



merlin standard

THE EFL TRUST

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1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	INITIAL ASSESSMENT
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	17/04/2021
Assessment Dates	15/04/2019 – 17/04/2019
Lead Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Customer ID	C11721
Assessment Reference	PN104178

2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

OVERALL OUTCOME	77% GOOD
1. Design	83% GOOD
2. Procure	73% GOOD
3. Contract	80% GOOD
4. Fund	67% SATISFACTORY
5. Develop	87% EXCELLENT
6. Performance Manage	80% GOOD
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	72% GOOD
8. Review and Close	72% GOOD

3. METHODOLOGY

The EFL Trust is voluntarily accredited against the Merlin Standard. It has a number of supply chains as a result of contracts with various commissioners and these are all included in the scope of the Merlin assessment.

The assessment team comprised of Susan Smith (Lead Assessor) and Sonia Renzo (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within the EFL Trust. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in November 2018 to establish the scope and discuss the logistics of the assessment. 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 advance of the Assessment a survey was carried out of the Supply Chain Partners, with all 94 being invited to participate. Responses were received from past, present and potential Partners, which represented 38.3% of the total. The results of the survey informed the focus of interviews for the assessment team and contributed to the overall scoring.

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 assessment - Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and interview schedule - were shared in line with the agreed timescales to enable the assessment to take place as planned.

The assessment team spent a total of 2.75 days each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with the EFL Trust staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. Some 20% of the Supply Chain Partners were interviewed in line with the published Merlin scoping framework. Interviews were conducted with a wide range of Partners: end-to-end, specialist intervention, as well as past, present and potential across all contracts.

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

4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

The EFL Trust is a national charity that uses the power of football to change people's lives. It has a dedicated network of members in the form of 72 community trusts, one for each EFL club. It was established in 2007 to support the growing amount of community work carried out within the English Football League to distribute core funding from the Premier League and the Professional Footballers' Association to each community trust. Since then the EFL Trust has secured commercial and government-funded contracts to deliver a range of services through its network of 72 organisations and some 22 other community-based organisations where there are geographic gaps in its reach.

The EFL Trust's mission is *"to advise, support and resource the network of community trusts of EFL clubs and other Supply Chain Partners in the development of their community provision and represent their best interests to key stakeholders."* The EFL Trust and supply chain network tackle societal goals by inspiring people through its four core themes – sport, education, community engagement and health.

The Supply Chain Partner charities have a combined annual turnover of around £50m working on a range of projects and programmes. The EFL Trust's network engaged 1.5million people in their community work in 2015/16. The largest programme has been delivered since 2011 and is the National Citizen Service (known in this report as NCS). There is also a range of other contracts such as the Futsal Educational Programme which commenced in 2013 and offers 16 to 18 year olds the opportunity to study a BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Sport as well as train and play futsal. There is also the Ferrero-sponsored Move and Learn, and Kinder+ Sport scheme as well as the Kids Cup and the Girls Cup which run throughout the football season. The Every Player Counts programme was formed in September 2016 and is funded by a single £1.1m donation from the Wembley National Stadium Trust which enables disabled people to access football, many for the first time. The EFL Trust also holds a contract with the Education Skills Funding Agency for education and employability through the Adult Education Budget.

All activity is delivered through the supply chain network and so Supply Chain Partner delivery across programmes is at 100%.

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

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:

In addition to the 72 charities associated with the English Football League, there are a number of diverse organisations also used within the supply chain to meet the commissioners' requirements. New clubs join and leave the supply chain due to promotion and relegation and the supply chain design is reviewed in order to deliver various contractual requirements. Supply chain review strategies create various routes to engage with new Supply Chain Partners. This creates diverse and vibrant supply chains that have aligned objectives to meet the four key themes of the EFL Trust. (1.1 & 1.6)

The majority of Supply Chain Partners indicate that the Capability Code of Practice (CCOP) and the How to Guides provide them with the support, development and encouragement that they need to be sustainable charities and organisations. Whilst the timescales for completion of the CCOP were tight, the majority of Supply Chain Partners described that the process does help them fulfil their contractual obligations, especially in regard to core funding, and supports the delivery of other new contracts. The EFL Trust also provides Supply Chain Partners with additional funding and facilitates new partnerships to create new projects and programmes; for example, providing access to a grant to improve infrastructure. (5.1 & 5.2)

There is a positive culture of communications across the supply chain. The vast majority of Supply Chain Partners describe operational relationships as open, honest and supportive. Staff at the EFL Trust are described as always being available for support and this has been consistent throughout the life of the various contracts and programmes. (6.2)

There is much emphasis given to encouraging Supply Chain Partners to share good practice. There are a range of meetings including a national conference, regional forums and specific events where Supply Chain Partners confirm that there are lots opportunities to learn from each other and to use this information to improve their own performance. Other Supply Chain Partners referred to the Club Portal System (CPS) where they have electronic access to good practice resources. (6.6)

6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A number of areas where further development would be beneficial were identified during the Assessment. These are for the Organisation to consider as a contribution to continuous improvement. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

Whilst there is clear alignments of aims between the EFL Trust and its Supply Chain Partners, the sharing of the new strategy with agreed core principles (leading by example, innovate and inspire, passionate about people, continually improve) will greatly assist in creating a more transparent set of core principles and behaviours. The EFL Trust could usefully consider how it will assess both its own and Supply Chain Partners' performance in relation to these core principles. (1.5)

Many of the programmes where the EFL Trust leads are shared equally amongst the 72 football trusts and as such there is no concept of market share. However, there are some programmes such as the NCS and the education activities that do have market share considerations. Whilst most Supply Chain Partners state they are not particularly concerned about their market share, the EFL Trust is asked to consider how transparent its communications are in this regard. (2.3)

For many Supply Chain Partners there are accurate and timely payments made, however during the Assessment a number of Supply Chain Partners stated that they cannot confirm the receipt of timely payments. Whilst it is understood that the EFL Trust model operates on transferring funds upon receipt from the Commissioner, a number of Supply Chain Partners referred to a lack of clarity about payment dates and the need to undertake a lot of chasing of payments. The EFL Trust may wish to consider a review of this area and the plans to continue with the schedule of visits to Supply Chain Partners by the Finance Team could assist in communications. (4.2)

The concept of a management fee does not apply across all supply chains; however, for those programmes where there is a fee levied, there is little transparency of this from a Supply Chain Partner point of view. Whilst the Supply Chain Partners generally understand what support is available, as they don't know the level of management fee then it is difficult for them to make any value for money judgements. The EFL Trust is asked to consider how this can be made clearer for relevant Supply Chain Partners. (4.3)

There is a comprehensive training programme that the EFL Trust delivers for Supply Chain Partners. There were some Supply Chain Partners who made useful suggestions for improvements in this area such as: offering a wider variety of training locations; offering an overall schedule well in advance of the delivery to allow for diary planning and attendance; differentiating the training to take account of the size and complexity of the Supply Chain Partner's organisation; and increasing the use of technology in training delivery, such as the use of webinars. (5.3)

Whilst performance review processes vary in accordance with the needs of the different supply chain programmes and contracts, the EFL Trust has recognised the need for a contract management framework with a clear performance management approach. The Supply Chain Partners would benefit from greater clarity of expectations in this area. (6.3 & 6.5)

Whilst the Due Diligence process takes many factors into consideration such as safeguarding including the Modern Slavery Act, information security and environmental sustainability, these could also be usefully added to the CCOP to ensure more regular ongoing focus on compliance. (7.4 & 7.5)

The EFL Trust has much evidence from its own supply chain and from a variety of national studies that shows the value of its activities. It is encouraged in its current work to further develop its own social return on investment impact tool which will further express the impact on wider social objectives such as health, crime and community development. (8.3)

Whilst there was no negative feedback about contract exit processes from Supply Chain Partners, there was a lack of clarity of the exit process itself. Good practice in this area suggests that there is clarity about the exit process from contract commencement phases in order that Supply Chain Partners are clear about managing the process and also for practical matters such as maintenance of records and archiving. (8.5)

7. FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 1: Design

The EFL Trust has a largely pre-defined supply chain given its role as the umbrella organisation supporting the 72 football charity organisations attached to English Football League (EFL) clubs in England and Wales. The EFL Trust also works with a small number of partners outside the EFL which include Football in the Community organisations from the Premier League and other sports-based and non-sports-based charities. As a charity organisation, the EFL Trust aims to focus its supply chain around the third sector.

The EFL Trust supports the supply chain through the development of wider partnerships and the commissioning of external organisations to provide additional services and support. Examples of this include training provision that Supply Chain Partners who deliver the NCS programme can utilise on their programmes, and the partnership with major national organisations such as Network Rail that is enabling all 72 football charity trusts to access new funding. A further example was when a Supply Chain Partner lost a contract with an education provider, the EFL Trust Link Officer sourced other providers and colleges to help them find a new provider and also put them in contact with the Local Enterprise Partnership. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the wider network is accessible in line with their expectations and level of delivery.

There are effective communications channels with Supply Chain Partners that inform the initial and ongoing design of the supply chain and its activities. National Update Meetings, national conferences and advisory group meetings are opportunities to update the supply chain and include two-way dialogue in relation to programme design. For example, when NCS was launched, there were a number of regional exploration events and facilitating consultation events which gathered information on local expertise and enabled the EFL Trust to identify local knowledge and needs and support the design of the network in the region. Further supply chain design has led to new Supply Chain Partners representing sporting charitable trusts, youth charities and social enterprises, as well as an independent school.

There are Link Officers and Project Managers who actively promote and support collaboration and facilitate local, regional and national events to allow the supply chain to share ideas and best practice. There are a number of current projects which require suppliers to work together to achieve objectives; examples include partnership working on the delivery of the NCS programme as well as education programmes and projects in cities with more than one club (Nottingham, Sheffield, Bristol for example). Additionally, the Innovation Fund actively encouraged Supply Chain Partners to work collaboratively which resulted in a successful joint application which has further led to continued joint working for the benefit of the community. Supply Chain Partners commented that *"they are very open and honest about the challenges we could face delivering the NCS programme before we commit to delivery"* and *"we are constantly consulted through regional and national events"*.

The culture and communication strategy supports open and honest communications. A new organisational strategy is in development and there has been consultation with the Advisory Group and at the national conference to develop a more explicit set of core principles and behaviours for the supply chain. The Advisory group has membership drawn from the Supply Chain Partner network nationally and is chaired by one of the Trust's trustees. The Advisory Group is the formal link from the network through to the Board and has been fundamental in reviewing key strategies and event content. There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity which is assessed through the CCOP process and is fundamental to the purpose of the charitable trusts that make up the supply chain. Supply Chain Partner comments included *"the best thing about the national conference is networking with other clubs"* and *"very good at sharing good practice, weekly newsletters, CPD events and National Conference"*.

Supply chain review is conducted regularly. For example, the delivery of the NCS programme supply chain was extended from the 72 charities attached to the EFL clubs and now includes other suppliers who support the EFL Trust to deliver its aims and objectives, such as training providers and wider governance providers in the form of insurers and legal representation. The need to bring in new suppliers to deliver the spread of service required by the NCS project now involves a number of other charity-based community engagement organisations. The process of seeking out appropriate new Supply Chain Partners is led by the individual project managers who utilise the skills, experience and knowledge of staff and enlisted the help of managers in the supply chain who have local knowledge and established community links. A recent example of reviewing and evolving one of the supply chains was the NCS Autumn 2018 Pilot Programme. Of the 12 Supply Chain Partners who were successfully onboarded and delivered on the Autumn Pilot, four have gone on to deliver in Spring 2019. Supply Chain Partners commented that the EFL Trust is *"definitely broadening scope of delivery, health, education, ageing population"* and *"they are working more strategically with national organisations such as Sport England and Network Rail"*.

PRINCIPLE 2: Procure

The EFL Trust operates a procurement procedure which includes relevant levels of control over the scoping, identification and checks of potential suppliers. Part of this process is to check capability of the supplier. For the Supply Chain Partners who are football charities there is the CCOP process which is conducted annually and the resulting actions taken into account before making final decisions regarding awarding any new contracts. For Supply Chain Partners who are not within the EFL network, there is a separate due diligence process which is used to assess their ability to deliver. The due diligence form responses are reviewed by various subject matter experts internally or outsourced externally - for example data protection and health and safety - and these assessments are collated by the Governance Team before final approval or otherwise from the project sponsor. All Supply Chain Partners are offered support in both the CCOP and due diligence processes as well as to help them with funding bids and applications. Procurement communications are controlled by the specific Project Manager who takes responsibility for keeping in touch with the supply chain during the procurement process.

Whilst there have been no cases of TUPE transfer (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations 2006), there is a process in place. The procedure in the event of a TUPE transfer is clearly set out in the contract between the EFL Trust and Supply Chain Partners.

There is a clear rationale in place to support a viable and transparent allocation of market share. As the EFL Trust's supply chain is in the main the 72 Football League community charities, where there is need to extend geographical coverage to satisfy a contract or funding arrangement, the supply chain is opened to Premier League community organisations or National League club community organisations, especially those who have previously been in the League. The supply chain has also been extended to other community and voluntary sector organisations, in particular for the NCS Programme in order to satisfy regional coverage. There could be greater clarity of market share as per section 6 of this report.

Negotiations regarding volume, funding and finance, and performance expectations have clearly been undertaken at the outset and then throughout the life of the contract. When a new funding opportunity is identified, the EFL Trust then consults all potential Supply Chain Partners to enquire about their thoughts on the funding opportunity, whether they would be interested in having any involvement in the contract, and if so, what their expectations from the contract would be. An example of negotiations can be seen from the Extra Time Hub contract. Upon successfully receiving funding in principle from Sport England, the EFL Trust notified all potential Supply Chain Partners, and issued each of them with a guidance pack about the contract and the application process. When the successful Supply Chain Partners had been selected, a steering group was established and consultation took place to ensure that they were involved in drawing up the final, stage 2 bid for the contract. Following being fully awarded the contract, there was continued involvement of the successful SCPs via the steering group and partnership working prior to issuing them with the final contracts. Following this, the EFL Trust continued to work with the Supply Chain Partners to co-design the programme detail and publish the final agreed specification before launching the programme.

PRINCIPLE 3: Contract

Contracts for Supply Chain Partners are issued at the start of the programme and as well as drafts being sent for consideration, workshops are often held to explain contract details. Where contracting arrangements are amended, either through changes to the main contract or performance necessity, the EFL Trust ensures contract variations are in place which highlight details of the changes including any impact on funding or resources. A record is maintained of contract changes by the Governance Officer who manages a contract database which includes a record of the flow of contracts, ensuring that there is a clear understanding of which contract variations have been fully executed. Supply Chain Partners comments included *"Comprehensive contract with schedule which identifies KPIs"* and *"The contract was sent in post – a huge document with a schedule of KPIs. We sought advice from our own Trustees on content; however, if anything is unclear we can contact the EFL Trust"*.

The performance expectations are clearly provided in each contract. Every member of the EFL Trust's supply chain has an assigned performance/project manager who has a full understanding of the programmes being undertaken. They support the Supply Chain Partner with formal pre-contract meetings to offer the following: a clear understanding of the obligations under the terms and conditions; guidance and advice on all aspects of the programme delivery; provision of training required to deliver the objectives of the programme; and ongoing performance management, as well as additional support where performance is failing.

The EFL Trust has a clearly defined route that Supply Chain Partners may take when a dispute arises which is outlined in the contract(s). Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they would feel able to use the process without fear of any repercussions. There have been no disputes raised since the last Merlin assessment.

PRINCIPLE 4: Fund

The EFL Trust seeks to establish an understanding of each Supply Chain Partner and their ability to deliver the numbers and specification of the contract in question. Payment schedules are clearly set out as part of the contracting arrangements; monthly funding values with performance related funding are plainly detailed. The finance model and payment structure for the various programmes is issued to all Supply Chain Partners in advance of the contract to support both the Supply Chain Partner and the EFL Trust in making well-informed contracting decisions. The payment structure and any deductions have been clearly explained and the majority of Supply Chain Partners confirmed they have been treated fairly and equitably.

Funding across all contracts is managed by the project manager and the finance team who work closely with Supply Chain Partners to support capability against contracts and aim to ensure accurate and timely payments. During the assessment, Supply Chain Partners noted some variable performance in timely payments. Testimony ranged from *"if there is a delay with a payment they are good at letting you know – they have got better over time"* and *"payment has got better over the past couple of years"* to *"we have had to wait a long time for payment"* and *"we have had to chase up to see what has happened with payment"*. Communication with regards to timeliness of payments is referred to in section 6 of this report. However, there are also good examples of where the EFL Trust will ensure that Supply Chain Partners are supported and not put in any undue financial risk. For example, early payments to help cashflow.

The EFL Trust seeks to ensure that as much funding as possible goes to Supply Chain Partners which, it is felt, promotes strong local delivery and engagement. Any surplus that the EFL Trust generates from any management fees earned is redistributed back into the network, usually in the form of grants such as infrastructure grants, innovation grants and social mixing grants. More about the transparency of management fees is included in section 6 of this report.

PRINCIPLE 5: Develop

The EFL trust develops and encourages Supply Chain Partners to fulfil contractual obligations throughout the life of the contract. The CCOP process identifies strengths and areas for development around business processes. Over the last five years, the EFL Trust has significantly increased its central resources to enable greater support, advice and guidance to the supply chain network. There is a Governance and Quality Team now in place, a Head of Finance, and Head of Marketing and Communications. These posts have been fundamental in enabling bespoke support to the SCPs in a more proactive manner. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they are supported to meet contract requirement and are referred to useful guidance documents produced, for example to explain how to upload data.

The EFL Trust employs strategic managers (Heads of Department) to actively seek funding and new income streams on behalf of the supply chain. The EFL Trust is well placed to work with national sports bodies such as Sport England and The Premier League amongst others and act as an intermediary to secure funding. It has also made connections with central government and parliament events, and successfully run government contracts have raised the profile of the power of the football brand with Government. Strategic managers are experienced bid writers and have had success applying for European funding. New funding opportunities are constantly sought for the supply chain and Supply Chain Partners confirmed that opportunities are presented to them on a regular basis. Supply Chain Partners commented that *“they helped us to put the tender together, meet contract requirements and financial price per head”* and *“we definitely feel that as a smaller Supply Chain Partner things have improved – used to feel it was the bigger ones that got funding”*.

The EFL Trust develops an annual organisational development plan which provides training and awareness events across the country which Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to book on and attend. Training requirements are identified and developed through the outcomes from CCOP and any operational trends that fall out of quality assurance and ‘end of programme’ review events. In addition to this, there is a range of Safeguarding training for Supply Chain Partners shared with the EFL. Recent examples have included Peer on Peer abuse and Board Level Safeguarding Training. All Supply Chain Partners delivering the NCS programme are provided with pre-summer delivery refresher training and post-summer review workshops. This enables the supply chain to respond to emerging trends and issues, such as promoting positive behaviour. Please see also refer to section 6 of this report.

PRINCIPLE 6: Performance Manage

There are clear communication channels to ensure that there is clarity in the business relationships underpinning the supply chain arrangements. The primary single point of contact is known as the 'CCO link officer role' which was reviewed during 2018 to ensure that this approach continued to provide the supply chain with the necessary communication and signposting support they required. The CCO link officers meet regularly with Supply Chain Partners and are able to signpost to other areas of the organisation that may be in a position to provide bespoke and specialist information, guidance and advice (IAG). The Advisory group exists to provide a voice for the supply chain and is made up of senior staff from a geographic spread of Supply Chain Partners. This is viewed by Supply Chain Partners as a positive communication channel to underpin business relationships. Also, the EFL Trust has recently developed a weekly e-bulletin based on feedback from Supply Chain Partners that too many daily emails were being sent, and whilst the content was useful, they said that they would prefer information to be collated and sent in a more structured way. There has been positive feedback since the introduction of this e-bulletin and Supply Chain Partners are also invited to share information in this way to the network. Supply Chain Partners comments included: *"weekly communications are really good, its centralized the information instead of getting it in dribs and drabs"; "you can just pick up the phone and speak to the relevant people"; "the Advisory group is a sounding board for the EFLT"; and "the Advisory group has the ear and respect of the network"*.

Communication between the EFL Trust and Supply Chain Partners both during initial negotiations on new programmes and currently during weekly and monthly communications and quality assurance checks, is open and honest. Opinions are freely shared and on occasion difficult subjects, ranging from initial negotiation of payments to issues with performance, have been discussed frankly and fairly, with appropriate resolutions reached. A good example of the way in which the EFL Trust listens to the supply chain was the National Conference where feedback was given that the EFL Trust should have less reliance on NCS and diversify into other projects; hence it is now engaging more with health through Sports England on Active Aging projects. Supply Chain Partner comments included:

"There is an open relationship, you can challenge and question the strategic objectives."

"They are there if you need them, very up front, straight and give direction."

"Approachable, positive and supportive."

"We can challenge."

"The Governance team are making themselves available to answer queries around the CCOP."

"The EFLT team has grown massively and we get lots of support."

Project or programme performance expectations are set out within the individual contracts. A series of contract management meetings take place between the Supply Chain Partner and the dedicated project manager to ensure that there is the opportunity to regularly review performance as well as raise issues and discuss concerns. Performance information is produced on an individual project or programme basis. This is reported at contract meetings, operational team meetings, and senior management team meetings. The EFL Trust recognises the benefits of implementing a more formal performance management framework as outlined in section 6 of this report.

Robust MI systems are in place to capture and accurately report on performance. The EFL Trust utilises an online monitoring system called Views and for the NCS programme it uses a system called Salesforce. Full expectations of recording and monitoring is detailed in the Service Level Agreement and full recording and technical support is offered to the Supply Chain Partner. A Management Information Coordinator is employed to manage data and to provide feedback on the progression of partners in relation to specific projects and on the validity and quality of data. The supply chain has direct input into both of the MI systems and the ability to run management and performance reports.

Supply Chain Partners are measured, encouraged, and their performance is supported to help direct improvements. The Quality Assurance Programme Quality Framework is used to assess all delivery partner activity. The CCOP process is also a mechanism by which the performance of each Supply Chain Partner is supported. An illustrative Supply Chain Partner comment was that *"we are really keen on the CCOP process – it challenges us to raise standards and improve."*

Good practice within the supply chain is shared in order to improve performance and service delivery. There are a range of meetings, including a national conference, regional forums and specific events where Supply Chain Partners confirm that there are lots opportunities to learn from each other and to use this information to improve their own performance. Other Supply Chain Partners referred to the Club Portal System (CPS) where they have electronic access to good practice resources. In addition to sharing best practice, EFL Trust negotiates central services and contracts on behalf of the supply chain, examples include the procurement of accommodation and activities with the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) for the NCS programme and services from the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust. These arrangements not only support financial savings for the supply chain but remove the need for partners to spend time and money sourcing quality services, as the Trust conducts central due diligence checks to ensure adequacy of services.

There is a Quality Assurance Policy and a quality audit cycle which detail the process for internal annual self-assessment and the development of quality improvement plans. It provides Supply Chain Partners with a self-assessment templates and on completion these are collated by the EFL Trust into an overarching Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The majority of Supply Chain Partners were engaged with the process in a positive way. For example, on the NCS programme, self-assessment findings were used to inform quality improvements such as providing training on epilepsy and forced marriage for NCS delivery staff.

PRINCIPLE 7: Quality Assurance and Compliance

Supply Chain Partners are kept informed of the wider policy and strategy information of commissioners through a range of methods including emails, meetings and training events. Supply Chain Partners described that information has come through a number of sources including emails and updates from the EFL Trust, directly from the commissioners, and from their own interest in the wider policy and strategy of organisations from whom they might receive funding. Supply Chain Partners referred to the national conference and the quality of guest speakers from inside the network and wider, including information being shared from Parliament and current national agenda themes which included safeguarding and community cohesion.

The quality assurance framework comprises customer experience, quality assurance and compliance. The extent of deployment is proportionate to the overall contract value and the commissioners' requirements. However, quality and compliance is managed through quality and compliance checklists and delivered by the relevant project-specific Supply Chain Manager. Queries and discussions are usually the subject of telephone conversations, and numerous site visits have taken place at Supply Chain Partner premises. All quality audits are recorded on a central register and reporting to Trustees of the summary of results is about to commence. On the NCS programme there is active involvement of NCS graduates and members of the various Youth Boards in delivering quality assurance activities. Supply Chain Partners commented that *"Quality is important to all our success"* and *"The CCOP process drives quality as well as performance"*.

The IAG provided by the EFL Trust to the Supply Chain Partners was felt to be accurate and timely. One Supply Chain Partner commented that *"You just need to pick up the phone and they will support, help and give IAG."* The EFL Trust holds the **matrix** Standard. Supply Chain Partners are aware of the importance of ensuring any IAG they provide is accurate, up-to-date and impartial. A number of Supply Chain Partners interviewed as part of this assessment confirmed that they are accredited to the **matrix** Standard.

The EFL Trust has policies in place for data protection and information security, health and safety, and safeguarding. Furthermore, the CCOP and due diligence processes require Supply Chain Partners to provide evidence of their approach through policies and procedures of data protection, health and safety and safeguarding. Whilst environmental sustainability and information security are covered in broad terms, this is something which could be developed further in the CCOP process. See section 6 of this report.

The EFL Trust adheres to the principles of the Modern Slavery Policy with their policy being published on the website. Currently, there is no provision for the Modern Slavery Policy within the CCOP, however, this is acknowledged and will be addressed in the next iteration. More than half the Supply Chain Partners interviewed had discussed the issue of modern slavery as part of safeguarding policy discussions with the EFL Trust.

PRINCIPLE 8: Review and Close

Stakeholder groups are clearly identified and play an active role in receiving and giving feedback on the impact of the various contracts. All parties work collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to deliver a service that meets local needs and provides value for money. For example, the NCS Youth Board members are used to inform key elements of delivery of the programme including phase delivery and quality, celebration events and marketing. Engagement with government departments has enabled the EFL Trust to support Supply Chain Partners with both financial and social projects. The Supply Chain Partners additionally seek and share regular feedback from other local partners that they work with and from customers. There is ongoing dialogue and relationship development with other 'sports family' organisations such as the Premier League, the Professional Footballers' Association and Sport England. At the most recent national conference there were speakers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, parkrun, Mind and Brightspot Fundraising. Supply Chain Partner event evaluation was very positive.

Both the EFL Trust and Supply Chain Partners were able to share some examples of how the work they are delivering is having a measurable impact on the various Commissioners' wider social objectives. This includes gaining and sustaining employment, improvements in skills and qualifications, unemployment reduction, addressing poverty and reducing potential for crime. Some examples of this are in one Supply Chain Partner where there is a 100% Achievement Rate in qualifications and through the NCS programme, some 5772 hours of social action were delivered.

The EFL Trust's activities, and the activities of its Supply Chain Partners, are positively impacting on external stakeholders. An example is how young people and adults have been encouraged to develop themselves and their wellbeing such as improved school attendance and attainment, reduction in anti-social behaviour, gaining qualifications, improved health and mental wellbeing and accessing skills and employment. Improving environmental sustainability is an area for improvement as outlined, however community environments are impacted positively as described earlier. Case studies collected and shared provide a powerful account of people with hearing impairments securing work and transforming their lives. National studies by the NCS Trust show that supply chain activity is contributing to social cohesion, social mobility and social engagement and that for every £1 invested there is £2.80 of social value generated. Various Supply Chain Partners contributed examples such as 99.5% increase in confidence in young people in the top 10% deprived wards in country, with 91% of those young people saying the diversionary sports activities kept them out of trouble.

Equality and diversity is embedded into the work of the EFL Trust and the supply chain. Inclusion runs through the process, from procurement to contract management. Supply Chain Partners' commitment and effective processes to promote equality and diversity are checked via the CCOP and due diligence review processes. 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. Data about equality and diversity is monitored and shared with Supply Chain Partners who respond accordingly to ensure that actual participation within the project reflects the requirements of the Commissioner. The way in which data relating to equality and diversity is collected, analysed and used within the supply chain provides direction for programme and service development and future marketing and promotion activities. An example is a demographic gap identified and thus a programme for the over 55s has been developed.

All contracts have a clear and detailed exit plan arrangement in place; however, this was not widely understood by all Supply Chain Partners. Good practice in this area suggests that there is clarity about the exit process from contract commencement phases in order that Supply Chain Partners are clear about managing the process and also for practical matters such as maintenance of records and archiving. Survey results did not indicate that any past Supply Chain Partners had any issues with contract exit: however please refer to section 6 of this report.

8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, the EFL Trust has gained accreditation 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@assessmentservices.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: (merlin@assessmentservices.com)
- 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	
PO Box 14, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 0EL	T: 0044 (0) 2038805059 E: merlin@assessmentservices.com https://twitter.com/merlin_standard