



merlin

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report
For

AVANTA ENTERPRISE LTD

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On behalf of emqc Ltd

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About the Organisation

Avanta Enterprises Ltd (Avanta) was formed in 2006 when two organisations merged: TNG and InBiz. The organisation aims to make the world of work a better place. They create and deliver a wide range of services that are all about people, which include:

- Helping people find and keep work.
- Helping change services to increase outcomes, reduce cost and increase productivity.
- Working with local communities to make big government programmes work locally.
- Equipping people with new skills to progress in the workplace.
- Re-engaging young people in education and work.
- Helping people to set up their dream business.
- Helping people perform better in the workplace.

Avanta has been involved in Welfare to Work programmes since its formation. On behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Avanta have been providing the Work Programme in three Contract Package Areas (CPAs) since it went live in June 2011. The three CPAs are Surrey, Sussex and Kent (CPA10), North West (CPA7) and North East (CPA5).

Previously, Avanta have opted to use a high proportion of internal resources for the delivery of programmes they have been contracted to deliver. More recently, in order to meet the commissioner's objectives and the needs of the customers, the organisation has increased its focus on the design, development and management of supply chains.

Assessment Methodology

It is a requirement by DWP that all providers (Primes) of the Work Programme undertake an assessment against the Merlin Standard before 29th June 2012, which includes Avanta. The assessment team comprised of Lorna Bainbridge (Lead Assessor) and two Assessors: Andy Richardson and Stuart McRill, supported by a co-ordinator within Avanta.

The Lead Assessor met the key stakeholders of the Work Programme in March 2012, to gain an understanding of Avanta's business and discuss the logistics of the Merlin assessment. A subsequent planning meeting provided the opportunity to review the self-Assessment Questionnaire and prospective interviewees.

Interviewees were selected from a list of partners, tier 2 the end-to-end providers and Specialist Intervention Partners, referred to as tier 3. In addition, Avanta personnel involved in the design of the supply chain and implementation of the programme were identified and included in the scope of the interviews.

The assessment team spent a total of 12 days on-site reviewing documentary evidence, IT systems and undertaking interviews with a total of 25 partners; tier 2 and tier 3, across the supply chain, as well as key stakeholders involved in the delivery of the Work Programme within Avanta.

Assessment Outcome

Overall %	75%
Overall Outcome	Good
Supply Chain Design	Excellent
Commitment	Good
Conduct	Good
Review	Satisfactory

Strengths

- ▲ Extensive research and consultation has resulted in a robust supply chain with scope and variety, comprising of private, public and third sector organisations to address the holistic needs of customer groups and local demographics. (1a.1, 1a.2)
- ▲ Communication with partners is consistently open and honest, and interactions between the two parties are positive and supportive. Partnership and Performance Managers (PPMs) play an important role in terms of building the relationship with partners, which is certainly valued by the partners themselves. (2a.1, 2a.5)
- ▲ Avanta has a genuine desire to build a robust, but flexible supply chain, which provides a range of services to customers. They aim to develop a strong partnership arrangement across the network, encouraging Avanta offices and all partners to work collaboratively as they work towards a common purpose. (2a.3, 3d.1)
- ▲ Avanta want their partners to be successful in business and programme delivery, and as a result provide and share a number of business development opportunities to grow a sustainable business and increase capacity. Similarly, the training and development of staff is a high priority, and equal access is provided to Avanta personnel and partners to up-skill and gain information to support the delivery of service. (2b.1, 2b.2)
- ▲ Contractual documentation clearly defined the obligations of both parties, and where amendments were discussed and agreed these were reflected and honoured in a revised contract. (2c.3, 3c.1)
- ▲ There was a clear strategy to ensure the allocation of market share was fair and transparent, which was clearly understood by partners. Avanta are open in their negotiations regarding volumes and demonstrated a genuine desire to ensure partners were satisfied and their needs were met pre and post contract award. (2c.4, 2c.5, 2c.6, 3c.1)

- ▲ The findings of this assessment indicated that the transfer of funds had been accurate and within the timescale agreed, and in some cases early. (2c.7)
- ▲ Quality assurance (QA) activities are effective and monitor the quality of service and customer experience, findings are utilised well and inform improvements. (3b.1, 3b.2)
- ▲ Performance Operation Groups (POGs) are effectively used to share and monitor good practice across the CPAs, and encourage collaboration and cooperation amongst SCPs. A number of partners made reference to Avanta sharing the vacancies across the CPA regions, which further demonstrates collaborative and cooperative working, and was welcomed by the supply chain. (3b.8, 2a.2, 2a.3)
- ▲ Management information has evolved over the past year, as a result of feedback from partners, improvements have been made and support provided to enable partners to utilise the information. Information is shared widely across the supply chain, further demonstrating the open and honest culture Avanta nurtures. (3d.4, 3d.6, 2a.5, 3c.4)
- ▲ Avanta continue to address the changing needs of the customer group and commissioner, proactively responding to gaps in the supply chain. (4a.5)

Areas for Improvement

- ▲ It would be advantageous for Avanta to revisit the wider objectives/policy intent of the commissioner to ensure the organisation maximises the opportunities to have a positive impact in these areas. (1a.1, 4a.3, 4a.5, 4a.6)
- ▲ There are effective strategies in place to use wider networks, however, these have not been exhausted to date, as a result, further consideration should be made to engaging with other providers throughout the CPAs. (1a.3)
- ▲ To further enhance the supply chain, consideration should be made to greater involvement of the tier 3s in a range of activities, i.e. POGs. (2a.2, 2a.3, 3b.8, 3d.1)
- ▲ Consideration should be made to promoting additional funding streams and providing partners (tier 2 and tier 3) with the appropriate support to submit a successful tender, i.e. IT upgrades, business growth opportunities, etc. (2b.2)
- ▲ To enhance the provision of training and development and ensure a return on investment, consideration should be made to identifying the preferred learning styles of partners. In addition, a more robust evaluation practice should be considered to truly identify the impact on performance as a result of specific activities. (2b.3)

- ▲ It was apparent that unsuccessful partners received feedback on their bid, but remained in the framework for consideration against additional income stream opportunities. In the future, consider providing in-depth feedback on performance against the Expression of Interest (EoI) indicating areas to be addressed to be successful in future bid opportunities with Avanta. (2a.1, 2c.1)
- ▲ Avanta were very open and honest with partners when explaining the financial model, however, in the future, consideration should be made to a more explicit approach to funding and designing a range of financial models to ensure partners are not put at undue financial risk. (2c.2)
- ▲ Following communication of their values Avanta should consider testing them at partner level and checking that they continue to be demonstrated and aligned at regular intervals throughout the life of the contract. (3a.1)
- ▲ Avanta have clear, robust communication strategies with the tier 2 SCPs, and whilst communication takes place with the tier 3s there is less rigour in terms of checking understanding and required actions, which the organisation should address in the future. (3a.4, 4a.4)
- ▲ Continue to drive quality assurance, security of data and assets, health and safety and safeguarding within the tier 2 SCPs, and drill down to tier 3. (3b.4, 3b.5, 3b.6)
- ▲ Throughout the early stages of the programme Avanta concentrated on ensuring the delivery of the service was in place, and more recently addressed the requirements of environmental sustainability. The policies and processes are in place, monitoring activities are planned and in time this will become embedded. The Assessors noted that over the coming months the organisation should be able to demonstrate that environmental practices are embedded. (3b.7)
- ▲ Share good/excellent practice across the CPAs and address areas of inconsistency, for example, ensuring IAG is effective at every level. (3b.3, 3b.8)
- ▲ Clearly define what excellent practice, innovation and value for money looks like for Avanta, and clearly communicate across the supply chain. Ensure POGs continue to meet the needs of the partners and drive development of the supply chain. (3b.8, 3d.2, 3d.5)
- ▲ Continue to encourage partners to interrogate the data collected to support and promote Diversity & Equality to ensure the practices become totally embedded. Ensure partners are aware of the targets, and understand how Diversity & Equality activities link to the commissioner's wider objectives/policy intent and will have a positive impact. (3e.1, 3e.2, 3e.3)

- ▲ Feedback is sought from a broad range of stakeholders; ensure CPAs identify all appropriate stakeholders across the private, public and voluntary sectors (tier 3 and wider network providers). (4a.1, 4a.2)

Areas Requiring Further Development

None identified throughout this assessment.

Assessment Findings

1 Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply chain design

Avanta had been working with previous Welfare to Work programmes, and whilst the Work Programme (WP) is very different, the commissioner's objectives and wider policy intent were clearly understood. This provided a level of focus when designing the supply chain and subsequent activities that have been undertaken from contract award and go-live to the present day.

There was clear evidence throughout the assessment that wide research was undertaken to contribute to the design of the supply chain, which included; a review of the NOMIS and inclusion reports, analysis of regional and local data and statistics, which was broken down into customer group to identify typical progress, trends, etc.

Consultation took place through a range of networking events, meetings and presentations with numerous stakeholders, which included, the three leading political parties, ERSA, DWP, Local Enterprise Partners (LEPs), Employability Networks, Job Centre Plus, County Councils, National Health Service and a number of community based organisations, across each CPA.

One-to-one meetings were held with some stakeholders, for example, County Councils; the Partnership Managers were coached to enable them to gain specific information; identify the rural and urban issues, areas of deprivation and regeneration and most importantly, how they could work together to develop a strong partnership.

The supply chain resulted in being a fair representation of public, private and third sector organisations to ensure the scope and variety to achieve the commissioner's objectives and meet contractual requirements.

The organisations currently in the supply chain are in a strong position to provide holistic services to the customer groups, and address rural and urban issues, deprivation, etc. The Tier 2 SCPs were selected based on their ability to cover a geographical area, previous experience and capacity. Similarly, the tier 3s, whilst demonstrating specific expertise, had to demonstrate the ability to address a specified geographical area, demonstrate experience and capacity. Throughout the second stage EoI and due diligence additional evidence and requirements were requested, which are detailed in 2a below.

Avanta has a very forward-thinking approach and clear strategies to ensure a robust and flexible supply chain at all stages of the contract. They paid close attention to the volumes, and in the urban areas awarded a minimum of two, tier 2 SCPs a contract. This ensured that if a partner terminated their contract, or had their contract terminated due to poor performance a service continued to be available in the area.

Avanta continue to review their supply chain to ensure capacity to fulfil customer needs in line with the commissioner's objectives, which was evidenced through a number of Tier 3s recently joining the supply chain, e.g. deaf association. At this stage, it would be advantageous for Avanta to revisit the wider objectives/policy intent of the commissioner to ensure the organisation maximises the opportunities to have a positive impact in these areas.

Avanta used the EoI as a vehicle to accept prospective partners onto the framework. All organisations that submitted an EoI remain in the framework, despite some being unsuccessful. Whilst this can be perceived as broadening the supply chain network, consideration should be made to the value of these organisations remaining in the framework. Equally, as organisations can change and evolve at remarkable rates, it may well be worth reviewing their propositions, capacity and interest levels in working with Avanta on an annual basis.

Avanta recognise that the tier 2 SCPs have established supply chains of their own, and actively encourage these to be used within their own network, providing partners with greater depth and variety of services to meet customer's needs. In at least one case, a tier 2 SCP had service level agreements (SLAs) in place with which to manage their supply chain and this is a model worthy of exploration for other tier 2 SCPs.

Where a specific need has been identified spot purchases have been undertaken. In addition, free services are accessed, i.e. money advice, drug and alcohol services, and where available access to other funding streams, e.g. SFA, are utilised across the network. Whilst wider networks are developed this could be improved in the future e.g. National Careers Services.

2 Commitment

2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

Partners described the communication activities throughout all stages of procurement. They were made aware of the opportunity to complete an EoI through presentations, meetings, website and/or direct contact from Avanta. Partners commented on the rigour of the EoI and the extensive support provided as and when additional information was requested.

Emails were circulated advising potential partners of whether they were successful or unsuccessful. Whilst it is appreciated time was paramount, in the future, consideration should be made to providing unsuccessful partners with the opportunity to access tailored feedback and direction in terms of how they could be successful in future bids.

Following contract award Avanta met with partners on numerous occasions, in groups and on an individual basis to ensure they were fully prepared for the start of the contract.

Currently, formal routes of communication include weekly and monthly performance reviews, monthly POGs, etc. However, all partners indicated that communication is ongoing; emails are regularly circulated, and there is daily access to PPMs, if required.

Partners described the level of consultation, both within groups and individually. Partners were fully aware of the delivery model to be implemented, however, Avanta demonstrated a level of flexibility and worked with their partners to find the most suitable approach.

The POGs provide ongoing opportunities for partners to be involved in consultation activities. In addition, PPMs consult with partners, and gain their ideas and opinions throughout performance reviews relating to key topics. Consideration should be made to further involvement of tier 3s and possibly even SCPs of the tier 2s, in future consultation activities.

Avanta have a positive approach to collaborative working and invest in developing effective working relationships with other Primes to 'save re-inventing the wheel'.

Avanta actively encourages the supply chain to work collaboratively to deliver comprehensive services to customers and Avanta offices and partners have fully embraced this way of working. Opportunities have been provided for tier 2 and tier 3 SCPs to promote their services through a POG meeting, which has resulted in referrals to other parts of the supply chain network. A list of tier 3 SCPs is regularly circulated, which contributes to effective signposting to meet specific intervention requirements, address disabilities, etc.

Tier 2 SCPs share the services they are able to provide as a result of additional funding streams, i.e. training opportunities for customers.

Partners confirmed that there are clear channels of communication to ensure that there is no ambiguity regarding the business relationship underpinning the supply chain arrangements. Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and there are clear routes to discuss contractual requirements, escalate problems, etc.

Partners confirmed that a culture in which communication is open and honest has been created.

2b) Developing supply chain partners

Avanta is very eager to ensure partners are successful and as a result provide opportunities for business development:

- The EoI is reviewed for each partner and areas for development addressed and supported through a range of activities.
- A PPM undertook a strategic organisation and staff structure review, which resulted in a clear business strategy and ongoing support to build capacity.
- A six-monthly financial audit has recently been introduced to ensure partners do not face undue risk.

- Some partners started as a tier 2, end-to-end provider, but through review are better suited to be a tier 3, which has been fully supported.
- PR advice and guidance, for example, dealing with the press, etc.

Avanta are proactive in terms of involving and engaging partners in bids currently being submitted, providing the opportunity to build capacity. However, there was limited evidence of partners being guided towards and gaining access to other additional funding streams that are independent of Avanta's direct interests.

Training and development needs to support Avanta personnel and partners to deliver the Work Programme and understand the customer journey were identified, planned and provided prior to the contract going live. Development activities have continued to be identified through performance reviews, POG meetings and informal discussion, which have been planned and provided, for example, sales training. Currently, a further training needs analysis is being undertaken to identify the future needs to support partners to deliver the programme in the forthcoming year.

E-learning modules are available for partners to access through the Partner Portal, which address health & safety, safeguarding, Diversity & Equality and environmental sustainability. Whilst this is a great platform to provide the information and raise awareness, consideration should be made to identifying the preferred learning styles to ensure this is the most appropriate method of delivery.

Extensive training and guidance has been provided and continues to be provided to support partners with the 'JMS' management information system, these are delivered through the POGs, PPMs and more recently webinars.

Avanta actively source and promote training opportunities to their partners through third parties, for example, First Aid for dealing with people with mental health issues.

The HR partners are involved in a weekly tele-kit; this includes discussion around the performance of Avanta offices and partners, and identifies any training and development to improve performance, for example, shadowing, one-to-one support, etc.

A level of evaluation is undertaken to identify the impact of training and development on the performance of partners and the CPAs. However, this could be improved and contribute to identifying the return on investment in the long-term.

2c) Contracting and funding

The procurement processes were designed and implemented to ensure selection was fair and transparent. The two-stage EoI was rigorously implemented, but supportive at each stage.

"It was the easiest EoI we were involved in."

"They were supportive all the way, it was as though they wanted us to be successful."

The EoI was scored and weighted to ensure a consistent approach to selecting the SCPs. Following each stage of the procurement activities feedback on performance was given to prospective partners.

There was evidence that a partner had not followed the full EoI and whilst it is recognised that there was a need for this partner to be part of their supply chain, Avanta should ensure the process is fully and consistently implemented in the future to protect both parties.

In the final stages of the procurement process due diligence was undertaken to identify any financial risk. Relevant information was collected and analysed to ensure prospective partners were of good financial standing.

Avanta adopted the DWP funding model, which was presented to SCPs at an early stage. Partners clearly understood the model and in some cases discussed this on a one-to-one basis. However, negotiation regarding funding was not proactively undertaken with all partners. In the future, consideration should be made to a more explicit approach to funding and designing a range of financial models to ensure partners can exercise choice and are not put at undue financial risk.

Avanta has introduced a six-monthly financial audit to monitor partner's viability; profit and loss, forecast, etc. to ensure they do not encounter undue financial risk.

The contracts for the SCPs mirrored those of DWP. These were reviewed with partners to ensure full understanding of the obligations of both parties. Similarly, contracted tier 3 SCPs have a formal contract, which clearly states the obligations and terms and conditions of the service.

Avanta had a very clear strategy to support a viable and transparent allocation of market share within the supply chain. They demonstrated a forward-thinking approach; awarding two SCPs with a contract in an urban area to ensure they were not at risk if a partner opted to terminate their contract. Partners felt the rationale was fair and provided a balanced delivery across Avanta offices and the supply chain.

Volumes were calculated on a percentage basis, as opposed to a fixed number of referrals. These were discussed and in some cases re-negotiated to meet the requests of partners, for example, one partner was allocated 50% and requested 63%, which was honoured, whilst another did not feel they had the capacity and reduced the percentage volume.

Performance expectations were very clear from the beginning and formed the basis of many communications prior to and following the contract starting.

Partners reiterated the fact that Avanta was open and honest from the beginning, and provided every opportunity to meet and discuss requirements pre and post contract award. There was evidence of flexibility and a strong desire to build a positive partnership. Every effort was made to provide support for partners to be successful pre and post contract going live.

This assessment indicated that Avanta have successfully managed the transfer of funds within the network to date. Partners confirmed that payments had been made accurately, and within the agreed timescale, in some cases earlier. One tier 3 explained payment had been made in advance, as agreed.

Partners were very clear regarding the services and support they gained as a result of paying a management fee. This included contract management, training, access to JMS, etc. In the case of the sub-primes, management fees were flexible and mutually agreed, based on the support and services they required, which in some cases were reciprocal.

Avanta are implementing a range of different tools to support partners deliver and monitor the service provided to customers. Partners are aware that these may incur additional fees, Avanta should consider introducing a menu of services linking to a range of services and tools to provide flexibility in the future.

3 Conduct

3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity

Prior to starting the EoI with Avanta, partners reviewed the values of the organisation to ensure there was a fit and they were aligned to their own business principles. Partners confirmed that the values are openly demonstrated throughout the business, and believe they are fit for purpose.

The organisation has recently undertaken a review of their values, which included wide consultation and testing Avanta staff at all levels. The values are to be communicated to the partners through planned presentations.

It would have been viewed as excellent practice if Avanta had included partners in the consultation regarding the values to ensure continuing alignment. Following communication of the values consideration should be made to testing them at partner level.

Avanta have clear and effective strategies in place to manage the TUPE process; an external consultant was brought in to manage the TUPE transfers. The organisation used project management tools were used to ensure timelines were agreed in line with business needs.

Partners confirmed that awareness sessions were delivered to address TUPE and there was good communications throughout. There was also evidence of Avanta working in partnership with the SCPs, phasing transfers to ensure people were in the right place at the right time.

Those involved in TUPE described the presentations that took place prior to, and following the transfers, including inductions and regular updates.

Partners confirmed that the interactions with Avanta are consistently positive and supportive.

The email alert system is used to communicate updates to legislative and regulatory requirements, as well as any changes to the contract. For example, in the case of the Youth Programme and Day One Prison Leavers, an email alert was sent, supported by a PowerPoint presentation to explain the requirements. PPMs follow up the communication with partners to ensure understanding and actions to be undertaken. Where necessary these are added to partner's action plan and checked throughout the performance review.

Whilst communications are undertaken with the tier 3s the same level of checking is not applied, as a result, consideration should be made to introducing a robust system to check understanding and required actions with these partners.

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

Avanta have a range of processes, policies and activities to monitor the quality of service and customer experience. Recently an external company was engaged to undertake a customer survey within each CPA; the outcome was drilled down to office and partner level to identify areas for improvement.

A satisfaction questionnaire is used to gain feedback from customers following different interventions, which has been effective in terms of identifying improvements to customer service. In addition, observations of training activities have provided valuable information to support changes.

File audits, health and safety questionnaires, a quarterly self-assessment report, etc. are all used to check the quality of delivery and inform improvements.

PPMs play a vital role in following up findings as a result of quality assurance (QA) activities. Partners confirmed that issues and problems identified were drilled down and solutions identified and implemented to improve service delivery. Solutions are documented in an action plan and subsequently followed up by the PPM.

Improvements made as a result of QA activities included:

- Reduction in form filling.
- Customer action plans underpin the customer journey and updated more frequently.
- Recruitment of a part time member of staff to ensure dialogue/visit with each customer every two-weeks.
- Change to the way customers were RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated.
- Monthly partner meetings as opposed to weekly.

Consideration should be made to ensuring the same rigour of QA activities is being undertaken by the tier 2 SCPs on their SCPs, ensuring audits, visits, etc. are being undertaken

to meet minimum service level agreements and identify areas to improve the customer service and experience.

Avanta ensures that effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) are provided throughout their offices through a range of activities, including audits, assessments and observations. It was apparent in one CPA that the same level of audit and observation was undertaken with the SCPs, which assures effective IAG. This same level of rigour should be encouraged across all the CPAs to assure the provision of IAG is consistently of a high quality.

Avanta is accredited with ISO27001 and clearly understand the full requirements of data and asset security. A clear strategy was designed to implement policies and processes to ensure and maintain the security of all data and assets within the supply chain, which started throughout the second stage of the EoI. Successful partners were subject to greater scrutiny and risk assessed, and where appropriate a two-day on-site visit was undertaken to review all the requirements in line with ISO27001. Partners viewed this experience as a developmental opportunity, and did not feel threatened throughout the process. Every partner scored over 80% for security of data, indicating high levels of security across the supply chain.

Avanta have set a target of 85% to be achieved across the supply chain, frequent monitoring, quarterly reviews and annual audits are undertaken with each partner, which are followed up by the PPMs. In one case a partner's scoring fell to 60%, as a result, an action plan was developed, which had to be completed within a six-month period.

To further improve the security of data and assets, consideration should be made to a more robust process for tier 3s and the SCPs of tier 2s.

Health & safety was fully assessed throughout the second stage of the EoI, and again site visits were undertaken, where deemed necessary following risk assessments. An e-learning training module was, and continues to be available for partners to access, providing relevant information regarding health & safety requirements. In addition, a checklist has been developed to support PPMs in the role, and an annual self-analysis and review of all aspects relating to health & safety is undertaken.

Tier 2 SCPs are required by Avanta to undertake health & safety checks with their supply chain, and documentary evidence of these reviews are requested by Avanta's health and safety specialists to ensure standards are maintained across the network. Whilst robust systems are embedded to maintain health & safety, consider testing the SCPs of the tier 2s on a regular basis.

The overarching health & safety strategy is clear, but it is recommended that a short-term action plan is developed and shared with partners across the supply chain in order to track milestones along the development pathway.

Policies and practices are in place to assure the safeguarding of vulnerable groups across the supply chain. Throughout the second stage of the EoI safeguarding policies are gathered and checked. Contractual requirements clearly indicate the requirements of tier 2 end-to-end SCPs; to ensure that annual training is provided to all staff, a Designated Safeguarding

Officer is appointed and the tier 2's SCPs are checked, alongside having the whistle blowing and other related policies.

Partners explained how they use the help centre and seek advice from the Designated Safety Officer within Avanta, which is working well, however, consideration should be made to recording these calls of seeking advice, and sharing the learning across the CPAs to identify trends.

Whilst there are plans in place to support safeguarding, for example, quality impact assessment to gain baseline data and identify measurable targets, consideration should be made to a consolidated strategy, which addresses each level of the supply chain.

Avanta have an overarching strategy to support environmental sustainability referenced as the 'One Planet' initiative, being the outcome from an independent analysis of Avanta by an external consultancy. The strategy indicates the planned approach towards the achievement of ISO 14001 in the future. Five priorities have been identified as a result of data analysis, which provide measurable targets to contribute to environmental sustainability, which incorporates the supply chain.

Recently Avanta undertook an environmental sustainability self-assessment review with the tier 2 SCPs, which was used to identify the priorities and targets. The three-month self-assessment review will extract data and provide an indication of performance against, and achievement of the targets.

An environmental sustainability-training programme is available to partners through the Partner Portal to contribute to improving overall awareness of the topic across the supply chain.

To continue to support the strategy for environmental sustainability it is recommended that a short-term plan is developed and shared with partners, which addresses all levels of the supply chain; tier 2 and their SCPs and tier 3.

Avanta act as a role model in the way they are working with other Primes, sharing experiences, good practice and different learning outcomes to contribute to the success of the Work Programme.

Recently, it was recognised that the POGs were of great value and contributed to sharing of good practice, and as a result, these have increased from quarterly activities to monthly. Whilst these have been effective to date, consideration should be made to how they can add value and contribute to further developments across the supply chain and across the CPAs. PPMs further support the sharing of good practice when undertaking the performance reviews with partners

People understand the definition of good practice, but there is not a consistent understanding of excellent practice, as a result consideration should be made to providing the definition of excellence within Avanta and sharing with partners at all levels of the supply chain. This could be re-enforced through the development of webinars that promote

excellent practice, for example, what is excellent practice in employer engagement? Whilst there are examples of effective sharing of good practice within the CPAs consideration should be made to sharing excellent practice across the organisation.

3c) Honouring Commitments

Pre-contract negotiations were clear and open due to the extensive range of opportunities to discuss, negotiate and agree expectations of both parties. In turn these were reflected in a written contract. Subsequent changes to the initial agreements have been discussed, negotiated (where appropriate) and agreed, which have been reflected in a revised contract.

Throughout this assessment all partners interviewed spoke highly of Avanta honouring all commitments and being very supportive in the event of changes taking place, for example the tier 2 end-to-end SCP becoming a tier 3, increasing/reducing volumes, providing the flexibility to work beyond delivery partners, etc.

Partners are aware of the complaints procedure Avanta has in place. In addition, they are aware of the Merlin Mediation Service, but currently (those interviewed) have had no reason to use the procedure, due to the positive and supportive relationships formed and the ability to openly discuss any concerns and issues with PPMs, Regional Directors, etc.

Avanta have stated that they would fully respect the decisions made as a result of the Merlin Mediation Service.

Tier 2 SCPs are fully aware of the expectations throughout the different stages of the life of the contract due to clear communication: verbal and written. Equally, tier 2 SCPs are aware of each other's expectations; market share and volumes are openly shared, as is performance.

Tier 2 SCPs clearly understand the contribution of the tier 3s to the supply chain, and what they expect as a result.

Tier 3s by their nature provide a range of specialist services to the supply chain, and ultimately the customer. These partners clearly understand what is expected of them in terms of service delivery to meet contractual agreements and/or minimum service levels and in turn are aware of other specialists in the network.

3d) Performance

In order to meet the needs of the customers and the commissioner's objectives the supply chain was made up of a diverse range of partners, which in turn is encouraged to work together to provide a seamless service.

Tier 2 SCPs recognise the value of working collaboratively, and appreciate that it reduces the time spent resourcing services. There was evidence of SCPs meeting informally, once a month to discuss a range of topics, including provision of service.

Collaborative working is encouraged across the supply chain and Avanta offices, and opportunities are planned and executed to promote the different services, for example, partners were invited to participate in a sales day with Avanta offices in one CPA.

Tier 2 SCPs meet with the PPM on a monthly basis to formally review performance, and discuss issues and concerns. Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) are reviewed and updated to ensure action/progress in specific areas identified for improvement.

In addition, on a weekly basis the performance outcomes for the previous week are published and shared. Opportunities are available to review performance with the PPM, identify problems and solutions to be implemented in the forthcoming week. Partners confirmed that they felt fully supported throughout the process due to the relationship they have with the PPM, and felt confident to discuss issues and concerns.

Partners made reference to the 'black box' approach, which encourages 'thinking outside the box', which in turn is innovation. However, it was evident that the true sense of innovation was not clearly understood by all partners, and as a result, should be defined and communicated more robustly.

Partners confirmed that performance expectations were clearly defined at the start of the contract and the flight path is effectively used throughout the life of the contract.

There was an understanding regarding the expectations in relation to security of data and assets, health & safety, safeguarding and environmental sustainability, as these were addressed throughout the expression of interest. In the initial stages of the contract all effort was focussed on the operational needs of the programme. More recently, however, expectations in these broader areas have become clearer through the introduction of reviews, checklists, targets, etc. related to the strategies identified above. These practices continue to be areas for development to ensure they are embedded, and drilled down to the tier 3s and the SCPs of the tier 2s.

Over the past year the management information tools have evolved to meet the needs of both Avanta and the partners. Throughout each development of the system extensive testing was undertaken to ensure the quality of data and accuracy.

Daily, weekly and monthly performance reports are readily available and shared across the supply chain. Avanta offices and partners are RAG rated, this approach creates a competitive edge, but partners also view this as a developmental tool. Following the publication of the weekly reports discussions are undertaken to review performance, identify the issues of the previous week, and forecast and plan for the forthcoming week.

Extensive analysis is undertaken to review performance against national and regional trends. Following the release of the unemployment figures, comparisons are made across the CPAs in terms of jobs filled and jobs vacant, in comparison months, etc. and further data published.

Avanta has identified the range of data to be captured to contribute to Diversity & Equality and environmental sustainability targets, which now provide a baseline for future analysis. The increased range of data will also contribute to making informed decisions about the improvements to the service, and demonstrate the impact on the wider policy intent.

Partners value the management information and whilst it is used extensively within the supply chain, the reporting element is flexible and provides opportunities to generate reports for their own use. In addition, partners made reference to other tools provided by Avanta to support them in monitoring their own performance for the Work Programme and other programmes and contracts they deliver.

Avanta has a clear understanding of 'value for money', which is based on job outcome and sustainability. Whilst partners have a broad understanding regarding the value for money for the Work Programme this could be improved, and in line with Avanta's definition.

The JMS is the main tool used to map a customer's progress from diagnosis through to job outcome and sustainability. The system categorises customers and the barriers, and indicates how far they are from the job market, how far they have moved in a given period, remaining barriers, etc. Some partners made reference to the 'Snake', which is a visual aid for consultants to monitor and review client progression through the stages of their journey. Some partners utilise the system to the full extent, which should be encouraged across the supply chain.

3e) Promoting Equality and Diversity

Avanta's key aim was to address and meet the needs of a diverse range of customers, which had to be reflected in the supply chain. Partner's commitment to Diversity & Equality was tested throughout the second stage of the EoI; policies were viewed to ensure they were aligned to those of Avanta. Policies and practices are subsequently reviewed at regular intervals to ensure they continue to be aligned to Avanta's strategy for Diversity & Equality.

Partners are supported to manage equality and promote diversity in all their activities. They are encouraged to use the data, monitoring their own performance and ensure they are providing a service to meet the needs of the different individuals and customer groups. The monthly performance review is structured to include discussion and analysis on a number of factors relating to Diversity & Equality, which includes equal access to interventions, taking into consideration the rural and urban differences, disabilities and other barriers customers face.

Partners recognise the value of collecting, monitoring and analysing the data and have recently started to use the information to improve the provision of services. For example, in one CPA it was identified that there was a lack of provision for the deaf community, which has subsequently been addressed. This approach needs to be encouraged across the CPAs to

become truly embedded.

Avanta recognised that whilst data was being collected, monitored and analysed it was the minimum requirement. As a result, the range of data collected from their offices and partners has been broadened, and will drive Diversity & Equality throughout the supply chain to a greater level.

To further promote Diversity & Equality Avanta could ensure links to the commissioner's wider objectives/policy intent are clearly communicated to all partners and the positive impact of the supply chain is understood.

4 Review

4a) Supply chain review

Avanta seek feedback from different stakeholders, using a range of mechanisms. Customer feedback is gained through surveys, questionnaires and observations. Tier 2 end-to-end SCPs complete a quarterly self-assessment report (SAR). The SAR requires feedback in key areas for each report. Additionally, every quarter a different theme is prioritised to collect additional information, for example, security, health & safety, safeguarding, environmental sustainability, etc.

POGs continue to be a source of gaining feedback from partners. In addition, there is on-going dialogue with external stakeholders, for example, political party ministers, Local Enterprise Partners (LEPs), Employability networks, Job Centre Plus, County Councils, ERSA, DWP and other audit and inspection activities. One CPA has created a steering group, made up of 15 different representatives to lobby opinions, ideas, etc. In the future, ensure CPAs identify all the stakeholders across the private, public and voluntary sectors, and include tier 3s, SCPs of the tier 2s and wider network providers to gain feedback, to further improve practices across the supply chain.

Information gained through these sources has been used to improve practices across the supply chain, for example, access to performance data, improved analysis of data, training and development needs, etc.

The quarterly SAR is a live process capturing a broad range of information from partners, which is fed into action plans, continuous improvement plans, quality improvement plans, etc. The use of themed SARs is effective and provides specific feedback and areas for improvement in the wider areas. Whilst these processes are effective, consideration should be made to improving the communication of the resultant overarching action/improvement plan and how these feed into the partner's plans. Partners have a number of different improvement plans, which benefit streamlining into one overarching improvement plan.

Avanta are coming to the end of the first year of implementation for the Work Programme, the annual SAR has been completed and will be communicated to partners imminently. Effective dissemination of the SAR to all partners, tier 2 and tier 3, will need to take place at

the earliest opportunity and there should be monitoring in place to ensure improvement actions feed into SCP's plans.

Avanta have communicated the commissioner's objectives/policy intent to partners, who subsequently understand how their services are aligned and have a measurable impact. Tier 2 SCPs are working towards job outcome and sustainability, which is measurable and paramount to the success of the programme. The tier 3s recognise how their expertise has a direct impact on key areas of the programme, for example, youth programme, day one prison leavers, sustainability, improving customer wellbeing, etc.

Avanta have set targets to contribute to environmental sustainability, Diversity & Equality, etc. and increased the amount of data collected in these areas, which will provide a benchmark to measure and improve performance in the future.

Communication relating to the wider policy and strategy is delivered through email alerts and supported by additional information, if appropriate, for example, slide presentation, reference on Avanta Me, etc. PPMs follow-up the communications during a monthly review and/or POG meeting to ensure partners understanding of the communication and the actions required. This approach ensures full understanding and alignment to the wider social objectives of the commissioner for the partners.

In the future, ensure tier 3 SCPs fully understand the communication and recognise the strategic alignment to the social objectives. Continue to reinforce the wider policy and strategy, set objectives, measure performance and check understanding to empower partners to confidently discuss and reflect upon these aspects of the Work Programme.

Avanta continue to review the strategy to maintain and manage a robust and diverse supply chain to meet the needs of the customers and the commissioner's objectives. The organisation is addressing the balance of national, regional and local partners to improve consistency and management across the three CPAs.

The initial strategy was to ensure sufficient coverage in all delivery areas in the event of a partner terminating their contract or losing the contract due to poor performance. This strategy has continued; an EoI activity has started to ensure continuation of the service with least disruption to customers, if a partner continues to under perform.

Partners clearly understand that the programme is a holistic service to meet the needs of customer groups and local demographics, and as a result review the provision of service and identify gaps, using various data analysis tools. Some gaps identified include; Health Condition Management, support for the Deaf community, etc.

Avanta has recently undertaken a full review of the way the supply chain is managed, which has resulted in a restructure and a new approach to working. Key personnel appointments have been made, they will be responsible for driving the supply chain management strategies and improving the alignment to the commissioner's wider objectives/policy intent.

There were numerous examples of anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that the supply chain has a positive impact on the external stakeholders and customer wellbeing, for example:

- Reduction of domestic violence, due to addressing the wellbeing of unemployed, young males and improving their employability.
- Engaging major national employers in the programme, providing job outcomes.
- Developing small, third sector businesses to be sustainable.

Avanta are in a good position to be able to demonstrate the positive impact on the external stakeholders, customer wellbeing and environmental sustainability in the future. The initial collection of data has been undertaken, which provides the benchmark and targets have been set. Data collection and analysis methodologies are in place for both Avanta and partners, which will measure and demonstrate a positive impact in the key areas. Ensure effective communication is undertaken with partners to enable them to understand the positive impact the supply chain has on the wider initiatives.