensure that these activities meet the preferred learning styles of the partners.

Additional support is provided, if required, to develop the business, for example, the internal marketing department provide extensive support to ensure partners have the marketing material, promotional leaflets and correct branding. This approach ensures the correct branding is used across the supply chain network and minimises the time and cost partners have to invest in these areas.

Partners promote and provide opportunities for development to others within the supply chain to contribute to up-skilling, building capacity and skills across the network. This was more effective in some CPAs than others, and should be further encouraged to develop consistency across the CPAs.

Working Links provide information to their partners regarding new funding opportunities, however, this tends to be left to the partner to progress, consideration should be made to supporting the partner to access appropriate, additional funding.

## 2c) Contracting and funding

The procurement processes were designed to be fair and transparent, including the way it selects and communicates to the partners. Partners described the process, from receiving the invitation to tender, completing the expression of interest, providing information for the verification process through to successfully gaining the contract. Successful and unsuccessful partners confirmed that the selection process and communication was fair and transparent. Interviewees felt that the information was readily available and accessible on the website, the communications were effective, the criteria and scoring was clear and support was available, if requested.

Working links designed different funding models, which provided partners with a range of options, which took into consideration the level of support required in terms of IT, health and safety, administration, etc. through to ensuring the partner experienced minimal financial risk. Partners confirmed that funding arrangements were openly discussed and negotiated to ensure they continued to be financially viable. Subsequently, some partners have re-negotiated due to volumes and performance, which was positively supported and accommodated, for example, minimum monthly fee to aid cash flow.

Partners recollected that the management fees were discussed and explained to ensure they understood what they were paying for and the level of support they would gain. However, throughout the interviews partners were unable to recall the detail of the management fees.

The findings of this assessment indicated that the management of transferring funds within the network was effective; payments had been made accurately and within the agreed timescale. Once again, there was evidence that Working Links were open with their partners and explained potential payment problems with the introduction of PRaP.

The contracts and service level agreements were discussed and negotiated between the partnership manager and partner, clearly indicating roles and responsibilities, obligations and expectations of both parties. Partners felt their contract/service level agreement was clear and they understood expectations, minimum service levels, etc. Partners were confident to challenge anything they failed to understand and received an appropriate answer.

The rationale to support a viable allocation of market share is predominantly based on location and range of services provided by the partner. Whilst this is agreed at the on-set of the Work Programme, throughout the life of the contract variations can and have been made. Consideration should be made to a more transparent approach to allocating the market share, allowing partners to understand the rationale.

Partners confirmed that negotiations regarding the volumes were openly discussed and agreed, and once again, felt confident to re-negotiate if necessary.

### 3 Conduct

#### 3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity

Working Links' over-riding aim and focus is: *Changing lives, creating futures*. This is underpinned with a set of core values, which drive the organisation. These include 'add value, work in partnership, aim high, show respect and accept accountability'. Findings throughout the assessment provided strong evidence that indicated these values are at the heart of everything the organisation undertakes, and they are driven from the top.

Whilst Working Links does not impose the values on their supply chain partners, the verification process identifies how partners are aligned, in terms of their values, and specifically supports the service delivery of the whole supply chain. Supply chain partners confirmed that Working Links operate in line with their core values, which contribute to the good working relationships, which are positive and supportive, and everyone contributing to a common purpose.

Whilst the organisation has had to become far more commercially adept they have managed to balance that with their social responsibilities, which is fundamental to the business.

Working Links has a very clear strategy to manage the TUPE process, which is proving successful. Human Resources have been available to support partners throughout TUPE activities, providing appropriate information, advice and guidance. One partner made the following comment: "*TUPE was handled extremely smoothly.*"

Communication of legislative and regulatory updates is undertaken in a variety of ways, through email, memos and letters. Partnership managers ensure partners have received and understood the communication throughout the monthly contract review. The partnership manager will ensure implementation of the requirements, and if necessary add to the performance improvement plan the outstanding actions. Whilst the information is communicated and it is recognised that the volumes are predominantly driven by DWP, Working Links may consider streamlining the approach and reducing the numerous communications that are sent out weekly.

#### 3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

Working Links has developed and implemented a range of tools to contribute to monitoring the performance and service delivery within the supply chain, including customer and partner surveys, mystery shopper, etc. The findings from these surveys are used to improve the service provided to the customer and enhance the relationship with the partners.

Quality in Delivery (QiD) is an internal standard (model) that has been developed to support the organisation's quality requirements. The model encompasses a range of external standards the organisation is assessed against through the collection of relevant information, in addition, it reduces the partner's workload.

A partner starts working with QiD throughout the verification stage of procurement, where they are scored, red, green or amber, identifying areas for improvement, which continue to be monitored through QiD and monthly contract reviews. The partnership manager will observe service delivery, review customer comments and findings from surveys, check files and data entries for accuracy, as well as check requirements for security of data, health and safety, safeguarding and diversity and equality.

The findings of the monthly contract review are recorded in a performance improvement plan, which is subsequently revisited during future reviews. The aim of QiD is to facilitate continuous improvement with partners using 'ONE' method/document, which has been effective to date. However, this could be further improved (plans are in place) to bring the process to life and further inform improvements to customer service, training needs, development of health and safety, safeguarding, environmental sustainability, etc.

On an informal level, the weekly tele-kit and regular, sometimes daily, dialogue with partnership managers monitor performance, identify issues and provide appropriate support.

Working Links provides a range of information, advice and guidance to partners to support their service delivery. The door is always open for partners to seek appropriate support from the organisation, which they are confident to do so, due to the relationship created. Consideration should be made to developing a clearer strategy to cascade intelligent information down the supply chain, as on occasions it can appear to be 'information overload'.

Working Links have provided extensive support to ensure security of all data and assets for partners. Once again this started at the verification stage, where-by potential partners were expected to hold or be working towards ISO27001. Prior to the start of the contract, training was provided to address the minimum requirements; in addition, super users have been used to provide relevant support. Security of data is monitored throughout the monthly contract review, through observations and questioning, and any areas of non-compliance are recorded on the performance improvement plan, and re-visited at the next review.

The organisation has developed a new strategy to further improve the security of data and assets and support the partners, which is being driven by the Head of Security. The new Partner Security Policy is robust in terms of requirements and monitoring.

The verification stage of the procurement addresses the health and safety requirements to ensure the partners meet the minimum requirements, which continue to be monitored throughout the monthly contract review. Similarly, throughout the verification stage, policies and practices to assure the safeguarding of vulnerable groups are checked, and partners provided with the appropriate support to ensure these are embed within the organisation. These policies and practices are reviewed at contract meetings to ensure there have been no issues. Working Links should consider how they are to further develop, support and drive health and safety and safeguarding across the supply chain.

Working Links has an environmental management system, which is proactively implemented with targets to reduce waste, carbon footprint, etc. Whilst the organisation has targets it is recognised that a more strategic approach is required to contribute further to the commissioner's wider objectives/policy intent.

Once again part of the verification process addresses environmental sustainability, which is followed up through QiD and monthly contract reviews. It is recognised that some partners have well advanced plans to support environmental sustainability, however, Working Links should be taking a far more proactive lead to contribute to, and drive environmental sustainability in the future with supply chain partners.

Excellent practice is being identified, shared and monitored through partner network meetings, however, these are far more effective in some CPAs than others. The weekly tele-kits facilitate the identification and sharing of excellent practice. In addition, due to the close working relationships of the partnership managers and detailed monthly contract reviews excellent practice is being identified, shared and monitored verbally. It is fair to say that some opportunities are being missed and benefits would be gained through a proactive approach being adopted to identify, share and monitor excellent practice across the supply chain network.

### 3c) Honouring Commitments

Partners confirmed that pre and post contract negotiations are clear and open, and that Working Links have honoured all agreements and commitments to date. This further demonstrates the organisation's commitment to developing good relationships and being open and honest in all its communications.

Throughout the assessment it was identified that some changes had been made to the pre-contract agreements, these had predominantly been started by the partners for a variety of reasons, and in every case they had been confident to approach Working Links and re-negotiate the contract, they felt well supported throughout the process.

Working Links has a three-stage complaints procedure, which partners are aware of, in addition, they are aware of the Merlin Mediation Service, but currently (those interviewed) have had no reason to use the procedure, due to the positive relationships formed and ability to openly discuss any concerns and issues.

Working Links have stated that they would fully respect the decisions made as a result of the Merlin Mediation Service.

All partners are aware of the expectations throughout the different stages of the life of the contract due to clear communication, verbal and written. Partners are very clear regarding the overarching expectations of the commissioner, which is updated at regular intervals. Consideration should be made to a more transparent approach, sharing information round the table (at the start of the contract) to ensure partners are aware of each other's expectations.

### 3d) Performance

Partners are encouraged to work collaboratively to support and promote performance across each CPA. Partners provided different examples of working with others to provide a holistic service and a range of opportunities to the customer, i.e. providing training opportunities, emotional and health support, etc. Consideration should be made to encouraging partners to work collaboratively across the CPAs.

Partners are very clear about the performance expectations, which are reviewed through formal and informal systems and processes. The monthly contract review is extensive and addresses all areas of the contract delivery, including performance. It is evident that partners have the confidence to discuss a range of issues and concerns, including those relating to the commissioning and feel well supported throughout the process. Consideration should be made to recognising and supporting innovation with partners, within and across CPAs.

Working Links have a management information system, which has been used over the past year, whilst it provides consistent and accurate performance information this has been limited to date and not without some frustrations for partners. Working Links have listened to the frustrations of the partners and subsequently consulted with them, which has resulted in a new system.

There is a level of understanding across the supply chain that value for money is being provided, which is evidenced through the data collected by partners and Working Links as a result of the surveys, mystery shopper activities, audits, inspections, etc. However, the organisation would benefit from far greater scrutiny across the CPAs and the development of an understanding of *'what is value for money for the Work Programme'*.

Customers are central to all activities undertaken by Working Links and partners. There is a genuine desire to take the customer on a journey and support them to make progress. Partners are provided with access to Working Links CRM and a range of tools, for example, 'My Way Up' undertakes an initial diagnostic for each customer at the start of the journey and enables them to measure and encourage distance travelled by customers. The CRM continues to evolve to meet the needs of partners.

Partnership managers discuss distance travelled by customers throughout the monthly contract review with the aim of providing information, support and signposting to progress customers through the journey.



### 3e) Promoting Equality and Diversity

Working Links have developed a supply chain, which is made up of a diverse range of providers who are aligned to their commitment to equality and diversity. The verification stage ensures there is a minimum expectation, which is monitored and actively promoted throughout the monthly contract reviews, and addressed in QiD.

Partners are very conscious that they need to be managing equality and promoting diversity in all their activities and use the data to monitor their own performance and ensure they are providing a service to meet the needs of the different groups/customers. In one CPA, strategies have been implemented to address those customers based in remote areas to ensure they have equal access to opportunities to progress their journey and gain the appropriate support.

Currently, mandatory data is collected by partners and submitted to Working Links, which is then analysed to a minimum level. However, to date, feedback and suggestions stemming from the collated management information has been limited and so partners are not aware how the data is being used, other than to meet the requirements of the contract with DWP.

Working Links recognises that whilst there is a strategy for equality and diversity and support is in place to manage equality and promote diversity, this area is still under developed. In the future, ensure partners know how the data collected is used, how it informs improvements in service delivery and design of the supply chain, and how it links to the wider objectives/policy intent.

## 4 Review

### 4a) Supply chain review

Feedback is actively sought from partners, customers and DWP through a range of approaches, for example, partner engagement tracker, customer engagement tracker, mystery shopper, local customer feedback and complaints, external inspections and audits, which are effective. Partners receive feedback on the findings of the surveys, inspections and audits and see how they link to the improvements made to the service delivery and techniques to engage customers. However, it is perceived that currently the organisation tends to be slow and reactive, as opposed to being proactive in terms of responding to feedback. In future, consideration should be made to an effective strategy for responding to, and communicating the actions taken as a result of feedback, to the stakeholders, on a timely basis.

Working Links has actively included all partners in the development of the annual SAR, which is currently being analysed and will be used to drive and contribute to further action planning and continuous improvement.

Partners are aware that the overarching SAR is being developed and the findings will be used to inform further improvements to the service delivery and to contribute to the contractual requirements with DWP. Communication will take place through the QiD and appropriate quality improvement plans.

Working Links learnt and improved their approach to delivering a programme of this nature following FND. They had a clear strategy at the start of the Work Programme, which has evolved over the past year. There is a clear strategy for the future development of the Work Programme, continuing to increase its supply chain to meet the changing needs of the customers and through a range of continuous improvement activities.

Working Links have communicated the commissioner's objectives /policy intent to partners, as a result, partners are fully aware of those objectives/policy intent, and have a broad understanding of how they are strategically aligned to their activities, however, this could be improved.

*"Our key focus is the customer, and improving their lives."*

*"We're more about helping our client holistically, not interested in just getting a job."*

In terms of measuring the positive impact on external stakeholders and encouraging customer well being there was anecdotal evidence; from partners and Working Links, but currently there is no centrally coordinated measurement. Examples included; reducing drug abuse, reducing homelessness, dealing with mental health issues, progressing a customer's journey through a tailored service, etc.

Some partners have high-level strategic plans for environmental sustainability, and provided examples of the positive impact in this area, for example, reducing carbon footprint, energy usage and waste levels. Once Working Links has a clear, overarching strategy with measurable objectives for this strand the impact can be measured.