

Merlin Standard Advisory Board Minutes for 3rd February 2016

Attendees:

John Michalski (JM)	DWP (Chair)
Jane Malbasa (JMa)	DWP
Polly Fortune (PF)	DWP
Caoimhe Murdock (CM)	Cabinet Office (deputising for Louise Beatty)
Steve Swan (SS)	Tomorrow's People
Sam Windett (SW)	ERSA (deputising from Kirsty McHugh)
Paul Winyard (PWi)	Compact Voice
Louise Capel-Cure (LCC)	Ingeus
Ruth Regan (RR)	Assessment Services Ltd
Paul Bridle (PB)	Assessment Services Ltd
Nikki Vokes (NV)	SNCBC
Juliana Ogundare (JO)	DWP (Note taker)

Apologies:

Glenn Finlayson (GF)	DWP
Andrew Thomas (AT)	DWP
Mark Winter (MW)	ACEVO
Kirsty McHugh (KM)	ERSA
Nick Davies (ND)	NCVO
Nicholas Starkey (NS)	Cabinet Office
Paul Warner (PWa)	AELP
Terry Davis (TD)	Bradford Council
Huw Davies (HD)	BASE

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 JM welcomed attendees, and introduced himself as the DWP Commercial lead for Merlin. This was followed by introductions.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

- 2.1 The minutes of the last meeting on 22nd Sept 2015 had been accepted by email.

3. Action Points

- 3.1 **Action Point 22/Sept 15:** LB to discuss with Crown Commercial Services a generic Government Supply Chain Standard with development led by Cabinet Office/CCS; assuming that Departments using it will require additions to the basic Standard.

On-going: Deferred to next MAB as Cabinet Office is looking into possibilities for collaboration with other Departments.

- 3.2 **Action Point 22/Sept 15:** To check that LEPs have been made aware of the need for Merlin accreditation

Cleared: DWP will commission the ESF co-financing to include mandatory Merlin accreditation

- 3.3 **Action Point 22/Sept 15:** DWP to send Recommendations to members for further comments and suggestions.

Cleared: The recommendations and proposals are now being considered by DWP.

4. DWP Update – John Michalski

- 4.1 JM said that Merlin used to sit in Contracted Employment Directorate but it's now part of Commercial Directorate. PF and JMa will look specifically at Merlin. JM also said Commercial Directorate is going through big changes at the moment.
- 4.2 JM advised that DWP and ASL will have a meeting to discuss what Merlin look like and consequently shape future plans for Merlin
- 4.3 JM gave out slides on Spending Review. Part of the spending review is that less money is now available, employment is growing. A new Work and Health Programme will be implemented replacing the Work Programme and Work Choice. The new programme will provide specialist support for the long-term unemployed and claimants with health conditions and disabilities.
- 4.4 JM also added that the Spending Review will see the start of genuine integration between the health and work sectors, with a renewed focus on supporting people with health conditions and disabilities return to and remain in work. There will be increase spending in this area, expanding Access to Work and Fit for Work, and investing in the Health and Work Innovation Fund and the new Work and Health Programme
- 4.5 In addition, JM said from 2017, local areas including London, Greater Manchester, Sheffield City Region, the North East, Tees Valley, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands will work with DWP to co-design employment support for harder-to-help claimants.
- 4.6 JM emphasis there will be Localism commission of contracts. SS supported this by sighting ESF contract as localised demand.
- 4.7 JM said DWP is open to MAB member's suggestions on taking Merlin forward.

Action Point 1: MAB members to contact DWP Merlin's team if they wish to put any suggestions forward regarding Merlin as the design of Merlin is currently being look at in DWP.

5 Improving the Current Standard – Ruth Regan, ASL

- 5.1 RR circulated a comprehensive report of planned assessments with details including dates, number of supply chain partners and whether accreditation was mandatory or voluntary.
- 5.2 Merlin webinars have been held for new organisations and current Prime Contractors during January 2016 in order to update on assessment process changes. RR said the webinars are available through the Merlin website and feedback received from those that attended the webinars has been positive with a number of Prime Contractors contacting Assessment Services and their Lead Assessor to comment.
- 5.3 15 more assessors are being recruited in preparation for the greater volume of assessments coming up. Training for new assessors has been booked to make sure all assessors are skilled and bring them up to speed.
- 5.4 RR presented the Merlin Management Information Report.
- 5.5 RR said the first voluntary organisation (Sheffield College) came forward for Merlin accreditation on a voluntary basis and have been assessed this month. RR said hopefully they will have a successful outcome and ASL can then promote them on their website.
- 5.6 RR said ASL is in the process of setting up new website.
- 5.7 ASL have mentioned to Work programmes providers that changes in the Standard will not affect this year's assessments in April; changes won't be made until later this year around July 2016. ASL has explained to Work Programme Providers that they might see changes to their assessments results due to the new scoring system.
- 5.8 RR said additional sector are coming forward to have Merlin accreditation. RR explained to organisations that Merlin assessment fee is no longer a standard fee of £8,583 but on sliding scale of charges depending on the size of the organisation.
- 5.9 RR explained that the booking process for Merlin assessments now includes the completion of a spreadsheet of all past, present and potential Supply Chain Partners. To ensure openness and transparency the names of the organisation's supplied by Prime Contractor will be published on the Merlin Website and the e-mail address (of an appropriate senior manager within the Supply Chain organisation) will be used by Assessment Services Ltd to send the confidential Merlin Standard Online Survey.

- 5.10 SS commented on the good work ASL has done and the progress made so far in improving the current standard.

Action 2: ASL to send link of Survey to MAB members through DWP.

6 Improving the rigour of the Merlin Standard – Jane Malbasa

JMa presented the work already commenced to improve the rigour of the scoring thresholds. She took members through the proposals and invited comments.

- 6.1 Two proposals have been developed – the first is to increase each of the score thresholds by 5% to encourage continuous improvement and increase rigour.
- 6.2 Secondly, to demonstrate added rigour, it is proposed that in addition to the requirement to achieve a Satisfactory score at Principle level in addition to overall, the prime will have to achieve a Satisfactory score in each of the ten Elements making up the Standard.
- 6.3 Discussions took place around the table on these two proposals.
- 6.4 JM concluded the discussion that MAB members should look at the ten Elements proposal and feedback their views at the next MAB meeting.

Action Point 3: MAB members to look at the 10 elements proposal and feedback their comments/suggestions at the next MAB meeting.

7 Preparing for the Future – Caoimhe Murdock

- 7.1 Caoimhe gave an update that Cabinet Office, No10 and Crown Commercial Services have already commissioned work to look at the generic standard and VCSEs entering the market.
- 7.2 This piece of work is still undergoing. Cabinet Office will be able to feedback on the progress of the work at the next MAB meeting.

8 Any Other Business

- 8.1 JM said the importance of the Standard have been communicated to some Prime Providers that failure by them to achieve accreditation, amounts to breach of contract and their contract will be terminated.
- 8.2 JM thanked members and closed the meeting.

The next meeting of the Merlin Standard Advisory Board will be at 12:30 – 15:00 on Wednesday 8 June 2016, in DWP