



**merlin standard**

**THE SHAW TRUST GROUP  
(incorporating Shaw Trust, Ixion  
Holdings and Prospects Services)**

**COMPACT REPORT**

## CONTENTS

1. KEY INFORMATION.....	3
2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME .....	3
3. METHODOLOGY .....	4
4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION.....	5
5. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH .....	8
6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT .....	10
7. FINDINGS.....	11
8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION .....	18

## 1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	30/05/2022
Assessment Dates	08/06/2020 – 11/06/2020
Lead Assessor's Name	SUSAN SMITH
Customer ID	C16241
Assessment Reference	PN104829

## 2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

<b>OVERALL OUTCOME</b>	<b>88% Excellent</b>
1. Design	87% Excellent
2. Procure	95% Excellent
3. Contract	87% Excellent
4. Funding	87% Excellent
5. Develop	87% Excellent
6. Performance Manage	89% Excellent
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	88% Excellent
8. Review and Close	88% Excellent

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The Shaw Trust Group continues to be mandated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be accredited against the Merlin Standard due to being a Prime delivery partner for various DWP contracts. Organisations that hold the Merlin Standard are required to be re-accredited every two years.

The assessment team comprised of Susan Smith (Lead Assessor) and Lorna Bainbridge and Ruth Regan (Team Assessors) supported by a coordinator from within the Shaw Trust Group. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in January 2020 to establish the scope and discuss the logistics of the assessment. The dates for the evidence gathering were identified, and a plan of action agreed. The plan was amended to take account of the Covid-19 lockdown.

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 reaccreditation review, a survey of the Supply Chain Partners was carried out, with all 198 being invited to participate. Responses were received from 35% of present and past Supply Chain Partners. 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 evidence gathering activity to review the schedule and logistics for the remote assessment. All documentation required for the assessment - Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and interview schedule - were shared to enable the reaccreditation review to take place as planned.

The assessment team spent a total of 3 days each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. Some 31 of the present and past Supply Chain Partners were interviewed, which is in line with the published Merlin scoping framework for Covid-19 virtual assessments.

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

## 4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

As a non-profit group of companies, the Shaw Trust Group help to transform the lives of young people and adults across the UK. Its specialist services help people gain an education, enter work, develop their career, improve their wellbeing, or rebuild their lives. As a charity, it seeks to add value to every service delivered by investing back into the people and communities that are supported. Following the acquisitions of Prospects and Ixion by Shaw Trust to form the Shaw Trust Group, there has been the development of a new purpose and values. These serve to drive all work and maximise the social impact delivered. The Shaw Trust Group's purpose is *'to help one million people transform their lives each year'*.

The Shaw Trust Group includes three contracting entities, each with various supply chains. These are Shaw Trust, based in Bristol, Prospects Services, based in Bromley and Ixion Holdings, based in Chelmsford. All three organisations were Merlin accredited with the most recent assessments taking place in 2017 and 2018. During the period since these assessments, there have been several significant changes to the structures within the Group, and its contracting entities.

The leadership of the Shaw Trust Group has formalised with the operational divisions of Employability, Learning & Skills, Justice, Community Health and Wellbeing and Children's Services coming under the leadership of Operations Directors. These Operations Directors are responsible for the management of the delivery of the contracts with the commissioners that reside within the contracting entities of Shaw Trust, Ixion or Prospects.

Due to strict market share constraints and commissioner-imposed restrictions, opportunities to novate contracts within the Group have been limited, with only the DWP New Enterprise Allowance transferring from Ixion to Shaw Trust. However, this contract has no supply chain.

To support the Operational Divisions, the Group has established centralised support services for Human Resources, Premises, Information Security, Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Finance, Business Assurance, Marketing and Communications and Business Development (under the Commercial Team). Responsibility for the identification and procurement of Supply Chain Partners sits within the Commercial Team, along with maintaining contract administration with commissioners and Supply Chain Partners for developing, existing and exiting contracts.

All the contracts in scope for the Merlin 2020 assessment with the support of Supply Chain Partners (SCPs) are listed below by contracting entity, including the percentage split between Direct Delivery and Supply Chain Partners as follows:

**Present:** ESF North Yorkshire and East Riding (Employability – participation and sustainable job outcomes)

Commissioner: DWP

Model: End to End SCP

Length of Delivery: Started November 2016, Customer Referrals Ended November 2018 – Expires Feb 2021

25% Direct Delivery 75% delivery with SCPs (Tier 2)

**Present:** 2019/20 Apprenticeships (Levy and Non-Levy) (National Coverage)  
Commissioner: Education and Skills Funding Agency  
Model: End to End SCP  
Length of Delivery: Commissioned Annually: Started August 2019, Ending July 2020  
90% Direct Delivery 10% delivery with SCPs (Tier 2)

**Present:** ESF Skills Support for the Unemployed - Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough  
Commissioner: Education Skills Funding Agency  
Model: End to End SCP  
Length of Delivery: Started April 2019 / Ends July 2021  
60% Direct Delivery 40% delivery with SCPs (Tier 2)

**Present:** HMPPS CFO3 (formerly known as NOMS)  
Commissioner: Ministry of Justice  
Model: End to End SCP & Specialist  
Length of Delivery: Started April 2015, Ends August 2023  
• West Midlands – 70% Direct Delivery 30% delivery with SCPs (Tier 2 & 3)  
• South East – 71% Direct Delivery 29% delivery with SCPs (Tier 2 & 3)

**Present:** Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Connecting Choices  
Commissioner: European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund  
Model: End to End SCP  
Length of Delivery: Started July 2017, Ends September 2022  
• Essex - 0% Direct Delivery 100% delivery with SCPs (Tier 2)  
• Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire -0% Direct Delivery 100% delivery with SCP (Tier 2)

**Past:** Work Choice/Work First  
Commissioner: DWP/Scot Gov  
Model: End to End SCP  
Length of Delivery: 8.5 years, (last referrals Oct 18)  
Geography: 19 contracts across the UK  
Direct Delivery 48% SCP 52% (Tier 2)

**Past:** Work Programme  
Commissioner: DWP  
Model: End to End SCP  
Length of Delivery: 7 years, (last referrals April 17)  
Geography: East London  
Direct Delivery 60% SCP 40% (Tier 2)

**Present:** Specialist Employment Support (SES)  
Commissioner: DWP  
Model: Specialist (Spot Purchase)  
Length of Delivery: 6 years, (last referrals Oct 19)  
Geography: UK wide  
Direct Delivery 70% SCP 30% (Tier 3)

**Present:** HMPPS CFO3 (formerly known as NOMS)  
Commissioner: Ministry of Justice  
Model: End to End Providers with Specialist  
Length of Delivery: Started April 2015, End August 2023  
Geography: 3 contracts – East of England, London and South West.  
Direct Delivery 44% SCP 56% (Tier 2 & 3)

**Present:** Kent Mental Health 'Live Well Kent'  
Commissioner: Kent County Council  
Model: Journey Management with Specialist DAF  
Length of Delivery: 2 years, (end of contract 2023)  
Geography: Kent  
Direct Delivery 38% SCP 62% (Tier 2)

**Present:** Work & Health Programme  
Commissioner: DWP/West London Alliance  
Model: Journey Management with Specialist Intervention Fund  
Length of Delivery: 2 years, (end of contract 2024)  
Geography: 3 CPAs – Central, Home Counties and West London  
Direct Delivery 46% SCP 54% (Tier 2 & Tier 3)

**Present:** Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Aim4Work  
Commissioner: European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund  
Model: End to End  
Length of Delivery: 5 years, (end of contract 2022)  
Geography: 2 Contracts North and East London and South London  
Contract One Direct Delivery 86% SCP 14% (Tier 2)  
Contract Two Direct Delivery 65% SCP 35% (Tier 2)

**Present:** National Careers Service – West Midlands  
Commissioner ESFA  
Model: End to End  
Length of Delivery: since 2014  
Geography: West Midlands  
Direct Delivery 61 % SCP 39% (Tier 2)

**Present:** National Careers Service -London  
Commissioner ESFA  
Model: End to End  
Length of Delivery: since 2009  
Geography: London  
Direct Delivery 55% SCP 45% (Tier 2)

**Present:** Thrive into Work  
Commissioner: Joint NHS England and DWP  
Model: End to End  
Length of Delivery: June 18 – October 2020  
Geography: Sandwell and West Birmingham  
Direct Delivery 93% SCP 7% (Tier 2)

## 5. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH

A number of significant strengths were identified during the assessment, and these are described below and aligned to the relevant Principle within the Standard.

The Shaw Trust Group is an inclusive organisation that seeks to work with the widest possible range and size of Supply Chain Partners from all different sectors. It ensures that all supply chains are well supported through the provision of specialist services and a wider network of partners, adding value to the client journey. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included *"Collaboration and cooperation are vital – we have a good network of people both locally and nationally that we can call upon to support the project or a specific participant"* and *"When lockdown happened with the support of Ixion we set up a website to enable us to keep in touch with participants and run virtual sessions. It has been suggested that this can be utilised for our next Partner Forum so we can keep in touch and share our experiences of lockdown."* The design of the supply chains and associated activities always takes account of the views of potential and existing Supply Chain Partners. Comments included *"We started to look at the new contract and suggest what we could do differently or better – we were able to sell new ideas";* *"We were one of the first organisations to deliver the service remotely, and as a result shared our practices with them";* and *"They were keen to have us involved right from the start, and that has continued. At the moment we are looking at menus for the different stages of the service provided throughout the customer journey."* The ongoing embedding of the Group approach to supply chain design will enhance this strength yet further. (Principle 1)

Procurement practice is excellent in terms of communication and due diligence processes. Supply Chain Partners commented favourably on the open and transparent communications. An illustrative comment was that *"Communications were effective throughout the procurement process with the ability to request one to one support for organisations if needed. Relationships with the Shaw Trust Group have been built on honest, transparent negotiations starting with the procurement process."* There are robust TUPE processes in place, where appropriate. Negotiations about all aspects of potential contracts are steered towards a co-production model. (Principle 2)

Performance expectations are agreed and communicated throughout the life of the contract such that Supply Chain Partners feel confident in understanding their delivery position and requirements. Comments included *"We have just signed a new contract, we reviewed what had gone well throughout the pilot and what we can do better. Whilst we have targets, we are reliant on the referrals from the case managers"* and *"There were a few tweaks to the original contract and had a contract variation recently in relation to payments, which was clear."* Relationships are positive, and there have been no formal disputes since the last Merlin assessment. Supply Chain Partners noted that this is illustrative of the Shaw Trust Group's approach in supply chain management; *"The complaints process is in the contract, but if I had a problem I'd go to X first and hopefully we'd resolve the issue – but I've never had the need."* (Principle 3)



The Shaw Trust Group was praised by its supply chains for its approach to Covid-19 lockdown. In particular, the rapid and proactive response to ensuring that payment terms were altered to ensure that Supply Chain Partners' financial risk was addressed and was cited by many as being gratefully received. (Principle 4)

Ensuring the supply chains are developed so that they remain viable is important to the Shaw Trust Group. In particular, there are clear processes in place to help Supply Chain Partners access other sources of funding that help them grow and sustain their business. Supply Chain Partners referenced the speed of communication particularly during Covid-19 to other sources of funding that might help them; *"Shaw Trust has also been particularly supportive of their Supply Chain during these unprecedented times and has kept all partners fully abreast and assured during this time which has been refreshing and supported our business continuity plans."* (Principle 5)

The positivity and clarity of business relationships, communication, and support were found to be exceptionally strongly referenced by Supply Chain Partners in that *"They are credible and very people-focused."* As a result, performance review at both individual Supply Chain Partner and supply chain level is supportive. It creates the opportunity for innovation, sharing of good practice and discussing issues to ensure clarity and to recognise performance. The effective communications and information, advice and guidance provided to Supply Chain Partners ensure compliance requirements are met. Again, of note has been the Covid-19 response with Supply Chain Partners commenting that *"At the start of lockdown there was a lot of information provided, and advice and guidance if needed, like accessing PPE. Now there is a weekly email summary, which is great"; "Throughout the lockdown other information has been shared – domestic abuse being a key area"; and "They've provided extensive information, as well as guidance and advice, but we were ahead of others and had a clear plan."* (Principle 6 and 7)

There is substantial evidence of the impact that the Shaw Trust Group and its supply chains make on the customer groups supported as well as wider communities. A range of case studies demonstrates the difference made to people's lives. This is assisted by clear and transparent contract closure processes that mean customers are supported fully throughout the life and sometimes beyond the end of the contract. Supply Chain Partners who have exited the supply chain as a result of contract closure were clear about the processes to be followed. (Principle 8)

## 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:

When designing the supply chains, detailed discussions take place to explore the values, business principles and behaviours of both the potential Supply Chain Partner and the Shaw Trust Group to ensure there is a synergy between the two. However, this conversation does not flow down to take place between the Group and the whole supply chain. Therefore, there has not been an opportunity to 'mutually agree', as a collective, the values and behaviours that will govern the way the supply chain is managed. As the Shaw Trust Group seeks partnerships that reflect their company values, consideration could be given to, for example, ensuring the Group values are shared within any procurement presentation and further explored and agreed within a contract kick-off meeting. Further consideration could then be given to how Supply Chain Partners' performance and the Group's performance is judged against these values. (1.5)

Contractual documentation is clear and concise, and there were examples of the Shaw Trust Group agreeing to change terms to assist Supply Chain Partners to manage risks. There could be a more consistent approach to ensuring that all risks are clearly highlighted, and that checks are made that Supply Chain Partners have truly and fully understood the contractual or Service Level Agreement terms. (3.1)

Whilst the majority of Supply Chain Partners could clearly describe the support provided for the management fee levied by the Shaw Trust Group, the level of awareness of the level of that fee was inconsistent. Hence, it was not always possible for Supply Chain Partners to judge for themselves whether they felt they were receiving value for money. There could be consideration given to more ongoing communication about the management fee, including any changes to it, or the services provided for it. (4.3)

There was evidence of an annual self-assessment resulting in a quality improvement plan for specific contracts whereby it was a requirement of the commissioner. Plans are in place to execute future self-assessment and action planning activities across all contracts, and, as a result, the Group is encouraged to be inclusive of its Supply Chain Partners throughout this process. In addition, consideration could be made to providing appropriate feedback to the supply chains to promote the areas for improvement and encourage collaborative working to embed the ethos of continuous improvement further. (6.7)

Environmental sustainability has undoubtedly become more prevalent in the work of the Shaw Trust Group and its supply chains. There is more emphasis on creating robust policies and plans. The next stage will be to develop a meaningful system that assesses and quantifies the impact of the environmental sustainability work undertaken such that the Organisation and the supply chain can create incremental improvements over time. (7.4)

## 7. FINDINGS

The feedback below is reported against key criteria of the Merlin Standard, aligned with the “Plan-Do-Review” business cycle.

PLAN
<p><b>Through planning an effective supply chain, the range of Partners and how they are engaged ensures there is a group of organisations that cover a diverse range of providers that all understand the requirements of the contract and their contributions to achieving the desired outcomes.</b></p>
<p>There is a central service approach to commissioning which includes the commercial and business development functions. The Group approach to support the objectives of any new opportunities is to aim to ensure that the supply chain(s) can deliver the solutions which meet the customers and commissioner needs. Where appropriate, this will include cross-sectoral representation (Private, Public and Third Sector), delivering sufficient capacity to meet the volume requirements provided by the commissioner. The split of delivery between Shaw Trust Group and Supply Chain Partners varies across contracts and commissioners. The present supply chain breaks down by sector as follows; 51% Private, 8% Local Authority, 20% Charity, 16% Third Sector and 5% Other. The initial service scoping commences with the tender opportunity being mapped against the Shaw Trust ‘Bid or no Bid’ process map to ensure the opportunity aligns with the Group’s purpose. Opportunities are presented to the Group Executive Team to sign off the strategy and partnership approach. Detailed research is then undertaken, and if an opportunity for a supply chain is identified, this is shared with existing Supply Chain Partners, and an Expression of Interest is advertised. Specialist providers are commissioned by using programme demographic data, for example, using SES data to inform partner choices for Intensive Personalised Employment Support (IPES) programme of a similar customer group. Supply Chain Partner comments included:</p> <p><i>“There is a good mix; it needs to have a range of partners as Birmingham is different to Telford, Stoke and surrounding areas where we don’t have the large nationals.”</i></p> <p><i>“At the presentation, we learnt about the other Partners, and there seemed to be a mix of public, private and third sector, and different sizes.”</i></p> <p><i>“The mix of partners works very well, end to end partners all have their own expertise as do the specialists we can use when clients need extra support.”</i></p> <p>There are strategies in place to review supply chain design to meet the changing needs of customers and commissioners. For example, Living Well Kent was initially designed based on the commissioners understanding of the current demand. Through a better understanding of the demand from a customer perspective via internal systems, working with commissioners and Supply Chain Partners via monthly meetings and interface meetings enabled the re-design of the supply chain to meet the demand. This was achieved through a mini-competition and Expressions of Interest information event on the type of services required, and the indicative price and volume. It also included a move from spot purchase to offering a minimum contract value, allowing potential Supply Chain Partners to plan for the future and to give assurance around income.</p>

The Shaw Trust Group staff state that *"The supply chain design has become a dynamic process based on the shifting demand of service users and the commissioner's expectations."* Supply Chain Partners referred to different organisations that were brought into the supply chain to meet specific needs, for example, small training providers and local authorities.

All legal requirements regarding TUPE continue to be followed, which include facilitating communications between Supply Chain Partners, ensuring all time-phased commitments are met and signposting to the relevant external legal experts where needed. All legal requirements are met from an employee point of view. TUPE is also accounted for in commissioning and implementation planning. An example was when one of the Supply Chain Partners went into liquidation, all the staff employed on the Work and Health Programme contract were TUPE'd into Shaw Trust, and brought up to date with any previously unpaid salaries. A further example was when a Supply Chain Partner's contract was not extended; two staff members were TUPE'd into Shaw Trust. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included *"Really good, supportive process from Human Resources for individual staff"* and *"Managed effectively throughout the process."*

Supply Chain Partners have clearly defined performance expectations set out in their contract which is in place when contract delivery starts. Performance expectations are first shared as part of Supply Chain Partner Packs ahead of bid submission to ensure understanding and confirm all parties feel these are reasonably achievable. Supply Chain Partner Packs are discussed, and declarations are signed to confirm the agreement. There is a contract specific Performance Management Framework (PMF) discussed with Supply Chain Partners to agree how performance will be monitored. Should the commissioner's requirements change, all Supply Chain Partners are supported to ensure they understand the variation and have an opportunity to discuss any concerns during the interface meetings. Where performance expectations shift, there is consultation with Supply Chain Partners to ensure they are achievable. Comments from Supply Chain Partners comments included *"Performance expectations have been clear from the start – they are realistic. At the moment we continue to discuss performance and forecast weekly, which is great – we talk about one job a month"; "We said we cannot achieve the performance requirements, so we sat down with them to work around it and make it viable and realistic and these revised targets were then included in the contract"* and *"We are very clear about what our accountabilities are."*

Shaw Trust strives to ensure that its funding and payment arrangements are fair and proportionate. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that negotiation is carried out openly and transparently. Contracts are only secured with organisations that are comfortable with the level and method of payment offered. There are examples of where, if required, financial support has been offered to one or more Supply Chain Partner. A recent example includes a change to payment terms for the Work and Health Programme Tier 3 Supply Chain Partners from March 2020. The initial model meant that each referral was paid even if the intervention offered by the Tier 3 Supply Chain Partner did not actually take place.

Following a review of the Tier 3 provision in September 2019 it was agreed that interventions needed to take place to demonstrate progression for the participants moving closer to work readiness with tangible outcomes and as a result, revised payment terms would need to be introduced. As part of this process, Tier 3 Supply Chain Partners were asked to re-design their service offer. In January 2020 calls were held with the Tier 3 Supply Chain Partners to discuss the revised payment terms. All understood the reason for the changes, and some raised concerns about how their cash flow would be impacted and in one case, it was felt that the Tier 3 Supply Chain Partners would not be able to continue their provision. Following further negotiations, an agreement was reached to fund 100% of their staff costs, ensuring that they continue to be a Tier 3 Supply Chain Partner providing a range of highly specialised and unique support. A further example of this is on the National Careers Service contract where, to support the management of Supply Chain Partners' cash-flow, payment terms have been reduced from 30 to 14 days for the next 3 – 6 months during the Covid-19 epidemic. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included *"Shaw Trust do try and mitigate the risks"*, *"Good – consistently timely within the thirty days"* and *"...only difference now Prospects are part of Shaw Trust is that the finance system changed, and it caused a bit of a blip. We were kept informed and, in the loop, and it was soon sorted."*

## DO

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

The Shaw Trust Group aims to support all Supply Chain Partners to fulfil their contractual obligations throughout the life of the contract. Examples include one of the HMPPS Supply Chain Partners who has been helped to deliver their contractual obligations and the requirements for evidence when working on ESF funded contracts. This support has involved weekly one-to-one meetings with their Regional Supply Chain Manager. Another example includes support provided to upskill staff in another Supply Chain Partner to meet job targets, supporting with job shadowing opportunities, sharing employer contacts and strategy, and sharing best practice. The interface meetings are a forum for sharing performance data within the supply chain community, and this process is open and transparent with clear reporting to support the discussion and subsequent actions. Supply Chain Partners attend interface meetings where they are given the opportunity to share any good practice and share ideas. Supply Chain Partners commented that *"We were provided with a manual and guidance bulletins through email and hosted webinars, GoToMeeting and conference calls to explain the new compliance requirements of HMPPS"; "We had a week's training in London to gain an overview of the contract and outcomes, delivery model and systems, and then there was support including having joint meetings with the job centres" and "You feel part of them – not just a Supply Chain Partner."*

The Group continues to develop its supply chain management approach so that there is a greater level of collaboration with Supply Chain Partners. The culture of open communication without unreasonable constraint is started as part of contract implementation. Contact details for each department or work-stream lead are circulated to Supply Chain Partners, ensuring they can contact specific areas for relevant advice. At Implementation events, contacts within all Supply Chain Partners are shared to encourage communications. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they are offered many forms of support to ensure the values of Open, Honest and Transparent Partnership Working are in place. The positivity of Supply Chain Partner comments indicates why this is an area of significant strength:

*"Very good at contract management, never had any major issues, no significant changes over the past year, which is great."*

*"Open to conversations and negotiations, very open and honest."*

*"Reliable and supportive with a good communications network and very supportive."*

*"Communication is good; they are proactive and tell us what we need to know."*

*"Really supportive and responsive."*

*"Very easy to work with, good relationship which is honest and open."*

*"Contract manager is brilliant – we have a strong relationship – very open and honest with each other."*

*"x is open, willing to think outside the box for the participants – she is a joy to work with. It's about making life better for participants - and she gets that."*

*"x is professional, engaged, communicative; she is very clear about what the parameters are – I think we have a very honest and professional relationship."*

*"They are a delight to work alongside – it's a true partnership and collaborative approach."*

*"This is definitely a strength for Shaw Trust Group. An example of this is where we joined every Shaw Trust implementation call in the run-up to the new contracts as a delivery partner, and we were seen and recognised as part of this team."*

*"We work closely with our Contract Manager and feel very supported. It is a transparent and open relationship; we discuss performance, delivery, finances and overall contract performance. Ixion/Shaw Trust is a great partner to work with."*

There is a robust PMF and Management Assurance Framework (MAF) that offers Supply Chain Partners every opportunity to discuss their performance and raise any issues or concerns. This activity is followed up with regular access to contract interface meetings that take place throughout the year. Supply Chain Partner comments included:

*"A two-way conversation, which has been built through openness and honesty, so there is trust, very collaborative and supportive, acceptance of reality, and they listen."*

*"Quarterly service delivery review was a great way to review performance and learn what others were doing."*

*"The quarterly service delivery meetings are really positive and supportive."*

*"The Contract Manager is very open about performance, acknowledges and recognises our performance, which is different to other Primes in my experience."*

*"You can talk about the issues and challenges quite openly and get a positive response."*

*"They have a methodical and formal approach to performance reviews, and these have taken place consistently on both our contracts. It is very much a two-way review, and we have built an honest and trustworthy approach that allows us to raise any concerns in a safe way, and their review mechanism ensures feedback and action."*

The Shaw Trust Group is currently in the process of reviewing the structure of its Management Information (MI) and Business Intelligence (BI) teams across the legacy organisations of Shaw Trust, Prospects and Ixion. The goal of this action is to create a central MI team and MI system, building upon the best practice of each legacy team and the strengths identified through feedback from Supply Chain Partners. Alongside this, the Group is currently making a significant investment into Microsoft Office 365 and cloud technologies that will benefit Supply Chain Partners by allowing greater ease of access to MI. This initiative is a direct response to challenges encountered since the last assessment in which Work and Health Programme Supply Chain Partners have been unable to access some of the self-serve reporting due to on-premises technologies differing and becoming outdated. An MI pack has been created and provided to Supply Chain Partners within the Work and Health Programme to ensure that they are not negatively impacted due to issues with their self-service access. Other contract specific MI systems and processes were found to be in good working order. Supply Chain Partner comments included *"The CRM has changed for this contract and is much improved with data available in real-time"* and *"The system provided is reliable and robust."*

The Group operates a three-line approach to quality assurance processes. Firstly, by Management Review delivered by business operations which identifies risks, implements controls, and reports on progress. First line review results are ultimately reported to the Chief Operating Officer who in turn summarises these into a report to the Chief Executive Officer. Secondly, by Independent Internal Assurance which is delivered by the functions that provide an overview and oversight of business processes, e.g. Finance, HR, and Assurance. The assurance function undertakes independent review and analysis of line one results to obtain assurance that risks have been properly identified; affirm that arrangements to review and assess risk and control effectiveness are adequate and consistent; drive Continuous Improvement and Quality Assurance; inform improvement in the design and application of mitigations; alert the organisation of any concerns, issues, or threats and determine whether any risks, issues or threats should be escalated or de-escalated. Thirdly, through independent External Assurance. To monitor the quality of contract specific delivery, the MAF provides support for Supply Chain Partners to conduct their own self-assessment of their quality assurance processes. These completed responses are used by the internal Commercial Assurance Team to allocate their resources based on proportionality and identified risk. Using this approach, Supply Chain Partners can monitor their own quality standards and identify areas for improvement which are captured during contract review meetings. Regional Supply Chain Managers receive MAF checks from Supply Chain Partners monthly and make trends available to the commercial assurance team and Quality Improvement Forum. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included *"Their MAF process helps us identify any continuous improvements as a partner and allows us to feed into our own quality improvement plans and gives us an impartial view which is critical"* and *"We value this impartial feedback we get from the file checks – we don't always see things from their eyes."*



## REVIEW

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

The approach to measuring the social impact of contract delivery is through policy development. The Group employs a directorate that researches wider social issues and documents how the delivery of contracts demonstrates social impact in the communities in which it operates. It has recently published two social impact reports, looking at Disability and Employment, following the delivery of Work Choice and Work Programme amongst other contracts and Mental Health in Employment, reflecting the Live Well Kent and Aim4Work contract delivery. These Policy documents are published and shared with commissioners and stakeholders, to influence future decision making and policy in all social activity. Impacts include ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; promoting sustained, inclusive, and vibrant economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all; making places inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Specific measurable impacts include an 85% progression rate from learning, 96.4% success rates on skills contracts, an average increase of 85% in wellbeing (using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Health and Wellbeing Scale), some 50,000 people helped to gain work, progress in their career and develop new skills through the National Careers Service work and 97% of the 44 people moving into employment had not re-offended in a specific project. Supply Chain Partner comments included:

*"It has brought many organisations together to deliver a holistic service in the area."*

*"It has provided opportunities for people to turn their lives around (typically they would have been written off), people gain housing, sustained employment which reduces re-offending."*

*"Due to our relationships with housing associations, 100% of our clients leaving prison after serving a long sentence have been housed."*

Shaw Trust Group delivers services for people at a disadvantage, so they can gain life and employability skills to live more independently, secure sustainable employment and actively contribute to family and community life. It seeks to educate and influence society to remove barriers and create opportunities for those at a disadvantage and help to build supportive communities for a more inclusive society. Joint activities with Supply Chain Partners are assessed, and it is found that these generate a positive impact on customer groups. Comments from the assessment included:

*"Staff gain real job satisfaction from working from start to end with the customer – we consulted them about having In Work Support team, but they wanted to see a customer all the way through."*

*"We provide a tailored service for each individual to enable them to gain independence and move onto permanent housing."*

*"We submit case studies / success stories which indicate the impact on people's lives."*

*"The case studies show the impact on people's lives; also, people come back as we are a safe place to visit."*

## 8. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

This assessment provided the opportunity to review the Shaw Trust Group against the Merlin Standard, and accreditation is granted for a two year period. The senior leadership team are asked to be mindful that any significant organisational or senior staff changes, and / or being awarded additional contracts using a significantly different supply chain may require a strategic review. Similarly, any decisions reached by the Independent Complaints Examiner may also result in a strategic review being required to ensure the Organisation continues to operate in line with the Merlin principles.

### Holders of the Merlin Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their approach to Supply Chain Management.
- Cooperate with annual Reviews as required by Assessment Services Ltd
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd ([merlin@assessmentsservices.com](mailto:merlin@assessmentsservices.com)) or their Lead Assessor if the key contact name or contact details change.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: ([merlin@assessmentsservices.com](mailto:merlin@assessmentsservices.com))
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they gain additional contracts.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received from Supply Chain Partners.
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the Merlin Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- Only use the Merlin Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines.
- Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for Accreditation Review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the Merlin Standard Quality Mark, nor refer to being a former holder of the Merlin Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.
- Submit their Booking Form for reaccreditation 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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