



merlin standard

TWIN TRAINING INTERNATIONAL

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1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	INITIAL ASSESSMENT
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	31/01/2022
Assessment Dates	30/01/2020 – 31/01/2020
Lead Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Customer ID	C16204
Assessment Reference	PN104680

2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

OVERALL OUTCOME	73% GOOD
1. Design	70% GOOD
2. Procure	87% EXCELLENT
3. Contract	70% GOOD
4. Fund	73% GOOD
5. Develop	73% GOOD
6. Performance Manage	66% SATISFACTORY
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	80% GOOD
8. Review and Close	68% SATISFACTORY

3. METHODOLOGY

Twin Training International Ltd (hereafter known as Twin) 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 Susan Smith (Lead Assessor) and Lorna Bainbridge (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within Twin. 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 were identified, and a plan of action agreed.

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

In advance of the Assessment, a survey was carried out of the Supply Chain Partners, with all 21 being invited to participate. Responses were received from 10 Partners, which represented 48% 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 Twin staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. Some 50% of the Supply Chain Partners were interviewed in line with the published Merlin scoping framework. Interviews were conducted with relevant contacts in each chosen Supply Chain Partner (present, potential 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 listed in the next section of this report. Areas of strength and areas to consider for development over the forthcoming two years are also highlighted.

4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Twin Training International Ltd was established in 1995 and is part of the Twin Group of companies. It is a welfare-to-work provider for British residents, delivering government-funded training programmes and free recruitment services, leading to employment opportunities in the UK. It has a national network of partners providing education and employment services across the UK, as well as several year-round centres and more than 45 outreach centres delivering welfare-to-work provision. Twin holds a range of contracts delivering employment and training support funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Twin is a growing business that employs around 30 staff with services for both learners and employers. It is committed to helping people to realise their potential, offering learning opportunities from unemployment into jobs and onto progressive career pathways. Its vision is *"Twin is committed to changing and improving the lives of its customers and our team, adding value to their futures, in short helping people to grow."* The business has a number of core objectives of which *"to make a real and positive difference to the lives of our clients"* is one.

Twin's supply chains deliver the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Skills Support for the Unemployed (SSU) contracts in Leicester, Coast to Capital and the South East regions. Twin's direct delivery is 65% and Supply Chain Partners deliver 35% of the contract.

In Dorset, Twin's supply chain deliver 100% of the ESFA Skills Support for the Unemployed (SSU) contract.

In the South East, Twin's supply chain deliver 100% of the ESFA Skills Support for the Workforce (SSW) contract.

For the DWP contract, Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) there are 4 Supply Chain Partners who deliver 100% of the contract in the Dorset region.

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:

Twin has clearly considered using a range of different organisations to make up its supply chains. There is a balance of public, private and community / voluntary sector organisations of differing sizes and structures. This ensures commissioner and customer needs are met. (1.1)

Twin has an effective strategy for supply chain review. There was evidence of new Supply Chain Partners being engaged to meet specific new commissioner and / or customer needs. This has enabled niche Supply Chain Partners to add value to the overall supply chain. (1.6)

There is a very robust, detailed and supportive procurement and due diligence process in place. Supply Chain Partners commented on the attention to detail and how Twin uses the process to help Supply Chain Partners develop their policies and processes. (2.1)

Due to the effectiveness of the ongoing robust due diligence activities coupled with regular quality assurance events, Supply Chain Partner's information security, health and safety, safeguarding and environmental sustainability are regularly checked. (7.4)

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:

Whilst Twin has built comprehensive networks of wider partners, more could be considered in relation to promoting and evaluating the use by the supply chains. This may also include inviting Tier 3 and 4 partners to the newly established forums for the various supply chains. Tier 2 Supply Chain Partners indicated the value they place on meeting with other Supply Chain Partners to share information and good practice. (1.2 /1.4)

Twin is encouraged to carry out its plan to ensure all Supply Chain Partners are aware of the constituent part of the payments made to them. To date whilst a majority of payments appear to have been timely, Supply Chain Partners did not all corroborate that they are accurate; however, Assessors were able to view documentary evidence of this. The issue to date has, in part, been due to a lack of Management Information that supports the self-billing process; plans are now in place to address this as of January 2020 and evidence of this was seen. (4.2 / 6.4)

Twin is encouraged in its plans to deliver training for all Supply Chain Partners on a variety of topics including safeguarding, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, sustainability, mental health, and First Aid. It has also identified that the Frequently Asked Questions log used to support Supply Chain Partner understanding of processes and systems should be updated and shared with Supply Chain Partners on a more regular basis. (5.3)

Business relationships are clear; however, some Supply Chain Partners indicated that internal communication within Twin could be improved. For example, the Supply Chain Manager acts as the first point of contact and on occasions does not appear to receive information from internal teams and so is unable to communicate the response back to the Supply Chain Partner. The use of a project management tool such as an issues log may assist with this, and this approach could help managers to keep an overarching view of communications between the different Supply Chain Managers and their respective Supply Chain Partners. (6.1)

Whilst performance review is designed to take place weekly and monthly as outlined in the Supply Chain Management Framework (SCMF), consideration could be given to consistency of delivery of the process. Additionally, Twin is encouraged to consider consultation with new supply chains about the frequency of performance review in the short, medium and longer term contract life. This will determine what is proportionate to the needs of the different contracts / supply chains. (6.3)

7. FINDINGS

PRINCIPLE 1: Design

Twin undertakes extensive research to identify both commissioner and customer requirements. This has included reviewing policy documents, Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) agreements and research to look at labour market statistics in specific areas, benefit claimant statistics, assessment products etc. to inform the delivery model / geographical scope of delivery and delivery of the required outputs. This information then informs the supply chain requirements and also in many cases, the content of the Expression of Interest (EOI) for potential Supply Chain Partners. As a result, there is a diverse mix of Supply Chain Partners which include local, national and third sector organisations as per the commissioners' objectives and contractual requirements.

Twin has effective strategies in place to deliver comprehensive support services to stakeholders, customers and partners through the use of wider networks via several methods across its contracts. It works with a number of referral organisations in both the public and private sector in which to obtain referrals for its programmes. The wider network open to all Supply Chain Partners includes various Jobcentre Plus offices, localised steering groups, NHS community services, LEP contacts, educational providers, Citizens' Advice Bureaus, health and wellbeing support providers, local authority services, community and charity services and National Careers Service. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included: *"More recently we've been encouraged to work with other organisations to progress learners into training and further education"* and *"We are now able to approach others to gain referrals in the local area, which has been successful."*

Supply Chain Partners are consulted about decisions as part of the Twin approach in developing new systems and processes. Examples of consultation opportunities include Supply Chain Partner Meetings and Task and Finish Groups, Project Board meetings and ongoing dialogue with the Twin staff. Supply Chain Partners interviewed confirmed their involvement. Comments included: *"They've consulted us on the paperwork and some changes have been made"*; *"They take our issues and have come back with changes; we can now gain referrals from different sources"* and *"Throughout my conversation with X I explained how we could be involved in the delivery."*

Twin seeks to promote a collaborative working environment. Communication throughout the network is friendly, clear and informative, which, as a result, encourages open participation and resource sharing. In order to achieve this Twin uses a range of methods, for example, a Frequently Asked Questions log, Contract Performance Review meetings, a monthly newsletter and Excellent Practice Forums. Examples of collaboration included sharing premises and vacancies. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included: *"We do work collaboratively with Twin Training"*; *"We meet with the other partner in the area and share resources like batch printing, as well as session plans"*; and *"The supply chain forums provide an opportunity to work together, share best practice and how each of us are doing things especially with compliance."*

Twin's core principles and values are discussed and agreed with potential Supply Chain Partners prior to establishing a formal partnership. These are outlined in the Twin SCMF. Principles and values are inclusive of a commitment to Equality and Diversity which is embedded in organisational practices. For example, policies and procedures, commitment to the Disability Confident scheme and encouraging supply chain members to participate in the same scheme and the provision of training and learning opportunities for Supply Chain Partners. Supply Chain Partner comments included: *"It was apparent that the organisational values were similar at the start"* and *"Twin is aware of our strengths and how we deliver, and we are aligned to the organisation's mission."*

Supply chain review is conducted regularly. Twin aims to continuously review its supply chain design in order to meet the needs of both customers and commissioners. It achieves this by keeping abreast of local developments, including labour market trends, policy development, publicity requirements, and provider guidance updates. Twin evaluates the ongoing capability and capacity of Supply Chain Partners with the potential of allocating more delivery outputs. Twin carries out monthly Contract Performance Reviews and weekly tele kits with the Supply Chain Partners, where feedback is actively sought to effectively meet the changing needs of all stakeholders involved.

PRINCIPLE 2: Procure

Twin operates a robust procurement procedure which includes relevant control of the identification and financial viability of potential suppliers. Identification of potential Supply Chain Partners is in response to tender requests made available by various commissioners. Twin publicises all opportunities on its website and to ensure a diverse range of potential suppliers is reached. It also advertises using a range of mediums relevant to the call e.g. via Employment Related Services Association (ERSA), local network groups, voluntary and community sector umbrella organisations and public tender websites. Information required for each specification is set out, and this includes an Expression of Interest (EOI) and/or a Mini Competition in-line with the requirements of the opportunity. Organisations that are not successful are offered the opportunity for feedback. A rigorous due diligence process underpins the selection. The due diligence process is reviewed regularly as part of the continuous quality improvement cycle. For example, Twin has updated its due diligence template to allow capture of more details about potential partners and an action plan for Supply Chain Partners to inform them about remedial actions required as part of the due diligence checks. Supply Chain Partner comments included: "*Communication throughout the EOI was effective and transparent, very robust approach to due diligence*"; "*I had an initial conversation with X to find out who Twin Training was and how they worked, and felt satisfied after that*"; and "*It was a disappointing outcome but Twin couldn't have done anything different – the EOI was straight-forward; in line with others and I had personal contact with X.*"

Twin is committed to observing guidance on Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) regulations as outlined in its contracts. It also works in line with the ACAS guidance with regards to Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 as amended by the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. To date, no TUPE transfers have taken place within any of the Twin supply chains.

Allocation of market share is understood by Supply Chain Partners and meets relevant stakeholders' requirements. Indicative volumes and values are discussed and agreed internally to ensure that they are in line with the operational budget submitted within the tender. If they are not within budget, this will be discussed with the Operational Director who will confirm whether there is sufficient funding to enable each contract to be agreed at that level. Once approved, the Contract Manager holds a meeting with each successful Supply Chain Partner to go through a list of items, for example, confirmation and agreement of volumes and values, including management fee. Criteria for market share include meeting Twin's geographical requirements, past performance, alignment of values and Supply Chain Partner ability to meet the needs of commissioners and customers.

Negotiations regarding volume, funding and finance, and performance expectations have been undertaken at the outset and then throughout the life of the contract. Prior to contract commencement, Twin supplies its supply chain with a Funding and Profiles document. There is also a flow down agreement that has a number of annexes stating further requirements such as Performance Management Process, Complaints Procedures and Insurance requirements. It also states the management fee and what support is given for the management fee charged.

The Supply Chain Partners are given an opportunity to thoroughly read through and understand the agreement, funding, profile and performance management processes and raise any queries or request any changes prior to both parties signing the agreement. An example of a request for change from one Supply Chain Partner was that the profile be amended to fit their delivery model. As this request was deemed reasonable and did not impact the agreement, performance points or finance, it was accommodated.

PRINCIPLE 3: Contract

Contracts for Supply Chain Partners are issued at the start of the programme and as well as drafts being sent for consideration, workshops are often held to explain contract details. Where contracting arrangements are amended, either through changes to the main contract or performance necessity, Twin ensures contract variations are in place which highlight details of the changes including any impact on funding or resources. The Contract Manager keeps an updated database of contracts. Any changes before and after contract agreements are openly negotiated and agreed upon with Supply Chain Partners, and any changes in contractual arrangements are reflected in a contract variation issued.

Twin communicates and outlines performance expectations of Supply Chain Partners in line with those of the commissioner at contract award and prior to bid submission; dependant on the performance related scoring / procurement requirements. If the bid is scored on a performance offer, the supply chain is given a performance range to be agreed following bid submission, or if it is standard, it is included in the contract. Performance expectations are confirmed in the contract and reviewed in line with the monthly performance review regime. Staff support Supply Chain Partners with formal pre-contract meetings to offer a clear understanding of the obligations under the terms and conditions; guidance and advice on all aspects of the programme delivery; provision of training required to deliver the objectives of the programme; and ongoing performance management, as well as additional support where performance is failing. Supply Chain Partners commented that: *"Expectations are very clear following the conversations"*; *"The weekly calls and monthly Contract Reviews ensure performance expectations are clear"* and *"Expectations are achievable."*

Twin has a clearly defined route that Supply Chain Partners may take when a dispute arises which is outlined in the contract(s). Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they would feel able to use the process without fear of any repercussions. There have been no formal disputes raised to date to test the process. Supply Chain Partner comments included: *"The contract will contain all the information of that nature, so I would refer to that, or my line manager"* and *"First point of contact would be X or others within Twin Training, but confident that X or Y would deal with the issue."*

PRINCIPLE 4: Funding

Twin seeks to establish an understanding of each Supply Chain Partner and their ability to deliver the numbers and specification of the contract in question. Payment schedules are clearly set out as part of the contracting arrangements; monthly funding values with performance related funding are plainly detailed. The finance model and payment structure for the various programmes are issued to all Supply Chain Partners in advance of the contract to support both the Supply Chain Partner and Twin in making informed contracting decisions. The funding and payment arrangements are discussed and mutually agreed, and these are detailed in the funding and profile documentation which is part of the contract. There are examples of where Twin is also open to different payment terms for smaller Supplier Chain Partners identified at risk of normal flow down terms, and this is discussed with them prior to contract stage. The majority of Supply Chain Partners confirmed they have been treated fairly and equitably: *"The fees are feasible, we are aware of the reduction in service fee coming and our understanding of payment by results has evolved"* and *"Understand the funding model and payment arrangements, and it is a viable contract for us."*

Twin follows a detailed process to manage the transfer of funds/finance to ensure that all Supply Chain Partners receive accurate and timely payments. Funding and payment agreement details are discussed and agreed in the contract. For Supply Chain Partners who have not signed Self-Billing Agreements, invoices are raised as payments become due based on fixed monthly payments for starts and outcomes. As and when Self-Billing Agreements are signed by Supply Chain Partners, invoices are raised by Twin and emailed by Contract Managers and effective self-billing arrangements are in place to meet contractual payment deadlines. As noted in the Areas for Improvement section of this report, Twin is encouraged in its plans to improve communication about payments linked to management information that is understood by Supply Chain Partners.

Management fees are determined by risk factors identified through the Due Diligence process. Fees are usually within a given range, and the majority of Supply Chain Partners were aware of this range. There is no defined management fee for RPC as this pilot programme has different commissioner funding calculations. In all supply chain activity, Twin provides a wide range of services to support Supply Chain Partners, for example, course and programme set up and mobilisation support, access to claims process and staff, enrolment input and compliance check of documents, Partnership Forums and Best Practice workshops, formal observation of teaching and learning with written and verbal feedback and support, feedback surveys and systems training. Supply Chain Partner comments included: *"The management fee is 20% and we get very good support for that"* and *"We do get value for money for the management fee and Twin is ultimately taking the risk"*.

PRINCIPLE 5: Develop

Twin develops and encourages Supply Chain Partners to fulfil contractual obligations throughout the life of the contract. The due diligence activity identifies strengths and areas for development around business processes. Twin has increased its central resources to enable greater support, advice and guidance to the supply chain network. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they are supported to meet contract requirements and are referred to useful guidance documents, for example, to explain how to upload data.

Twin supports and encourages Supply Chain Partners to develop and sustain themselves by making them aware of any forthcoming bid opportunities and contracts as and when they become available. A number of examples were found of Supply Chain Partners being signposted and supported to access other funding. In addition, the Quality and Compliance team supports Supply Chain Partners to enable them to develop and maintain comprehensive services which helps them to maintain other contracts with other Prime Organisations. Some examples provided by Twin staff of this are as follows: *"Business Development will support and assist to write bids – worked with a partner to write a youth bid and gave them some hints and tips"* and *"New ESFA funding opportunities are shared with the partners."* Supply Chain Partners commented *"We achieved our targets for regulated training and Twin Training approached us with additional funding for starts on non-regulated training"* and *"Recently, in the last supply chain forum, made aware of the bids being submitted by Twin."*

Twin aims to identify learning and development needs of staff across the supply chain and uses these findings to improve the quality of service delivery. Examples include; systems and process training such as Twin Training Solutions for ESFA contracts and E-employ for RPC, observations of teaching, learning and assessment to share good practice and identify any areas of improvement. A monthly newsletter is also shared which includes best practice, training opportunities, policy updates and regulatory practice, and success stories. The majority of Supply Chain Partner comments included *"X provided me with support when I started the job and provided systems training"*; *"X is really knowledgeable on the contract and the way DWP works and provides a lot of support"* and *"There is new training available on the systems and processes."* Twin has recently undertaken a training needs analysis with Supply Chain Partners and is encouraged in plans to roll out a training programme.

PRINCIPLE 6: Performance Manage

There are clear communication channels to ensure that there is clarity in the business relationships underpinning the supply chain arrangements. Allocation of a dedicated Contracts/Partnership Manager to each of the Supply Chain Partners provides continuous practical and operational support. They act as a first point of contact to either directly answer queries or signpost to appropriate members of staff for further advice and guidance. There are also a number of dedicated email addresses to ease communication. Supply Chain Partner comments included: *"Communications through the weekly calls and monthly reviews is good, but she is also available and responsive as we need clarification on different aspects of the contract"*; *"X is our main contact for everything, and others are available to help with quality and compliance"*; *"X is our main contact then we have quality and finance available as required"*; *"Communications is improving and the introduction of the newsletter has helped as information is consolidated in one place"* and *"We operate with three comms teams; validator, quality and contract manager and they are not always up to date with the most recent developments"*. The interface between Supply Chain Managers and other internal staff is an Area for Improvement.

Communication between Twin and Supply Chain Partners both during initial negotiations on new programmes and currently during weekly and monthly communications and quality assurance checks is open and honest. Opinions are freely shared and, on occasion, difficult subjects, ranging from initial negotiation of payments to issues with performance, have been discussed frankly and fairly, with appropriate resolutions reached. Supply Chain Partners commented that: *"X is very supportive and positive and works with us"*; *"X is really good at communicating with us, and she is responsive to our needs"*; *"Our contribution is valued and appreciated, we are motivated and work together"* and *"X is supportive and positive, as well as knowledgeable."*

Project or programme performance expectations are set out within the individual contracts. A series of contract management meetings take place to ensure that there is the opportunity to regularly review performance as well as raise issues and discuss concerns. A process is in place where monthly performance reviews take place to formally review Supply Chain Partners performance against profile and key targets. At the same time, weekly tele kits are also in operation. Twin promotes the discussion of issues and challenges relating to the contract and Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to discuss their success stories and innovative approaches. Some Supply Chain Partners commented: *"We have a performance call fortnightly where we talk about performance over the week, delivery and referrals, and a monthly face-to-face – it is supportive and two-way – its proportionate to the numbers"* and *"The weekly calls and monthly face-to-face meetings are worthwhile with a focus on performance."* Consistency of recording of the monthly performance reviews has been acknowledged, and Twin is encouraged to consider frequency in relation to contract stage, as per the Areas for Improvement.

Twin uses the following platforms to gain Management Information (MI) - Twin Training Solutions(TTS) for ESFA ESF Skills Support to the Unemployed and Skills Support for the Workforce provisions and E-employ PICS system for DWP ESF Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) provision. All Supply Chain Partners have undertaken MI systems training. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that TTS and E-employ PICS system are user friendly and provide consistent, accurate, real time and detailed reports which support them to track daily activities, monitor performance and identify areas of improvement. A Help and Support function is also available for all system users.

Supply Chain Partners are measured, encouraged, and their performance is supported to help direct improvements. The Quality Assurance Framework is used to assess all delivery partner activity. This process is also a mechanism by which the performance of each Supply Chain Partner is supported. Weekly tele kit and monthly Performance Review meetings also support regular contact for improved performance.

Good practice within the supply chain is shared in order to improve performance and service delivery. As already described, there are weekly tele kits and monthly Performance Reviews, MI systems training, observations and a monthly newsletter. For example, sharing of the effective use of technology in one centre whereby all resources and materials were online for those completing English language courses, and was contributing to individual's IT skills. In another centre, a PowerPoint presentation was rolling throughout the day promoting job vacancies and the policies and procedures. Supply Chain Partner comments included: *"X shared referral partners and provided examples of what other partners were doing, as well as Twin, which really helped improve our performance"* and *"As a supply chain we share practices, most recently this has been version control and how others use the TTS with limited user licenses"*.

In order to produce an annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), Twin follows a Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle where all relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to make a contribution into the process. This includes feedback from ESFA and DWP meetings, monthly Performance Review meetings with Supply Chain Partners and customer survey results. Comments included: *"They have requested information from us, and feel that they have the SAR and QIP in hand"*; *"We've received the template that they plan to use, which we have to populate and return in February"* and *"The SAR and QIP is being developed in line with the new Education Inspection Framework"*.

PRINCIPLE 7: Quality Assurance and Compliance

Supply Chain Partners are kept informed of the wider policy and strategy information of commissioners through a range of methods including emails, meetings and training events. Supply Chain Partners described that information has come through a number of sources including emails and updates from Twin, directly from the commissioners, and from their own interest in the wider policy and strategy of organisations from whom they might receive funding. Meetings with Supply Chain Managers check that information has been understood and implemented.

The Quality Assurance Framework comprises customer experience, quality assurance and compliance. The extent of deployment is proportionate to the overall contract value and the commissioners' requirements. Twin has developed the quality and compliance activities over a period of time and subsequently have a robust approach to undertaking file checks and audits. As a result of compliance activities issues have been identified and support has been provided to Supply Chain Partners, for example, additional training in relation to version control and preparing a SMART Intervention Action Plan. In addition, Twin has designed checklists for the different contracts to ensure delivery staff clearly review the eligibility of learners. More recently, Supply Chain Partners are actively being prompted to encourage learners to complete the satisfaction surveys as a measure of their experience, as currently response rates were low. Supply Chain Partners commented: *"Our errors are highlighted and we also get to know about trends across the supply chain; most recently version control and recording responses to the question 'how long have you lived in the UK'"* and *"Compliance is really driven across the supply chain."* Queries and discussions are usually the subject of telephone conversations, and numerous site visits have taken place at Supply Chain Partner premises. All quality audits are recorded on a central register.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provided by Twin to the Supply Chain Partners was felt to be accurate and timely. One Supply Chain Partner commented that *"Twin itself holds the **matrix** Standard"*. Supply Chain Partners are aware of the importance of ensuring any IAG they provide is accurate, up-to-date and impartial. A number of Supply Chain Partners interviewed as part of this assessment confirmed that they are accredited to the **matrix** Standard.

Twin is committed to carrying out due diligence activities to ensure all Supply Chain Partners have relevant policies in place for Information security, Health and Safety, Safeguarding and Environmental Sustainability and these are in line with regulatory and legislative requirements. This is achieved by undertaking annual due diligence activities which include the review of the above policies, encouraging Supply Chain Partners to review and update their policies as part of the annual governance checks. There are also site visits conducted as part of the Quality and Compliance checks, which includes Health and Safety site assessment. At due diligence stage Twin checks that Supply Chain Partners have full enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks and reviews training records for staff members on Equality and Diversity, GDPR, Safeguarding and Prevent. Continuous support relating to policy creation and amendments is available at due diligence stage and throughout the duration of the contract.

Supply Chain Partner comments included: *"We submitted our environmental sustainability policy and also submitted energy usage, waste disposal and other information"; "We have visits to premises booked for March" and "All matters are discussed at the monthly meetings and are routinely checked by Twin staff – they are serious in their commitment, especially to environmental sustainability".*

Twin states publicly that it is committed to working in line with the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. In the October issue of its newsletter this commitment was cascaded to the supply chains and the Twin Modern Slavery Policy was also shared. Advice was provided to request that all Supply Chain Partners update their safeguarding policies and procedures to reflect this.

PRINCIPLE 8: Review and Close

Stakeholder groups are clearly identified and play an active role in receiving and giving feedback on the impact of the various contracts. All parties work collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to deliver a service that meets local needs and provides value for money. Comments included: *"We get feedback from Twin and DWP"; "Twin fight for change for us, and are successful – referral routes have increased" and "We get feedback from Twin on the ESFA audits."*

Both Twin and Supply Chain Partners were able to share some examples of how the work they are delivering is having a measurable impact on the various Commissioners' wider social objectives. This includes gaining and sustaining employment, improvements in skills and qualifications, unemployment reduction, addressing poverty and reducing potential for crime. Some examples shared during the Merlin Assessment included:

"We started to run sector based academies for specific employees and provided training for warehousing, forklift and customer service and built a good reputation of working with different employers."

"We meet with the LEP every three months and as a result respond to their priorities."

"Previously an organisation promoted that it was acceptable to ask for help and we are building on that."

"We have been working with Job Centre Plus to help them to have the right conversations and ask the right questions to promote the service."

"We completed all our regulated training targets and progressed individuals."

Twin's activities, and the activities of its Supply Chain Partners, are positively impacting on external stakeholders. An example is how individuals and families have been encouraged to develop themselves and their wellbeing such as improved school attendance and attainment, reduction in anti-social behaviour, gaining qualifications, improved health and mental wellbeing and accessing skills and employment. Environmental sustainability is an important area for Twin, and through the work with the supply chain, community environments are impacted positively earlier. Case studies collected and shared provide a powerful account of parents transforming their relationships with each other and their children. Some quotes from Supply Chain Partners included:

"Learners are able to join the 100% club when they are achieving 100% in their qualification, which celebrates their achievements."

"Certainly having an impact on individual's lives as it is reducing isolation, and as a result reduces their anxiety and depression."

"Communication is improving, and evidence indicates that conflict is still there but couples have more confidence to deal with it."

"We make home calls and establish whether couples are using the tools, and evidence indicates that this is positive."

"Pre and post questionnaires to demonstrate improvements."

"100% have enjoyed the intervention and gained from the process, there is evidence of parents changing the way they communicate with each other, the children, other family members and the school."

"We've reached over 200 learners and moved their levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, so they are in a far better place."

Twin and Supply Chain Partners have effective processes in place to monitor and promote Equality and Diversity. Through the due diligence activities, Supply Chain Partner policies and processes are carefully checked to ensure they reflect current practice, are in line with latest legislation and are embedded throughout delivery. Data is collected and analysed, and corrective actions are identified to ensure programme recruitment meets the requirements of the commissioners and inform further improvements. Newsletters share information on a variety of topics, for example, an Inclusion Calendar, Learning Disability Week in November, Disability Confident Scheme Anniversary, and Trans Day of Remembrance. In the ESFA supply chain there are targets in the contracts – 20% Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME), 20% disability, 21% without basic skills and these are monitored across the contracts and performance feedback is given at the Supply Chain Partner forums. Currently all targets are being achieved. The ESFA approached Twin to work with the homeless and there are difficulties with the eligibility and having proper identification through proof of address, the organisation is looking at ways of working with this group of potential customers. During the Merlin Assessment, reference was made to the DWP requirements for working with Primes in terms of the Life Chances Monitoring Report and the need to monitor those with disabilities, ethnic minority, BAME, etc. Comments included:

"We collect the data relating to age, ethnicity and disabilities and analyse the information, we realised there were a number of single parents and changed the time of the sessions to 10.00 – 14.00 to make it easier for them. We have also set up new centres to make the courses more accessible and focused on women experiencing domestic violence and refugees."

"We can't do this as it is not required by DWP, but we do it with our own system, no family is the same, they range from professional couples to lower income. Ethnicity reflects the area."

"We review our equality and diversity data at the senior management team meetings but have made no changes to the delivery of the ESFA contract – but we have to others."

Twin has prepared and agreed a process to handle the end of the relationship with the Supply Chain Partners, including timely communication and documentation sharing. If a Supply Chain Partner leaves for any reason, Twin follows the processes outlined and agreed in the individual contracts issued at the beginning of the partnership. It takes reasonable steps to support underperforming providers to improve in cases of service failure and operates an early warning system to allow Supply Chain Partners to improve before termination processes commence. Past Supply Chain Partners state that they would work with Twin again in the future should the opportunity arise.

8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

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

Holders of the Merlin Standard Accreditation must:

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

 ASSESSMENT SERVICES	
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