



**merlin**

promoting supply chain excellence

**Assessment Report**

**For**

**NEWCASTLE COLLEGE GROUP  
(INTRAINING LTD)**

**By Andy Richardson**

**On behalf of emqc Ltd**

**Assessment Dates: 2/6/14 – 5/6/14**

# Contents

About the Organisation .....	2
Assessment Methodology.....	2
Assessment Outcome .....	3
Strengths .....	3
Areas for Improvement.....	4
Areas Requiring Further Development .....	7
Assessment Findings .....	7
1 Supply Chain Design.....	7
2 Commitment .....	8
3 Conduct .....	14
4 Review .....	23
Conclusion.....	25

## About the Organisation

Newcastle College Group (Intraining) provides, as part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Welfare to Work programme, services designed to return the longer term unemployed back into sustainable employment.

Services offered include the Work Programme (WP), European Social Fund (ESF) funded Skills Support programmes, apprenticeships and workplace skills, Programmes of Study (for young people), traineeships and Intraining, through its centres in the Midlands, the North East of England, Yorkshire and Humberside. These provide practical training for many job functions and tailored support to help unemployed people back into sustainable employment. Centres are supported by an extensive supply chain, driven by Tier 2 end-to-end providers, who work alongside Intraining's own direct delivery provided through its own centres. Supporting the Tier 2 Supply Chain Partners (SCPs), including Intraining's own direct delivery centres, are the Tier 3 specialists. Finally, the supply chain is reinforced through a number of advisory and referral organisations, often working on a call-off and spot purchase basis, unless services are provided to the service user free of charge.

Intraining has, over the last two years, experienced significant organisational and cultural change, leading to the creation of a new post, that of Head of Supply Chain. The purpose of these changes was to create a wholly more Supply Chain Partner centred approach to service delivery, through improving communications, creating greater opportunities for collaboration and taking a collegiate approach to improving performance across the supply chain.

Intraining are accredited as a **matrix** organisation

## Assessment Methodology

This assessment is Intraining's second assessment against the Merlin standard, having been first assessed in June 2012. The scope of the assessment was based primarily on Intraining's Work Programme contract, though also factored in the Organisation's wider range of work, as described in the services above.

The team comprised of Andy Richardson (Lead Assessor) and two team assessors: Susan Smith and Alice Grove.

At an initial planning meeting between the Lead Assessor and senior representatives of Intraining, including the person acting as Coordinator for this Merlin assessment, a sample of SCPs were identified that suitably reflected the make-up of Intraining's supply chain. From this sample, the Coordinator created schedules for each of the assessors, modified marginally over subsequent weeks to accommodate the availability of individuals.

During the assessment, assessors reviewed a diverse and substantial range of evidence, including written documentation and electronic systems. This was supported by face-to-face and phone interviews with representatives of Intraining, including the direct delivery offices and the SCPs at tiers 2, 3 and 4 within the two Contract Package Areas (CPAs) covered.

Each assessor completed the schedule of interviews over the first three days of this assessment, convening on day four to share findings and agree scorings for each criterion within the Merlin standard. These detailed findings were provided to Intraining's leadership and management team, including Directors and senior managers, at a feedback session on the afternoon of the fourth day. This feedback included the final outcome of the assessment, as well as providing an overview of the key areas of strength and areas for consideration when it comes to continuous improvement moving forward.

## Assessment Outcome

Overall %	93%
Overall Outcome	Excellent
Supply Chain Design	Excellent
Commitment	Excellent
Conduct	Excellent
Review	Excellent

## Strengths

A number of strengths were identified during this Merlin assessment and summaries of these are given below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard to which the areas relate.

### ***Supply Chain Design***

- ▲ Supply chain design has been shown to be of a high standard throughout all criteria of Principle 1. The scope and range of Intraining's provision and its links with wider networks has allowed for some very effective relationships to be established with local councils, employer networks, various national bodies, voluntary and third sector organisations and major pre-existing providers, enabling a diversity and depth to its provision.

Clear consideration has been given to the wider social objectives of the commissioners and strong links are being established with organisations concerned with homelessness, poverty, criminality and health. (1a.1, 1a.2 & 4a.1)

### ***Communications and Relationships***

- ▲ Good up-front communications, through presentations, group discussions and one-to-one dialogue, enabled prospective SCPs to see exactly what is on offer through the contract in a transparent fashion.

This included helping them to understand the processes, relationships, obligations and reporting lines throughout the supply chain and SCPs in particular commented positively on the support available through the Supply Chain Managers (SCMs) as part of the

onboarding processes.

- ▲ Central to the building of effective relationships are the core principles upon which the entire ethos of Intraining is based. These principles were established from the very outset of the contracts and are understood and shared across the supply chain. (2a.1, 2a.4, 2a.5, 2c.3, 3a.1)
- ▲ The approach taken by Intraining is clearly collegiate and all the SCPs commented that they find the consultation arrangements to be both transparent and effective. From the monthly reviews to the quarterly SCP meetings, all those interviewed indicated that they had frequent opportunities to share ideas and concerns and are confident that action will be taken by Intraining as appropriate. (2a.2)

### ***Performance Management***

- ▲ The effective communications and positive relationships also support a robust approach to performance management of the supply chain, allowing for efficient resolution of any problems arising. These mechanisms support clear performance outcomes and all SCPs are clear as to the expectations that Intraining have of them and what they can reasonably expect from Intraining in turn. (3d.2 & 3d.3).

## **Areas for Improvement**

The following areas have been identified as opportunities for Intraining to improve and develop its approach to supply chain management. The comments should be seen as recommendations only and are not to be considered as 'mandated' in any way. It should be noted that the next Merlin assessment will review the Organisation's approach to these areas in order to establish progress as appropriate.

### **Commitment**

#### ***Collaboration, Cooperation and Communication.***

- ▲ With good degrees of consultation with the many and various Tier 2s and some Tier 3s, there is now an opportunity to extend consultative practices to the wider network of Tier 3s and, where possible, the Tier 4s. This will help to ensure that the broadest views are taken into account in the design and the development of processes and practices, thereby helping to meet the needs across the stakeholder group. (2a.2)

#### ***Developing Supply Chain Partners***

- ▲ Recognising that examples exist of where Intraining staff have aided and supported the strategic development of some SCPs, there is a common feeling that this could be further reinforced where appropriate, especially for the Tier 3 and possibly the Tier 4s, as these are the cornerstones of an effective supply chain. They can also often be the most vulnerable in terms of strategic and financial robustness and their withdrawal from the

supply chain can have a negative effect and a long-term legacy.

- ▲ Intraining are currently in the process of developing a range of e-learning materials with which to support the development of staff across the supply chain. It is recommended therefore that these materials include interactive elements, thereby appealing to a wider range of learning styles.
- ▲ Allied to the development of SCPs is the opportunity to raise their awareness of the various funding streams that come available from time to time, either from within or outwith the welfare to work sector. In some cases, the local councils are awarded monies that supply chains could bid for if they are made aware of the opportunities, yet often these opportunities go unrecognised by local supply chains. Here it is recommended that Intraining act as 'facilitator', rather than 'activist' by helping SCPs to be aware of funding that Intraining itself may not necessarily want to access directly.
- ▲ Whilst Intraining carries out robust due diligence checks and financial viability checks on its own SIPs, it appears to be a little less robust for Tier 3s that are working to other Tier 2 SCPs and not Intraining. It is therefore recommended that all Tier 3s have at least a basic credit check done to establish that they will prevail for a reasonable period of time and not have to withdraw from the supply chain at the first economic hurdle.
- ▲ It is also recommended that financial risk associated with variations to contracts be more robustly determined in order to mitigate against performance pressures that later prove to be untenable for the supply chain partner. (2b.1, 2b.2, 2b.3 & 2c.2)

## **Conduct**

### ***Demonstrating Business and Commercial Integrity***

- ▲ With the business principles having been in place now for a number of years, it is recommended that this could be a good time to undertake their review in association with the SCPs. This would enable stakeholders to ensure that the principles remain fit for purpose and further increase the level of buy-in and ownership across the supply chain. (3a.1)

### ***Quality Assurance and Compliance***

- ▲ With direct communication and reporting lines, Tier 2s are able to collect and collate data regarding customer experience at the point of delivery and share this with Intraining. What is less clear however is the robustness of equivalent processes for the Tier 3 and Tier 4 SCPs. Having a more robust process to capture customer experience could help to develop a better understanding of the customer journey that takes place beyond the immediate control of Intraining. With Tier 3s and Tier 4s offering a degree of the information, advice and guidance available, it is also recommended that the senior team consider how quality IAG can be more robustly and comprehensively assured at this level. (3b.1 & 3b.3)

- ▲ Discussions with Intraining's specialists in regards to environmental sustainability, safeguarding, health and safety and data security, revealed that some good work has been done and progress has been made in defining some excellent parameters against which to measure progress and performance in the future. Equally there is evidence of good practice across this suite of topics, however there is something of a lack of consistency in approach taken by the teams involved. It is therefore recommended that the senior management team looks to review the various approaches taken and in so doing, identify and share this good practice. (3b.4, 3b.5, 3b.6 & 3b.7)
- ▲ In discussions with SCPs regarding best practice, it became evident that no clear definition has been shared throughout the supply chain. As a result, SCPs gave many and varied examples of what best practice might look like. It is therefore recommended that Intraining provides a clear definition of what 'best practice' is in relation to the contract being delivered and that a definition for 'excellent' also be developed. This should help to identify best practice where it exists and create a framework for discussions at the various supply chain meetings. (3b.8)

### ***Performance***

- ▲ 'Innovation' can often be one of those nebulous subjects and it is recommended that the senior team discuss the nature and definition of innovation as it applies across the supply chain. It is further recommended that this definition be generated in consultation with SCPs, as this will help to reinforce and embed the concept. (3d.2)
- ▲ MAYTAS is currently being used as Intraining's management information system. Not without its faults, it is recommended that Intraining looks to define a migration plan for the system that will manage the expectations of the supply chain. (3d.4)

### **Supply Chain Review**

- ▲ With the supply chain having been developed to meet the wider needs of the commissioner, it is recommended that Intraining look to establish additional *measurable* data on the impact activities are having on these social objectives, in particular Environmental Sustainability, for example through the setting of targets across the supply chain.

Intraining have made some good progress in setting itself targets to achieve in this latter respect and driving these down to all SCPs will help them to identify their own contributions, as well as allowing Intraining to create a corporate view. It would also be prudent to look to other wider stakeholders to gain impact data, for example the National Housing Federation for homelessness data, NHS trusts for data on the impact on health and wellbeing and the judicial system for data on criminality, etc. (3b.7, 4a.3, 4a.4 & 4a.6)

## Areas Requiring Further Development

As Intraining has met the Standard, as described in the Section 'Assessment Outcome', there have been no areas for development identified as requiring immediate action in order to gain accreditation. However Intraining should consider the above Section 'Areas for Improvement', in order to continue to seek excellence in all their supply chain management activities.

## Assessment Findings

### 1 Supply Chain Design

#### 1a) Supply chain design

The scope and variety of the supply chain was found to be of a high standard with a good representation of public, private and third sector organisations forming the network used to deliver services. This use of a diverse range of delivery partners, including national associations and other Prime contractors, enables the commissioner's objectives to be addressed effectively, for example in the areas of employability, health and well-being, criminality and financial hardship.

The organisations within the supply chain are able to deliver services to a wide range of customer groups with varying needs. Supply Chain Partners (SCPs) were initially, and continue to be, selected based on geographical coverage, experience and track record, as well as for their specialisms. Element 2c carries more detail of the selection process itself.

There is clear evidence that Intraining undertook research and consultation regarding local demographics and existing supply chains and delivery models, as well as employer and customer needs. In addition to an analysis of their own experiences in delivering a range of contracts, this research consisted of discussions with various Local Authorities, government departments, existing providers, Job Centre Plus, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), key employers, including the rail industry and other central players in the areas covered by the various contracts. Particularly worthy of note is Intraining's use of a National Health Service model for managing the longer term ill-health conditions within the Expert Patient Programme.

Payment Groups (PGs) 6 and 9 and their particular needs have had a significant impact on the design of the supply chain and in one case, three of the Primes work jointly to identify specialist support needs related to one particular client group.

**"They've really turned around in the last year to 18 months with regards to numbers and meaningful support". (SCP)**

**"You can see by looking at the providers they've got that they thought about the wide range of needs and that they have taken account of the government's social objectives". (SCP)**



Good use has been made of NOMIS data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and from other national and local sources, a good example of which relates to a recent tender submission, where the data was used to create a compelling case for funding. Policy trawls and data trawls also build in public and local authority information related to NEETs (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) figures, including projected jobs data.

Over the course of the contract thus far, there is evidence of an evolving supply chain and examples were provided of a number of new SCPs being brought in to the supply chain to reinforce and enrich the range of provision on offer, for example to provide end to end support for people with disabilities and to cater for the needs of ex-offenders.

Intraining is also able to identify a number of organisations outside its own supply chain that are used to provide further support of a more specialist nature and this was confirmed in some of the discussions with SCPs. Examples here include: Job Centre Plus, housing associations, families associations, borough and district councils and various NHS trusts and health sector support groups.

## 2 Commitment

### 2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

The procurement processes for SCPs within Intraining were found to be effective and transparent. SCPs commented that they found the communications throughout the procurement process to be of high order and that there are good links to established best practice, for example the weighting of questions. The communication processes included a number of presentations and workshops for all interested parties, together with emails, face-to-face discussions with existing networks and individual organisations.

Opportunities to engage with Intraining have been posted on their own web site that links to a dedicated partner web portal and meetings with the Supply Chain Managers (SCMs) keep SCPs up to date with emerging developments.

**“You quickly got the feel that this is a very open organisation. I found communication processes from the very start to be excellent.” (SCP)**

**“I had regular meetings and attended several group sessions to learn more about the contract and how Intraining operate”. (SCP)**

The only slightly negative comment came in the time taken from being successful at the tender stage to the receipt of the official contract, though SCPs were quick to point out that they felt this was down to the parent organisation, Newcastle College Group (NCG) rather than Intraining itself. It is understood that the corporate team at NCG is currently addressing this concern in consultation with Intraining.

Following procurement, communications continue to be good, with SCPs citing discussions with their SCM and quarterly quality and compliance audits, ongoing emails and networking events as effective at all levels.

SCP meetings in particular received very positive comments, with SCPs commenting that they found them to be open, honest and effective at challenging processes and identifying good practice currently in effect. There is sense that Tier 3 SCPs are somewhat 'out of the loop' when it comes to communications from Intraining in this sense and this then may be worthy of further investigation by the senior management team (SMT).

Discussions with unsuccessful supply chain applicants indicated that they have been provided with quite specific feedback related to each criterion within the application and compared the applicant's scores to the scores of the winning bidder. This feedback then went on to explain the reasons for the scoring in each section. This approach has enabled SCPs to develop and improve their bid writing and, in some cases, this has led to successful subsequent bids. In this way, it can be seen that Intraining has helped to support and enhance the capabilities of SCPs and build capacity.

Intraining has certainly proved to the satisfaction of its SCPs that they listen and act on what they hear through the range of feedback opportunities and the 'strengths' section of this report identifies a more collegiate approach to managing relationships that now exists.

This consultation has impacted on many aspects, including the development of the Supply Chain Management Framework (SMF) and the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), both of which are core to the recruitment and management of Intraining's effective supply chain.

**"The DPS has evolved over time really, we've made quite a few improvements to the system through the discussions that we've had at supply chain meetings and with our Supply Chain Manager". (SCP)**

**"There is certainly the freedom to be creative". (SCP)**

There are many examples of SCPs working and collaborating for mutual benefit and these include the use of programmes offered by other providers, for example an employability course to help customers move more quickly into employment and the sharing of premises in order that SCPs are not required to invest in funding and leasing arrangements for only a limited delivery time. There are also examples of Intraining bringing parts of their own supply chain together to help reduce NEET levels amongst young people. Quarterly supply chain meetings are well received by SCPs as a vehicle to collaborate and have open participation and many commented on the efforts taken to develop the various systems and processes. Other examples include the collaborations between SCPs in meeting the needs of those hardest to reach and those facing the largest barriers to employment.

**"The meetings are open and it's easy to bring up issues". (SCP)**

**"Collaboration is good and has helped us to save money in leasing our own premises". (SCP)**

**"I think there is a genuine spirit and commitment across the supply chain for collaboration and partnership working. We've worked with a number of Primes over the years and I think that this is the strongest in this respect that I've come across". (SCP)**

Whilst these cases exist, there are fewer examples evident of Tier 3s & Tier 4s being consulted or collaborated with for the benefit of the supply chain and this may be worthy of further consideration going forward.

All those SCPs interviewed within this assessment were clear as to the business relationships underpinning supply chain arrangements now in place and there was no ambiguity evident. All Tier 3 SCPs operate under a Service Level Agreement (SLA), whether they contract with Intraining directly through one of their delivery centres, or through one of the Tier 2s.

**“The various contracts and service level agreements make relationships very clear, though sometimes communications can be delayed where they have to come through one of the end to end partners”. (Tier 3 SCP)**

With very effective working relationships in place at both senior and operational levels, communication was cited by all SCPs to be of a high standard. In addition to face-to-face discussions, for example at the monthly performance reviews and the quarterly audits for quality and compliance purposes, Intraining has introduced a number of guidance and support materials, for example the ‘Telekits’ and the ‘InSync’ newsletter, to help keep SCPs up to date with a wide range of developments and emerging issues. Alongside this run the daily and weekly email and phone contacts, as well as the more structured regional conferences.

All SCPs questioned commented that they found the communications to be open and honest, with some commenting on the ‘no secrets’ approach taken by Intraining. Many SCPs commented that they feel communications have improved over the last couple of years or so, citing the new management structure, the work of the SCMs and the introduction of various new processes as major contributory factors.

**“Communications are always professional and supportive”. (SCP)**

**“I think that they are always been open and honest in their communications with the partners, that’s just part of their values and who they are”. (SCP)**

## **2b) Developing supply chain partners**

With existing providers coming into the supply chain to deliver these contracts from the very outset, many SCPs are already well established and at an advanced state of organisational development, requiring little in the way of further development by Intraining. That said, Intraining did provide examples of working with their Tier 2 SCPs in order to help build capacity and to develop strategically, for example through the provision of leadership training and support. The supply chain meetings and regional conferences provide further opportunities for strategic development of SCPs through the provision of guidance and the sharing of best practice. It is through these mechanisms that SCPs have been encouraged to move into other contract areas and to develop their own approaches to program delivery, thereby improving performance.

**“The Supply Chain Managers are particularly encouraging”. (SCP)**

For a small number of Tier 3 and Tier 4 however, encouragement and support has been less forthcoming and this remains an area where further development by Intraining could bring dividends, for example in identifying potential SCP failure earlier than that indicated by any financial 'Red Flag' type system, as often, this is too late to effect a remedy.

There is good evidence to show that additional funding streams have been brought to the attention of SCPs, e.g. through the monthly review meetings and other communication channels. Several SCPs commented that they had been able to identify alternative funding streams as a result of the information received from Intraining and in some cases they had shared this with other members of the supply chain. Developed relationships with local authorities and the providers of employability programmes were also cited by SCPs as being beneficial in their strategic development.

**"It's made big difference to us – we've seen a 20% increase in the delivery of our face to face sessions as a result (of access to other SCPs)". (SCP)**

In regards to developing the staff within the SCPs, there are many examples of training being offered, in the main associated with systems and processes, but also including safeguarding, equality and diversity and data security.

The training offered thus far has been without cost to the SCPs and has been delivered either by Intraining's own training staff, or by drawing in internal specialists as required, for example to brief on data security issues. There are also examples of Intraining providing coaching and mini training sessions to help SCPs to fully understand processes and staff from both SCPs and Intraining have met up to share experiences. SCPs are also actively encouraged by their Supply Chain Manager to raise areas where they considered that their staff would benefit from training or development activity not already planned by Intraining. The subcontractor portal was also commented upon during discussions in terms of sharing useful information and best practice that can help SCPs improve performance

**"There's some good stuff on the portal". (SCP)**

**"They've delivered some really useful training over the last couple of years, especially around the Information Systems. The portal is also really useful for accessing information and learning and you know you can always get support from your Supply Chain Manager." (SCP)**

Examples were also provided by SCPs of support being offered for the induction of a new operations manager within one particular SCP and in so doing helped the SCP to move from low compliance to 94% compliance overall. With a number of developments planned over the coming months, opportunities exist for Intraining to expand the range of staff development available to supply chain personnel, in particular at Tier 3 & Tier 4 for whom this could provide a valuable source of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

## 2c) Contracting and funding

It is clear that Intraining have continued to build on their strengths from the previous Merlin assessment and, from discussions with SCPs, the contracting processes continue to be considered as fair and equitable by all those interviewed and, as identified above, communications are good throughout the process.

Potential supply chain partners are identified through an established Expression of Interest (EoI) process and applications are scored against a matrix that includes performance, quality, engagement and local labour market needs. Best practice is demonstrated in that this scoring process also factors in the priorities and relationships between the criteria through a weighting system. Feedback is provided to all applicants and shows how their score compares to the winning score, this being supported by a brief narrative against each area. Discussions with SCPs in this regard identified that this has proven to be highly effective in terms of improving the quality of subsequent applications and, in some cases, this has led to applicants being appointed to the supply chain.

**“The feedback we received was particularly useful in helping us to develop our approach to bid writing. Not only are we now part of Intraining’s supply chain, we have also been successful in other bid submissions and that has helped as no end”. (SCP)**

**“The DPS is particularly robust, yet I think it is fair and transparent and is one of the best I’ve seen”. (SCP)**

Successful applicants were then put through a standard due-diligence process that included financial stability and this process was applied to all SCPs on direct contract to Intraining.

SCPs commented favourably on the fact that the communications had made the funding arrangements clear from the very start including the management fee level and purpose. There were several examples of the funding/payment structures being varied to help mitigate any undue financial hardships for specialists, especially as some SCPs struggled initially with the payment by results payment model. In one case however, an SCP had had a significant increase in volumes and this had potentially placed them in a financial risk situation. One of the recommendations made therefore is that such increases are always accompanied by financial viability checks.

SCPs confirmed that Intraining has devised and distributed effective and robust contract and guidance documents that clearly define the obligations of both Intraining and its SCPs. Tier 3s working to Intraining’s own direct delivery offices indicated that they are operating under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Intraining and other Tier 3s confirmed they had written agreement with one of the Tier 2s.

**“We have always found Intraining to be open to requests to vary the terms of any agreement”. (Tier 2 SCP)**

**“The contracts are very clear and define exactly what the obligations are of everyone involved”. (SCP)**

There is evidence to suggest however that not all Tier 3s are having their financial viability established by the Tier 2s and this may be worthy of further consideration by Intraining.

Market share has been defined and agreed largely based on geographic areas, with a degree of flexibility when it comes to boundaries. Specialisms also play a part and, as a result of the presentations and up front discussions in advance of contracts being issued, in which the delivery model was outlined, SCPs are generally aware of how market share was allocated. SCP awareness of market share is reinforced through the monthly performance statistics that are published and accessible to all directly contracting supply chain partners.

**“I think there is a fair share of volumes between partners and Intraining’s own direct delivery offices”. (SCP)**

**“Market share has been based on expertise, capacity and postcode and I think that that is the fairest way to do things”. (SCP)**

**“As (part of the supply chain), we have been given market share in way that means we can still deliver the quality that we want to”. (SCP)**

There is also evidence to show that proactive negotiation took place regarding volumes and expectations, with examples being provided where numbers have been adjusted under contract variations to better reflect demand and capacities/capabilities. These include the moves to better cater for the ex-offender payment group (PG9) and people with disabilities (PG6). Evidence exists of funding arrangements being flexed based on performance to date and all SCPs commented that they found arrangements to be fair, equitable and effective.

**“Intraining enables us to put the customer at the heart of everything we do”. (SCP)**

**“It definitely feels like the volumes and contracts are genuinely negotiated – it is not a case of *“here’s what you’ve got”*”.**

The ability to vary payment terms and structures have allowed Intraining to meet the needs and expectations of SCPs post contract and make their obligations as discussed and agreed prior to the contracts being issued. There is also evidence to show that Intraining also took account of pre-existing SCP processes that could be incorporated into the contract, rather than imposing their own on the SCP.

**“They explained everything up front and have kept their word – it all went smoothly”. (SCP)**

The transfer of funds throughout the supply chain is working effectively with no examples identified within this assessment of inaccurate, or late payments being made. Evidence shows that the incidence of withheld payments has reduced over the last 2 years as SCPs become more adept at submitting payments through the management information system and relationships have developed in which issues can be resolved professionally and amicably. All SCPs found the management information system to effectively support the claims process, and there are several examples of staged repayments and shared payments being agreed in order to preserve the financial integrity of the SCP.

The initial presentations and discussions around procurement have done an effective job and all Tier 2 providers are aware of the level of management fee and its purpose in quite specific terms, citing management information, staff training, Intraining's infrastructure, the development of systems and processes, quality and compliance audits, communication tools and Intraining support generally.

**"I think is clear just what we get for the management fee and although obviously I would like it to be lower, I think it represents value for money" (SCP)**

**"We are currently investigating the possibilities of introducing a menu-driven approach in which Partners can identify the services they require and the management fee will be varied accordingly". (Intraining)**

### **3 Conduct**

#### **3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity**

The working relationships between Intraining and its SCPs are clearly effective at all levels and have improved since the initial assessment in 2012. There are particularly good relationships between the SCMs and SCPs and feedback from Tier 2s, Tier 3s and Tier 4s all suggests that these relationships are fundamental to the effective working of the supply chain and the success it has enjoyed. The core principles and operating philosophy of Intraining have been presented to the supply chain as part of the workshops and support provided to SCPs during the onboarding process and are very much in keeping with those of NCG. Over the last 18 months, work has been done in consultation with the SCPs to develop the SMF that encompasses these business principles and it is evident from discussions with the SCPs that all staff at every level within Intraining are upholding these values during day-to-day activities.

**"We have discussed the basic principles at several of our supply chain meetings and I think they are now very clear to all". (SCP)**

**"The values of Intraining are very transparent and it is clear how they link to our own". (SCP)**

With significant experience under their belt and the support of HR related specialists, Intraining has demonstrated a good understanding of the TUPE processes and requirements and the transfer of staff between organisations have been effectively managed. Regular meetings and discussions and workshops, together with a nominated specialist within Intraining that acted as the focal point for enquiries and provided one-to-one support, all helped TUPE'd staff to make the transition effectively and allayed any concerns they might otherwise have had. The support has also been extended to those SCPs who technically speaking are outside the remit of Intraining.

**"I was stressed and then (Intraining) HR explained the process which eased my mind. When TUPED over to Intraining felt welcomed". (SCP)**



**“We provided them with support and guidance and met with the staff in order to help them understand the processes and to put their mind at ease as much as we could. We didn’t have to do that, but we knew that if we didn’t, the Partners and their people within them could be negatively affected”. (Intraining)**

As identified earlier in this report, the relationships and interactions between Intraining and its SCPs are wholly positive; this, despite some difficult decisions being taken, together with extrapolation and performance improvement requirements. Pivotal to these effective relationships are the Supply Chain Managers, supported by Regional Partnership Managers. The appointment of a Head of Supply Chain has also been instrumental in raising the strategic importance of effective relationships throughout the supply chain.

**“I can’t begin to describe how much support and help we’ve had from our manager. You really feel that they are working with you and are on your side”. (SCP)**

**“Even though we are not part of the supply chain any more I’ll still describe the relationships as positive and I’d happily come back into the supply chain if I had the chance”. (Tier 2 SCP)**

**“Nothing is too much bother for either Intraining or SCP members. Right from the start there has been help and support” (SCP)**

These interactions are supported by the monthly and quarterly reviews for performance, compliance and quality assurance purposes and reinforced through the quarterly SCP and Best Practice meetings.

Changes in legislation and statutory requirements are notified effectively through discussions and emails and these are again reinforced within the monthly performance reviews and discussions with Intraining’s SCMs and during QA and audit activities. InSync, Telekit sessions and best practice meetings also play a large part in helping SCPs to keep up to date with latest legislative and regulatory requirements, as do DWP’s Exchange updates. The effective relationships and open dialogue provide for a high degree of understanding amongst SCPs regarding interpretation and implications of funding, regulatory and legislative changes.

**“Intraining do a great job in keeping us up-to-date with any changes that might affect us. The subcontractor portal, E-mails and newsletters are the starting point, and these are followed up when our Supply Chain Manager visits us”. (SCP)**

### **3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance**

Quality Assurance processes and practices are good at the Tier 2, end-to-end provider level and within Intraining’s own direct delivery provision, all driven by the SMF. These processes include quarterly quality reviews and a full audit against DWP providing guidance on at least an annual basis. Each SCP will then receive their own post-audit report and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), detailing improvement areas as agreed and these are reviewed as a matter of course at the next audit.



The SCMs also review the quality of provision during their monthly meetings with SCPs along with performance against contract. Customer experience is monitored on an ongoing basis through Survey Monkey and through the tracking of comments, compliments and complaints. Customer forums also feed valuable information in to Intraining and these are further supported by observations at the point of delivery, including interviews with customers and through telesurveys.

All results of QA activities and feedback are channeled through Intraining's Head of Supply Chain, in order to identify trends and areas for development. SCPs commented that they find the quality and compliance audits to be well managed, effectively conducted and valuable in identifying areas for development. Examples of improvements as a result of these activities include, modified observation processes and system developments, including the move away from a RAG rating system to the five-point scale that Intraining have developed

**"We negotiated on the sampling quantity and coverage so as not to be too onerous while still meeting requirements". (SCP)**

**"We've both learned and put infrastructures in place (as result of the QA processes)" (SCP)**

**"I've always found the quality assurance processes to be highly effective and supportive. We've made a number of improvements as a result and this has helped to improve our performance. We even shared this at some of the supply chain meetings that we have". (SCP)**

With well established SCPs, many of whom having a long history in the field of Information, Advice and Guidance, Intraining is able to demonstrate that access to good quality provision is made available and promoted to customers at the point of delivery, where this takes place at Tiers 2 and 3 and through the Intraining direct delivery offices. Intraining itself has been assessed and accredited against the **matrix** Standard and its Tier 2 SCPs also either hold this accreditation, or are working towards this national standard. For any SCP working under Skills Funding Agency funding, accreditation against the **matrix** Standard is obligatory. In recent months, a new observation form has been introduced specifically to monitor the delivery of information, advice and guidance sessions delivered by SCPs.

Through the various communication channels, directories, networking approaches and one-to-one dialogue, all SCPs are aware of the IAG available in their geographic areas. Intraining has also supported the development of a range a promotional materials and information about the services in conjunction with some of the SCPs and these have been widely distributed throughout the supply chain. Intraining equally was found to provide good quality information, advice and guidance to its own SCPs and training modules have been provided for frontline staff to help embed core policies and procedures to good effect.

**"I've always found the information, advice and guidance we've received from Intraining to be excellent and it makes our job so much easier than it would otherwise have been". (SCP)**

As part of procuring new SCPs, Intraining provides detailed information on the various system requirements and this includes data security. Data Security within Intraining is designed to meet ISO 27001 standards and is closely monitored and implemented during the Due Diligence process at the outset, including site visits and penetration tests to all Tier 2s and Tier 3s and at frequent intervals thereafter as part of the QA and compliance audits. The IT Department within Intraining have a responsibility for ensuring that all parties are compliant and the general feeling amongst SCPs is that measures to ensure information security is robust. Observations undertaken by Intraining whilst on site, for example during performance reviews, are used to determine the degree of compliance with requirements. Such visits are used to determine the degree to which SCPs are protecting data by ensuring that computer screens are cleared and locked down when SCP staff leave the position where they are viewing information and how hardcopy information/records are maintained. Each SCP is issued with a copy of the NCG security policy and all Tier 2 SCPs are required to submit their own security plan. In order to help drive data security forward, Intraining have also provided presentations at the quarterly supply chain meetings.

**“They take data security very seriously”. (SCP)**

**“Data security is extremely rigorous and we receive regular checks”. (SCP)**

**“We did a lot around the data security when we first joined the supply chain and we had to submit a plan to show how we would maintain and improve our standards. Since then we’ve had penetration tests and discussions and I think we’ve improved a lot in this area over the last couple of years”. (SCP)**

**“There’s been a couple of security breaches over the last year or so, but rather than try and hide them, Intraining have brought them into the supply chain meetings and used them as a learning situation and we all benefited from that”. (SCP)**

Health and Safety policies are also initially assessed by Health and Safety (H&S) specialists as part of the procurement process and again reviewed as part of the monthly performance discussions between the Tier 2 SCPs and their SCMs and by the QA and compliance teams in their quarterly inspections. In the event of any shortfall, or corrective action being required, an action plan is drawn up by the SCP and agreed with their SCM, supported by Intraining’s specialist H&S advisors.

Discussions with the SCPs in this assessment would indicate there has been some specific training made available to SCPs on H&S and further guidance is available through the specialist team as required and requested. This training is undertaken over two days, rather than the more typical one day sessions delivered by other providers. In order to support the site visits made to all direct contract SCPs, Intraining also requires Tier 3s to undertake a workplace appraisal, which is then submitted to the H&S Team for approval.

A similar situation exists for safeguarding, with initial checks on policies in place through the procurement processes and ongoing monitoring of SCPs for effective practices during the reviews and inspections by Intraining staff. A specified member of Intraining staff effectively acts as a Designated Safeguarding Manager (DSM) and a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) supports the role at each of the Intraining sites.

With safeguarding having a high profile, many SCPs have developed their own approach and policies and many have undergone specific training in this regard and again this is a topic that has been made generally available to them by Intraining. The Survey Monkey online questionnaire also captures customers' views on safeguarding and this is reviewed by the specialist team on a regular basis. A revamped Safeguarding Policy has been developed in conjunction with some of the SCPs to include a flowchart and advises customers/ staff on key considerations through posters/information and induction.

Monthly management information returns capture related data, although there have been no reported, or identified incidents since contract start. With both safeguarding and H&S, there remains a need to continue the work to drill down to the SCPs at Tiers 3 and 4.

There are policies in place throughout the supply chain related to Environmental Sustainability (ES) and this forms part of the selection criteria for all supply chain applicants and is an integral part of the structured reviews, audits and inspections undertaken by Intraining. NCG's Sustainability Policy has its place on the subcontractor portal to act as a guide for all SCPs and staff. Intraining itself is subject to ESF and DWP audits on a regular basis and these factor in their approach to environmental sustainability. Intraining has made some good strides forward in understanding its own performance related to ES, for example in identifying carbon emissions, business mileage and energy consumption, though there are currently no targets defined to improve performance against these metrics. Nor have any targets been defined for SCPs specifically related to ES issues, beyond those that the SCP organisations may have in place of their own volition. The collation and analysis of this data is also in its infancy at this time, although this forms part of a feasibility study for Intraining moving forward over the next few months. A recent development has been the production of guidance notes, though this has yet to reach the SCPs.

**"We've started to look at the feasibility of measuring impact and benchmarking against good practice in sustainability". (Intraining Specialist)**

**"We have our own policy with regards to sustainability and we have objectives to achieve, though we haven't been set any targets by Intraining". (SCP)**

**"We're definitely encouraged by Intraining to improve our environmental sustainability and we've talked about what we might do beyond just recycling". (SCP)**

There are many and varied examples of 'excellent practice' being shared and demonstrated, e.g. the use of Survey Monkey to collect customer experience data, the sharing of exemplar policies and the use of incentive strategies to increase the collection of job outcome evidence. Through the good practice workshops and SCP meetings, Intraining has created a good understanding throughout the supply chain of just what represents good practice. These opportunities enable SCPs to identify what they believe to be good practice and share the same with colleagues. In discussing good practice, the comments made by SCPs were wholly positive when describing Intraining's approach to identifying and sharing good/excellent practice and several referred to the sharing of details around the data breaches as highly beneficial in helping them to avoid similar situations going forward.

**“We get lots of opportunities to identify and share good practice. Not only do we get to discuss such things at the supply chain meetings, but our Supply Chain Manager is exceptional in helping us to identify good practice that exists elsewhere and incorporate it into our own practices”. (SCP)**

**“We’ve worked a lot together and that’s helpful to identify and share good practice, especially when dealing with those furthest from the labour market”. (SCP)**

### **3c) Honouring Commitments**

Intraining has managed SCP expectations well with effective communications being demonstrated and communicated upon throughout the procurement phase and during live running. Overall, expectations have been clearly defined from the outset and these have been communicated in both written format and verbally through discussions. Within this assessment, SCPs confirmed their understanding of these expectations and that post-contract arrangements reflect pre-contract agreements. All parties agreed that there is now an open culture for communication that encourages and allows both the Prime and SCPs to voice their opinion and/or seek clarification where required. Any changes to the original agreements are covered diligently by variations to contracts, for example where original targets have had to be revised due to higher or lower than anticipated referral numbers, depending on the geographic location, customer type and particulars of the contract.

**“We’ve always found them (Intraining) to be open and above board and have always honoured the pre-contract agreements”. (SCP)**

SCPs are generally aware of the dispute resolution processes and how to access it on the web portal and through their SCMs should the need arise. All SCPs were quick to point out that should they have any issues or concerns, they are confident that these will be resolved quickly and seamlessly through the efforts of their SCM and the senior management team.

It may be worth considering reinforcing this degree of understanding at the Tier 3 and Tier 4 levels, as a small number of SCPs were unaware of the dispute process.

Where SCPs indicated that a ‘dispute’ had been raised, these in reality were confined to performance issues and were managed through the performance improvement measures and all were resolved to the satisfaction of the SCPs, without the need to escalate to a higher level.

Intraining senior staff also indicated that they would abide by any decision made by the Merlin Mediation Service (MMS). Both the MMS and the Independent Case Examiner - ICE (for Work Programme SCPs) were generally known to the SCPs, though in reality, these options have not been required to this point in time by any SCP. Regarding the dispute resolution process, it may be prudent to remind all SCPs, including Tiers 3 and 4, of both the MMS and ICE where appropriate in order to maintain transparency across the piece.

As identified earlier in this report, expectations regarding processes, practices and standards form part of the pre-contract presentations, workshops and dialogues with potential SCPs and these have been built into the contracts, SLAs and service guidelines. These expectations are also defined in the SMF, and include behavioural aspects and these continue to drive the performance and quality reviews and are a key feature of the monthly and quarterly Good Practice and SCP meetings and audits by Intraining staff. Monthly partner meetings are positive and the level of support required is reflected in the management fee. Tier 3 SCPs typically receive an SLA that includes the expectations and obligations of both parties, though it may be prudent to dip sample Tier 3 SCPs who are connected to a Tier 2 provider and not Intraining in order to ensure robustness and consistency.

**“The compliance team is working closely with us on file checks and providing us with support. As result compliance has gone from 58% (Red) to 70% (Amber), with some instances of 90% (Green)”. (Tier 2 SCP)**

**“The performance management framework is clear and I think it’s understood by all providers. We discuss expectations in an open and transparent manner, typically at the supply chain meetings and of course with our Supply Chain Manager on a monthly basis”. (SCP)**

### **3d) Performance**

It is clear that aspects of the supply chain have been encouraged to work collaboratively, for example in sharing job vacancies and premises and infilling employability courses offered by another SCP. The regular email and phone contacts, monthly review meetings and attendance at Best Practice meetings evidence Intraining’s approach to working in partnership and collaboration with its SCPs. This meetings and relationships infrastructure provides for SCPs to review and discuss developments and requirements across the network, though there is a tendency for this to be end-to-end providers, rather than the specialists working at Tier 3 and Tier 4. Further encouragement by Intraining for SCPs to collaborate in joint funding bids and share resources could also reinforce this supportive approach to supply chain development and position Intraining as a catalyst for change and improvement in the eyes of the supply chain.

**“They helped us by sharing out the PG1 referrals .... and so some were taken by other SCPs to balance out the numbers and help our performance figures”. (SCP)**

**“Supply chain design helps as we only work with young people but you can learn from adult provision like the budgeting skills work or self employment advice”. (SCP)**

**“We get the right people into work to build the supply chain reputation rather than working in competition with each other”. (SCP)**

Intraining has demonstrated highly effective performance management processes and practices, primarily through the monthly performance reviews with Intraining’s Supply Chain Managers and quality and compliance team staff.

These reviews are used to determine progress against contracted Minimum Service Levels and Minimum Performance Levels. Opportunities exist for SCPs to raise issues and discuss concerns at these meetings and these are shared across the operational teams within Intraining in order to resolve them effectively. Lessons learned are also noted and shared across the network through weekly emails and ongoing discussions; though at this time there is no central log of lessons learned in this fashion.

**“One good example is where an SCM helped one of the partners to improve their performance related to job outcomes by sharing what other partners were doing. Their performance improved from 35% to 47% in a matter of months”. (Intraining Manager)**

Any under-performance identified within an SCP results in a targeted Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) being drawn up and agreed between the SCP and their SCM and this drives any subsequent reviews, audits and inspections until such time as the shortfall is addressed. Innovation is identified and discussed where it's arises within the meetings infrastructure.

**“A good example of innovation was in the development of an exit questionnaire for young people developed by one of the partners. This was identified as good practice and the partner brought it along to one of our meetings and shared it with us. That's had a positive effect on performance, as we can better understand why young people leave the programme”. (SCP)**

Through good communication and effective monitoring and reporting, supply chain partners confirmed that they are very clear as to their performance expectations and that the review processes provide for effective analysis of such performance. A league table is produced monthly to allow all SCPs with a direct contract to see their performance as compared to others.

The MAYTAS management information system is a well-established piece of technology that has developed over time with input from the supply chain and now has the capability to store, analyse and report information in a comprehensive manner. SCPs commented that it allowed for accurate data to be maintained and reported upon and several commented that they had used the reporting features to good effect in analysing their own performance. Performance information is shared across the supply chain during network meetings and is also available through the SCM's meetings with their respective SCPs. As with any system, there were a small number of SCPs who indicated that they found it to be a little unreliable on occasions, though it is evident that Intraining is working to overcome the issues.

**“It's often the case with any IT system, it will fall over from time to time. Intraining Are usually quick to respond to any problems and I got to commend them for that”. (SCP)**

**“The Maytas system is extremely useful for monitoring and sharing performance information. We get various reports on volumes and standards and finance and these are used to drive performance improvements”. (SCP)**

For a small number of SCPs, Maytas has yet to be accessed and it is recommended that Intraining create and share clear migration plans for these SCPs, in order to manage expectations effectively.

With the focus of the payment system being attachments, progress measures, job outcomes and sustained employment for the customers, those SCPs questioned were very clear that this is how they calculate value for money in their own minds, when compared to the cost of achieving these key performance indicators. In some cases, SCPs described a value for money as meeting performance expectations, up holding values and supporting customers to move closer to the jobs market.

The regional conferences are also used to gain the big picture view of what value for money is in relation to the supply chain and all SCPs agreed that Intraining offer good value for money across the supply chain.

**"I think the management fee is a good examples of how Intraining offer good value for money. It's also about getting people into jobs and sustaining them ". (SCP)**

In looking to measure and encourage demonstrable outcomes and performance improvements, the main process across the supply chain is the customer journey. This is monitored against the progress measures for all contracts through the EMPRO system and, as such, Intraining has established effective processes to determine 'distance travelled'. Initial assessment of various factors including confidence, ambition, self confidence and motivation, is undertaken using Intraining's own five point system and regular customer reviews by Intraining's advisors continue to monitor an individual's progression and development, with personal goals being agreed and monitored on an ongoing basis. For SCPs, distance travelled is equally transparent through the EMPRO system and through customer feedback.

### **3e) Promoting Diversity and Equality**

Diversity and Equality (D&E) is seen as a key issue for all customers and stakeholders aligned to Intraining. All those within the supply chain are required to have and maintain a D&E policy that at least matches that of Intraining and compliance with this requirement is confirmed during the procurement process and is subject to audit during the QA inspections and the performance reviews.

In designing the supply chain, Intraining were able to contract with SCPs that share its own beliefs and values, including those related to diversity and equality. The partnering Primes and other large stakeholders of Intraining have very clear guidelines and requirements in this respect leading to a high degree of visibility for this issue and, through Intraining, all SCPs are clear as to expectations.

The Intraining Maytas system is designed to capture diversity and equality data and there are some examples internally of this data being reviewed by both Intraining staff and SCP staff. In one case for example, training was provided to the rest of the supply chain by one of the Tier 3 SCPs who specialise in working with people with autism.



Training modules have also been provided, for example on Safeguarding and equal opportunities and InSync and the sub-contractor portal carries several articles related to this subject.

**“Intraining are very keen on equality and diversity and we discuss it at the quarterly meetings with the other providers”. (SCP)**

**“We monitor equality and diversity as part of the teaching and learning and the information, advice and guidance observations and of course, in the quarterly quality reviews”. (Intraining Manager)**

SCPs were clear when it came to describing how Intraining use the data to determine any equality and diversity issues. Examples provided include an SCM working with a small SCP to review the images used within their promotional materials to ensure that they reflect the local community. In another example, an SCP talked of how changes have been made to provision for lone parents in order to allow them to start at a later time.

**“There’s much more of an emphasis now on equality and diversity and that’s changing how we do things”. (SCP)**

## **4 Review**

### **4a) Supply chain review**

Feedback has been collected from a wide range of stakeholders such as customers, employers, SCPs, staff, local authorities, Local Employer Partnerships (LEPs), employers, third sector organisations and of course, DWP, ESF and central government, through formal processes such as performance review meetings, national and local networking or through informal situations. Customer journey results and surveys also feed in to the supply of review data to good effect and the Intraining conferences were commented upon favourably by several of the SCPs. Effective relationships with these stakeholders all provide for a rich vein of information and feedback and there were several examples of this information giving rise to improvements being made to both practices and processes throughout the supply chain.

**“Intraining is the most proactive of all our non-college providers and regularly seeks feedback and looks to make improvements”. (Wider Network Member)**

**“We’ve improved our whole approach to monitoring progression as a result of the feedback we’ve had from stakeholders”. (Intraining Manager)**

**“There’s been a lot of streamlining and refining of systems and processes over the last couple of years as the result of discussions and feedback at the supply chain meetings and conferences we’ve attended”. (SCP)**



In keeping with DWP requirements, Intraining has developed and produced a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) on an annual basis. Contributing to this report are the discussions held with SCPs during the performance reviews and the requirement of all Tier 2 'end to end' SCPs to complete and submit relevant information through their own SAR. In at least one case, Intraining provided support and training to one of the Tier 2 SCPs in conducting and writing their own SAR and one SCM used a workshop approach with a number of SCPs to provide guidance and create an opportunity for them to produce their own SAR in supported fashion.

The outcome of this process is a series of Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) for each of the SCPs across the contract package areas, together with an all-encompassing SAR and QIP, used by Intraining to drive development and improvement activities. The overarching QIP is not currently shared across the supply chain network, however highlights are shared through the various communication routes, e.g. the website, the InSync newsletter and the performance review and quality meetings as appropriate and each Tier 2 SCP has their own copy of their QIP, though currently there is no published timescale for this.

**“They’ve helped us to understand the importance of SAR writing”. (SCP)**

**“The improvement plans have been really useful in helping us to focus on what we need to do in the future to improve our performance and meet their expectations”. (SCP)**

Providing an opportunity to include more Tier 3 SCPs and SIPs in the process however, could effectively support this 'bottom up' approach, in order to increase the diversity and richness of the information collected.

There is a clear commitment within Intraining to the wider policy and objectives of the commissioner. This is evident in the design of the supply chain and the use of specialist providers and in the various new initiatives being explored and delivered. Many of those SCPs interviewed showed a good understanding of the commissioner's wider objectives, as well as the part they will be playing in contributing towards them in a demonstrable fashion, although this tended to some degree to relate to their own area of expertise and interest, rather than across the wider range of social objectives. Many SCPs commented on the usefulness of InSync, the Change Briefings and the Telekits as vehicles for keeping them updated on the wider policy and strategy of the commissioner and affirmed that this is a subject often discussed at the supply chain meetings and Best Practice sessions. Intraining have recently become a member of one of the Health and Well-being Boards in the north of England as a pilot and others are to follow if successful.

**“It’s been a wonderful journey of development for me”. (SCP)**

**“We quite regularly discuss DWP’s and the government’s wider social objectives and the examples that all the partners bring to the table (at SCP meetings) are really useful in understanding what’s being achieved”. (SCP)**

All SCPs interviewed were clear on how they contribute to these wider objectives and many were able to give specific individual examples of impact. Intraining have undertaken some good work in trying to understand the impact that their programmes and initiatives are having on certain sectors for example, poverty and unemployment. There are now clear opportunities to extend this analysis to include such aspects as health and well-being, recidivism and homelessness and this has been built into the recommendations earlier in this report.

**“About a year ago we started to look at the wider social objectives in line with our own aim of broadening our economic regeneration remit”. (SCP)**

The introduction of various specialists into the supply chain over the previous year or so, for example to better meet the needs of ex-offenders and those with health challenges, are clear demonstrations of how the supply chain has evolved over time to better meet the changing needs of stakeholders of all types. Indicative of this evolution can be seen in the partnership working established between Intraining and several of the other major Prime contractors to better meet the needs of particular client groups.

**“We recognised a while ago that we needed to work more strategically with some of the other Primes if we are to meet the diverse needs of the various client groups and still offer value for money”. (Intraining Manager)**

**“I can see us working more closely with the LEPs in the future and this could influence the design of our supply chain significantly”. (Intraining Manager)**

**“Obviously, Intraining will continue to look for additional opportunities to secure funding and contracts and this will mean changes to the supply chain, though I’m confident that any such changes will be done in a consultative and collaborative manner”. (SCP)**

The design and activities of the supply chain have without doubt had a positive and demonstrable impact on such aspects as poverty and employment, with some anecdotal evidence relating to other aspects, such as health and well-being. Opportunities now exist to extend the range of data collection to wider stakeholders, e.g. the NHS, the National Housing Federation, environmental organisations and the various Police Authorities, in order to better understand the wider impact of the supply chain on these key social objectives.

## Conclusion

Intraining Ltd has exhibited behaviours that fully meet the requirements of the Merlin Standard and several areas of good practice have been demonstrated.

It was evident to the assessment team that Intraining has, over the last 12 to 18 months, significantly improved communications across the supply chain and that this has resulted in improved working relationships at all levels, leading to improved performance all round.

The supply chain is clearly evolving to meet the changing needs of both the customer groups and the commissioners and any underperformance against contract is approached in a collaborative and supported manner. Wider stakeholders are clearly being consulted and involved in supply chain design and improvements and all those involved in this assessment were highly positive in their descriptions of Intraining's efforts and contributions.

Supply Chain Partners confirmed that Intraining has established and continue to demonstrate the positive behaviours expected of a Prime contractor organisation - and that the strategies, policies and processes deployed since the organisational changes and senior staff appointments have resulted in a supply chain that can better meet the needs of the various stakeholders.

In particular, good work has commenced around some of the wider social objectives, namely poverty, environmental sustainability and employability, thereby creating a good foundation on which to build over the coming year, or so.