

Merlin Advisory Board Minutes for 24th November 2016

Attendees:

Polly Fortune (PF)	DWP CD (Chair)
Andrew Friedman (AF)	DWP CD
Paul Bridle (PB)	Assessment Services Ltd
Ruth Regan (RR)	Assessment Services Ltd
Louise Capel-Cure (LCC)	Ingeus
Steve Swan (SS)	Tomorrow's People
Paul Winyard (PW)	NCVO
Jon Morgan (JM)	DWP PAT
Rhys Toone (RT)	BASE
Terry Davis (TD)	Bradford Council
Sam Windett (SW)	ERSA
Seonaid O'Gorman (SO'G)	DWP CD

Apologies:

Susann Hering (SH)	DCMS
Mark Winter (MW)	ACEVO
Nick Davies (ND)	NCVO

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1. PF welcomed attendees, explained new team structure in DWP Commercial Directorate (John Michalski has left DWP since last meeting; Neil Griffiths now head of Employment category). Merlin now sits in CD.
- 1.2. PF explained aim of meeting was to share and receive updates since last meeting (Feb 2016), take the group through the next stage of Merlin refresh work.

2. Previous Action Points

- 2.1. SO'G ran through action points from Feb 16 meeting
 - AP1:** MAB members to contact DWP Merlin team with any suggestions for Merlin design.
Merlin refresh underway in DWP. MAB to be consulted once DWP has completed further work. **ONGOING.**
 - AP2:** ASL to send link of survey to MAB members through DWP.
RR confirmed to SO'G via email that MAB members have received copies of survey. **CLOSED.**
 - AP3:** MAB members to look at 10 elements proposal and feedback comments/suggestions at next MAB meeting.
PF confirmed the discussion around the structure of the standard and scoring would be considered as part of the refresh. **ONGOING.**

3. Purpose of MAB; Terms of Reference

- 3.1. PF explained that discussion surrounding purpose of MAB would be throughout the meeting as part of other topics.
- 3.2. Discussion about ToR as to who the 'independent member' was; the group suggested perhaps it could be a member of Cabinet Office
- 3.3. Clarification request on who 'MAG' group is, TD confirmed this term was used at the origins of Merlin and is no longer relevant
- 3.4. SS asked if consideration had been given to whether MAB membership would be awarded to individuals, or to Organisations; PF explained this could form part of discussion but no current plans to do so.

Action Point: SO'G to update ToR and circulate to MAB

4. ASL Update

- 4.1. RR explained the new survey process which is sent to past (within 12 months)/present/future supply chain partners, requesting feedback on prime. 3000 surveys sent out, with a response rate of 25%. Low response rate normally related to previous partners. Discussion around the table about what actions might increase response rate, what response rate is required to be able to carry out assessment and the numbers of surveys sub-contractors receive.
- 4.2. RR recapped the changes to fee structure.
- 4.3. RR suggested there are areas for development because not all organisations manage to improve their score when being re-assessed. Discussion around which parts of the Standard have seen lower scores and the potential reasons for this.
- 4.4. RR gave an update from the assessment team, who feel their relationship with the prime providers is now more positive and that progress has been made since Merlin was initially launched. The process is no longer viewed as an audit but a way to add value. General agreement from the group that Merlin has had positive influence. Request from the group that it might be useful to see trends in assessment results in graphic format.
- 4.5. Queries and discussion as to the consequences of a lower score upon re-assessment, or not coming forward for re-assessment. PF confirmed that contractually there are no consequences for lower score so long as the organisation still hold accreditation and that requirement is to become accredited after contract award. RR points out that some organisations have not come forward as they no longer have supply chains. RR and PB commented that some organisations who received lower scores at re-assessment intend to come forward for earlier voluntary re-assessment once they feel improvements have been made.
- 4.6. PB noted that some organisations are voluntarily seeking accreditation. There may be interest from local authorities.
- 4.7. Discussion about whether Merlin scores are considered when contracts are re-let, as Merlin is independent evidence. PF confirmed that holding Merlin accreditation has not been a requirement of any DWP procurements, but organisation could point to positive Merlin scores as evidence of strong supply chain management. Discussion surrounding

potential issues for new organisations without Merlin accreditations if this was given weighting in procurement process.

Action Point: ASL to consider producing assessment results in a graph format.

5. DWP Forwards Look and Merlin Key Questions (2 agenda points taken together)

- 5.1. PF explained the two strands to the refresh work: content of Merlin and contract re-let.
- 5.2. Scope: PF confirmed that devolved areas are part of the discussion. SS suggested Merlin should be applied wherever DWP money is being spent.
- 5.3. Query about whether Merlin is required for FSF contracts.
- 5.4. Discussion around the table about engaging with Other Government Departments as part of refresh work to determine interest. Agreement that DWP would re-engage with Other Government Departments to ascertain if any outside interest in Merlin.
- 5.5. Conversation about future changes in provision and the market as Work Programme comes to an end, whether Merlin can be used to encourage good behaviours for those entering and leaving the market and maintain supply chain health. DWP pipeline would help with this.
- 5.6. Discussion about marking of Merlin assessments, as the need for stretch in the Standard is understood, however increasing pass marks could be a barrier to new entrants.
- 5.7. The limited use of the Merlin mediation service was talked about, however the group didn't necessarily feel this means it is not needed, but suggested looking more closely at cases that were brought to mediation.
- 5.8. Agreement that the right message needed to be sent about 'refreshing' the current Standard, rather than launching a new Standard.

Action Point: DWP to follow-up with FSF colleagues about the requirement for Merlin in their contracts.

Action Point: DWP to engage with OGDs about Merlin

Action Point: DWP to bring pipeline to future meeting

Action Point: DWP to bring paper to next MAB meeting about the parameters of the refresh of the standard.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1. SW suggested using the term 'employment support' rather than 'welfare to work'
- 6.2. Request for future MAB meetings to be scheduled with more notice
- 6.3. Agreement that, where needed, work could be progressed by correspondence or by telekit, rather than MAB needing to formally convene between meetings.
- 6.4. PF thanked members and closed the meeting.

Action Point: DWP to schedule 2017 MAB meetings by end of year