



merlin standard

ADVIZA

COMPACT REPORT

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1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	10/11/2021
Assessment Dates	18/11/2019– 20/11/2019
Lead Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Customer ID	C11454
Assessment Reference	PN104582

2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

OVERALL OUTCOME	85% EXCELLENT
1. Design	87% EXCELLENT
2. Procure	85% EXCELLENT
3. Contract	90% EXCELLENT
4. Fund	80% GOOD
5. Develop	87% EXCELLENT
6. Performance Manage	86% EXCELLENT
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	80% GOOD
8. Review and Close	84% GOOD

3. METHODOLOGY

Adviza is voluntarily accredited against the Merlin Standard and has been since 2013.

The assessment team comprised of Susan Smith (Lead Assessor) and Lorna Bainbridge (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within Adviza. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in May 2019 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 40 being invited to participate. Responses were received from 10 Partners, which represented 25% 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 1.75 days each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with Adviza staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. Some 45% of the Supply Chain Partners were interviewed in line with the published Merlin scoping framework. Interviews were conducted with relevant contacts in each chosen Supply Chain Partner (present and past; there were no potential at the time of the assessment).

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

4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Adviza is a registered charity based in the Thames Valley. It aims to inspire people to make better decisions that help them progress in learning and work. A particular focus is helping young people progress in education, employment and training. As well as delivering projects on behalf of local authorities, other public bodies and charities, a key part of its work is providing careers services direct to schools, colleges, parents, graduates and other individuals. In terms of supply chain management, Adviza states that "*Supply Chain Partners enable us to deliver services for young people and adults without duplication and keeping to our ethos of raising aspirations, confidence and skills and allowing customers to progress and sustain work or learning.*"

Adviza's current delivery of services which have supply chains includes delivery of the National Careers Service (NCS) in the South West, the Prince's Trust Programme in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and a Big Lottery/European Social Fund project Building Better Opportunities (BBO) known as Building Futures. Each of these has Supply Chain Partners that enable Adviza to deliver the services for young people and adults to raise confidence, aspirations and skills in applying for and securing employment or further training/education. In terms of percentage of delivery by Supply Chain Partners, this is as follows:

Building Futures (ESF and Big Lottery funded): 19.6% Adviza and 80.4% supply chain

National Careers Service (ESFA funded): 51% Adviza and 49% supply chain

Princes Trust: 82% Adviza and 18% supply chain

Since the previous Merlin review assessment in 2017, Adviza has significantly changed its geographic reach in the National Careers Service from Oxfordshire through all the south west counties to the Isles of Scilly. This has resulted in a number of new Supply Chain Partners. Its 2019-2023 strategic plan has 4 key actions to develop partnerships to enable successful service delivery. The Assessors found many improvements over the last two years, including improved supply chain review and enhanced performance and quality monitoring.

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:

Adviza has built wider partnerships and networks with and for the supply chains that enables more comprehensive services for customers. Examples include support with mental health, substance misuse, disabilities through to new project initiatives that have assisted in developing wider employability skills. Supply Chain Partners made reference to working with different community groups, supported housing associations and Job Centres. (1.2)

There were numerous examples of collaboration across the supply chains. For example, two National Careers Services Supply Chain Partners worked collaboratively, sharing customers and moving them to gain Jobs and Learning Outcomes. A further example was Supply Chain Partners sharing staff to cover absence. Within Building Futures, the key workers have developed close working relationships and become a team, as well as being part of their own organisation. As a result, they share ideas and seek support from each other. In addition, participants are moved to different Supply Chain Partners to ensure participant's needs are addressed appropriately, and the right support provided. (1.4)

Supply Chain Partners confirmed a viable and transparent market share of all contracts was clearly understood and agreed. This means that everyone feels able to realistically achieve the required performance and expectations are clear from contract outset and throughout the life of the contract. Where Supply Chain Partners request a reduction in profile, there are no negative judgements made by Adviza. (2.3 / 3.2)

Extensive upskilling of the key workers has been undertaken to enable them to work with participants with a range of complex needs, for example, autism, mental health, and dyslexia. Supply Chain Partners all enjoy access to the Adviza Moodle virtual learning environment. (5.3)

Business relationships are clear for all Supply Chain Partners, and communications are positive and supportive. Named personnel were cited for quality and compliance. The collaborative approach to working with Supply Chain Partners across performance, compliance and quality appears to be working well and reduces duplication. Some Supply Chain Partner quotes included "*Communication is good, the weekly update ensures access to information in one place*"; "*X and Y are accessible and approachable, and responsive. They come back to you quite quickly*"; and "*I find them to be very open and transparent.*" (6.1 / 6.2)

Fortnightly performance calls, monthly reporting and quarterly formal performance reviews provide the opportunity for Supply Chain Partners to share their issues and challenges of working on the National Careers Service, as well as the identification of good and innovative practice. This demonstrates Adviza's commitment to providing supportive and comprehensive performance management processes. (6.3)

There is a weekly e-newsletter that Supply Chain Partners value as a mechanism for updating on any matters pertaining to the contract or to wider policy and strategy information. The understanding of the information shared or how it has been applied is checked at the fortnightly teleconference calls. This means Adviza is closing the loop on communication in partnership with Supply Chain Partners. (7.1)

Adviza is well connected with various government departments, Local Enterprise Partnerships and leading organisations in the careers sector. As a result, Supply Chain Partners confirm they have prompt and effective access to sector updates, policy feedback and this assists their performance on the contracts. Feedback from external audits is also used to improve supply chain activity. (8.1)

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:

The Adviza Procurement and Commissioning Policy and Procedure includes the mission, vision and values by which Adviza operates as an organisation. Supply Chain Partners often match the values and, as such, this becomes a blueprint for supply chain activity. Adviza could consider how Supply Chain Partners' performance could be judged against these values and also seek feedback on their own performance in line with the stated values. (1.5)

There are some good examples of how Adviza supports Supply Chain Partners to develop. It was suggested that perhaps Adviza could give consideration to a more proactive approach to this with Tier 3 Supply Chain Partners. Some expressed that it would be helpful to capitalise on Adviza's experience. (5.1)

Whilst the YETI Management Information System provides accurate reports, some Supply Chain Partners have noted that the range of reports is quite extensive. The suggestion was made that perhaps there could be a reports folder set up that details the different subgroups of reports for ease of access. (6.4)

There could be more emphasis on communicating the process that will be used to develop both the contract specific and the overarching Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan. Currently Supply Chain Partner connectivity with the process varies, and many are unclear about how they contribute. (6.7)

Whilst much development work has taken place to improve the supply chain position regarding environmental sustainability, including an audit for the Building Futures supply chain, Adviza is further encouraged to replicate this for its other supply activities. One simple and practical step might be to include environmental sustainability in the National Careers Service contract review documentation. (7.4)

Contract closure is outlined at that start of each agreement, however during the lifetime of a contract, it can be readily overlooked. It may be helpful to consider refreshing and reminding Supply Chain Partners about the requirements for closure at certain points in the contract lifecycle, for example, when issuing contract variations. (8.5)

7. 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 that all understand the requirements of the contract and their contributions to achieving the desired outcomes.</p>
<p>Adviza's supply chain design is underpinned by its vision and values, putting customers at the heart of the design and approach. It identifies needs through consideration of national and local labour market information from sources such as Jobcentre Plus and Department for Education Statistical Neighbour data, academic research and local knowledge including that from Local Enterprise Partnerships. In terms of acquiring the new National Careers Service contract, Adviza discussed knowledge of the South West geography as to suitability of new partnerships with the exiting prime contract holder. More generally however once the Senior Leadership Team has approved the pursuit of an opportunity the Re-procurement and Commissioning Policy sets out the process of selection of Supply Chain Partners, as appropriate. It ensures that potential Supply Chain Partners who have sufficient capacity, capability, quality and business standing have a fair opportunity to be selected to deliver the required provision. Adviza also considers previous successful delivery, not just as Supply Chain Partners with Adviza but in projects partnering similar organisations.</p> <p>There is a robust process for supply chain review to ensure the needs of customer and commissioners are met. An example was the Building Futures contract which was awarded the maximum extension by the Big Lottery in terms of time and finance. To maximise this opportunity, discussions took place with Supply Chain Partners to understand their ability to engage key target groups and address their needs. A further example was that the National Careers Service held a new tendering round after 6 months of contract delivery to strengthen the cohort after the needs of the new geographic area were better understood.</p> <p>Adviza fully complies with TUPE regulations and there has been recent experience of staff transferred both into and out of the organisation. The Deputy CEO and Human Resources team are very knowledgeable of TUPE and feedback from staff during the assessment was positive about their respective transfers. An individual spoke of the positive approach from Adviza, effective consultation and communication which resulted in a smooth transition with all resources readily available. The induction to the organisation, including information from the CEO was found to be useful and staff generally very helpful. They commented, <i>"The transition was easy, and everything set up with Adviza, I've now transferred to Adviza's terms and conditions."</i></p>

Performance expectations are clear for all Supply Chain Partners from contract inception and throughout the life of the contract. Each Supply Chain Partner has an agreed and detailed profile and financial value over the lifetime of the contract. This is reviewed at a minimum quarterly interval with each of them. Adviza recognises that output related contracts have some challenges but are realistic and take into account external factors that may negatively impact performance, such as sickness and bad weather. Supply Chain Partners interviewed were very clear about the performance, quality and compliance expectations as a result of explicit conversations upon joining the supply chain. The fortnightly telephone calls prioritise actions to ensure targets are met, which are supported by the monthly management information and quarterly reviews. Comments included, *"Very clear expectations, right from day one"* and *"Regular communications include the expectations of the contract."* One Partner spoke of the contract not performing as expected, however, Adviza has been very supportive. *"The targets and timelines are realistic; we've been able to design the flight path to indicate the action we'll take in a set time to meet the expectations."* The Building Futures supply chain has very clear performance profiles, originally these differed dependent upon the customer group the organisation was working with. However, as all participants are 'hard to reach' it was decided to standardise the profiles; this has remained throughout the extension period. Performance profiles are reviewed throughout the Steering Group meetings, as well as one-to-one performance reviews with the supply chain manager, consequently, Partners clearly understand the expectations.

With larger contracts, Adviza models a range of delivery mechanisms both centrally and with Supply Chain Partners before arriving at the final bid submission. Contracting takes into account the potential risks to Adviza and the Supply Chain Partners and optimises the targets to deliver a realistic income stream agreement. Help and support is provided so that new Supply Chain Partners understand the implications of their promises. Supply Chain Partners are aware that quarterly reviews can raise the possibility of funds being redirected from under to over performers. Adviza routinely checks the resources allocated are sufficient to meet the targets and can be flexible in terms of payment arrangements. For example, one Supply Chain Partner was able to claim funding earlier than originally agreed to help their cash flow.

DO

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

Help and support are routinely provided to many Supply Chain Partners in developing their policies and procedures that support effective supply chain and contract delivery success. Supply Chain Partners have been assisted in increasing claimable activity through Adviza's help with business process development which has resulted in better outcomes for customers and more competent staff. At the start of the Building Futures contract, initial onboarding was undertaken; however, none of the Supply Chain Partners were familiar with contracts that were heavily biased towards quality and compliance. Consequently, throughout the life of the contract, further support has been provided to ensure a clear understanding regarding compliance and the submission of appropriate evidence. Comments from Assessment interviews included, *"We've had ongoing support to address compliance, which has been really helpful and made a difference"* and *"Three weeks ago we had a workshop to address quality elements and already seen an impact."*

There is a positive culture of communications between Adviza and its Supply Chain Partners. Contract management meetings focus on identifying both good practice and supporting the reduction of potential problems. Under delivery or poor quality issues are identified and discussed as early as possible, and support is provided to Supply Chain Partners before any impact on customers or on the overall performance of the contract. Comments from all Tiers of Supply Chain Partners that illustrate the positive culture included:

"Very open to questions and respond promptly."

"Great relationships with X, Y and Z, very supportive."

"Positive, two-way approach."

"Supply Chain Partner manager is very responsive to needs, very good indeed."

"I know the key people to contact, but tend to go through the supply chain manager, she deals with my issues."

"A very fluid relationships, it feels natural just to pick up the phone, and more importantly get a response."

"No one likes to have conversations about performance, but they are open and transparent and understanding."

"Very productive, helpful and supportive."

"Key workers have been upskilled, not just knowledge, but also ability to network."

There is a clear process for performance review through the contract review meetings. These identify both good practice and any potential problems regarding performance. There is a standard template for the meetings which assists Supply Chain Partners in fully understanding their current position. As a result of effective contract support, compliance ratings have improved from 68% in October 2018 to 98% in October 2019. More frequent Supply Chain Partner performance meetings take place if risk ratings highlight a specific problem. A bespoke improvement plan sets out action points to be addressed before the next meeting review. Good practice is also routinely shared.

For example, an adviser produced a useful handout for going through National Careers Service charter which was adopted across the supply chain and a revised Jobs and Learning Outcomes (JLO) declaration with an added box for a tracking number resulted in improved JLO rate. Supply Chain Partners commented that:

"Following the ESFA audit, we received communications and also getting the opportunity to get in the same room as the other providers to review the outcome."

"It is well planned and organised, and as a result the contract has progressed over the year."

"You can discuss issues and challenges with X and Y, and they take note."

"We haven't performed as well as we could have, but they are being really supportive and hand-holding as we go through the process."

"Sharing best practice is good, like undertaking group activities, but ensuring every customer still has an individual action plan."

"We have worked with Partners to analyse the demographics of delivery and identified that X saw 68% women, due to their approach of working in local children's centres and women's group. As a result, this has been shared with X who is now working in children's centres and engaging more females."

"Adviza observe the delivery and give feedback – it's great."

The Management Information (MI) system used in each project varies according to the funding and contractual requirements. All members of the supply chain confirmed they receive timely and accurate MI on performance for themselves and the contracts as a whole. Adviza has recently employed a Head of MI to improved data analysis through the Performance Management Group on National Careers Service (Chaired by Head of Delivery), and Steering group at Building Futures. Monitoring of the take up of the service amongst different groups and the progress they make now takes place. To support these changes and improve responsiveness, the MI team now report directly into delivery staff teams and have also added new fields to the database, e.g. length of time unemployed, to increase the richness of the data analysis. Several Supply Chain Partners spoke of the sharing of the league tables produced by the MI system; providing an element of healthy competition. However, reference was also made to being able to see who is performing well against certain targets and learning how they are achieving the outcome.

Adviza operates to ISO standards and has a quality system which includes the auditing of supply chain processes. It works closely with Supply Chain Partners to support and to measure, monitor and quality assure the work they deliver. A delivery plan clearly sets out how the service will be delivered and incorporates a performance monitoring schedule which includes quality requirements. The Contract Compliance Handbook explains the obligations of each party, the process and format for quality assurance arrangements. Quality assurance includes regular file audits and observations of professional practice. Additionally, customer feedback is sought to assure the quality of supply chain delivery. Many examples of support / training were provided to address concerns about quality and compliance, and within a short period of time improvements gained. The Building Futures supply chain has addressed a number of quality and compliance issues throughout the life of the contract, for example, the accurate completion of timesheets and evidence to be captured. As a result of the work undertaken, there have been improvements in performance.

REVIEW

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

Both Adviza and Supply Chain Partners were able to share numerous examples of how the work they are delivering is having a measurable impact on the commissioners' wider social objectives. This included gaining and sustaining employment, improvements in adult skills and qualifications, unemployment reduction, NEET reduction and impact on attendance, and attitude and behaviour of young people. Case studies also highlight the impact of supply chain delivery on individuals lives such as improving confidence, motivation and job readiness.

Adviza takes staff and employee wellbeing seriously and has a range of policies around this. It has employed apprentices as a role model for Supply Chain Partners to do the same. Community sustainability has been developed through the development of wider partnerships and networks. The activities of Supply Chain Partners are positively impacting in 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. Examples shared included job creation, wealth and financial stability, improved wellbeing and family cohesion. Supply Chain Partner commented included, *"80% of our tenants use the service, it gives us access to labour market information to transition them from training into paid employment"*, *"The project has brought partners together and provided additional opportunities to work in partnership"* and *"Staff have been upskilled throughout the life of the contract and as a result gone onto better things, including promotion."*

8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, Adviza has retained accreditation against the Merlin Standard. The senior management 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: (merlin@assessmentsservices.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.

	
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