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promoting supply chain excellence

## **DONCASTER DEAF TRUST**

Assessment Dates: 12/09/2016 to 13/09/2016

**ASSESSMENT SERVICES**  
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## 1. About the Organisations

Doncaster Deaf Trust (DDT) can trace its history back to 1829 when Reverend William Carr Fenton set up a school to help young deaf people receive an education to equip them to become self-supporting adults. Throughout the Trust's history, there has been a consistent belief in the importance of deaf and hearing impaired children and young people receiving specialist intervention to help them achieve their full potential.

Its current mission is "to advance education, training and care for deaf and hearing impaired children, adults and those with communication and/or learning difficulties." In order to provide the earliest possible specialist intervention and to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to succeed in employment, Doncaster Deaf Trust has overseen the development of a nursery, school, college and care home.

DDT is the Prime contractor running two Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programmes; Specialist Employability Services (SES) and Goals which is a motivational/behavioural employment programme for long-term unemployed clients currently claiming Employment Support Allowance. Merlin accreditation is therefore mandated in the contracts.

To deliver SES, DDT has three sub-contracted partners and Goals has only one sub-contracted partner. SES is delivered nationally (including Wales and Scotland) according to client demand. DDT has a 40% Direct Delivery share of the market, operating in Yorkshire, Humberside and North Nottinghamshire with one Supply Chain Partner having a further 40% and covering the rest of England. The two Supply Chain Partners that operate in Wales and Scotland have a 10% market share each. Goals is purely a South Yorkshire only provision, with offices located in Doncaster, Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley; delivery is 50% direct delivery by DDT and 50% by the Supply Chain Partner.

DDT has embraced the Merlin principles and has used the journey towards accreditation to improve its systems and processes for future potential supply chain developments.

## 2. Assessment Methodology

DDT was mandated to undertake an initial assessment against the Merlin Standard prior to the end of September 2016 as a result of being awarded the SES contract by DWP. The purpose of the assessment was to gain accreditation against the Standard - which demonstrated the organisation was managing the supply chain effectively - identify areas of strength and those to consider for further improvement.

Initial planning conversations took place in May 2016 where the scope of the Merlin Standard was discussed and agreed in accordance with the guidelines. The Supply Chain Partners were informed of the assessment and supported the process throughout. The Self Assessment Questionnaire was completed and Pre-Assessment Notes compiled that enabled the assessment team to conduct a thorough and robust assessment.

The assessment team (lead Assessor Susan Smith and team Assessor Stuart Morgan) interviewed representatives from both the Prime (DDT) and the Supply Chain Partners. The interviews included those involved in the strategic and day-to-day development and management of the Supply Chain Partner and in the management and delivery of the contract activity itself.

During the assessment, written documents were presented, including those relating to communications, contractual documents, policies, finance, quality, marketing communications, evaluation report and information on contract and performance/quality management. There was also a demonstration of the Moodle online management information and communication portal.

### 3. Assessment Outcome

<b>Overall</b>	<b>%</b>
Overall Outcome	68% Satisfactory
Supply Chain Design	60% Satisfactory
Commitment	70% Good
Conduct	72% Good
Review	70% Good

## 4. Areas of Significant Strength

A number of significant strengths and areas of excellence in practice were identified during this Merlin assessment and summaries of these are given below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard to which the areas relate.

- There is good clarity regarding business relationships. This enables Supply Chain Partners to effectively target their queries to the relevant person in DDT and to gain prompt and appropriate responses. (2a.4)
- Communications are open and transparent. Supply Chain Partners fully believe in the key messages communicated and thus feel everyone is working towards the same mission. In addition, there are supportive and positive interactions between DDT and Supply Chain Partners which enable not only effective but trusted communications to occur. (2a.5, 3a.3)
- Despite the imbalance in organisational size between DDT and some of the Supply Chain Partners, facilitated activities for the benefit of Supply Chain Partners have occurred which has supported their own business development to good effect; for example, one Supply Chain Partner which is a large national charity has been supported to extend its range of services to include employability skills which weren't previously delivered as part of its service portfolio. (2b.1)
- There is clarity and transparency about the management fee and what Supply Chain Partners receive for the fee. The management fee was agreed at the outset between all parties at a low level in order to maximise the funds available for customer support. DDT (and indeed its Supply Chain Partners) is seen to contribute support for customers above and beyond the management fee. (2c.8)

## 5. Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement could be considered for review and improvement. The numbers in brackets cross-reference the findings to the relevant element and criteria of the Merlin Standard.

- Although DDT operates within a defined market with a limited number of specialist Supply Chain Partners, consider opportunities for new, emerging potential Supply Chain Partners to declare an interest and develop a process that enables them to be considered for involvement in any future opportunities where DDT is the Prime organisation. (1a.1)
- Consider the benefits of developing a more formalised and published procurement process highlighting up-to-date opportunities. Whilst current practice is described as "*informal but professional*", should the numbers of contracts and Supply Chain Partners increase, this would be challenging to maintain in the current mode of operation. (2c.1)
- Consider a more formal and published Quality Management Framework such that Supply Chain Partners understand both their own and DDT's responsibilities for quality assurance activities. The current proposals for including observations of delivery practice are encouraged. (3b.1)
- Ensure data security, health and safety, safeguarding and environmental sustainability policies, implementation actions and, where necessary, improvement targets are reviewed and set with Supply Chain Partners on an ongoing basis and not just at the Due Diligence phase. There are plans about to be put in place to address this. (3b.4, 3b.5, 3b.6, 3b.7)
- Complete the Diversity and Equality data analysis in hand and use this work to affect both commissioner and Supply Chain Partner activity. (3e.3)

## 6. Areas Requiring Significant Development

Although the Merlin Standard overall has been achieved with a 'satisfactory' outcome, there are a number of criterion within the requirements of the Standard where limited evidence was presented and requires significant development in order to support the organisation to achieve excellence in supply chain partnership working. The numbers in brackets cross-reference the findings to the relevant element and criteria of the Merlin Standard.

- DDT should develop more robust processes to quality assure effective delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to customers through its supply chain. This may form part of Due Diligence activities or the proposed observation of delivery process. (3b.3)



## 7. Findings Against the Merlin Standard

### 1) Supply Chain Design

#### 1a) Supply Chain Design

Doncaster Deaf Trust has designed two supply chains: one which is national provision with three partners (SES) and one that is delivered locally in South Yorkshire only, with one partner (Goals). Each contract specification required a specific set of skills, experience and locations. For SES, which is a special contract designed to assist people who have a hearing impairment, the requirement for staff to be able to communicate in British Sign Language, to have employment/employability expertise and to be able to deliver a service throughout England Scotland and Wales, were key factors in the design of the specialist supply chain. DWP events for the sector enabled DDT to establish contact with relevant organisations and hold detailed pre-bid discussions with each potential partner, leading to a 'partner' meeting where details were discussed with regard to possible client numbers, contract requirements, delivery model, management and payment. Research has been carried out to take account of geographic, demographic and customer needs for respective contracts prior to contracting with Supply Chain Partners. Additionally, business ethics are considered when working to design supply chains.

DDT supply chains consist of national registered charities, private organisations, a not-for-profit social enterprise, a Community Interest Company, colleges and self-referral organisations for the SES programme, where those organisations come from a specific range of partners defined by DWP (local authorities, national charities with proven sensory impairment expertise and the NHS).

The supply chain design for SES took full account of the need for national coverage. DDT had created an effective supply chain by engaging and partnering with similar specialist organisations. A plan to engage with those most likely to be able to relate to the deaf community was fundamental in considering a strategy which would deliver comprehensive support services to customers and stakeholders. It engaged with wider networks to secure premises in areas which allowed it to deliver to client groups in appropriate geographic locations. The providers of the services were charities working with pan disability contracts from DWP. A further example was the use of a local college and its funding to provide services to a deaf/autistic client.

## 2) Commitment

### 2a) Collaboration, Cooperation and Communication

Supply Chain Partners are communicated to in a number of ways before, during and after procurement such as through DDT's website, exploratory phone calls, meetings with the Senior Management Team at DDT and with the Supply Chain Manager, face-to-face discussions, pre-tender information, telephone discussions, emails, and pre-contract award negotiations and partner meetings. This could be more formalised as part of a documented Supply Chain Management Framework. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that there is open dialogue with DDT staff and assistance had been provided to assist in the successful Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for the respective contracts awarded to DDT. *"It was a very good, all round. There was open and honest communication throughout."* Initial mobilisation included comprehensive training delivered to all partners and one-to-one meetings between individual Supply Chain Partners and their Supply Chain Manager to discuss and agree profiles, finances, staffing, resources, performance targets and other relevant topics. *"Train the Trainer was used to determine the details of the overall contract. There were no variations requested."* There was also the opportunity for Supply Chain Partners to meet health and safety representatives, human resources, finance and information security experts to receive information and support. *"Communication with DDT was excellent in the procurement process and continues to be so with information and changes in benefits etc."*

Systems and processes were designed and established during the bidding phase and throughout the procurement and service delivery cycle to meet commissioner's needs. As a result of monthly and quarterly meetings, information gained from Supply Chain Partners influences the way in which the contract is interpreted and the resultant design of systems and processes is accordingly consulted on; for example, the introduction of the Moodle system for contract management and communications and the assessment process / toolkit used.

DDT is proactive at encouraging collaboration and has arranged face-to-face and virtual meetings where Supply Chain Partners can come together to consider how comprehensive services to customers can be delivered. There are also less formal channels where there is an open sharing of information which helps the contract move forward. For example, a Supply Chain Partner talked about the sharing of contacts in wider networks that provide additional learning opportunities for customers. *"I attended the partner meeting in June. It was really useful. We met our DWP managers and were encouraged to share information with each other to learn 'new' approaches. Very valuable."*

Openness and transparency is cited by DDT as being central to the strong working relationship achieved with Supply Chain Partners. At a contractual level, it clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of the two parties so that there is no underlying ambiguity. *"The paperwork and contracts are very clear; we know exactly what is required."* At a practical level, DDT has clear processes for maintaining clarity in the supply chain arrangement in this contract. There is a single person who is the conduit of all information. The simplicity of the single point of contact system facilitates an open and transparent business relationship. In addition to the freedom for Supply Chain Partners to contact their Supply Chain Manager, it is clear who else in DDT is available for more specialist clarification or assistance, for example health and safety advice. Daily emails and weekly bulletins (also posted on Moodle) are forwarded to Supply Chain Partners to update them on issues such as performance, legislation, changes in policy and performance.

DDT sets the tone for open, honest communication, which is then modelled by staff employed to performance manage the Supply Chain Partners. There is a positive culture around communication. A very high proportion of Supply Chain Partners confirmed the communication to be two-way, open and honest. Supply Chain Partners gave several examples of where they speak to their dedicated Supply Chain Manager for clarification and an immediate response is forthcoming. One such example related to a Supply Chain Partner telephoning to query performance data and receiving an immediate response from the Supply Chain Manager. *"Their approach is informal but professional."*

## 2b) Developing Supply Chain Partners

Capacity building of the whole supply chain is a key principle that governs the relationships in these supply chains and is subsequently built into all of the interactions between DDT and its Supply Chain Partners. In general, the Supply Chain Partners are much larger organisations than DDT, however it was interesting that despite DDT being the smaller organisation, it was able to assist and help Supply Chain Partners to develop the skills to deal with the specific issues of the contract(s). An example of assistance was helping a Supply Chain Partner to fully understand and upskill in relation to getting customers ready for employment. The Supply Chain Partner visited DDT and was provided with one-to-one assistance and learning to acquire the appropriate skills. *"We learned such a lot from our visit to Doncaster. Although they are much smaller than us (a national charity) we developed practices around employment services that we didn't have before."*

The Business Development and Supply Chain Manager share potential future business with current partners to ensure they are aware of pipeline opportunities, for example, the new Health and Work Programme. Where the Supply Chain Manager becomes aware of local delivery opportunities, they share these with partners. These may relate to new provision or provision that may enhance the range of services offered to customers. Opportunities not of interest to DDT but which may be appropriate for partners are communicated.

DDT senior managers believe that staff development is one of the principal ways to enact continuous improvement in terms of quality and performance and ultimately, impact for customers. There is direct support and development of key staff roles, especially in areas where the Supply Chain Partner may have less internal experience. For example, training on all administrative systems and requirements, the initial assessment process, documentation requirements, training needed to use Moodle, and the Goals motivational training which is a licensed course.

## 2c) Contracting and Funding

There are managed processes and procedures to support procurement effectively in line with the requirements and expectations of the commissioner. To ensure a fair and transparent approach to procurement from the outset, all information is shared with Supply Chain Partners. *"Communication was of a very high standard"* commented one Supply Chain Partner. This ensures all parties have access to the same range of information and they understand the process in place, including what is required, the scoring criteria and timeframes.

Feedback was provided to Supply Chain Partners with an additional offer of bespoke support to increase capacity. Due Diligence is carried out robustly. Successful organisations were offered a contract and a 'go-live' date was agreed.

As all contracts are subject to the funding rules of the commissioner; all terms, including delivery payments, are passed on to the Supply Chain Partner. Payment profiles are discussed prior to contracting to ensure that the initial request for funding is realistic and will not put the Supply Chain Partner under any known financial risk. DDT is driven by a genuine desire to create and foster good working relationships with organisations that share its values and ethos and so look to negate as much of the financial risk as possible by agreeing to a very small management fee. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that funding arrangements and amounts are fair and that there has been dialogue about this. Supply Chain Partners were complimentary about the prompt, low risk payment system.

Contract documentation is in place for all Supply Chain Partners and is seen to be clear and understandable. Supply Chain Partners agreed that the documentation was clear, fit for purpose and set out the obligations of each party. The commissioner requires certain aspects of the header contract to be cascaded to the supply chain and this is understood and accepted. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both the Supply Chain Partner and DDT.

Market share discussions began at the bidding stage and related to the geography and demographics of the opportunity, as well as customer groups and requirements of the commissioner. All Supply Chain Partners confirmed they understand how they were allocated their market share, as consideration was given to what service they were providing and the locations to be delivered in. Financial viability of contracts was discussed with potential Supply Chain Partners by sharing with them as much information possible. This included indicative numbers for identified customer groups, geographical locations and the volumes that they would reasonably be able to deliver. All Supply Chain Partners believe market share allocation to be fair and are aware of other organisations' delivery areas. *"We know delivery is based on NOMIS data and some sensible research."*

At the point of contracting, Supply Chain Partners agreed the payment profile. Through the performance management activities, there is the capability to detect where a Supply Chain is experiencing difficulties in meeting its performance or compliance expectations due to customer volumes and resource allocations. In these cases, with the Supply Chain Partner's agreement, adjustment would be made to allow Supply Chain Partners to address delivery issues. There have been no issues or examples so far. Supply Chain Partners confirm their understanding of this principle.

The payment process is documented within the contracts and was agreed as part of the contract negotiation process. The transfer of funds within the supply chain is managed carefully. DDT's normal payment terms for partners are payment within 30 days from receipt of an invoice. There was no evidence that DDT has not adhered to the payment terms contained in its contracts with Supply Chain Partners. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that payments are agreed and paid promptly within agreed timescales.

DDT has applied management fees to its end-to-end Supply Chain Partners and believes that those fees are reasonable and reflect some of the costs associated with management and stewardship as the prime provider. Management fees were agreed at pre-contract negotiation stage with Supply Chain Partners. Supply Chain Partners are fully aware of the support available from DDT and their Supply Chain Manager. Supply Chain Partners agreed that there had been a clear and transparent discussion about the actual percentage of management fees.

Supply Chain Partners were also able to relate to the services they received for the management fee including the use of Moodle and quality and compliance checks. All Supply Chain Partners considered that the management fee was more than generous.

### 3) Conduct

#### 3a) Demonstrating Commercial and Business Integrity

The senior leaders of DDT have set and communicated a very clear strategic direction for the organisation, supported by ambitions, values and aspirations for all customers. Core principles that are embedded throughout procurement and service delivery and which govern the relationship between parties were shared with and agreed by the Supply Chain Partners from the outset and are now maintained. The contracts give detailed descriptions of the core principles embedded into organisational practice and which all parties are expected to comply with. For example, given the nature of the customers (disabled and often vulnerable adults), Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks had to be completed for all advisers and minimum insurance levels had to be in place.

There have been no requirements of TUPE transfer involving the supply chain. The Supply Chain Partners also confirmed that there was no TUPE requirement.

DDT endeavours to interact with Supply Chain Partners in a way that is positive and supportive at all times. All Supply Chain Partners reported supportive and positive relationships and interactions with the Supply Chain Manager. Supply Chain Partners note that whilst no formal response times are agreed, the replies are always prompt. A partner feedback questionnaire was distributed in May 2016 and replies from partners were both positive and supportive. Good news stories are shared between partners, as are examples of best practice. Good news and best practice examples were also shared at the most recent full partners meeting.

There is ongoing monitoring of the legislative and regulatory requirements relating to this contract and this enables DDT to inform Supply Chain Partners of relevant developments. Supply Chain Partners receive contact through various Moodle pages and have to provide a read receipt after opening and reading the information which is up to date (assessed from times and dates on DWP messages). The information may be legislative, for example relating to Living Wage, or regulatory relating to benefits such as the approach to Universal Credit. The use of Moodle and email to communicate with each Supply Chain Partner is a quick and efficient vehicle for transmitting such messages. On occasion the Supply Chain Manager contacts Supply Chain Partners to ensure that there is a level of understanding as well as receiving the content. It was consistent across the organisation and contracts. The Supply Chain Partners confirmed that changes to regulatory and legislative requirements are communicated and subsequently checked for understanding and implementation.

#### 3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

The quality assurance framework comprises of customer experience, quality assurance and compliance. Quality and compliance is dealt with remotely by the Supply Chain Manager based in Doncaster. Queries and discussions are usually the subject of telephone conversations, although some site visits have taken place at Supply Chain Partner premises. There is a process in place for the Supply Chain Manager to view the active files and hard copies are forwarded by recorded delivery to DDT. Currently there is no process of observation of the service delivery to ensure quality is being delivered to customers, however there are plans in place to implement this imminently.

The customer journey is the subject of a continuous log contained electronically on Moodle. Customer satisfaction surveys are in use. Although the processes are relatively basic they appear to be appropriate given the low numbers involved across the contract.

Delivery is monitored on an ongoing basis through regular review activity. Training is also provided on a regular basis for Supply Chain Partners and their staff. Supply Chain Partners confirm that the quality assurance arrangements are fit for purpose. There are systems in place to ensure that the findings of quality assurance activities inform and improve delivery. An example is the consistent approach to initial assessment and improving the quality of Individual Support Plans. This has led to improvements in quality and efficiency over the first year of this contract.

The IAG provided by DDT to the Supply Chain Partners was felt to be accurate and timely. However, DDT should develop more robust processes to quality assure effective delivery of IAG to customers through its supply chain. This may form part of Due Diligence activities or the proposed observation of delivery process.

There are very strict information security processes and policies in place. DDT and all of its Supply Chain Partners have submitted a Data Security questionnaire which is strictly scrutinised by DWP and once agreed, signed off. Quarterly security updates, in respect of people who have access to 'Authority' (DWP are the Authority) data, are strictly monitored and security cleared. Data security plans are extremely detailed and cover all policies and procedures in relation to customer and other sensitive data and so information collected from all partners is secure. Any paper files are kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only the Supply Chain manager and Administrator have access. Sensitive personal data is only ever transferred by email in accordance with DWP's process.

DDT has an up-to-date health and safety policy and the Supply Chain Partners' policies were discussed, checked and agreed during the joint bidding and contracting phase. Ensuring health and safety policies, implementation actions and, where necessary, improvement targets, are reviewed and set with Supply Chain Partners on an ongoing basis and not just at the Due Diligence phase are being planned over the forthcoming period.

The safeguarding of all customers includes checking sessions are carried out in a safe environment, ensuring safeguarding procedures are in place, and providing training to staff. Recent training has been around responsibilities linked to the Prevent Duty in challenging radicalisation. Baseline security checks continue to be a contractual requirement and monitoring of this process occurs centrally. All policies and procedures are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they are current, fit for purpose and reflect any legislative changes. A Safeguarding Risk Assessment is planned to be reviewed annually to ensure all is in order.

Both DDT and Supply Chain Partners have environmental sustainability policies, which include the recycling of organic and inorganic matter, the use of recycled materials where possible, the use of conference call facilities where possible to avoid unnecessary travel and the use of energy efficient hardware (such as printers or laptops). There are currently no reviews or targets associated with this or shared with the Supply Chain Partners, however plans exist to address this.

Good or excellent practice is highlighted during individual conversations or meetings between DDT and Supply Chain Partner staff, for example, what constitutes 'outstanding' in terms of customer advice and support. Examples of good practice are also shared on Moodle internally and through press releases externally.

### 3c) Honouring Commitments

Pre-contract communication with potential partners continues to take place in a variety of ways, for example, with groups, in meetings with individual potential partners and via emails and telephone calls. These discussions include negotiations around quality, value for money and delivery. Requirements are made clear to partners at pre-contracting stage and reiterated or updated throughout the life of the contract. Any re-profiling that may be required in the future will be done through consultation and negotiated in an environment of openness, honesty and trust. All Supply Chain Partners confirmed this.

Whilst there is a dispute resolution process outlined in contracts, Supply Chain Partners felt the relationship would mean that informal methods would be their preferred initial option. *"With the quality of communication and approach to problems I can't imagine it ever being used."* In addition to DWP, Supply Chain Partners have access to the Merlin Mediation Service and Independent Caseload Examiner (ICE).

Within the supply chains there is an understanding of what each party is and should be doing. Delivery plans ensure that both parties are still honouring what was agreed prior to contracting. At pre-contract meetings with the potential Supply Chain Partners there are discussions around what each partner is to be allocated in terms of work flow and what they would be working towards. After the contract award, meetings with the Supply Chain Manager are used to discuss and share the allocations across the supply chain. This open discussion across the supply chain was carried out at the recent partner forum.

### 3d) Performance

Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to work collaboratively to support performance across the contract as a whole. Supply chains were chosen based upon their expertise and delivery locations to ensure these matched the needs of the customer groups that were identified. Supply Chain Partners collaborate or mentor each other where needed; for example to develop and share policies. Where gaps are identified, DDT has engaged with other external organisations through its partnerships to support these requirements, for example in providing qualifications or work experience.

There are processes in place for reviewing performance, supporting innovation, and raising issues and concerns, including scheduled contract review meetings to discuss performance, address concerns and, importantly, working together to find innovative solutions to problems. Examples include the introduction of Moodle and the sharing of employer vacancies and placements information.



Performance expectations appear clear to all parties and were discussed and negotiated prior to contracting, then followed through into the contract. The Supply Chain Partners have access to DDT's financial and operational model, and as a result can revisit performance expectations at any time.

Management Information (MI) requirements were communicated in the contract awarding process and post-contract negotiations, so the whole supply chain was aware of and agreed to these requirements from the outset. The process for collecting, storing, and using MI was outlined during the joint bidding and contracting process and agreed and refined post contract award. MI is collected on an almost daily basis via Moodle and copied to DWP in the format required by them on a monthly basis. MI is discussed with the DWP contract manager on a fortnightly basis and the content of those discussions is shared across the supply chain. DWP produces monthly performance charts which are also shared across the supply chain.

Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to add value to the existing services provided to customers to enable the meeting of national and local priorities. There is strong evidence of resources used across the contracts and that collaborative activities of Supply Chain Partners have a positive impact on customers and create the DDT definition of Value for Money (VFM). This includes the utilisation of specialist services already funded by other commissioners, the sharing of premises and staff, more effective referrals and results in improved supply chain performance and customer satisfaction rates. *"We act as a real partner. We get nothing in return other than facilitating the service to those with a hearing impairment."*

Both parties described the importance they placed on measuring the progress of customers in becoming more work ready. In terms of distance travelled, the framework includes pre-, mid- and post-intervention self-assessments by customers across a number of metrics (such as confidence or job readiness) and advisers are also asked to assess customers both pre and post intervention. This data is stored on the Moodle system for analysis.

### 3e) Promoting Diversity and Equality

All parties hold a strong commitment to diversity and equality (D&E). The Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the initial Due Diligence process they engaged in included sharing their policy and a commitment to being positive about D&E. As part of this process, organisations are asked to provide details and copies of their own policies relating to D&E. DDT specialists ensure that the necessary policies are in place so that the whole of the supply chain is aligned with its own commitment to D&E. These policies and procedures are reviewed annually.

D&E is discussed during partner reviews. Training and support is monitored in Supply Chain Partners. Marketing materials, leaflets and other IAG materials given to customers are checked to ensure they conform to current legislation.

Equality information is collected in every piece of documentation completed by Supply Chain Partners in relation to their customer groups. Information is stored on Moodle. Referrals come from DWP (and as such these are outside the control of Supply Chain Partners); however Supply Chain Partner staff indicated at interview that all referrals are dealt with in accordance with Equality and Diversity legislation. DDT issued a D&E monitoring form at its most recent partnership meeting and is currently analysing the data for all Supply Chain Partners.

Early findings suggest that there are a large proportion of men aged 25-45 on programme and this is being discussed with the referring commissioner.

## 4. Review

### 4a) Supply Chain Review

Stakeholder groups are clearly identified and play an active role in receiving and giving feedback on the impact of the SES and Goals contracts. All parties work collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to deliver a service that meets local needs and provides value for money. For example DDT seeks and shares feedback on emerging policies from DWP. The Supply Chain Partners additionally seek and share regular feedback from employers and customers that they work with and from Local Authority contacts.

A Self-Assessment Report (SAR) is carried out based on Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework and DWP's requirements regarding self-assessment as outlined in the Provider Guidance. The SAR informs the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Stakeholders and Supply Chain Partners are to be more actively involved in the self-assessment process and DDT will use their feedback to add value to the service. The importance of continuous improvement is communicated to the supply chain network. Performance monitoring reviews require partners to self-assess and identify any improvements to the service required at a local level. Information is gathered progressively to assist Supply Chain Partners in being able to provide accurate and relevant information which may diminish from memory with the passage of time.

Supply Chain Partners are kept informed of the wider policy of the commissioner and strategy information through a range of methods including emails, Moodle, meetings and training events. Supply Chain Partners described how their knowledge of DWP and other commissioners has come through a number of sources including emails and updates from DDT, information directly from the commissioners, and their own interest in the wider policy and strategy of organisations from whom they might receive funding. Supply Chain Partners interviewed were aware of the wider policy and strategies of commissioners. For example, they were aware of the new Health and Work Programme from DWP and the Skills Funding Agency role in supporting the development of traineeships, and the development of employer-led apprenticeships.

Both DDT and Supply Chain Partners were able to share some examples of how the work they are delivering is having a measurable impact on the commissioner's wider social objectives. This included gaining and sustaining employment, improvements in skills and qualifications, unemployment reduction, addressing poverty and reducing potential for crime. Additionally, Supply Chain Partners have a measurable impact on the wider social objectives around health and wellbeing through the delivery of a holistic service to customers who are supported 'in work' post the end of the contract activity.

The outcomes of the mechanisms to review and develop the supply chain have given rise to no changes so far. However should the need arise, there is capacity to introduce new organisations with different delivery access. Regular reviews of working with key partners are carried out. Services are developed and enhanced based on the feedback received to ensure the service is meeting the needs of the local community.

The activities of Supply Chain Partners are positively impacting on external stakeholders, such as the way in which customers have been encouraged to develop themselves and their wellbeing.

Supply Chain Partners confirmed that their contact with stakeholder groups showed that the programmes were having a positive impact; formerly unemployed deaf, hearing impaired or those with communication difficulties indicated that they were feeling healthier and valued as individuals. Data on Moodle showed that an increasing number of customers were securing employment and achieving the sustained periods of work despite there being no formal provision for 'in work' support in the contract.

## 8. Conclusion

This assessment provided the opportunity to consider the practices of Doncaster Deaf Trust against the Merlin Standard. The organisation has met the requirements of the Merlin Standard, having demonstrated that its behaviours are positive and supportive, and communication is open and honest, and a true working partnership has evolved with the Supply Chain Partner.

Whilst no significant organisational or senior staff changes or additional contracts are envisaged, should any occur then this may require a strategic review to ensure this limited life organisation continues to operate in line with the Merlin principles.

In September 2018 Doncaster Deaf Trust will be required to undertake a further assessment against the Merlin Standard in order to retain the accreditation. Consideration could be made to a continuous improvement review being undertaken in September 2017. The purpose of the review would be to establish progress made against the areas recommended for further improvement following this assessment.

Assessment Type	INITIAL
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Lead Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Visit Date	12/09/2016 and 13/09/2016
Client ID	C19811
Assessment Reference	PN101974