



merlin

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report

For

Groundwork UK

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On behalf of emqc Ltd

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About the Organisation

Groundwork UK is the central office for the Federation of Groundwork Trusts, and is a Registered Charity in its own right. Groundwork UK delivers large national or regional programmes and contracts in partnership with Groundwork UK Trusts and other delivery partner organisations. Groundwork UK has over 30 years of experience working with people of all ages and backgrounds to help them change their own life whilst bringing beneficial changes to the wider community.

Groundwork UK provides training and creates jobs, reduces energy and waste, re-connects people with nature and transform green spaces, community assets and whole neighbourhoods. Groundwork UK forge partnerships with organisations of all sizes, from small community groups and schools to housing bodies and multinational businesses. Many of Groundwork UK's partnerships focus on using the environment as a vehicle for positive change. Groundwork UK work falls under one or more of the following themes:

- Improving people's prospects – increasing confidence, skills, well-being and employability.
- Creating better places – helping people create safer, greener and healthier places.
- Promoting greener living and working – helping businesses and people build a greener future.

In 2012 the Education Funding Agency (EFA) awarded Groundwork UK the Youth Contract (YC) in 3 Contract Package Areas, Manchester & Cheshire, East Midlands and Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria. Delivery is via a network of Supply Chain Partners. Groundwork UK have managed approximately 20% of the national enrolments between contract 'go-live' (June 2011) and September 2013. With a supply chain comprising mainly 3rd sector organisations who provide end to end support for the young people it serves Groundwork UK have encouraged delivery partners to develop a delivery model which is appropriate to the young person it aims to support and consists of delivering holistic mentoring support and guidance, with the aim of supporting them back into the type of work that is right for them.

Assessment Methodology

An initial planning meeting between the Lead Assessor and 2 representatives of Groundwork UK, including the assessment coordinator, took place in May 2014 where support and guidance was given, including information as to how the assessment would take place and to agree which Supply Chain Partners would be interviewed. Following this meeting, Groundwork UK created schedules for each of the assessors.

During the assessment, 100% of the supply partners in which Groundwork UK deliver Youth Contract work programme were spoken to, by telephone or in most instances face to face interviews. During the assessment, assessors reviewed a range of documentary evidence and IT systems provided by Groundwork UK, interviewed a wide range of staff, including senior managers and customer facing staff from the Supply Chain Network and a range of staff from Groundwork UK who manage the contract delivery from a base in Birmingham.

A number of representatives of Groundwork UK were also interviewed. All principles of the Merlin standard were fully assessed by a team of 3 assessors; Rob Mottram (Lead Assessor), Chris James and David Folland who spent a total of 12 days onsite.

Assessment Outcome

Overall %	83%
Overall Outcome	Good
Supply Chain Design	Good
Commitment	Excellent
Conduct	Excellent
Review	Good

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.

- ▲ Collaboration, communication and co-operation, which supports successful working relationships within the supply chain.(2a.1, 2a.2, 2a.4 & 2a.5)
- ▲ The positive approach to contracting and funding, particularly how expectations have been met and that funding and market share was clearly defined to Supply Chain Partners. (2c)
- ▲ Positive and supportive interactions between Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partner staff. (3a.3)
- ▲ Commitment shown to enhance and further develop the approach to performance review and the management of Supply Chain Partners expectations, including the overall desire to improve approach to Supply Chain Management. (3d.2, 3d.3 & 2c.5)
- ▲ The positive impact of the activities undertaken by Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners which meet the wider objectives of the commissioner.

Areas for Improvement

In order to support the organisation to further develop and improve its supply chain delivery strategy, the following suggestions for improvement are made. However, the assessment team acknowledges that many points had already been identified as areas for improvement within the organisation's Self-Assessment Questionnaire which was submitted in preparation for the Merlin assessment and therefore are already under development. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard to which the areas relate.

- ▲ Further develop the current arrangements for performance management, particularly contract underperformance to ensure they are sufficiently robust to meet Groundwork UK's needs and those of their Supply Chain Partners. (3d.2)
- ▲ Ensure that appropriate Equality and Diversity measures are agreed with all Supply Chain Partners as this area remains underdeveloped and further promotion is required. (3e)
- ▲ Ensure Supply Chain Partners can calculate the Value for Money (VFM) of the services they receive from Groundwork UK, this may include clarifying the cost of support and the range of support provided by Groundwork UK. (2c.8 & 3d.5)
- ▲ Ensure that all Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to access refresher training and become fully skilled in correct completion of paperwork, which is particularly important given the high volume of complex paperwork which is required in order to make a valid claim. (2b.3)
- ▲ Increase the systematic and formalised collection and use of feedback gathered from all stakeholders, including young people and local authorities and ensure its use leads to inform decisions and make improvements, particularly to performance (4a.1)
- ▲ Groundwork UK need to consider how to further engage their Supply Chain Partners and ensure both Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners capture and promote the measurable impacts on the wider social objectives of the commissioner. (4a.4)

Areas Requiring Further Development

Because Groundwork UK has met the Merlin Standard, as described in the assessment outcome above, there are no areas for development identified as requiring immediate action in order to gain accreditation.

Assessment Findings

Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply Chain Design

Partners were able to validate that Groundwork UK demonstrate a focus on working with a diverse set of partner organisations and stakeholders, including Local Authorities who are key stakeholders in the on-going development of the supply chain. Groundwork UK have previously been successful in delivering services and provisions to young people across a range of contracts including Future Job Fund, Community Task Force and most recently Department for Education funded Achievement Coaches and SFA/ESF NEET contracts. Groundwork UK has developed its experience of managing contract delivery via its network of Groundwork UK Trusts which it supports within its federal structure. This structure allows funding to be sourced, budgets managed and operational activities to be arranged locally where appropriate for small scale projects and when required, for example for delivery of larger scale programmes such as Youth Contract. Groundwork UK acts on behalf of Federation members to provide centralised and cost effective support.

Senior management strongly felt the appropriate supply chain make up was to include a significant proportion of 3rd sector organisations, which it has successfully managed to achieve. Groundwork UK ensure that customer needs are placed at the centre of its supply chain design considerations and through ongoing and continuous review Groundwork UK has identified the need to diversify from its original contract design to support a maximum number of young people. This has included the addition of a small number of colleges and the introduction of a charity focusing on supporting single parents. This change is having positive results and is leading to increased numbers of young people accessing support. Where possible Groundwork UK have endeavoured to utilise the services of more than one Supply Chain Partner in each contract area to provide appropriate services and mitigating risk should a partner withdrawal, however this is not always possible due to low volumes and the financial viability of smaller contracts.

100% of delivery of Youth Contract is undertaken by a network of delivery partners, including approximately 35% of the supply chain is comprised of Groundwork Trusts. Groundwork UK utilises a supply chain made up predominantly of organisations from the Voluntary Community Sector. Groundwork UK use its well developed links with public and private sector organisations, such as Youth Offending Teams and the Fire Service to enhance the delivery offer made to customer and utilise the skills of an external organisation to help identify indicative numbers of potential young people across the contract package areas covered by Groundwork UK when designing the supply chain.

During the procurement processes Supply Chain Partners were required to demonstrate their connections with wider specialist support organisations, in particular local authorities and their equivalent Connexions services. These relationships are managed at a local level and Groundwork UK raise awareness of appropriate support services with Supply Chain Partners during implementation and live running of the contract during six monthly performance reviews. Groundwork UK support Supply Chain Partners in identifying appropriate organisations and agencies to best support the young person. Supply Chain Partners were able to validate that there is a wide range of external networks not involved in delivery but providing support services.

2 Commitment

2a) Collaboration, Cooperation and Communication

Supply Chain Partners readily confirmed that during all stages of the procurement processes, communications were clear and transparent. Supply Chain Partners were encouraged to attend program briefing days which provided opportunities for partners to discuss together program development, contracts and processes. These events allowed Supply Chain Partners to make important decisions in respect to forming part of Groundwork UK's supply chain. These events were effective in fostering a sense of community and collaboration; share best practice and discuss, ask key questions and address concerns. Partners also used these sessions to build their own important networks. Following these sessions written feedback was provided to supplement and obviate any ambiguity.

Regular update e-mails were used during procurement and continue to be used to ensure this channel of communication is open and transparent. Submission of any Expressions of Interest (EOI), follow a set procedure and feedback is provided to all applicants on request.

"...the process was straight forward and simple, the team at Groundwork UK don't overcomplicate things" – Supply Chain Partner

Supply Chain Partners within the Groundwork UK network were able to describe how they contribute to decisions regarding the design and improvements to systems and processes. Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to comment on proposed processes and documentation through regional delivery partner meetings, performance reviews and by email. Recent examples of changes made include, the introduction of a 'completers form' and simplification of the recording of 1:1's held between Supply Chain Partner staff and the young person it is supporting. Consultation has also resulted in the introduction of new Supply Chain Partners to the network.

"...every time we've fed something in they've done something about it" – Supply Chain Partner

"...some of the things I've suggested that taken into account" – Supply Chain Partner

"...we often get e-mails which say 'as a result of what the supply chain has said we are...'" – Supply Chain Partner

Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners were able to demonstrate and validate how they work collaboratively and with open participation to deliver comprehensive services. Groundwork UK promote the importance of working collaboratively through its ongoing activities which are coordinated by its managers. These activities include performance review meetings and quarterly network meetings. Where operational challenges are identified these are discussed openly by partners during network meetings which prove effective in identifying possible solutions and different approaches. Where certain providers are identified as being more effective with specific cohorts of young people, Groundwork UK has also encouraged the active promotion of learning from other Supply Chain Partners. By facilitating visits across the network for advisors and managers, staff are able to learn first hand about how others' are managing issues faced by operational delivery units.

"...this is a combined journey we are on" – Supply Chain Partner

The clarity of the communication has recently been strengthened through the introduction of a 'Delivery Partner Charter'. This charter sets out Groundwork UK's approach to working in partnership, outlines the expectations of delivery partners and how they can expect to be treated as a subcontractor. The charter was formed following an internal review of program management processes and the approach continues to be developed and refined as part of Groundwork UK's commitment to continuous improvement in this area. Formal communication channels such as monthly and six monthly performance review contacts are effective; these are complimented by a nominated single point of contact co-coordinator employed by Groundwork UK who offer a professional, reassuring and supportive approach to Supply Chain Partners.

"...the single point of contact is really good – it helps to know who you are working with and build a relationship with that person" – Supply Chain Partner

"...they are annoyingly efficient" – Supply Chain Partner

Supply Chain Partners were able to validate that Groundwork UK has created a culture which is honest, open and without unreasonable constraint. Communications between Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners are respectful and professional which allows for frank conversations to take place. Groundwork coordinators are responsive to Supply Chain Partners and their requests who describe the relationship as two-way, honest and effective. Supply Chain Partners feel equal and able to discuss issues or operational challenges faced by them.

"...we can have frank and honest conversations with our contract managers - its never taken personally and if they're not happy they've been honest enough to say" – Supply Chain Partner

"...they're there sitting in the background - they're there if I need them and they assist if I need it" – Supply Chain Partner

"...I can't think of another Prime where I could say 'I've really messed up what do I need to do?'" – Supply Chain Partner

2b) Developing Supply Chain Partners

Groundwork UK partners are supported and developed well. Supply Chain Partners validated that they felt Groundwork UK have encouraged them to improve and build capacity. Through facilitating discussions on areas such as delivery issues, sharing best practice, training of staff and the use systems and processes, this area is strong. Partners have recently been given access to a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), which is used by partners to reflect and consider the appropriateness of their policies and procedures, approach to delivery and overall commitment to the delivery of the programme. This framework has helped partners to ensure they are fit for purpose and identify training needs. Groundwork UK strongly believe they have a significant role to play in the building of capacity of its Supply Chain Partner network who are made up of a very high proportion of Community Voluntary Sector organisations. Facilitation and brokerage of opportunities to meet with local authorities also supports Supply Chain Partners in ensuring that partners have access to appropriate and important data relating to the young people in the area that they deliver services on behalf of Groundwork UK.

Groundwork UK also supports Supply Chain Partners in accessing additional funding opportunities or access to resources where possible, in some cases signposting partners to low-cost or free of charge solutions. Groundwork UK utilise its significant wider network of contacts to assist the supply chain, for example in developing a suite of financial support resources for use with young people. Specific opportunities to jointly bid with Groundwork UK are communicated via email and face to face meetings.

Promotion and facilitation of staff development within the network is structured via the Quality Assurance Framework and training needs are identified using this tool. The performance review process and the review of completed paperwork submitted by Supply Chain Partners are checked for compliance which helps identifies trends that may require additional training. Delivery critical training in processes and using the management information are mandated for Supply Chain Partners which ensure that relevant staff meet a required standard before gaining access to IT systems. These activities are supported by additional bespoke training advice and guidance which is provided by Groundwork UK's contract management team. Groundwork UK need to ensure that all Supply Chain Partners continue to access refresher training to ensure that all partner staff are fully skilled in this area given the particularly high volume of complex paperwork which is required in order to make a valid claim. Surveys are carried out following training events to allow Groundwork UK to analyse the effectiveness of training and plan subsequent events and activities. This area has been identified as a area of further development by Groundwork UK, however it is acknowledged and recognised by the assessment team that many of the Supply Chain Partners which Groundwork UK use are members of other Prime contractor supply chains and therefore receive capacity building activities and opportunities from multiple sources.

2c) Contracting and Funding

Supply Chain Partners validated that procurement processes used by Groundwork UK are fair and transparent. Groundwork UK conduct initial partnership meetings as part of the invitation to tender process to ensure perspective Supply Chain Partners were given consistent information and the opportunity to discuss openly. A standard briefing document was also issued; partners are consulted on both group and individual basis as required. Groundwork UK also gave prospective partners the opportunity to meet and discuss with current partners who provided valuable testimony to help the decision making process, which was identified as excellent practice by the assessment team. Expressions of Interest are assessed and organisations are communicated with indicating whether they have been successful, both verbally and in writing. For unsuccessful applicants feedback is offered to help them strengthen future applications. Where new partners are required to join an existing supply chain a different yet still open approach is adopted.

Groundwork UK manage their approach to funding and payment arrangements by mirroring commissioners terms where appropriate. Groundwork UK ensure contracts between the Commissioner and Groundwork UK is replicated to meet Supply Chain Partners needs and ensure clarity and consistency. Where contractual terms are not deemed suitable by Supply Chain Partners Groundwork UK seek to work with the Commissioner to ensure parity between the Prime contract and that of its Supply Chain Partners. Written payment schedules are issued to Supply Chain Partners which details agreed profiles and assumed minimum levels of performance set by the commissioner.

Contractual documentation is clear and defines the obligations of Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners. Partners are provided with documentation to support them in making decisions which is produced by Groundwork in consultation with its legal advisors.

Groundwork UK provides a Programme Requirements document which provides partners with a range of detailed information which contains performance management processes; the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and contract specific guidance, which all provide valuable support to help Supply Chain Partners meet their obligations.

Market share is clear and Supply Chain Partners were able to validate their understanding of this during the assessment. Providers understand that allocation is based on their submitted capabilities, relating to geographical coverage and delivery capacity and follows extensive negotiation between themselves and Groundwork UK. Whilst exact market share is difficult to calculate given the limited data available to both the Prime Contractor and its supply chain, estimated numbers were used by Groundwork UK and shared via a matrix document. Discussions took place between all parties to agree individual Supply Chain Partner share. This data was subsequently used in the contracts issued to partners. Volumes of young people have been lower than expected and as such Groundwork UK have taken steps to ensure, where possible, the financial viability of the delivery of these contracts is maintained and a re-profiling exercise has taken place to ensure the success of the strategy.

There is a successful strategy to manage the transfer of funds within the supply chain, which was validated by Supply Chain Partners. Details of the payment processes and timeframes are indicated within the Programme Requirements document. For partners, a process ensures once validation checks have been made claims are submitted to the commissioner within 7 days of the cut off point in the month. Once payment is received from the commissioner, Groundwork UK Supply Chain Partners claims are processed. There were no examples given by the supply chain where payments have been held unnecessarily or delayed and Supply Chain Partners are satisfied with the current arrangements.

"...no issues with the payment at all, they make the claim, once they have been paid, they pay us" – Supply Chain Partner

Supply Chain Partners were unclear on the management fee paid to Groundwork UK, however Supply Chain Partners indicated they felt happy with the support they receive. Fees are discussed and explained to partners during the contracting process. It may be worth Groundwork UK considering periodically reminding and refreshing with partners the level of management fee payable and the support they receive for the payment.

'...I presume they take fees, but I don't know what they are or what it pays for" – Supply Chain Partner

"...I know there are fees but I don't know what it is – they certainly earn it though" – Supply Chain Partner

3 Conduct

3a) Demonstrating Commercial and Business Integrity

Groundwork UK have developed supply chain arrangements to utilise partners who share its very strong commitment to its organisation values. These values are reinforced with Supply Chain Partners through the behaviors and actions demonstrated by Groundwork UK staff. Groundwork UK establishes Supply Chain Partner relationships with similar organisations to themselves, with the supply chain featuring organisations predominately from the CSV sector. The delivery partner charter clearly sets out Groundwork UK's approach to working in partnership. Supply Chain Partners interviewed validated that their own organisations values were reviewed at due diligence stage and that they firmly believe that their values are shared.

Groundwork UK has clear and effective strategies to manage the TUPE process and a clear position to support the transfer when such a requirement was made. Groundwork UK engages the services of a specialist independent HR consultant who provide support on such matters. Groundwork UK was able to provide assurances that they have previously successfully integrate staff into an incoming provider when TUPE was applied.

Interactions between Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners are very positive and supportive. This is an area of particular strength for Groundwork UK. The Delivery Partner Charter provides clarity for partners and helps Supply Chain Partners be clear of what to expect from Groundwork UK. The contributions of Groundwork UK coordinators as single points of contact enhance this area significantly.

"...the coordniators are great, very supportive, we've got an excellent relationship with them, they understand how we work and how to get the best out of us" – Supply Chain Partner

A range of approaches ensures that Supply Chain Partners receive timely updates to support and allows them to maintain legislative and regularly requirements. The main method is by email where all Supply Chain Partners receive information relating to key changes. Contract coordinators follow up with Supply Chain Partners at Delivery Partner Meetings.

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

Groundwork UK uses a range of tools to ensure effective and proportionate approaches are in place to monitor the quality of delivery and customer experience within the supply chain. A Quality Assurance Framework has been developed in consultation with Groundwork UK's Supply Chain Partners. The framework requires Supply Chain Partners to self assess against 6 areas which focus on quality and also requires them to gain feedback from a number of stakeholders. The refinement of these processes is currently taking place and forms a significant part of the Youth, Employment & Skills (YES) teams activities. This approach is welcomed by Supply Chain Partners and helps engage partners with its easy to understand format. This approach is allowing partners to develop their capabilities and understanding within this area.

Through these activities it is anticipated by Groundwork UK that where any issues are identified across the supply chain these will be addressed by them through regional or national briefing days.

"...we contributed to the development of the new quality tool, it's a good tool, not yet used it enough to say what difference its making but it seems very appropriate for the contract we're delivering and I'm sure its going to help up grow" – Supply Chain Partner

Groundwork UK have implemented policies and processes to ensure they maintain security of all data and assets within the supply chain. Groundwork UK require Supply Chain Partners to agree to a 'Minimum Services Requirement' which meets the Commissioners expectations. A register containing details of staff delivering the contract is also required and details qualifications held and status of security checks for the individual. Information Security audits and tests are carried out, including penetration testing, along with data storage checks by coordinators, when site visits are carried out and form part of the performance review meetings.

Healthy and safe work environments are assured by Groundwork UK through processes at the due diligence stage, to ensure the Supply Chain Partner meets Groundwork UK's required standard. A consultant is used by Groundwork UK to carry out initial due diligence activities and Programme Coordinators have responsibility for checking Supply Chain Partners premises prior to contract 'go live'. These requirements are checked on a 6 monthly basis and form part of the performance review meetings. A serious incident protocol is in place, which monitors and tracks any serious incidents.

People at risk and vulnerable groups are appropriately safeguarded by Groundwork UK's through a requirement to submit a range of policies as part of the due diligence process. Policies that are checked include, Child Protection, Vulnerable Adults, Bullying and Harassment and Disability Discrimination. In addition coordinators ensure that relevant risk assessments are in place and practices being used reflect policy. Staff employed within the partner network are not permitted to work with customers or access customer data until Groundwork UK have been satisfied that they meet appropriate Baseline Personnel Security Standards (BPSS). These processes and standards are clearly defined within the Programme Requirements Document.

Groundwork UK assures itself of Supply Chain Partners commitment to environmental sustainability through the on-going Performance review and compliance processes undertaken by all partners to ensure they meet Groundwork UK standards. Historically Groundwork UK has held BS8555 Environmental Management Systems standard and the nature of much of the work carried out by Groundwork UK is strongly linked to improving the environment we live in and improving and increasing 'green spaces'. Supply Chain Partners have set targets, for example to reduce paper and travel, however this is not currently monitored sufficiently by Groundwork UK to assess how embedded these activities are.

"...they [Groundwork UK] went through a rigorous due diligence process, there was a hefty amount of paperwork but they're looking to achieve so I'd expect this anyway. It included policies etc on safeguarding, data it also looked at qualifications and CPD of staff, finances and our management structure" – Supply Chain Partner

Good practice is currently identified, monitored and shared with the supply chain through a variety of methods. Groundwork UK identifies good practice during performance review meetings and shares these with delivery partners. The quality assessment framework references good practice examples and what is expected of partners. Case studies are requested from partners twice yearly and these are used to highlight and share particular successes gained by young people engaged in the Youth Programme, for example in securing jobs or entering training. In addition to these activities file checks allow good practice to be identified specifically focussing on validation and evidence gathering and claim related activity. Groundwork UK encourages Supply Chain Partners to share their areas of excellence with others at National briefing days and local quarterly meetings where programme related operational topics are discussed.

3c) Honouring Commitments

Supply Chain Partners were able to confirm that contract negotiations were clear and open, and partner expectations have been managed effectively. In a number of instances Supply Chain Partners have had volumes negotiated post contracting. These changes have not been seen by partners as having a detrimental effect on the good relationships that exist and that changes have been fully explained and discussed, with clear rationale being given for the changes and why these were required. Clear channels such as email and delivery partner meetings were used to communicate fully where Supply Chain Partners were encouraged to raise questions and discuss any areas of concern.

"...we can't fault the quality and level of detail given to us during the on-boarding" – Supply Chain Partner

Supply Chain Partners are aware of Groundwork UK's formal dispute resolution process. At the time of assessment there had been no formal complaints from the supply chain. Supply Chain Partners were insufficiently aware of the Merlin Mediation Service. Supply Chain Partners have expressed concerns regarding the inconsistent flow of referrals in some geographical areas which, whilst is the responsibility of the delivery partner Groundwork UK are aware of and are managing and supporting dialogue between all parties, including the commissioner, the local authority and the data holding organisation.

Groundwork UK senior managers have stated they would fully respect decisions made as a result of the Merlin Mediation Service if it had been deemed to have not acted in accordance with the principles of the Merlin Standard.

Good use of processes ensure that at every level within supply chains, all parties are aware of each other expectations, clear written documentation is provided at all stages of the life of the contract and this is complimented by open and respectful communication from contract co-ordinators who form part of the Youth, Employment & Skills (YES) team. A fairly flat structure allows visibility of senior management of Groundwork UK to the Supply Chain Partner network which partner's value and feel confident and comfortable to contact senior management where necessary with concerns.

"...I can pick the phone up to the Chief Executive if I like, they are very open like that" – Supply Chain Partner

3d) Performance

Groundwork UK has a good approach to performance management. The carefully designed supply chain ensures that (where viable) within each geographical area multiple Supply Chain Partners deliver services to young people, this mitigates risk but also ensures that more strategic relationships can be built. Good and collaborative working takes place a local level with partners meeting each other and enjoying sharing operational solutions with other operationally based staff. Comparative performance data is not currently shared with Supply Chain Partners, with Groundwork UK preferring to focus on improvements to quality rather than quantity. Contract coordinators meet with Supply Chain Partners on a regular basis and review performance against agreed performance targets and measures.

Clear channels support regular performance review; partners receive detailed monthly performance data which is complimented by telephone based discussions. Formal and detailed face to face reviews take place on a 6 monthly basis which review all aspects of the contract and provide an ideal time to discuss issues or concerns and supporting innovation. Some partners felt the approach was insufficiently robust to manage poor performance and that a revised approach may need to be adopted in order to help support partners who are underperforming. Groundwork UK s have identified that the current arrangements for performance management are insufficient and have identified this as an area for further development.

"...they don't put any pressure on us – they encourage confidence" – Supply Chain Partner

"...we have discussions on profiles, they have allowed us to carry numbers forward" – Supply Chain Partner

Performance expectations are now clear, well defined and understood by Supply Chain Partners. Open and frequent discussions between supply chain managers quickly identified significant differences in the expected number of young people that the contract would support, a process of review and resetting of profiles and expectations has now taken place, which has resulted in additional clarity and understanding of this area. Sanctions and tolerances are indicated within the Programme Requirements document, however these are due to be updated to reflect revised expectations. Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to set their own targets.

Groundwork UK provide Supply Chain Partners with a Management Information System that produces clear performance data. The VIEWS system is web-based and seen by partners as being user friendly and helpful in understanding their current performance. The VIEWS system also records the 'customer journey' and the interactions that take place between Supply Chain Partner staff and the young person, acting as an effective caseload management system. A suite of standard reports are produced on a regular basis and a "statement of claims" is produced for each Supply Chain Partner for checking, which forms part of the claim to the funding organisation. Reports are available for partners to generate

at any time via the VIEWS and these allow Groundwork UK's Supply Chain Partners to track their own performance. Some partners expressed frustration with the seemingly overly onerous task of paperwork upload, which can be slow at times, this is recognised by Groundwork UK.

Whilst no formal measure of value for money has been made across the contracts held by Groundwork UK, young people are positively benefitting from the activities of the Supply Chain Partners. A dedicated team within Groundwork UK focuses on identifying service improvements, applying lessons learned and driving value for money. Customers continue to benefit from services and support offered by organisations outside Groundwork UK's own supply chain through the provision of signposting.

3e) Promoting Diversity & Equality

Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners demonstrate a strong commitment to ensure an alignment to the promotion of diversity and equality. All partners are required to evidence that they have a suitable Equality and Diversity policy at the initial stage of expressing an interest in work with Groundwork UK, which is checked as part of the due diligence process. Supply Chain Partners on-going commitment to this area is checked on a 6 monthly basis and through spot checks conducted by contract coordinators. The VIEWS Management Information system allows partners to access programme specific equality and diversity data. Through the Quality Assurance activities Groundwork UK are ensuring that all young people are made fully aware of procedures around equality and diversity.

"...we have a large pro-forma which we complete for Self Assessment, this asks us to measure against our local demographics, as a result we've developed an action plan to target more White British people with a working class background" – Supply Chain Partner

Groundwork UK currently collects a range of Equality and Diversity data. This data however is currently under-used, which is recognised by Groundwork UK. An action plan has been developed to improve Groundwork UK's approach to this area, for example to in helping them to better identify less well performing customer groups and to use data to influence future supply chain design decisions.

4 Review

4a) Supply Chain Review

Groundwork UK's approach to how it actively seeks and uses feedback is satisfactory. Feedback from Supply Chain Partners is gathered on an on-going basis through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and e-mail updates and more recently via a delivery partner survey which is due to be repeated early in 2015. The recently developed Quality Assurance framework prompts Supply Chain Partners to obtain feedback from the young people with which it supports and other stakeholders including local authorities however these activities are currently underdeveloped. External audits and inspections completed by Commissioners,

Such as Compliance Monitoring Officer (CMO), the EFA and Ofsted also provide results which are used to inform and improve practices.

Groundwork UK encourage Supply Chain Partners to invest in Self Assessment activities and develop continuous improvement plans, the contents of which are reviewed by the YES team. Groundwork UK have recognised the need to ensure that robust self-assessment takes place across all its Youth, Employment and Skills contracts and are developing appropriate mechanisms to ensure this leads to demonstrable improvements. Some Supply Chain Partners were unable to describe their contribution to Groundwork UK's self-assessment report. Groundwork UK accurately self assessed in preparation for the Merlin assessment and had identified many of the areas for improvement detailed within this report.

Groundwork UK very effectively keep its Supply Chain Partners informed of wider policy and strategy information via regular briefing emails, and whilst information contained is relevant and useful, some partners found these emails overly long. Through nationally produced publications such as the annual report Groundwork UK promote very effectively the good news stories of the young people they help and highlight the improvements made to local green spaces and other public areas which relate directly to the impact of sustainable employment, equality and diversity, and environmental sustainability.

Groundwork UK have, and continue to ensure that very effective activities and review processes ensure that the design of supply chain continues to be fit for purpose and this has recently been demonstrated through the recent addition of new partners. The activities undertaken by its Supply Chain Partners through, in particular Youth Contract are having a very positive impact on external stakeholders, most importantly the Young People the contract aims to help, however Groundwork UK need to consider how to further engage their Supply Chain Partners and ensure both Groundwork UK and its Supply Chain Partners are able to recognise the measurable impact on the wider social objectives of the commissioner. Groundwork UK were able to provide a good range of case studies to demonstrate how the activities have impacted positively on its customers.

Conclusion

Groundwork UK has demonstrated behaviors that fully meet the requirements of the Merlin Standard, and Supply Chain Partners were particularly complimentary about the approach that Groundwork UK take with them; particularly how they work to develop confidence as valuable and respected members of the supply chain.

It was evident to the assessment team that Groundwork UK are very well suited to support the delivery of this type of contract (Youth Contract) and their commitment to develop their approach to supply chain management and their clear commitment to continuous improvement.

Supply Chain Partners confirmed that Groundwork UK actively display and the staff they employ behave in a highly respectful and supportive manner, essential behaviors expected of a Prime contractor organisation.