



merlin standard

RELATE

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## 1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	INITIAL ASSESSMENT
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	05/02/2022
Assessment Dates	04/02/2020 – 05/02/2020
Lead Assessor's Name	LORNA BAINBRIDGE
Customer ID	C29073
Assessment Reference	PN104678

## 2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

<b>OVERALL OUTCOME</b>	<b>68% Satisfactory</b>
1. Design	77% Good
2. Procure	60% Satisfactory
3. Contract	60% Satisfactory
4. Fund	73% Good
5. Develop	73% Good
6. Performance Manage	69% Satisfactory
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	64% Satisfactory
8. Review and Close	72% Good

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Relate sought to become accredited against the Merlin Standard due to holding a contract with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) pilot programme.

The assessment team comprised of Lorna Bainbridge (Lead Assessor) and Ruth Regan (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within Relate. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in March 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 and present - tier 2, end-to-end service for the RPC, as well as the Federated Centres providing a tier 3, spot purchase service for a range of Benevolent Contracts. There were no potential Supply Chain Partners at the time of the assessment.

In advance of the Assessment, a survey was carried out of the Supply Chain Partners, with all 38 being invited to participate. Responses were received from 23 Supply Chain Partners, which represented 60% 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 1.5 days each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with Relate staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. All (100%) of the tier 2, end-to-end Supply Chain Partners were interviewed. Of the spot purchase, tier 3 Supply Chain Partners, 28% were also interviewed, including two past Supply Chain Partners. This was in line with the published Merlin scoping framework. Interviews were conducted with relevant contacts in each chosen Supply Chain Partner (present and past).

The following report provides an indication of the findings against the criteria within the Merlin Standard, which was evidenced within the supply chains, as well as areas of strength and areas to consider for improvement and development over the forthcoming two years. To provide clarity: tier 2 refers to the end-to-end Supply Chain Partners delivering RPC and will be referred to as Partners. Tier 3 Partners are spot purchase providers for the Benevolent Contracts and will be referred to as Centres throughout this report.

## 4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Relate – *'the Relationship People'* is an organisation of Charitable status, which is governed by a Board of Trustees. It provides relationship support for people of all ages, backgrounds, sexual orientations and gender identities. In 2019 Relate helped over two million people to strengthen their relationship. Whilst funding is gained to deliver services from a range of Commissioners, the bulk of the services are delivered outside of these contracts.

Relate has a Formal Federation Agreement in place with 36 independent Relate Charities, which are Federated Centres. In addition, 16 internal Centres come under the Relate banner. There is Federated Centre representation on the Relate Board and Relate Federation Affairs Committee, and as a result, all deliver in line with the same mission and values. They all work collaboratively to deliver the overarching strategy and services, and influence policy and commissioning.

At the time of the assessment against the Merlin Standard, Relate were gaining funding from the DWP for the Reducing Parental Conflict pilot programme, as well as six benevolent organisations; Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF), Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC), Grocery Aid, Charity for Civil Servants, Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association and the Bank Workers Charity.

Relate are delivering the RPC in the Gateshead Contract Package Area (CPA) which covers Newcastle, Northumberland, Durham, Gateshead, Sunderland, Redcar & Cleveland, South Tyneside, Hartlepool and Stockton on Tees. Direct delivery constitutes 72%, whilst the remaining 28% is via two Supply Chain Partners. The Benevolent Contracts are delivered nationally; 60% through the Federated Centres and Relationship Scotland, and the balance through the internal Centres.

## 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:

There were numerous examples whereby Partners had been consulted and / or had the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the initial and ongoing design of the supply chain and its activities. For example, sharing previous delivery models and being consulted on the Quality Improvement Framework. Whilst some Centres referenced their involvement in designing the invoicing and payment process and Service Level Agreement (SLA). (1.3, 8.1)

The appointment of a Contract Manager for the RPC programme and a National Partnerships Manager for the Benevolent Contracts ensures a Specific Person of Contact (SPOC) for all Partners and Centres, which has proven beneficial. All Partners were aware of their main day-to-day contact and commented on the fact that these individuals were accessible and responsive to their needs. A range of communication channels have been adopted, which support the way the SPOC operates and the approach taken by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). As a result, there is a resounding positiveness regarding open and honest communications, and confidence to have difficult conversations to address the issues and challenges. (6.1, 6.2)

Relate aims to ensure the funding and payment arrangements are fair, proportionate and do not cause undue financial risk. There was evidence of discussions taking place with the Partners to review the finances prior to the award of the RPC contract and subsequently throughout the life of the contract. Similarly, the fees for Centres are closely scrutinised to ensure they cover the cost of the delivery. As a result, the fees per session are reviewed and amended from time-to-time. (4.1)

Support is provided to all Partners and Centres at the point of mobilising a contract to ensure there is a good understanding of the delivery model, systems and processes. Subsequently, throughout the life of the contract Centres spoke of the support and development provided to meet the contractual obligations, for example, branded marketing templates leaflets, posters and banners, the design of a suite of bespoke materials to generate referrals through to access to policies and procedures that can be amended to meet local funding requirements. In addition, reference was made to ongoing learning and development activities, including a broad range of Virtual Learning Tutorials, access to workshops, meetings and the annual conference, as well as online / face-to-face supervision and training activities for clinicians. (5.1, 5.3)

Equality and diversity are promoted across the supply chains. Partners and Centres collect, analyse and use the data to inform improvements throughout the life of the contract. A number of examples were provided whereby changes had been made to promoting the service to attract hard-to-reach and disadvantaged customer groups. (8.4)

## 6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

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:

Partners clearly understand their allocation of market share, which is based on geographical location. However, there was a lack of awareness of the market share delivered by Relate or the other Partners within the supply chain. Consequently, to further promote a culture of transparency, consideration could be made to communicating the breakdown of the market share. (2.3)

Currently, the Centres are advised of the contractual requirements / outcomes via the distribution of an Information Sheet with links to key information pertaining to the funder and contract. A SLA is in the process of being designed and as a result, Relate are encouraged to consistently adopt this approach for National contracts to ensure there is a clear understanding of the requirements. (3.1)

The performance management activities for Partners is proportionate to the volumes and value of current contract levels. Whilst reference was made to discussing the issues and concerns of the contract, there had been limited innovation identified and recognised. As a result, consideration could be made to promoting more significant innovation, which can then be shared across the supply chain between direct delivery and Partners. (6.3, 6.6)

A number of Centres utilise 'Penelope'; a CRM system to capture information and manage performance, which is a centrally managed, and as a result, Relate has an overview of performance on a daily basis. However, there continue to be several Centres that opt to use paper-based spreadsheets; consequently performance management is limited, and these Partners fail to recognise how Relate is using the information. Consideration could be made to promoting the benefits of Penelope to these Centres and how the Management Information (MI) will then be more readily available and accessible to both parties. (6.4)

Relate have a range of approaches to monitor the quality of delivery and the customer experience for the Benevolent Contracts. However, Centres fail to recognise the compliance and quality of service activities and the value these bring to both themselves, Relate and the funder. Consequently, consideration could be made to educating Centres regarding the activities undertaken to monitor the quality of delivery and how these contribute to ensuring contract compliance. (7.2)

Partners experienced a level of due diligence prior to entering the RPC programme, which included a review of finances, policies and procedures. In the future, a far more robust approach to ensuring Partners are working in line with the policies and procedures could be considered, for example, a review of incidents during performance management activities. In addition, consideration could be made to a formal review of all policies and procedures, including a plan for environmental sustainability to demonstrate these reflect legislative and regulatory updates, and are in line with the commissioner's requirements. (7.4, 2.1)

## 7. AREAS REQUIRING SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT

The following areas were identified as needing improvement as there was limited or insufficient evidence found during the assessment (a score of less than 3). The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

A Quality Improvement Framework has been designed in consultation with the Partners, which indicates the process to be undertaken to complete a Self-Assessment Review (SAR), resulting in a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Relate are encouraged to implement the plan for the RPC programme, and also consider a similar activity for the Benevolent Contracts. This will provide the respective supply chains with a clear indication of the areas for improvement and measurement for a given period of time. (6.7)

## 8. FINDINGS

### PRINCIPLE 1: Design

Historically, Relate has bid for contracts as a National provider based on the skills set within the organisation, as opposed to a Prime provider utilising Supply Chain Partners as part of the delivery model. Relate entered into formal contract bidding for the first time as a Prime for the RPC pilot programme. Every effort was made to gain a good understanding of the commissioner's aims and objectives and expected outcomes. In addition, extensive research was undertaken into the four Lots (locations) to fully understand the demographics of the respective area and to forge relationships with local providers.

In order to meet the commissioner's requirements, Relate recognised that a supply chain was required to deliver the RPC programme, consequently, the opportunity was promoted and subsequently seven potential Partners were engaged. All seven potential Supply Chain Partners were named in the bid, however, due to various reasons, including the viability of the contract, five opted not to progress the opportunity.

The current supply chain is made up of direct delivery and two Partners; one Partner delivers the full range of interventions in Tees Valley whilst the other delivers one intervention – Incredible Years (IY) in Newcastle and Northumberland. Currently, due to the geographical spread, the supply chain is deemed fit for purpose, and the respective organisations, whilst both being from the charity sector are equipped with the skills to deliver the services expected.

Relate have an Engagement Plan which outlines a range of activities whereby its services are promoted, and this indicates the plans to widen engagement with different sectors. This includes actions to target statutory and voluntary organisations who can reach those with additional and complex needs or who have chaotic lives. For example, Probation Services, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) through to organisations such as Streetwise and schools, to mention a few. This provides a wrap-around service for relationships to become established and built upon. As a result, Partners and Centres are actively encouraged to work with wider networks to support the delivery of the services. Currently, Partners are contributing to the development of the North East Directory and identifying organisations in sectors such as debt and financial advice, legal and advocacy services, mental health support, drug and alcohol misuse, plus others. The directory was referred to as 'work in progress' as organisations and agencies are identified and added on an ongoing basis to ensure it is current and accurate.

Centres are encouraged to work collaboratively and in partnership with a wide range of organisations and agencies to gain referrals and meet the changing needs of customers at a local level. In addition, national partnerships have been developed and maintained, for example, Health Education England (HEE); to support the Federated Centres to access training to deliver the Increasing Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT). Partner / Centre comments included:

*"We have a network of partners beyond the Relate work which can be utilised if what the client needs isn't what we have to offer."*

*"Local knowledge used to establish relationships."*

*"Initial assessment will identify if we can or cannot help the client. If not, then they can be signposted to particular support required such as the local addictions service."*

Consultation takes place throughout the life of the contract; a Partner spoke of sharing previous delivery models and their knowledge and experience of working with families and the support required to provide a holistic service. Subsequently, ongoing consultation has taken place in relation to the flexibility of the programme, events for sharing practices, quality improvement planning, as well as the Customer Service Standards and ways of working.

The Centres spoke of the ongoing consultation in relation to systems and process, as well as timelines and costings. Specific reference was made to their recent engagement in the design of an SLA and the review of policies and procedures, which was valued by a number of Centres. Partner / Centre comments included:

*"We very much work in a relationship, consultative way – we have mutual respect and value each other's background, culture and expertise."*

*"They consult a lot – they ask for our views on things – they will ask us what we think about new ways of working."*

Relate works closely with the RPC supply chain to improve referral rates to the IY programme and improve retention through the development of a wrap-around model. The range of meetings, including one-to-ones and with the supply chain provide platforms whereby collaborative working starts. The supply chain works together to identify and access other funding and resources required to contribute to the delivery of the programme, for example, funding to pay for playworkers to enable the programme to run over school holidays.

Relate hosts a range of meetings for the Centres which encourage collaborative working, as well as the sharing of ideas and practices, for example, quarterly meetings with the CEO, an annual conference, etc. Reference was made to sharing ideas for training, funding and engaging staff to contribute to remaining viable Centres. Centre comments included:

*"Real culture of sharing and collaborating – policies, ideas, etc – someone will help if you need resources or support."*

*"We have a very collaborative and positive relationship with Relate National."*

*"We share staff and training opportunities."*

*"Worked together with Centres on two bids in the past."*

Whilst the vision and mission of Relate had been shared with Partners, and there were common threads between Relate and the Partners, recently the RPC supply chain met and spent time establishing a core set of values and principles that will be used as a base to operate. There is intent to review and measure performance against these throughout the life of the contract. One Partner confirmed that there was an interesting conversation around the values and principles and felt the outcome was positive and reflected the way of working to date.

The Centres sign a Federation Agreement which outlines the mission and values that are to be adopted across the organisation. Centres were aware of the mission and values and confirmed that this was an adopted way of working.

Currently, the supply chain is viewed fit for purpose, whilst referral rates are low for one Partner there is a focus on *'fixing it – making it work'*, as consideration is being made to different promotional approaches. Relate has started to develop a contingency plan to be executed in the event of a Partner leaving the supply chain.

## PRINCIPLE 2: Procure

As previously stated, this was the first formal opportunity whereby Relate had opted to bid as a Prime and design a supply chain to meet the commissioner's needs. It worked closely with each potential Partner organisation through face-to-face, email and telephone conversations to establish the offer and location of delivery. Consideration was also taken to DWP requirements as they engaged with the different Partners.

The two Partners worked through procurement and due diligence, providing information as requested by Relate; financials and insurance, as well as some policies and procedures. Subsequently, Relate requested additional information, for example, equality and diversity and sustainable development plans, in line with DWP requirements. Relate has learnt from this initial procurement experience and designed a Supply Chain Management Framework (SCMF), which will be adopted when procuring contracts of this nature in the future.

Over the past twelve months, there has been no requirement for TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) across the supply chain or the Centres. The TUPE policy and process is reviewed and was, at the time of this initial assessment, being thoroughly updated to ensure it reflects legislative requirements. Staff spoke of Centre Managers being informed of key aspects of the policy and process, and their role in ensuring staff know which contracts they deliver. This is critical in the event of TUPE to be able to determine who is eligible for a transfer.

The rationale for the market share of the RPC contract was based on location and anticipated referrals / volumes. Partners were aware of their geographical area and that this represented the market share. One Partner comment included:  
*"I know we have 25%, but I don't know the others."*

Partners were aware that the programme was based on referrals from the Local Authority from the outset, and whilst there were indicative volumes, there was no guarantee. At the start, Relate worked with both Partners to review numbers, funding and finance arrangements, as well as performance expectations throughout the programme to ensure it was financially viable. Subsequently, similar discussions continue to take place due to the low referral rates for the interventions.

### PRINCIPLE 3: Contract

Relate flowed down the DWP contract to the tier 2 Partners through an initial draft contract which enabled them to gain an understanding of the expectations and requirements of the contract, prior to the formal contracting activity. Formal contracts were released and Partners gained legal advice and subsequently returned to Relate to challenge the requirements and gain clarifications of 'what this meant in practice'. Negotiations ensued with Relate making appropriate alterations to the contract to ensure it was fit for purpose for all stakeholders; Partner, Relate and DWP.

Centres have a Federation Agreement in place to outline the terms of conditions of the working arrangements. An Information Sheet is released for all Benevolent Contracts to provide a clear indication of the contract requirements and outcomes.

Throughout procurement and contracting activities, Partners gained a clear understanding of the performance expectations of the contract and how these could be achieved. Ongoing discussions with Partners review the expectations and seek to identify different approaches to gain referrals and achieve the commissioner's requirements. The Customer Service Standards form part of the performance expectations, which were clearly understood by Partners due to the ongoing review.

The Information Sheet indicates to the Centres the overarching purpose, objectives and outcomes of a specific Benevolent Contract. As a result there is clarity in relation to the expectations of the funder.

Partners and Centres referenced appeals / complaints procedures; however, open and honest discussions were viewed as the most appropriate approaches to deal with any potential dispute, of any nature. One Partner comment included:

*"In the contract, but prefer to talk to stop any disputes before they happen."*

## PRINCIPLE 4: Funding

Partners understood the funding and payment arrangements and confirmed that they were aware of the service fee and outcome payments, as well as the financial risk. Reference was made to ongoing financial modelling and ways of working to ensure the contract remains viable in the long term. One Partner comment included:

*"Relate could have just said that we signed the contract and leave us to it – but they are working hard with us to improve the situation."*

Centres spoke of the session fees and that every effort was made to ensure these were fair. One Centre referred to a contract paying less than their usual hourly rate, and after raising this with Relate (National), the hourly rate was renegotiated and increased.

Partners and Centres confidently explained the methods used to raise invoices in order to receive payment for the service / outcome achieved. Subsequently, a majority of Partners and Centres confirmed that they received payments, which were within the agreed timeframe and accurate. Partner / Centre comments included:

*"Service charge paid each month on time – no issues."*

*"We raise an invoice, and they pay on time – very smooth."*

*"Paid on time for the last two years."*

Partners recognise that there is no direct management fee; however, they do contribute to the overhead costs, indirectly. Reference was made to contract management, a range of support and administrative functions received from Relate, and consequently, understand the rationale of such a charge.

## PRINCIPLE 5: Develop

Partners spoke positively regarding the mobilisation of the RPC contract and the support available to prepare staff to start to deliver the service. Centres referenced a broad range of resources provided to enable them to meet the contractual terms and conditions, for example, media templates, PRINKK: branded marketing templates, the design of a suite of bespoke materials, including leaflets and videos using the correct terminology, etc. In addition, Relate Extra (intranet) is accessible. It hosts policies and procedures for health and safety, safeguarding, etc, as well as manuals and guidelines to enable effective use of the CRM (Penelope). Centre comments included:

*"Relate centrally has a coms team which help with our Brand. They send example press releases, templates for us to use."*

*"We get a range of resources to help the Centre to deliver the contract."*

*"Relate National is really helpful. If we are struggling as a Centre, we just have to ask."*

New contract opportunities are shared through a newsletter, corporate news and / or an email. In addition, Centres are encouraged to seek and access local funding, which subsequently, may escalate to being a National contract. Partner / Centre comments included:

*"Having the opportunity to obtain funding outside of the Relate network is vital to the service in terms of funding and survival. People cannot fund themselves as our minimum charge is £50, so additional funding helps to cover the shortfall in fees."*

*"Our experience of new contracts coming through is a news flash and being asked then to let National Relate know if we want to be involved in the delivery."*

Relate actively promotes and facilitates a range of learning and development activities for staff across the supply chain, from induction for new recruits to ongoing tutorials via the Virtual Learning platform. These tutorials include mandatory activities relating to policies, as well as system training (Penelope) and working with clients. In addition, regular Partner meetings are hosted to share information and best practices, as well as a range of workshops and an annual conference. On occasions, webinars are hosted to address key topics, for example, a change in the way of working.

Supervision is accessible for Centre staff through online or face-to-face methods, and as required, training is hosted for the clinicians. One Centre manager explained that a member of staff had also had the opportunity to be trained to deliver the IY programme. Centre comments included:

*"There are online tutorials on a virtual learning platform – or if we have a particular question we can just ask Relate National for help – it's clear who does what so you can contact them direct."*

*"The VLE is great. It provides a broad range of topics from mandatory, systems and processes to effective ways of working with clients."*

*"I know that equality and diversity and domestic violence is planned for the future."*

## PRINCIPLE 6: Performance Manage

Partners and Centres confirmed that the business relationships were clear and there was a conduit to facilitate two-way communications. A range of communication channels are adopted, for example, the monthly newsletter referred to as 'Connected', corporate news, federations news and clinical news. All have a specific target audience to relay appropriate information and updates. Partner and network meetings, one-to-one performance reviews and the annual conference further contributed to providing information and sharing updates. In addition, reference was made to emails, formal and informal conversations to address performance, including issues and challenges. Partner / Centre comments included:

*"Communications are reasonable – can always ask for support and know who to contact."*

*"Much improved – X is leading, and she is supported by a strong administrator."*

*"X is always accessible and responsive, if she isn't her administrator is available."*

Similarly, Partners confirmed that communication was open and honest, and they felt confident to 'bring anything to the table'. There was a consensus that Relate staff were positive and supportive and worked in partnership to achieve the stated outcomes. Partner / Centre comments included:

*"CEO is all about being open and honest, and this is now reflected in our communication styles. He will attend meetings and front events with partners – and staff are following his lead."*

*"Very supported network to work in – the communication and openness of approach with each other makes it a good place to work."*

*"Centre manager meeting held in Doncaster – but cannot always attend them. But the minutes will be sent with the agenda for the next meeting."*

*"Meetings are a forum for managers to raise any issues and get their views heard."*

*"We have three or four meetings a year for Centre Managers which are now national and move around the country, so helps people attend. Also people can join in remotely."*

Performance management activities with Partners encourage open and honest, two-way dialogue whereby challenges, issues and concerns are raised. Partners confirmed that the interaction in terms of performance management with Relate was proportionate to the current performance of the contract. Partner comments included:

*"Real openness to sharing challenges and issues which comes from the culture set by the CEO."*

*"Swim lanes in place – what we need to produce is clear, and all timescales are documented etc., so we know how our performance will be managed - when we have sufficient parents on programme."*

Centre Managers spoke of the red, amber, green (RAG) rating of their respective Centre, as well as performance being managed through the CRM system. However, this was not consistently recognised as performance management against the contracts being delivered. The National Partnerships Manager referred to plans to formally review performance of the Centres against the requirements of the contracts, and this was echoed by some Centres. As a result, this is actively encouraged. Centre comments included:

*"Performance management is online via CRM – Relate National can see what we are doing and what time we are taking to complete."*

*"Going forward, performance management needs to be proportionate for the level of activity undertaken."*

Partners explained that MI was limited to date due to the low referrals; however, a simple spreadsheet provides key performance indicator data on a monthly basis. Reference was made to information such as; breakdown of referral data by Local Authority Area, breakdown of allocation of referrals by provider, starts by intervention and provider and leavers by intervention and provider. The information is evaluated to establish progress and patterns; for example, the 'moderate' cohort have a significantly higher 'do not start rate than the 'high' referrals.

A number of Centres utilise Penelope, whereby the 'Jasper' element of the CRM provides a range of MI. This enables Centres to analyse performance and if appropriate, generate more in-depth data. There was evidence of some Centres still using manual spreadsheets to manage performance. One Centre comment included:

*"Data from Jasper is used to manage the centre in terms of looking at appointments booked vs. counsellors available etc. Very helpful to forward plan to ensure commitments can be met."*

The Contract Manager for the RPC programme explained the relationship with the Partners was one of encouragement and support. Whilst the MI is utilised to measure performance, the approach adopted is collaborative - working together to find solutions. Partner meetings provide the opportunity to identify what is working and what is failing to work, and any appropriate learning or solutions to be shared and implemented.

The Centre Managers' meeting provides a platform for the sharing of information, ideas for new funding, performance achievements, as well as sharing practices. It is appreciated that all Centres have different demographics and as a result perform well in some contracts, for example, those near an army or naval base, as opposed to those in more remote areas. However, the sharing opportunities present ideas and different ways of working within Centres.

Senior Practice Consultants identify cases of practice which they can share and use to provide advice to clinical staff. Similarly, the findings from supervision are shared as case studies / scenarios at meetings – all aimed at helping others' to develop their practice and help with the increased challenges faced by clients with mental health issues.

At the time of this initial assessment, Relate was in the early stages of establishing a process to undertake a self-assessment and develop a QIP. Consequently, Relate are encouraged to progress the plans as intended.

## PRINCIPLE 7: Quality Assurance and Compliance

The respective supply chains are updated with legislative and regulatory requirements, as well as policy and strategy information through the vast array of communications: newsletters, meetings and Relate Extra. Where action is required by the Partner / Centre, this is followed up to ensure understanding and implementation.

The compliance requirements for the RPC programme include file audits and measures against key Customer Service Standards. Based on current volumes this is deemed to be proportionate and not overly burdensome to the Partner. In addition, peer mentoring / coaching and supervision support ensure the quality of the service being delivered.

Within the Centres, file audits are undertaken on a monthly basis and 100% of closed cases are audited. The quality of the service delivery is reviewed through the Supervision Framework; clinicians receive six weekly supervision whereby sessions are observed and / or recorded and subsequently reviewed and discussed. Reference was also made to regular supervision groups to share best practice, for example, review a case and the group shares how this would be handled. Centre comments included:

*"File checks on Penelope is the main activity to check we're doing things right."*

*"We sign up to a way of working with clients which is part of the contract and will be in SLA."*

Partners and Centres spoke positively regarding the information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided at the start of, and throughout the life of the respective contract. Centres referenced Relate Extra whereby they can access a range of documents: policies and procedures, templates and guidelines. These are all dated, and as a result, there is confidence that the information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided is current.

Partners confirmed having current policies and procedures relating to health and safety and safeguarding. There is a requirement that all delivery staff are DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked. In addition, to comply with DWP requirements Partners hold Cyber Essentials accreditation, as a minimum and have a GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) policy. An equality and diversity and an environmental sustainability plan have also been submitted by the Partners, following the request from Relate.

The Centres operate in line with the Relate policies and procedures, however, these can be tailored, if required, to meet local funders needs. Centres are responsible for the development and update of risk assessments, including the personal safety of staff whereby home visits are undertaken in pairs. Once again, staff have to be DBS checked, and there is restricted access to Penelope and confidentiality boundaries are in place.

Relate are aware of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the implications, and use safe recruitment processes in order to work within the legal requirements. The intention is that the Adults at Risk policy will incorporate Modern Slavery requirements, as this policy is developed. Similarly, Partners were aware of the Act and had a policy. One Partner comment included:

*"We have our own policy in place and Relate have a copy."*

## PRINCIPLE 8: Review and Close

Partners confirmed that Relate is receptive to formal and informal feedback, and subsequently, responds positively. For example, feedback relating to the contract and DWP requirements pertaining to the referrals. Similar meetings have been hosted in conjunction with the Local Authority, whereby feedback in relation to referrals was gained. As a result, Relate met with DWP to gain more flexibility regarding the referral routes.

A Federation wide survey took place in 2019 to establish what services provided Nationally were valued by the Centres, and this resulted in a positive outcome. In addition, client evaluations are undertaken through a post counselling questionnaire, which has provided valuable insight in the past in relation to the client journey. Centre comments included:

*"Semi-structured interviews are undertaken with clients to get their feedback and we turn them into case studies which we share with Stakeholders."*

*"At the end of each 'case' the client provides feedback which is shared with the counsellor and their supervisor – if there are issues raised these will be picked up and actioned through supervision."*

Centre managers confirmed that they are confident to provide feedback to the CEO and National Partnerships Manager through the range of meetings and believe that it is well received.

Relate assesses how the activities of the supply chains have a measurable impact on the wider social objectives and / or policy intent of the commissioner. For example, a three-year Impact Report for a MacMillan project provided a range of statistical data indicating the impact on individuals and families, as well as commissioner. An annual report is prepared for the six Benevolent Contracts, once again demonstrating the impact through statistical data, as well as the difference made to individuals, families and communities. Some examples gained from Partners / Centres included: children being taken off the child protection register, families staying together when at risk, reduced offending, to mention a few. Partner comments included:

*"What legacy can we leave is the important part of the pilot."*

*"DWP evaluation will be published after the funding ends – but we need to start on an interim evaluation and pull together the case studies and use focus groups."*

The annual reports prepared for the different funders provide an indication of the number of individuals supported and the difference the service provided through the statistical data. For example, seven out of eight started the programme with psychological stress, and upon measuring at the close seven out of eight were healthy and free of psychological stress.

Partners / Centres are encouraged to identify and submit case studies demonstrating the impact of the service on customer's lives, which clearly indicated the difference made to individuals and their families. Some examples gained from Partners / Centres included: reduced stress and anxiety, increased confidence, a better relationship with spouse, improved relationship with wider family members, ability to attend and communicate with children's school. Other examples included: mental health benefits, abilities to get a job, and improved children's wellbeing and success in school.

Partner / Centre comments included:

*"Young people and parents being helped to see things differently and deal with challenges."*

*"It's about making practical differences to people's lives."*

*"We make a real difference to people's lives."*

Partners / Centres collect data in relation to equality and diversity and subsequently analyse and use the information to inform changes and make improvements. As a result, this has identified under-represented groups, which has provided alternative approaches to gaining referrals. Partner / Centre comments included:

*"We were attracting heterosexual couples, white British, very few Eastern European and white Asian, so we started to work with organisations and agencies that work with BAME."*

*"We are looking at this more now – working with the Gateway to look at how we can widen the range of parents who come forward – looking at the information we use to promote the programme to try, for example, reach parents who adopted their children. We also want to target minority groups."*

*"We identified that as a region at least half of the service users were children, as a result, we looked at a contract with Children in Need."*

*"Tricky – what we are asked to collect for National Relate is a bit intrusive i.e. asking about finances and benefits – also religion and sexuality, but if they refuse then that's fine, but it is standard practice to ask these questions. Data input into the National Relate IT system is used to lobby government and influence services provision, but also used locally to share with local funders – LGBT figures, etc. so they can help funding."*

The contract for the RPC programme outlines the requirements for the exit process. In addition, the SCMF will incorporate the approach to handle the end of a relationship for different reasons. At this stage, Partners confirmed that they believe Relate would take the necessary steps to close the contract in line with the commissioner's requirements. In terms of the current DWP contract Relate have already indicated that they will start preparing for the exit process in November 2020 as the contract closes in July 2021.

The relationship with the Centres would only end if the Centre became disaffiliated, ceased trading or merged with another Centre or the National organisation. In these cases the process is clearly documented in the Federation Agreement. In the event of a Benevolent Contract coming to a close, guidelines would be prepared and distributed to those Centres delivering the service. In any event, as is common practice, all cases would go through a 100% audit and documentation stored or destroyed in line with the funders requirements.

## 9. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, this assessment provided the opportunity to review the practices of Relate against the Merlin Standard for the Reducing Parental Conflict and National Benevolent Funded Contracts.

Relate may consider undertaking a health check in February 2021 whereby an Assessor could review actions taken throughout the year to establish the impact on the supply chain. This may also provide an indication of how embedded the practices have become. Alternatively, the Organisation could come forward for an accreditation review at any stage throughout the following two years.

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 Relate 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](mailto: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](mailto: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.

## ASSESSMENT SERVICES



PO Box 14,  
Grantham,  
Lincolnshire NG31 0EL

T: 0044 (0) 2038805059

E: [merlin@assessmentservices.com](mailto:merlin@assessmentservices.com)

[https://twitter.com/merlin\\_standard](https://twitter.com/merlin_standard)