



merlin standard

2018

DONCASTER DEAF TRUST

COMPACT REPORT

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1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	13/09/2020
Assessment Date	18/09/2018 – 19/09/2018
Lead Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Customer ID	C19811
Assessment Reference	PN103861

2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

OVERALL OUTCOME	71% GOOD
1. Design	60% Satisfactory
2. Procure	67% Satisfactory
3. Contract	90% Excellent
4. Fund	67% Satisfactory
5. Develop	67% Satisfactory
6. Performance Manage	83% Good
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	68% Satisfactory
8. Review and Close	64% Satisfactory

3. METHODOLOGY

Doncaster Deaf Trust (hereafter known as DDT or the Trust) continues to be mandated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be accredited against the Merlin Standard due to being a Prime delivery partner for the Specialist Employability Services (SES) programme. Organisations that hold the Merlin Standard are required to be re-accredited every two years and consequently, DDT came forward for a re-accreditation review in line with the anniversary date.

The re-accreditation review assessment team comprised of Susan Smith (Lead Assessor) and Lorna Bainbridge (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within DDT. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in June 2018 to establish the scope and discuss the logistics of the re-accreditation review. The dates for the on-site were identified, and a plan of action agreed.

A booking form was submitted to Assessment Services Limited along with a spreadsheet indicating a full list of Supply Chain Partners - past, present and potential - delivering an end-to-end service or specialist intervention activity. In this case there were three present end-to-end Supply Chain Partners declared.

The Lead Assessor was in regular contact with the coordinator before the on-site activity to review the schedule and logistics. All documentation required for the re-accreditation review - Self- Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and interview schedule - were shared to enable the re-accreditation review to take place as planned.

The team spent a total of one day each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with DDT staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chain. All three (100%) of the Supply Chain Partners were interviewed in line with the published Merlin scoping framework.

The following report provides an indication of the findings against key criteria within the Merlin Standard, which was evidenced across the supply chain, as well as areas of strength and areas to consider for development over the forthcoming two years.

4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

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.

The Trust's mission is *"to empower and support individuals to be resilient, independent and skilled to enable them to achieve their future aspirations and live fulfilling, independent, lives."* In order to provide the earliest possible specialist intervention and to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to succeed in employment, DDT has overseen the development of a nursery, school, college and care home.

DDT is the Prime contractor for the DWP funded programme Specialist Employability Services (SES). Merlin accreditation is mandated in the contract.

To deliver SES, DDT has three Supply Chain Partners that have remained in place since the original Merlin assessment. 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.

Since the commencement of the SES contract in September 2015 a total of 74 people (31% of starts on the programme) have been helped into work by DDT and the Supply Chain Partners.

DDT continues to embrace the Merlin principles and has used the journey since the last Merlin assessment to continually improve its systems and processes.

5. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH

A number of significant strengths were identified during the Assessment and these are described below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

Performance expectations are very clear for Supply Chain Partners. There are good performance management processes in place that mean the DDT Supply Chain Manager can be clear and effective in ensuring that Supply Chain Partners understand what level of performance is required: *"We're strict on expectations – to ensure the customer gets what they expect, and they are happy with the service."* Supply Chain Partners find this clarity helpful in planning their SES delivery alongside their broader service delivery portfolios. (3.2)

Supply Chain Partners believe that communication is a two-way process where they are able to openly and honestly express concerns and ideas. Interactions between the DDT and Supply Chain Partners are consistently positive and supportive, including throughout challenging times such as poor performance. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included: *"Great, close relationship, superb"; "It's fantastic working with DDT"* and *"Supportive, teamwork from the beginning."* (6.2)

6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A number of areas for further development were identified during the Assessment and those of particular note are highlighted below. These are for the Organisation to consider as a contribution to continuous improvement. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

DDT is encouraged to continue to work with the Commissioner to assist DWP in resolving the acknowledged DWP IT systems error that is resulting in late payments to DDT and subsequently to Supply Chain Partners. It is acknowledged by Supply Chain Partners that DDT has been very proactive in this regard and communications at each stage have provided the necessary information. It is anticipated by DDT that this will be resolved imminently based on recent DWP communications. (4.2)

Whilst the training for Supply Chain Partner staff on the systems and processes required for contract delivery is good, DDT may wish to consider a more proactive approach with regards to identifying the learning and development needs of staff across the supply chain and promoting and/or delivering learning interventions. Equally it would be helpful then to evaluate the impact of the learning and to reflect on this in terms of improved quality and performance of service delivery across the supply chain. (5.3)

The SES programme relies on effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to customers. Current quality assurance measures do consider the effectiveness of the support in terms of job outcomes. DDT may wish to consider the introduction of observations of IAG delivery, seek more feedback from Supply Chain Partners on their own observations or consider encouraging Supply Chain Partners to seek the **matrix** Standard accreditation. (7.3)

Whilst it is recognised that there is good analysis of the equality and diversity make up of the staff groups across the supply chain, there is less of this with regards to the customers. Although the size of the overall contract is small, DDT is encouraged to undertake periodic data collection and analysis and use this to inform improvements throughout the life of the contractual relationship. (8.4)

7. AREAS REQUIRING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT

The following areas were identified as needing improvement as there was limited or insufficient evidence found during the assessment (a score of less than three). The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

There was very limited current evidence to support that there is a robust system in place which assures DDT that all Supply Chain Partners are working in line with the ethos of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. DDT is encouraged to review the policies of the Supply Chain Partners and to support staff in understanding the implication on wider safeguarding. It is acknowledged that training for DDT staff is planned for October 2018. (7.5)

8. FINDINGS

The feedback below is reported against key criteria of the Merlin Standard, aligned with the “Plan-Do-Review” business cycle.

PLAN
<p>Through planning an effective supply chain, the range of Partners and how they are engaged ensures there is a group of organisations that cover a diverse range of providers and that all understand the requirements of the contract and their contributions to achieving the desired outcomes.</p>
<p>The SES supply chain design remains as per the original and as this 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 or employability expertise and to be able to deliver a service throughout England, Scotland and Wales, remain key factors in the design of the specialist supply chain. The supply chain design for SES took full account of the need for national coverage.</p> <p>DDT has created an effective supply chain by engaging and partnering with their Supply Chain Partners, and reviews of SES requirements and performance have concluded that the supply chain remains fit for purpose.</p> <p>Whilst there have been no cases of TUPE transfer, there is a process in place. The relevant Human Resources representative attends the DDT monthly senior management meeting for SES. As a result, if any anticipated changes were being considered whereby TUPE may be required, the first stage would be to undertake due diligence to establish the position and DDT would take an appropriate role following the legislative requirements.</p> <p>Contracts for Supply Chain Partners were issued at the start of the SES programme and have been re-issued following discussions around the extensions. These are not overly burdensome to Supply Chain Partners and any risks are properly communicated by DDT. Documentation was seen by the Assessors, and Supply Chain Partners confirmed that an effective change control process is in place.</p> <p>Prior to contracting and throughout extension discussions, the funding and payment arrangements were reviewed and discussed at length, for example when the payments were to be reduced by 30%. Supply Chain Partners confirmed awareness of this being a DWP requirement and discussions were held between DDT and themselves to ascertain if contracts were still financially viable. DDT staff were able to explain the payment structure whereby a payment is made based on the interactions/reviews with customers and on job outcomes.</p>

DO

Supply Chain Partners are supported to develop their services to meet or exceed expected performance and quality assurance requirements.

At the point of contract set up, DDT provided an induction and training on systems and processes for all Supply Chain Partners and this is updated as changes take place or as new staff are recruited by Supply Partners. Staff and Supply Chain Partners confirmed that as changes are made to the contract, the systems, processes, and customer journey maps, then subsequent training and development is provided to delivery staff. For example, changes to the duration of the customer being 'on programme' is to change along with the number of interventions undertaken on a monthly basis. This will result in a change to the customer map and inform future training to ensure Supply Chain Partners continue to meet the contractual obligations.

As noted in the strengths section of this report, openness and transparency is cited as being central to the strong working relationships. 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. The simplicity of the single point of contact system facilitates an open and transparent business relationship.

Performance is well managed through a standardised monthly reporting tracker which shows the number of customers and activities or interventions completed as well as customer distance travelled. The Moodle platform is used consistently by DDT and Supply Chain Partners to update the customer records which informs the reporting. A monthly conversation to review performance with a focus on exceptions routinely takes place.

Management Information (MI) requirements continue to be communicated effectively, so the whole supply chain remains aware of and agrees to these requirements. The process for collecting, storing, and using MI has remained the same throughout the life of the contract. MI is collected on an almost daily basis via Moodle and copied to DWP in the required format. MI is discussed with the DWP contract manager on a regular basis and the content of those discussions is shared across the supply chain.

The quality assurance framework comprises of the customer experience, quality assurance and compliance. Quality and compliance are managed 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. Currently there is no process of observation of the service delivery to ensure quality is being delivered to customers and this forms an area for development. 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 are appropriate given the low numbers involved across the contract.

REVIEW

Review and evaluation is used to demonstrate the impact of the services delivered and continuously improve service delivery.

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 support required for the 40% of residents in Wales with a disability that are living in poverty, and the need to move people into employment to change this, as well as the need to save the government's money and reduce reliance on benefits.

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 includes 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. Case studies collected and shared with DDT provide a powerful account of people with hearing impairments securing work and transforming their lives. A comment included that case studies indicate *"the positive impact on the customers, both in terms of progression and preparation for the labour market and a job outcome."*

9. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, DDT remains accredited against the Merlin Standard. The senior leadership team should be mindful that any significant organisational or senior staff changes, and/or being awarded additional contracts using a significantly different supply chain may require a strategic review. Similarly, any decisions reached by the Independent Complaints Examiner may also result in a strategic review being required to ensure the Organisation continues to operate in line with the Merlin principles.

Holders of the Merlin Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their approach to Supply Chain Management.
- Cooperate with annual Reviews as required by Assessment Services Ltd
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd (merlin@assessmentsservices.com) or their Lead Assessor if the key contact name or contact details change.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email:
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they gain additional contracts.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received from Supply Chain Partners.
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the Merlin Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- Only use the Merlin Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines.
- Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for Accreditation Review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the Merlin Standard Quality Mark, nor refer to being a former holder of the Merlin Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.
- Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the Merlin Standard at least 4 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment, completion of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 2 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.

 ASSESSMENT SERVICES	
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