



merlin standard

SEETEC PLUS LTD

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1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	INITIAL ASSESSMENT
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	23/01/2022
Assessment Dates	20/01/2020 – 23/01/2020
Lead Assessor's Name	LORNA BAINBRIDGE
Customer ID	C23375
Assessment Reference	PN104695

2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

OVERALL OUTCOME	81% Good
1. Design	80% Good
2. Procure	95% Excellent
3. Contract	90% Excellent
4. Fund	80% Good
5. Develop	73% Good
6. Performance Manage	77% Good
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	72% Good
8. Review and Close	80% Good

3. METHODOLOGY

Seetec Pluss Ltd (referred to as Seetec Pluss or the Organisation throughout the report) is mandated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be assessed and subsequently accredited against the Merlin Standard. The organisation is a delivery Partner (Prime) for the Work and Health Programme. This is the only contract within Seetec Pluss and as a result, this was the full extent of the scope for this assessment.

The assessment team comprised of Lorna Bainbridge (Lead Assessor) and Susan Smith (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within Seetec Pluss. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in September 2019 to establish the scope and discuss the logistics of the assessment. The dates for the on-site evidence gathering activity were identified, and a plan of action agreed.

A booking form was submitted to Assessment Services Limited along with a spread-sheet indicating a full list of Supply Chain Partners (referred to as Core Delivery Partners (CDPs) throughout the report). The CDPs listed included tiers 2 and 3, current and past, there were no potential CDPs.

The Lead Assessor liaised with the coordinator prior to the on-site evidence gathering activity to review the schedule and logistics. All documentation required for the assessment; Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and 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 2.5 days each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with Seetec Pluss staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. In addition, 100% of the tier 2 Partners and 16 tier 3 specialist providers across the Work and Health Programme were interviewed.

The following report provides an indication of the findings against all the criteria within the Merlin Standard, as well as areas of strength and areas to consider for development over the forthcoming two-years.

4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Seetec Pluss Ltd was formed in June 2019 following the integration of Pluss Organisation CIC (Community Interest Company) to the Seetec Group, which formed Seetec Pluss; Seetec's Employability and Health pillar. The Organisation currently supports over 5000 people per year to move into employment by providing a range of employability and health services. It provides services to customers furthest away from the labour market and offers specialist employment support to individuals with a range of learning disabilities, mental health issues, physical disabilities and long-term health conditions.

The Organisation's mission is *'to inspire and empower people in work, life and wellbeing'*. It has a vision to *'enable people, businesses and communities to thrive, through high quality collaborative and customer-focussed employability and wellbeing services'*. These are underpinned by the core values: Adding Value, Respect, Transformative and Aspirational.

Pluss Organisation CIC had a proven track record spanning over forty-five years, delivering a range of national and locally procured employment programmes on behalf of DWP, European Social Funding (ESF), National Lottery Community Funding, Local Authorities (LAs) and the National Health Service (NHS).

Historically, Seetec Pluss has operated in locations throughout South West England and West Yorkshire and has been a Prime provider for the Work Choice Programme and Work and Health Programme both funded by DWP, Building Better Opportunities (BBO) funded by Big Lottery and ESF and the Right Steps to Work ESF1420 (DWP).

At the time of this initial assessment, Seetec Pluss were delivering the Work and Health Programme for Contract Package Area (CPA) 4 (Southern). 67% was through Direct Delivery and 33% by tier 2, end-to-end CDPs. Tier 3 organisations were providing specialist interventions which are co-ordinated through an online Interventions Framework; this is used both internally and by the tier 2 CDPs. Seetec Pluss also deliver the Work and Health Programme as a sub-contractor to Ingeus in the North West and Greater Manchester areas.

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:

Seetec Pluss engages with organisations from the different sectors; public, private and third, which include charitable, social enterprise and community interest companies. These include large corporates, small and medium enterprises, as well as sole traders. The Intervention Framework consists of tier 3 specialist providers of varying sizes operating at local, regional and national levels to address the diverse needs of customers. CDPs confirmed that there was the right mix of organisations within the Work and Health Programme supply chain to deliver the end-to-end service, which encouraged healthy competition and opportunities to work together. (1.1)

A robust strategy to address Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE), for those employees transferring in or out of Seetec Pluss has been designed. The aim is to work in partnership with the CDP to ensure a positive experience for the employee and minimal disruption to the provision of the service to the customers. Seetec Pluss has successfully implemented the TUPE strategy on a number of occasions and very recently transferred several staff from a tier 2 CDP that closed. Staff who had recently transferred into Seetec Pluss spoke of regular communications throughout the process, the opportunity to seek clarification and most importantly having the resources to deliver the service to customers from the first day at Seetec Pluss. (2.2)

CDPs had clarity regarding the allocation of market share and were aware that this linked to the geographical area and size of the Local Enterprise Partners (LEPs). It was recognised that the geographical base is to ensure the geographical coverage of the contract, to meet the commissioner's requirements and to provide customers with ease of access to the service. Information relating to the market share is shared with CDPs on a monthly basis, resulting in a good understanding of the breakdown. (2.3)

Seetec Pluss actively reviews the performance and forecasts with the CDPs on a monthly basis, and as a result flight path targets have been updated to reflect these discussions. CDPs explained that they are confident to open up further discussions / negotiations in relation to their flight path targets to reflect anticipated performance. (2.4)

CDPs explained that the performance expectations were clear at the point of go-live, and subsequently Seetec Pluss was explicit and provided further clarification when the contract was novated. Ongoing daily and weekly dialogue is aligned to performance expectations, as well as the monthly and quarterly performance reviews. The development of the Client Management System (CMS) and Management Information (MI) provides CDPs with an indication of the expectations and actual performance against flight path targets and tender Customer Service Standards (tCSS). (3.2)

CDPs confirmed that they entered into the Work and Health Programme clearly understanding the funding and payment arrangements, for example, Payment by Results. Seetec Pluss make every effort to ensure CDPs do not experience undue financial risk and as a result, have changed the payment arrangements to support cash flow for two CDPs. As a result, one-off payments have been made, and payments have been made within seven days as opposed to 30 days, as outlined in the terms and conditions. (4.1)

Seetec Pluss reviewed the structure of the business and the roles and responsibilities of key positions following the merger, which resulted in the recruitment of new employees to fulfil specific functions. CDPs referred to changes in personnel, which has resulted in substantial improvements to communication. They confirmed that communication is frequent, two-way, open, honest and without unreasonable constraint. The interactions between the Organisation's and CDP's staff is positive and supportive, with individuals being accessible and responsive and *'keen to work in partnership, as one team'*. (6.2)

The CDPs spoke of the improved support; information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided to enable them to address a range of performance issues and challenges with the Work and Health Programme. They believe it is a true partnership with Seetec Pluss recognising that their success is reliant on their contribution and as a result, they listen and support with the aim of improving performance and the working relationship. (7.3)

Seetec Pluss seek feedback from different stakeholders, for example, DWP, CDPs, Job Centres, LEPs, as well as external audits and assessments. CDPs made reference to surveys and feedback encouraged throughout the quarterly CDP meetings, as well as weekly, monthly and quarterly formal activities and daily informal discussions. CDPs confirmed that they feel their views and opinions are valued as action has been taken as a result, for example, improvements to MI and raising issues with DWP whereby changes have been made. (8.1)

Equality and diversity across the supply chain is actively promoted and monitored with examples of organisations working towards Disability Confident status, and events focussing on disabilities. The data relating to equality and diversity is collected by the CDPs and subsequently analysed and utilised to make improvements to the service provided to specific customer groups. CDPs spoke of the data informing peer support networks, activities specifically for females, lone parents and those over 50. (8.4)

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:

Seetec Pluss have started to review the Intervention Framework to ensure the tier 3 specialist providers are fit for purpose and support the Work and Health Programme. This is being undertaken in consultation with the CDPs to ensure the needs of the customer are being met, and the services required are accessible at a local level. Whilst changes have taken place within the supply chain, which has reduced the number of CDPs and increased the Direct Delivery, this was not by design. Although the changes were managed successfully, Seetec Pluss are encouraged to continue their plans to develop future contingencies in the event of another CDP opting to exit the supply chain. (1.6)

The Intervention Framework provides the platform for tier 3 specialist providers to promote their services to enable them to evolve and build capacity. Whilst some Partners spoke of a positive impact recently, this was not a consistent message. The review of the Framework is welcomed by tier 3 specialist providers, and as a result, Seetec Pluss are encouraged to continue the work and develop a strategy to continually refresh the services available through this platform. (5.2)

A Performance Management Framework (PMF) was designed to provide a robust approach to managing the performance of the CDPs to address poor performance at the time of the merger. The weekly, monthly and quarterly performance reviews are making a difference, and CDPs spoke of the supportive approach and opportunities to identify, share and monitor best practice. This is actively encouraged to embed the process across the supply chain to have a lasting impact on performance. There was limited evidence of tier 3 specialist providers experiencing any form of performance management; however, a few spoke of performance review dates in the future with the Intervention Coordinator. Consequently, consideration could be made to designing a performance review structure for these providers to ensure the service being delivered is meeting the aims and objectives, and gaining the outcomes required by the customers. (6.3, 6.6)

Policies, processes and activities to monitor the quality of delivery and the customer experience have been implemented throughout the life of the contract. The performance of CDPs in relation to quality and compliance is now available through the MI and as a result they have clarity regarding the expectations and measures. The Assurance Framework has recently been created and is due to be shared with the CDPs, which will contribute to embedding the quality and compliance activities. In the future, consideration could be made to designing an approach to assuring the delivery of the services provided by tier 3 specialist providers to ensure these meet the contractual requirements. (7.2)

Prior to the contract start, Pluss Organisation CIC undertook due diligence of all Partners, and subsequently, annual due diligence has been undertaken with the CDPs. The Delivery Partner Systems Questionnaire (DPSQ) complemented by site visits will further strengthen Seetec Pluss' approach to ensuring the CDPs have appropriate policies and procedures that are implemented effectively. Similarly, throughout the review of the Intervention Framework, a level of due diligence is taking place for tier 3 specialist providers. In the future, consideration could be made to designing a clear process to ensure the relevant policies and procedures of the tier 3 specialist providers are current and meet requirements throughout the relationship. (7.4, 7.5)

The Organisation has successfully exited two CDPs following notice to terminate the contract (by the CDP). A comprehensive plan was designed and implemented in consultation with key personnel within the Partner Organisations. Whilst the Work and Health Programme continues, the current CDPs were unaware of expectations / requirements as this contract draws to a close. Consequently, consideration could be made to ensuring an exit plan is designed and communicated to provide an overview of the approach to be taken by Seetec Pluss and CDPs at this stage. (8.5)

7. FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 1: Design

Seetec Pluss gained a supply chain that was fully operational when Pluss Organisation CIC merged with Seetec. It was made up of a range of organisations; tier 2 CDPs and tier 3 specialist providers from the different sectors, sizes and legal entity. There are a broad range of tier 3 specialist providers, for example, colleges using the Adult Education Budget (AEB), organisations using funding for delivering a mental wellbeing course, charities offering counselling, arts and music therapy, plus many others. The current review of the Intervention Framework (a platform designed to provide CDPs with access to specialist partners) aims to identify additional organisations that are locally, regionally and nationally based to ensure the customer needs and commissioner expectations continue to be met. Once again, organisations from different sectors, of varying sizes and legal entity are being considered. CDP comments included:

"Originally Pluss CIC did all the design work and prep in CPA4, so this is what Seetec Pluss have taken over / merged with."

"We are aware that Seetec Pluss are undertaking a review of the current portal and updating it."

Since June 2019 there have been minimal bid opportunities. However, Seetec Pluss has developed a Growth Plan for the forthcoming years and seek to bid for new contracts within the Employability and Health space. A Supply Chain Management Framework (SCMF) has been designed which clearly outlines the steps to be taken to take a contract from 'cradle to grave'. It includes the different methodologies to be utilised to gain a clear understanding of the objectives of the commissioner, contractual requirements, and customer needs and outcomes, in order to determine the need for and design of a supply chain.

As previously stated, the Intervention Framework is designed to provide CDPs with access to a broad range of additional services outside of the formal supply chain to provide appropriate support to customers. In addition, CDPs are encouraged to identify and utilise local specialist providers to support the changing needs of customers. The review of the Intervention Framework will incorporate these organisations to provide CDPs with a comprehensive list of organisations to be considered. These organisations will have undertaken due diligence to provide CDPs with a level of assurance regarding the service/s provided.

Seetec Pluss is also working with strategic stakeholders, for example, the National Health Service (NHS) and Public Health England to assist customers on the Work and Health Programme. Initiatives include the use of a suite of new health apps such as 'One You' and 'Sugar Count' to support customers improve their overall health and wellbeing.

CDPs explained that Seetec Pluss has adopted a different approach to working with them, which is far more inclusive and consultative. Over the past six months they have actively been consulted on key topics. These include the development of the CMS and MI, the Guided Self-Assessment process, as well as the Assurance Framework and more recently discussing actions to contribute to the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Seetec Pluss recognise the importance of working in partnership with the CDPs and as a result has developed a collaborative approach. Consequently, CDPs confirmed that they work with Seetec Pluss to deliver the service as one team and the focus of the quarterly CDP forum is 'how we can work together'. In addition, those in an Employer Engagement role meet and network, and as a result, share vacancies and good practice across the supply chain. One tier 3 specialist provider spoke of being able to use Seetec Pluss' offices and accessing training free of charge. Another tier 3 explained how they had worked with a CDP to run a skills academy and employed 240 seasonal staff of which 60 were from the Work and Health Programme, and of these 50% went into permanent work.

CDPs explained that they work with others within the supply chain, visit each other's premises, sharing successes and practices with the aim of improving performance. CDP comments included:

"We were struggling to meet targets and visited X to see how they do things; it was really helpful."

"I took two potential team leaders to X to see how things were done."

"One CDP shared its weekly diary system and others adopted this to good effect."

CDPs spoke of the vision and values of Seetec Pluss being shared during a quarterly forum and whilst there was no consultation felt confident that they were aligned to their own organisation, as well as how the supply chain should operate. There was a focus on 'inclusive growth' and working with a wide range of customers: older workers, people with health issues and disabilities, ex-offenders etc. to improve their lives. CDPs confirmed that the culture of the organisation had changed over recent months due to a far more inclusive approach to undertaking business, as well as being open, honest and supportive. CDP comments included:

"It's always been very positive – we have always been known as delivery partners not subcontractors and that's how it has been – we've all been in it together from the start and that has remained consistent."

"They told us of their focus initially and we agreed with their principles."

"Equality and diversity is a real driver across the supply chain."

"They were honest from the start and the expectations were clearly communicated."

"The ethos has changed – for the better."

At the time of the assessment the tier 3 specialist provider review was being undertaken to ensure these were fit for purpose and continue to meet the needs of the CDPs and customers. Seetec Pluss had just worked with a CDP which had closed, and as a result, the delivery was taken in-house with staff being TUPE'd into Seetec Pluss. Whilst there was minimal evidence of the CDP supply chain being fully reviewed, the Organisation was starting to put contingency plans in place in the event of another CDP opting to terminate their contract.

PRINCIPLE 2: Procure

CDPs and tier 3 specialist providers confirmed that communication regarding the potential opportunity to work with Pluss Organisation CIC was effective through the Partner Opportunities Portal (POP), Employment Related Services Association (ERSA), social media and emails. Subsequently, the Expression of Interest (EOI) and due diligence was viewed as fit for purpose. Ongoing communications and support throughout the procurement activities were readily available and accessible, as required. Since the merger with Seetec, there had been no procurement activity, however, the SCMF clearly outlines the process to be adopted in the future.

At the time of the assessment due diligence was taking place for all CDPs and tier 3 specialist providers to refresh policies and procedures. All Partners (CDPs and tier 3) understood the rationale for this recent activity and confirmed that it was straight-forward with support available, if required.

Seetec Pluss has taken over two failing CDPs and brought the delivery in house and therefore the TUPE liability has been managed. In each case a clear strategy was designed and implemented with the respective CDP. Ongoing communications throughout the period leading to the transfer date were viewed as open, transparent and supportive. Employees confirmed that the TUPE activity was well-managed, they were kept well informed, and the transition to Seetec Pluss was smooth for both themselves and the customers. Employee (TUPE) comments included:

"There was an appetite on both sides for a seamless transition."

"There was no horse-trading."

"The most important thing to all parties was to support vulnerable customers."

"It's all gone smoothly, and we have moved across on the same terms and conditions."

"We've had an effective induction into Seetec Pluss."

"Good communication throughout."

"The TUPE process really benefited us in terms of premises, systems, staff and has made us more efficient."

CDPs understood the rationale in place to support a viable and transparent allocation of market share within the supply chain. The market share is currently shared on a monthly basis, and as a result, CDPs were aware of the percentage they were delivering.

CDPs confirmed that there was a proactive approach to engaging them in reviewing the flight paths, and were confident to renegotiate if the need arose. The review of MI included the development of league tables to indicate performance, which is shared with both the supply chain and direct delivery to further demonstrate an open and transparent approach to the way Seetec Pluss encourages its CDPs to operate. One CDP comment included:

"There's nothing to hide."

Tier 3 specialist providers use other funding routes to provide the service/s, for example, Big Lottery, ESF, AEB, etc. In some cases, the cost of the service/s provided by a tier 3 specialist provider has been negotiated, for example, Occupational Health Assessments. These organisations confirmed that fees were openly discussed with a focus on ensuring that the organisation did not experience financial risk.

PRINCIPLE 3: Contract

The CDPs confirmed receipt of a contract variation with the new name and signatures, but no further changes were required as the general terms and conditions continued to be applicable. They spoke of very few contract variations, as many changes were communicated by the User Guide, which was an effective method of communication. One CDP comment included:

"There was no need to do anything than change the name – all terms were clear at the outset for us."

Tier 3 specialist providers were aware of the terms and conditions, as well as the expectations, and some had a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place; however, this was not a consistent practice. The current review of the Intervention Framework is formalising the approach to working with these providers and, as a result, Seetec Pluss are urged to adopt a consistent approach across the specialist provider network.

Seetec Pluss has undertaken extensive work to ensure the CDPs clearly understand all the performance expectations for the Health and Work Programme, including those within the tCSS. The development of the MI has subsequently provided these Partners with a clear indication of what is required on a daily, weekly and monthly basis to meet the targets. One CDP comment included:

"Expectations have become clearer since the merger, there is a clearer performance management structure and we have a clear flight path to meet."

CDPs confirmed that Seetec Pluss is open to being challenged and encourages them to bring issues to their attention in order to identify solutions. Whilst there was an awareness of a complaints / appeals process, as well as mediation service, CDPs were confident to raise the issues / areas of dissatisfaction as they arose, as opposed to the formal route. CDP comments included:

"We have challenged points, but we have always been listened to and our feedback taken on board."

"We are aware of mediation, but I can't envisage it being needed based on our experience."

"I emailed recently about something I wasn't happy with and got an immediate response and apology, so we've moved on and it's done."

"I enjoy our mutual respect."

PRINCIPLE 4: Fund

CDPs made reference to the Payment by Results model, which was made clear at the start of the contract by Pluss Organisation CIC. Subsequently, service fees are paid in line with the contract schedule and performance related outcome payments are paid once verified and the Prime has received funds from DWP. Seetec Pluss continues to be supportive of the CDPs and conscious that small organisations may experience cash flow issues from time-to-time and, as a result, have changed payment terms and conditions in favour of the CDP.

CDPs and those tier 3 specialist providers who receive payment from Seetec Pluss for their service/s explained the process to follow in order to gain payment. Whilst Seetec Pluss has been transferring funds to Partners, payments have been made timely and accurately in line with the payment schedule and terms and conditions of the contract. CDP comments included:

"They pay us when they get paid."

"The finance department has never raised any issues that would show there is a problem with funding and payments."

"Always been accurate and timely."

There was an awareness a management fee being paid for the Health and Work Programme, and CDPs understood what they received as a result. Reference was made to the support levels for the management fee having improved since the merger. Examples cited included; current and accurate MI, support to improve performance, quality and compliance checks and training activities. CDP comments included:

"They are providing more support now and training on systems and compliance – so there is better value for money."

"We get performance management and compliance checks, much better MI, as well as support from X to deliver the contract and training on the CMS when needed."

PRINCIPLE 5: Develop

Whilst Pluss Organisation CIC provided the onboarding for CDPs at the start of the contract to ensure they were able to fulfil their contractual obligations, Seetec Pluss has provided additional support. Some examples included, ongoing support to fully utilise the CMS, along with training in relation to the tCSS and quality and compliance requirements. The aim was and continues to be to ensure the CDPs are provided with the resources to enable them to meet their contractual obligations. In addition, support is provided to induct new staff into their respective role, either on a one-to-one or group basis.

Pluss Organisation CIC and Seetec Pluss endeavoured to assist the two failing CDPs and adopted different strategies to support them to remain viable organisations. Whilst these organisations closed, it was not due to the lack of resources allocated by Seetec Pluss. The current work being undertaken to refresh the Intervention Framework will potentially open up further opportunities for the tier 3 specialist providers to evolve and build capacity.

The POP (which currently has in excess of 900 organisations and agencies registered on it) is the main resource used to promote and communicate new bid opportunities, and further work planned to integrate it with the CMS will enable all Partners to find out about potential opportunities.

Since the merger, CDPs believe support has been readily available and accessible to build the knowledge, skills and competencies of the delivery staff. A range of learning and development activities have been identified and subsequently delivered including one-to-one support for Change Coaches, refresher training on the CMS and quality and compliance activities, a review of the tCSS requirements, as well as using the MI effectively. One CDP also spoke about the training tool on the CMS whereby there is guidance and videos on key topics, and access to safeguarding, health and safety and data security training. CDP comments included:

"They have offered us Mental Health First Aid training and they paid for it for us which was brilliant."

"They attend our team meetings and offer training and support now."

"MAPPA training has been provided and we could do with it again."

"Training is identified at the monthly reviews and then planned – a lot better."

PRINCIPLE 6: Performance Manage

The CDPs explained that there had been changes in personnel since the merger; however, this was viewed as positive. The Delivery Partner Manager and the newly appointed Operations Manager were cited as being professional, accessible and very responsive. Whilst the Delivery Partner Manager is the Specific Point of Contact (SPOC), CDPs made reference to support available for quality and compliance, as well as from senior leaders, if required. CDP comments included:

"It's a great relationship with X, issues are escalated and we get responses now."

"X is great, very professional and is accessible and responsive."

The tier 3 specialist providers explained that their main contact was the Change Coach, whereby referrals and signposting took place. They confirmed that the relationship was professional and communication was clear. A few had experienced contact in recent weeks with the Intervention Coordinator who was reviewing the Intervention Framework and confirmed that this was positive and supportive. The ongoing work of the Intervention Coordinator is encouraged as it provides a SPOC for the tier 3 specialist providers.

Seetec Pluss has developed a culture whereby communication is open, honest and without unreasonable constraint; CDPs are confident to raise issues and challenges they face with the delivery of the Work and Health Programme. They confirmed that the interactions between Seetec Pluss' staff and their staff were very positive and supportive. Similarly, tier 3 specialist providers confirmed that communication was open and honest, and interactions between staff were positive and supportive. CDP and tier 3 specialist provider comments included:

"Really positive and supportive."

"Have had a long standing positive and open communication routine."

"Communications are very professional and focused."

"Always friendly and open."

A robust approach to managing the performance of the CDPs has been designed and executed and, as a result, the CDPs feel that communication is two-way and that there is far more support than prior to the merger. At the time of the assessment there was no formal mechanism to review the performance of the tier 3 specialist providers, however, some made reference to future meetings with the Intervention Coordinator whereby performance was to be discussed.

Seetec Pluss has invested heavily in the development of the MI to support CDPs to monitor and evaluate performance, which is recognised and appreciated. CDPs made reference to a broad range of reports that are readily accessible, current and accurate. The reports address performance as an individual CDP, as well as individual Change Coaches. In addition, the release of the league tables is viewed by CDPs positively, as it encourages healthy competition and the sharing of what is working well / best practice. CDP comments included:

"MI is much better now – it really was an area that required some focus and since the merger is much improved."

"We didn't really have access to any MI, the current reports are great."

"The reports now help me to monitor and evaluate performance against all the targets, and I can drill down to review the performance of each Change Coach."

CDPs explained that they have received far more support to improve performance across the contract over the past four months. The weekly, monthly and quarterly performance reviews provide a structure and focus to reviewing progress and identifying areas for improvement. In addition, the suite of MI reports enable CDPs to monitor performance in real-time. Some CDPs had been served a Performance Improvement Notice (PIN), and whilst this is not always seen favourably, they confirmed that support was available to work through a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) with the aim of addressing the areas of concern. CDP comments included:

"Yes, they helped us when we had a lack of referrals. They helped us meet with DWP / JCP and now we are back on track with referrals as a result of this joint approach."

"X is really good at working with us and helping us identify improvements."

"We have had the support to improve performance, and it has been successful."

Seetec Pluss staff identify effective practices and subsequently share these throughout the quarterly CDP forum and / or performance management activities. Some examples of practices being shared amongst the CDPs included; the structure of the delivery team, approach to quality and compliance, development of workshops, employer engagement activities, etc. CDP comments included:

"We shared our forecasting tool and how we deliver our support and other CDPs have said they found this valuable."

"One CDP shared their weekly scheduling diary, which we adopted."

An external consultant was commissioned to undertake a review of practices in line with the Provider Assurance Testing (PAT) requirements, which resulted in the development of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR). A QIP has been created as a result and subsequently the CDPs were engaged in reviewing the SAR and QIP at the recent quarterly forum. They were invited to review two areas for improvement and identify appropriate actions to be taken forward as a supply chain. One CDP commented:

"At the last CDP forum, the meeting looked at the Seetec Plus SAR and CDPs were encouraged to give feedback on two specific areas – induction and guided self-assessment and embedding equality and diversity and sustainability plans – the issues were unpicked and actions agreed for both the Prime and the CDPs."

PRINCIPLE 7: Quality Assurance and Compliance

The supply chain is informed of updates to legislative and regulatory requirements, as well as policy and strategy information through emails and the quarterly forums. Subsequently, the communications and information are shared on a central portal to enable future reference. If appropriate, the requirements are reviewed through the performance management conversations to ensure action has been undertaken.

CDPs confirmed that Seetec Pluss have adopted efficient and appropriate policies, processes and activities to monitor the quality of delivery and the customer experience. These include file checks to be undertaken by the CDP and the Organisation. The CDPs made reference to the support and training provided in relation to the tCSS and the MI, which has provided greater clarity in terms of quality expectations and performance. CDP's performance against the tCSS are RAG (red, amber, green) rated which provides a clear indication of performance in relation to quality and compliance. In addition, Seetec Pluss has undertaken quality assurance data analysis and reviewed the compliance feedback from the CDPs, which has identified areas for improvement, for example, how to record customer call logs. Subsequently support has been provided to address key areas of underperformance. CDP comments included:

"There's eleven tCSS, which I understand better, and the RAG rating gives me an indication of how we're performing over a three-month period."

"We had poor performance on two of the tCSS requirements, but have addressed this with the support of X."

"We had 100% compliance and shared some of the things we were doing with the others."

CDPs confirmed that the provision of IAG had improved substantially over recent months due to the supportive approach adopted across the supply chain. IAG is impartial and aimed at supporting CDPs to address issues and improve performance. CDP and tier 3 specialist provider comments included:

"Since the merger – lots more IAG."

"The IAG has been really good, objective and aimed at supporting us to improve."

"Plenty of IAG, which has been helpful."

"The IAG that Seetec Plus provide to customers coming on to our courses is very good and makes for effective referrals to us."

In terms of the IAG provided by CDPs and tier 3 specialist providers, reference was made to customer feedback and in some cases being accredited against the **matrix** Standard. CDP and tier 3 specialist provider comments included:

*"We are **matrix** accredited and we told Seetec Pluss of this."*

"Customer feedback indicates whether the IAG (support) was effective."

Seetec Pluss and CDPs have policies and procedures in place to maintain effective information security, health and safety and safeguarding. Consistently CDPs made reference to policies being reviewed throughout due diligence, and the monthly performance reviews whereby incidents and issues are raised in relation to the policies. This is to be further strengthened with the introduction of the DPSQ, which is to be complemented by site visits to test the systems and processes in place. The DPSQ also addresses environmental sustainability and Modern Slavery, which has failed to be consistently addressed since due diligence. CDP comments included:

"There is less focus on environmental sustainability after the due diligence phase."

"I think we talked about our sustainability plan but nothing was done."

"We were asked about a Modern Slavery policy and had a discussion once, but nothing more."

"It (Modern Slavery) has been talked about and it might well be on the DPSQ."

PRINCIPLE 8: Review and Close

Seetec Pluss values feedback from different stakeholders, for example, the DWP Compliance Monitoring Officers (CMOs), activities aligned to PAT by an external consultant, as well as feedback following assessments such as ISO27001. The feedback informs areas for improvement which are reported to the CDPs, for example, the review of the SAR and QIP at the quarterly forum.

Similarly, feedback is gained from CDPs with the aim of improving resources and / or the way they are managed and supported. Consequently, CDPs felt that since the merger, their views and opinions have been valued and changes have been made as a result.

CDPs confirmed that the feedback from Seetec Pluss following meetings with DWP, LEPs, employers, etc. as well as findings from audits and assessments was forthcoming. CDP comments included:

"They shared feedback from an audit, which helped us make a case in the organisation to recruit additional staff – so that we were working the same as other CDPs in terms of case load size."

"The recent forum included a review of the SAR and QIP, as a result of feedback they gained."

"We've been told that DWP have said we are making good headway as a CPA."

Seetec Pluss and CDPs explained that the activities have an impact on the wider social objectives of the commissioner and cited the positive benefits of being the solution for employers, LEPs and LAs. In addition, they were integrating health into devolution deals and designing other services to support the Work and Health Agenda, for example, WorkFit programme. CDP comments included:

"Helping people back into work in construction by providing CSCS cards."

"We have assisted 717 vulnerable people into work."

One tier 3 specialist provider explained the contribution to the NHS strategic objectives, for example; reducing mental ill health and reducing obesity, as well as helping customers by referring them to other support services, assisting them to gain confidence to undertake volunteering and start other courses such as maths and English.

Seetec Plus commissioned an external organisation to undertake an interim analysis of the WorkFit programme to establish the impact / benefits, which indicates the progression of a number of customers in terms of improving their lifestyle, looking after themselves, feeling positive, plus other indicators using the 'Wellbeing Star'. A similar process is to take place for the Health and Work Programme. This will be completed internally with information being gathered in relation to the distance travelled by customers and the impact on other stakeholders, for example, employers.

The supply chain is actively encouraged to prepare and submit 'good news case studies', which outline the impact of the Work and Health Programme on individuals. Some examples included; positive physical and mental health benefits, measurement of distance travelled indicating customers have moved closer to work, moving customers into work who had been unemployed for many years, etc.

Equality and diversity is actively promoted through Disability Confident events and encouraging members of the supply chain to work towards an appropriate level of the Scheme. Whilst the Work and Health Programme is reliant on referrals from the Job Centre, data relating to equality and diversity is collected, analysed and utilised to make changes and improvements to the service provided to specific customer groups. CDP comments included:

"A Change Coach noticed ladies of a certain age with similar health conditions, so we created 'Ladies that Lunch', its a peer sharing opportunity."

"We identified the older male who wanted to work before retirement, and set up a group."

"There were a number of 'anxious participants', so we designed a workshop and as a result deliver Confidence and Self-Esteem Courses on a rolling basis."

"We have recently just looked at the average age and gender of customers and we have used this to look at the design / set up of our peer support networks. We also used it to help our employer engagement officer target certain types of employers who we know might look for different types of potential employee."

Seetec Pluss designed and executed clear plans to enable two CDPs to exit the supply chain with minimal disruption to employees and customers. The plans (one presented as evidence) clearly indicated the timescale for activities to take place, including timely communications and document sharing. Whilst the current CDPs spoke of referring to the contract to establish the process to be taken in the event of the contract being terminated (by either party), there was minimal awareness of the contractual requirements to be adopted as the Work and Health Programme draws to a close. However, as previously stated, the SCMF takes a contract from 'cradle to grave' and will enable Seetec Pluss to provide CDPs with greater insight to the requirements to close down the relationship. CDP comments included:

"It might be in our contract, but this runs till 2024."

"Our focus is on the here and now and our current flight path."

"We're still at the fighting end of the contract but I don't expect any issues."

8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, this assessment provided the opportunity to review the practices of Seetec Pluss for the one contract held; the Work and Health Programme against the Merlin Standard. The findings indicate that improvements have been made and continue to be made to systems and processes to support the supply chain to be effective.

Seetec Pluss may consider undertaking a health check in January 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 and evaluate the impact of the work undertaken with the Intervention Framework. 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 Seetec Pluss 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.

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