



merlin

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report

For

INSPIRA

By Ruth Regan

On behalf of emqc Ltd

Assessment Date: 06/05/2014 to 08/05/2014

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About the Organisation

Inspira is an award-winning national social enterprise company, based in Cumbria. It is a delivery-based provider of community services, and its name reflects its purpose - to *inspire people, organisations and communities to success*.

Inspira's roots are in the provision of youth support services and careers guidance. However, it now offers comprehensive solutions to a wide variety of social challenges, including delivery of statutory services to public bodies, strategic support for local and national programmes supporting youth in the community, and managing contracts across geographically and socially diverse areas.

Supply Chain Partners have enabled Inspira to deliver four contracts.

- ▲ National Citizen Service
Originally commissioned by the Office for Civil Society as a pilot in 2010, Inspira manages and delivers the National Citizens Service across Cumbria, Lancashire and Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre, Blackburn with Darwen using a range of Supply Chain Partners, some of whom were involved in the original pilot.
- ▲ Youth Work
Commissioned by Cumbria County Council, contracts are delivered by a consortium of providers called the Cumbria Youth Work Consortium. This consortium was established by Inspira (then Connexions Cumbria) in partnership with Young Cumbria.
- ▲ The Friday Night Project
Part of a local area bid submitted to deliver additional and complimentary activities for young people on Friday nights across the Allerdale and Copeland areas. This project is delivered through existing Cumbria Youth Work Consortium members and other community-based organisations and individuals.
- ▲ Support for the Third Sector
Commissioned by Cumbria County Council to provide infrastructure support and training to organisations providing youth work.

Assessment Methodology

Initial discussions were held with Inspira in February 2014, where the requirements of the Merlin Standard were explained and the Supply Chain Partners in scope for this assessment confirmed, in accordance with the agreed guidelines.

The assessment team (lead Assessor Ruth Regan and team Assessor Neil Potentier) interviewed a representative sample of Supply Chain Partner organisations delivering on the four contracts mentioned above. The sample also included an organisation which had recently left the delivery network.

In addition Inspira personnel were interviewed, including those involved in the strategic and day-to-day development and management of the supply chain, as well as those in administrative, financial, human resources, quality assurance and IT/management information roles.

During the assessment, a number of documents were made available for the team to review, including the subcontractor manual, a business development strategy, a delivery plan, internal communications strategy, service level agreements and contractual documentation, quality assurance frameworks and a range of policies and processes.

Assessment Outcome

Overall %	77%
Overall Outcome	Good
Supply Chain Design	Excellent
Commitment	Good
Conduct	Good
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.

- ▲ Inspira has a very clear understanding of commissioner, customer and stakeholder needs and uses this intelligence to good effect when reviewing the needs of individual contract requirements. (1a.1, & 4a.1)
- ▲ The organisations working within the supply chain have, in the main, a long standing relationship with Inspira and are recognised as having the experience, expertise, community standing etc. to address the holistic needs of young people. (1a.2)
- ▲ The engagement of wider networks both by Inspira and their partner organisations is exceptional – with real engagement taking place ensuring specialist support is available to stakeholders, young people and partners across the network. (1a.3)
- ▲ The supply chain considers Inspira’s approach to communication - both oral and written - to be a key strength, with open, honest and two-way discussions at both operational and strategic levels taking place. The delivery network perceives its relationship with Inspira staff to be supportive, business-like, performance-focused, relevant and realistic based on the contract(s) being delivered. (2a.1, 2a.4, 2a.5, & 3a.3)

- ▲ The openness of communication flows through into Inspira's approach to sharing information about contract requirements (pre- and post-contracting), funding, fees and costs, all of which are openly discussed with network partners across the different contracts. Every effort is made pre-contract to ensure that potential partner organisations fully understand the requirements of the contract, the outcomes needed for payment, etc. (2c.2, 2c.5, 2c.8, 3d.3 & 3c.1)
- ▲ The business principles on which the network of partner organisations operate is clear due to the working history of those involved. (3a.1)
- ▲ Strong and proportionate policies and procedures are in place across the supply chain to ensure that the security of personal data and the safeguarding of people at risk are maintained. (3b.4 & 3b.6)
- ▲ Stakeholder engagement is robust – from one-to-one discussions between strategic decision makers through to opportunities given to groups of young people. (4a.1)
- ▲ Partners believe they are having a very positive impact on the wider objectives/policy intent of the commissioner(s). They were able to share many anecdotal examples about improving the lives of the young people they were engaging with. (4a.3 & 4a.6)

Areas for Improvement

Whilst Inspira demonstrated that it met the Merlin Standard the following areas could be considered for review and improvement based on feedback from Inspira staff and/or partners, observations and/or documentary evidence. The number in brackets cross-references the findings to the element and criteria of the Merlin Standard.

- ▲ In order to support the Business Development Strategy, consider the benefits of developing a framework of potential public, private and 3rd sector partner organisations. (1a.1 & 4a.5)
- ▲ Supply Chain Partners have developed effective and fruitful relationships with a variety of support organisations that add value to the customer and the contracts. Consider how to pull together a database of all provision/partner provision which can be openly shared and accessed/used by all of the network. (1a.3 & 4a.1)
- ▲ Due to the extensive networking within the partner network (especially within Cumbria) collaboration and the sharing of best practice is taking place – albeit perhaps informally, on occasion. Consideration could be given to what Inspira can do, where appropriate, to formalise collaboration and the sharing of best practice within and across the contracts. (2a.3 & 3d.1)
- ▲ Consider what business development support can be made available for the small, 3rd sector and volunteer-based partner organisations. (2b.1)

- ▲ Continue to review and build on learning and development provided for partners – especially for staff new to the supply chain. Consider the benefits of developing a timetable of learning activities which can be accessed by all. (2b.3)
- ▲ The Subcontractor Manual details the principles by which partnerships are based – from an Inspira perspective. As the supply chain continues to develop and grow, there may be benefits to be had by enhancing this document further by specifically highlighting a set of core principles as developed and agreed with the current Supply Chain Partners. (3a.1)
- ▲ Most Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they believe the processes, policies and activities undertaken by Inspira to monitor the quality of delivery and the customer experience are relevant, proportionate and developmental. However, where the commissioning body also embarks on quality monitoring activities partners are frustrated by the lack of feedback they receive. Inspira need to consider how to work with the commissioners to agree a process which is supportive, proportionate, open and transparent, where the outcomes are shared and performance improvements made as a result. (3b.1 & 3b.2)
- ▲ Whilst Inspira has achieved a gold 'Green at Heart' award from the Cumbria Business Environmental Network, and in general terms encourages partners to implement an environmental sustainable strategy, in the future consideration must be made to developing a holistic environmental sustainability strategy within the supply chains, which is measured and monitored by Inspira. (3b.7, 4a.6)
- ▲ The supply chain would benefit from having clear definitions/examples from Inspira of 'excellent practice', 'innovation' and 'value for money'. (3b.8, 3d.2 & 3d.5)
- ▲ When appropriate, remind Supply Chain Partners of the Merlin Mediation Service. (3c.3)
- ▲ Partner and network organisations could benefit from having a greater understanding of how individual organisations are contributing to the wider Inspira supply chain. (3c.4)
- ▲ Consideration should be given to the potential benefits of further developing collaboration between the organisations across the whole supply chain. (3d.1)
- ▲ There is no question that diversity and equality is at the heart of what Inspira and its partner network do on a day to day basis. Because it is so embedded the activities taken to promote diversity and equality go almost recognised, and therefore consideration needs to be given to how they can be further developed. (3e)
- ▲ Consider the benefits of undertaking a formal annual feedback survey of all partner and network organisations and stakeholders on the impact the contracts being delivered are having on the commissioners' strategies, and to confirm that the make up of the supply chain is still meeting identified needs. (4.1, 4.2.4 & 4a.4)

- ▲ Review how the annual continuous improvement plan is produced and ensure that relevant partners and stakeholders - including the smaller, community-based organisations - have a real opportunity to contribute to it. (4.2)
- ▲ Inspira and partners work together to deliver the services to gain positive outcomes for young people and contribute to the commissioners' wider social objectives. Whilst a level of anecdotal evaluation takes place regarding the impact on the wider social objectives/policy intent, consideration could be made to developing a more robust, formalised approach to measuring the impact that the activities of the supply chain are having on external stakeholders, customer well-being and environmental sustainability. (4a.6)

Areas Requiring Further Development

Inspira have successfully met all the requirements of the Merlin Standard, as described in the assessment outcome. As a result, there are no areas requiring further development identified throughout this assessment.

Assessment Findings

1 Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply chain design

The scope and variety of the supply chain is excellent, with a diverse range of partners forming the network and niche support/provision where necessary. This ensures that Inspira are able to deliver services which meet the needs of the diverse range of customer groups. Partners were initially, and continue to be, selected based on geographical coverage, experience and track record, as well as for their specialisms. The Inspira team spend time undertaking research and consultation into the local needs and demographics across their delivery areas and make every effort to get to know and build relationships with key stakeholder organisations, community groups and influential individuals.

- ▲ *"...it was important that we met the expectations of the Council who wanted to keep a local, Cumbrian supply chain."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...we have strong relationships with a number of key subcontractors already delivering in Lancashire and the North West."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...our current delivery model is 30% Inspira, 70% SCPs, which enables us to deliver the range of (NCS) contracts we hold."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...we began talking to x because of their delivery location – we supported staff and their management committee to a point where they could support a contract – it was an important strategic decision to engage with them."* – Inspira

Due to their robust knowledge of the areas in which they operate, Inspira works with a variety of public, private and 3rd sector organisations to support contract delivery. This mix of national, local and area-based organisations are all used to support delivery of the contracts. Community centres, housing associations, youth organisations and children's centres are all involved in delivery. Over the course of the contracts thus far, there is some evidence of an evolving supply chain and examples were provided of a small number of new SCPs being brought in to the supply chain to reinforce and enrich the range of provision on offer. For example, the delivery of the National Citizen Service has expanded and organisations including Youth Action and the Outward Bound Trust have joined the supply chain.

- ▲ *"...we have a real mix – from national organisations who are Primes in their own right – to xxx who is a volunteer at a venue we hire to deliver a Friday Night Project."* - Inspira

Inspira is able to identify a large number of organisations outside its own supply chain that are used to provide further support of a more specialist nature and this was confirmed in the discussions with Partners. For example the network that supports the delivery of contracts include:

- ▲ Schools, Academies and Sixth form/FE colleges, for example in the recruitment of young people to projects and the use of school premises for activities.
- ▲ Local Authorities, for example with the involvement of local councillors in programmes which inform young people about local politics.

- ▲ Chamber of Commerce and businesses, for example by talking to young people regarding employability skills and supporting young people with discounts on travel costs whilst on NCS.
- ▲ Local media, for example working with young people to ensure their achievements are reported appropriately.

2 Commitment

2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

Partners report positively on how Inspira communicated during all stages of procurement, describing how they were approached with invites, offers and information. Due to the diversity of the contracts delivered, and the scope of the supply chain, Inspira have developed a very flexible approach to procurement as *"...one size does not fit all"*. However, for all the contracts, partners described how Inspira were proactive in engaging them in the procurement process and that communication was effective and relevant to their needs and expertise in such matters – giving them appropriate information and time to consider their engagement and gain an understanding of the volumes, funding and payments etc.

- ▲ *"...they improved the planning of meetings to meet our needs."* – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ *"...everything was explained so clearly to start with – made it simple to understand."* – Supply Chain Partner

When asked about how consultation informs decision, partner organisations shared many examples - from an operational level in terms of paperwork and process, through to major strategic decisions informing Schools' allocations for the recruitment of NCS participants and how best any increase or decrease in commissioned places could be absorbed. Partners delivering on the Youth Work contract described how the use of IYSS (the client database used by Inspira) has developed as a result of feedback they had been asked to provide. At a grass-roots level, weekly, monthly, quarterly and ad-hoc meetings ensure partners are involved in decision-making about processes relevant to the contract they are delivering and the level of sophistication required.

Opportunities for members of the supply chain to work collaboratively are still improving and where collaboration has taken place it is as a result of pre-existing working relationships and local knowledge. However, the strength of the partnership network means that there is a natural willingness to meet and share problems, discuss issues and share best practice to support local needs of their client groups. This takes place regularly, with the input of Inspira staff who work hard to create a sense of collective responsibility and team spirit. Performance figures are always shared across the delivery partners to ensure they have accurate and up-to-date knowledge of progress to target, and to grow the feeling of collective responsibility. For example the introduction of the 'Friday Night' project required existing youth work partners to work collaboratively with new providers to address local political and policing concerns and ensure a holistic service for young people.

- ▲ *"...Inspira encourage us to work together."* – Supply Chain Partner

The supply chain considers Inspira's approach to communication - both oral and written - to be a key strength, with open, honest and two-way discussions at both operational and strategic levels taking place. Partners believe that any ambiguity and potential conflict regarding the business relations across the network have been eliminated and that the geographical allocations are fair and equitable.

Oral communication - such as quarterly review meetings during which performance data is shared - is supported by contracts and schedules which are issued at the start of each contract year.

- ▲ "...no one is treading on anybody else's toes." – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ "...we worked hand-in-hand with Inspira to achieve targets." – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ "...we have such a good relationship – we can ask them anything." – Supply Chain Partner

A particular strength identified by partners is the effective approach taken to 'difficult discussions' such as those relating to funding or performance, and how Inspira staff are always honest and open with responses and fulfilling any promises made during these discussions. All partners have an identifiable point of contact within Inspira to ensure communication flow is as easy as possible. At a strategic level Inspira's Development Director keeps in regular contact with senior staff within the partnership and the contract management team are in regular contact at an operational level.

- ▲ "...we have had some bumpy patches but we have always managed to come through them." – Supply Chain Partner

2b) Developing supply chain partners

Partners confirmed that they are supported and encouraged to develop throughout the life of their relationship with Inspira, and have access to a range of resources to ensure they meet contractual requirements and achieve performance expectations. Whilst a number of NCS and youth work partners are well established and have robust strategies and policies, others are less advanced and as a result have gained support to develop policies which are fit for purpose, for example on diversity and equality, and health and safety. Partners also made reference to being introduced to other resources as and when they are made available, for example tools to meet contract requirements and to support the development of sessions with young people.

- ▲ "...we have supported joint bids and put organisations in touch with each other." - Inspira

Continuity Plans are built in to the contractual processes to encourage the development of all partner organisations, and local help and guidance is given on such things as room hire to open up income streams for Youth Providers. Inspira were very proactive and instrumental in spreading the Friday Night Project Scheme so that other youth providers could grow, and this is now replicated in several areas. Partners confirmed how they have, through Inspira, accessed funds for new equipment and activities so as to extend their services.

Existing providers that have proved successful in their delivery of one contract and have the necessary capacity are, if appropriate, given the opportunity to deliver new contracts. An example of this is youth work partners delivering the Friday Night Project and NCS.

- ▲ *"...Inspira help us access other funds and provided us references to do so."* – Supply Chain Partner

Discussions revealed Inspira's input into promoting and facilitating the development of staff within the supply chain, for example delivering training on recording of outcomes, monitoring and tracking, and supporting Young Cumbria in their delivery of a menu of learning such as NVQs, drugs awareness, challenging behaviour, etc. Within youth work, planning for new contract years includes the completion of a training needs analysis to ensure that staff delivering on contract - regardless of which organisation they are employed by - have the skills and knowledge necessary. This has resulted in Inspira supporting additional training, for example in the use of the IYSS database and PowerPoint. For NCS additional training has been offered to partners to support temporary staff recruitment along with additional sales training to support the promotion of the service.

- ▲ *"...we encourage all new NCS staff to attend the ethos, values training they provide."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...every year we undertake an analysis of training needs as part of the due diligence process."* – Inspira

2c) Contracting and funding

Due to the diversity of commissioner and contract requirements, Inspira do not have a 'one-size fits all' procurement process. For example within youth work a formal tender approach is not used due to the make up of the organisations involved in delivery of the contract. Many are very small youth clubs run by volunteers who would not have the knowledge or capacity needed, and for the small amounts of money some receive this process would be disproportionate. Organisations are selected for a variety of reasons including building on the original Youth Work in Cumbria Partnership, particular specialisms they have to offer and their reach within the local communities. That said, due diligence questionnaires are completed before contracting and annual updates are completed at the start of the financial year. The original NCS partners were chosen based on proven ability to deliver during a pilot scheme, however, the NCS Trust has just completed a national stakeholder engagement event aimed at increasing the number of providers in their delivery areas. Inspira intend to build on this to support the further growth of their own supply chain by including those interested in a mini tender round. All partners, regardless of contract, believe that procurement and selection has been fair and represents geographical needs and makes best use of their expertise.

The senior managers and Board of Inspira strongly believe they have a duty of care to their partners, and as a result ensure the financial aspects of the contracts/service level agreements they exchange, including the interpretation of the payment model, is clearly understood. Partners confirmed that discussions and negotiations regarding finance have been undertaken, and over the life of the contract(s) have had opportunities to review the terms and conditions.

Although the Company policy is not to make payments to third parties until they have received payment from the commissioner examples were shared of where immediate payment have been made, or monthly payments agreed where an organisation has experienced financial difficulty or cash flow problems. The Inspira Audit and Performance Management Committee of the Board were involved in one major decision to adjust a partner organisation's payment arrangements to ensure due process and protocols were followed.

- ▲ *"...partners have asked us to review their payment profile and we have tried where possible to accommodate them."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...we provide partners with purchase orders every year to show our commitment to them and so they know what they should be able to claim."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...they understand our cash flow – great payment profile which is front loaded."* – Supply Chain Partner

Contractual documentation provided by Inspira tries to reflect the contract they have with the commissioner so there is openness and transparency within the contracting arrangements. All NCS partners confirmed that their contract documentation is clear and understood, while a number of youth work partners did express a concern that the contract was complex, though time was taken by Inspira to help them understand the detail. The service level agreements provided for the Friday Night project partners are simple, straightforward two page documents which clearly set out the finances, policy requirements, activities to be provided etc.

- ▲ *"...the SLA is simple for the Friday Night project."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...NCS contract flowed from the original Inspira contract with the commissioner."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...contract document is only two sided – very straightforward."* – Supply Chain Partner

Work has recently been undertaken to review the market share and delivery targets of partners within youth work as a result of the budget being reduced by the commissioner. The decision was taken that providers contracted above a fixed monetary value would take a fixed percentage cut and those with lower value contracts would not experience any reduction. Inspira have taken a larger reduction in funding in order to protect the smallest providers who, without the funding received through this contract, would be unlikely to continue to operate. NCS negotiations in 2012 were in large part based on existing market share, appetite for growth and available resources, including staffing levels and ability to enhance those levels seasonally. More recent amendments to market share have been made based on performance, changes to delivery locations and the introduction of additional delivery partners. Within the individual contracts, partners confirmed that extensive efforts have been made to ensure the market share means all partners have a viable contract.

- ▲ *"...we really spent time agreeing with NCS partners their market share of schools – if they are delivering 30% of the contract then they get 30% of the schools."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...we keep the claiming process to a minimum depending on the funder so that it's easy for the small organisations to claim for the work they do."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...Inspira are great at sharing the wealth."* – Supply Chain Partner

Partners confirmed that negotiations regarding the volumes, funding/finance and performance expectations are openly discussed and agreed and that they felt confident to challenge and re-negotiate. For example there has been ongoing dialogue with some partners on volumes, funding and finance due to some major changes being made by the commissioners, and partners described proactive negotiations between them and Inspira resulting in acceptable and agreed outcomes.

Throughout the lifetime of any contracts, funding, finance and performance expectations are reviewed with partners at contract meetings at least quarterly and are revisited if concerns are raised by either party.

- ▲ *"...we negotiated an additional 100 places from the commissioner to support x, who had asked for additional numbers to support their finances."* - Inspira

Pre- and post-procurement consultation and negotiation was described as engaging, open and clear. Agreed payment schedules are attached to all contracts/service level agreements as confirmation of the negotiations. All partners reported that any post-contract requests they have made to alter the original contractual arrangements have been discussed and negotiated, and where possible accommodated. For example including renegotiating a payment profile to meet the individual partners' changing needs.

- ▲ *"...we were able to re-negotiate additional numbers for our spring contract – Inspira were very flexible and met our needs and reduced our risk."* – Supply Chain Partner

The strategy to manage the transfer of funds within the supply chain was readily acknowledged by partners to be clear, fair, flexible, accurate and timely. Inspira makes every effort to ensure that invoices are accurate and support staff within the supply chain to understand what is required to ensure payments can be made on time. Partners reported on-time payments and no claw-backs or under-payments.

- ▲ *"...I like the Inspira version of payment terms (by comparison to other Primes)."* – Supply Chain Partner

Because of the level of consultation and negotiation throughout the procurement process partners are fully aware of the value of the contract and the associated costs and management fees. All partners confirmed that they were happy with these arrangements and what they received for the management fee (monitoring, support, performance reviews, use of the MI system etc.).

- ▲ *"...partners should know the fees and costs relating to their contract – we are open with all our figures and finance."* - Inspira

3 Conduct

3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity

The Inspira Board takes an active role in ensuring appropriate governance, and that integrity and the agreed core principles are embedded into the ethos of the company. Whilst there has been no formal alignment of core principles between Inspira and its supply chain, all partners believe there is strong synergy between their own organisation's core principles and those of Inspira. To support organisations who have not worked with Inspira before, the Inspira values have been clearly stated and shared with partners in the sub-contractor manual. For NCS partners the core principles and ethos are established by the NCS Trust, who deliver training for staff in order to support the embedding of the NCS ethos with all delivery partner practices.

- ▲ *"...our handbook sets out clearly how the relationship works – partner organisations need to have values which reflect those of Inspira."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...our vision and values fitted very well with x so we wanted to develop a relationship with them."* - Inspira
- ▲ *"...in essence we share their principles and values."* – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ *"...the quality of the service they provide is amazing – we want to reflect that in our delivery too."* – Supply Chain Partner

Although there has been no direct requirement for Inspira to manage a TUPE process within their role as lead contractor, partners provided examples of being supported through the process. This included the sharing of knowledge, facilitation of communications between the parties concerned, ensuring all time-phased commitments are met, and signposting to the relevant legal experts where needed. Where Inspira has been part of the TUPE process, all legal requirements are met from an employee point of view. TUPE is also accounted for in commissioning and implementation planning.

- ▲ *"...we talked to Inspira about TUPE – very helpful."* – Supply Chain Partner

The interactions between Inspira and partner staff are extremely positive and supportive. Partners gave examples of how Inspira staff were accessible, approachable, friendly and supportive – with responsiveness being highlighted as a key strength. Inspira staff described how important it is for them to be supportive and work with partners to develop strategic and operationally mutually beneficial relationships, promoting open, supportive and constructive dialogue.

- ▲ *"...we have strategic meetings with representatives of the partners and will phone or meet them for a catch up."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...x really helped me get up a steep learning curve and was always there to help me with my daft questions."* – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ *"...it's been a positive experience – we have a good relationship."* – Supply Chain Partner

Partners confirmed that prior to contracting, Inspira checked that they had everything in place relevant to diversity and equality, health and safety, information security and safeguarding. If necessary partners were supported to develop policies, procedures and practices that were proportionate to the contracts being delivered. During the lifetime of the contract policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and each quarterly review meeting focuses on a specific policy which is checked and discussed in detail.

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

All sub-contracted delivery is subject to regular reviews with direct observation of practice being carried out to ensure that the quality of delivery meets defined standards. Either the contract management team or the service commissioner conducts observations across the supply chain delivery, and Inspira ensure that any processes are proportionate to the size and contract value. Internally client evaluation and feedback is sought at the conclusion of group and individual interventions. This work has been further enhanced by analysis being undertaken across the full range of contracts to ensure compliance to the ISO 9001 and **matrix** quality standards and the requirement that a 95% customer satisfaction rate is achieved. Case studies continue to be used as a means of demonstrating the client journey; this has included written and video journals. Case studies are used quarterly and shared with the Local Authority and other commissioners to demonstrate the impact of the work that has been undertaken with the client. Most Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they believe the processes, policies and activities undertaken by Inspira to monitor the quality of delivery and the customer experience are relevant, proportionate and developmental. However, where the commissioning body also embarks on quality monitoring activities, partners are frustrated by the lack of feedback.

Inspira staff gave examples of how their quality assurance activities have informed and improved delivery. While partner organisations were able to give examples of feedback they had received, following their own monitoring / audit visits for example, they were less able to give examples of how quality issues or concerns raised across the individual contracts or the supply chain as a whole had been addressed.

Across all delivery Inspira hold regular formal contract meetings with partner organisations where Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) can be provided as necessary. Information from the commissioner and other sources is shared as necessary, and where appropriate Inspira will include an interpretation of the information provided to ensure it is understood in context of the Inspira contract. Quarterly operational/good practice meetings within the NCS contract or consortium meetings for youth work partners are also used to share IAG. Inspira holds the **matrix** Standard which confirms that all customers receive a high quality, effective and up-to-date information, advice and guidance service.

▲ "...consistency of message is important to us." - Inspira

Supply Chain Partners confirmed that policies pertaining to the security of data, a healthy and safe environment and the safeguarding of people at risk were all submitted to and scrutinised by Inspira as part of the initial due diligence process.

Contract management information from the youth work contract is largely held in the secure IYSS database. Staff using computer-based systems are required to sign and return the Inspira acceptable user policy and their DBS details are confirmed with the organisation's management. Partners not able to use the database make paper returns, either via secure email or by registered post (any data is unidentifiable). Within the NCS contract Inspira have recently successfully completed the NCS Trust Data Security Review which assessed partner organisations' processes and practices around data security.

- ▲ "...access to the system is role secured and an acceptable user policy is in place." – Inspira
- ▲ "...barcodes used to log attendance - we want to make it as easy and fool proof as possible." – Inspira
- ▲ "...we have business continuity plans in place." - Inspira

As part of due diligence each partner submits their health and safety policy and accompanying procedures for checking and validation, and are contractually obliged to notify Inspira of any serious or reportable incidents concerning customers. Partners are also obliged to inform Inspira of any substantive change to their policies or procedures and will make expert resources available if required. All partners, regardless of contract, confirmed the importance placed on health and safety. Some of the smaller, community based organisations described how Inspira's staff had pointed out potential risks and had worked with them to remove potential hazards.

- ▲ "...policies, procedures checked and 'eyes and ears' role when we visit locations." - Inspira

Safeguarding procedures and safeguarding guidelines are regularly monitored to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. Checks are also completed to ensure staff working on contracts - whether employed or supporting delivery as a volunteer - have all the relevant DBS checks in place prior to them engaging with customers. As an organisation Inspira takes the safeguarding of young people extremely seriously, with senior members of staff chairing and/or contributing to local and regional safeguarding committees/panels.

- ▲ "...we offer guidance and support to partners – they will contact us if there are any potential safeguarding issues." – Inspira
- ▲ "...we have discussed DBS with the network as it doesn't cover everyone." – Inspira

Environmental sustainability is discussed at contract management meetings with partners being encouraged and supported to improve their own practices. Whilst Inspira has achieved the gold 'Green at Heart' award from the Cumbria Business Environmental Network, the green agenda hasn't been fully embraced throughout the supply chain. In the future consideration must be made to developing a holistic strategy for environmental sustainability across the supply chains, which is measured and monitored.

Whilst there are examples of 'excellent practice' being identified and shared within the individual contracts during meetings, the consortia approach and day-to-day communications, Inspira has not set out to define what the term actually means and consequently has not communicated with the supply chain in this respect.

This means that whilst ideas are shared, specific examples of 'excellent practice' are not yet overtly monitored for their effectiveness. This is compounded where the commissioning body embarks on quality monitoring, as any 'excellent practice' they may identify is not being shared.

3c) Honouring Commitments

Partners confirmed that the contract expectations were clearly defined from the outset, and communicated in both oral and written format. Post-contract, some contract and funding arrangements have - due to changes made by commissioner - led to Inspira having to make changes to agreed arrangements. For example, following lengthy discussions with partners following changes in funding to the youth work contract, the decision was taken that providers contracted above a fixed monetary value would take a fixed percentage cut and those with lower value contracts would not experience any reduction. Partners confirmed that this was as fair a decision as possible and protected the smallest provider who, without the funding received, would have been unlikely to continue to operate.

▲ *"...we had open and frank discussions about allocations and funding."* – Supply Chain Partner

To avoid any potential difficulties arising as a result of a lack of clarity Inspira ensure that contracts are detailed and specific regarding required delivery. This clarity, underpinned by positive relationships with partner organisations, means that any difficulties are dealt with early and by negotiation and so there are no recent examples of formal dispute resolution processes being initiated.

Senior managers confirmed that Inspira would respect decisions from an appropriate and agreed Merlin Mediation Service if it were to be deemed to have not acted in accordance with the principles of the Merlin Standard.

Within the individual contracts being delivered partners have a clear and unambiguous understanding of what Inspira expects of them in terms of delivery, outputs, outcomes, and Inspira clearly understands what partners require and expect of them. This is then clearly documented through written contracts, service level agreements and delivery plans as appropriate. During the lifetime of a partner's contract all expectations are reviewed via regular communication with contract review meetings and informal contact as necessary. While Inspira staff have a very clear understanding of how the individual contracts support each other, partner and supporting network organisations could benefit from having a greater understanding of how individual organisations are contributing to the wider Inspira supply chain.

▲ *"...we all worked hand-in-hand with Inspira to achieve targets."* – Supply Chain Partner

3d) Performance

As mentioned above, within contracts there is evidence of partners working collaboratively to support the overall performance of their individual network/contract. For example management information and data is shared across the partnership to promote understanding of the need to achieve individual organisation targets and the impact this has on overall contract delivery. Performance is discussed at contract management meetings and for the youth work contract at wider consortium meetings. For NCS delivery, partners have their own individual targets but are well aware that there is an overall target and any underperformance affects the whole network. Partners described how they believe Inspira have recently taken a more proactive approach to facilitating collaboration across the wider networks.

Partners made reference to at least quarterly performance reviews, which are proportionately robust and provide a clear indication of achievements, good practice, expectations and areas for improvement. When underperformance or areas for improvement were identified partners described how Inspira were supportive and encouraging during the improvement discussions/actions.

Due to the robust communication processes in place, partners are very clear about what they need to achieve in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Partners described that through one-to-one meetings, briefings and consortium meetings, as well as phone calls and emails, they had numerous opportunities to raise issues and identify concerns, including wider issues, for example commissioner/funder expectations and/or procurement.

▲ *"...every year we agree delivery plans and schedules so expectations are clear."* - Inspira

The management information systems have been developed and updated to enable Inspira to provide regular, accurate and appropriate information to partners, and to monitor and evaluate performance. Contracts operate differing methods in relation to the management of performance information, depending on the needs of the delivery partner and the commissioner. For example within the youth work contract, partners using IYSS have the ability to run their own MI reports and are able to access information as necessary. Partners not using IYSS can request data, or are provided with data as necessary. Management Information is sent out to all partners on a quarterly basis with whole contract performance being shared, not just a partner's own. NCS operates two models in terms of management information. Some partners are also Primes elsewhere in the Country and therefore submit their own data to the NCS Trust. Inspira access this data so they can performance manage and audit the partner as required. The other three partners (including Inspira) collect and report data through the use of the IYSS database. Partners gave many positive comments about the IYSS.

- ▲ *"...partners update the data monthly, or weekly if they prefer."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...MI system is good – it's easy to use."* – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ *"...it gives us good stats to measure performance."* – Supply Chain Partner
- ▲ *"...it really needs a back-button!"* – Supply Chain Partner

The understanding of value for money across the contracts held is underdeveloped. Many partners feel it is a black and white definition of just meeting profile to give value for money. Whilst some feel value for money can be measured in terms of enjoyment as well as achieving other contract outcomes. Within Inspira, discussions regarding value for money are more advanced and include reviewing their unit costs against other Primes' and identifying the amount of voluntary support brought in through social and community inclusion.

▲ "...we keep the cost down year on year – that offers value for money." - Inspira

The IYSS MI system facilitates the monitoring of distance travelled by customers. For example, whilst youth work partners have the option to use their own tools to measure outcomes, validation processes are in place to assure the quality of the outcomes achieved, and data is recorded on IYSS as confirmation. Case studies continue to be used as a means of demonstrating the client journey; this has included written and video journals. These are used quarterly and shared with relevant commissioners to demonstrate the impact of the work that has been undertaken with the client. All partners confirmed that there are methods to track customer progression, depending upon the contract.

3e) Promoting Diversity and Equality

Partners confirmed that they are expected to demonstrate a commitment to diversity and equality, aligned to that of Inspira, which is checked/discussed during the initial contracting phase. They also confirmed that they are expected to promote diversity and manage equality at every opportunity and throughout the lifetime of the contract. For example, any observation of delivery of services by partners includes consideration of access and equal opportunities generally.

The policies, procedures and practices of partners relating to diversity and equality are checked as part of initial due diligence process and then as part of ongoing contract management meetings. Inspira have produced a checklist which is provided within the Inspira Sub-Contractor Manual to ensure all partners, regardless of size or complexity, understand the importance placed on diversity and equality.

Management information returns from partner organisations are monitored and equal opportunities data is used to ensure that services and programmes are developed to meet the needs of clients and that services are meeting the requirements of the commissioner/funder. For example, youth work groups have been developed to meet the needs of young people with learning difficulties or those from other previously under-represented groups, and within NCS separate groups have been developed to enable the participation of Muslim girls.

There is no question that diversity and equality is at the heart of what Inspira and their partner network do on a day to day basis. Because it is so 'embedded' the activities taken to promote diversity and equality go almost unrecognised and therefore consideration needs to be given to how they can be further developed.

4 Review

4a) Supply chain review

Feedback is gained from clients, commissioners, schools, training providers, parents, Local Enterprise Partnerships, external auditors etc., to inform and improve practice across the supply chain. A detailed stakeholder analysis identifies these organisations and the role they play in supporting, informing and improving delivery. Inspira have adopted a range of feedback methods, including external monitoring and direct observation of practice, and yearly contract reviews to inform and improve practice and aid development of contract management. Within the NCS contract at the completion of the first year of contract delivery a review session was held with all subcontractors which resulted in an action plan to address underperformance and identify support mechanisms for the second year of delivery. In addition, Inspira staff keep well informed of local/community based developments such as increased crime rates which might then be used to influence where the Friday Night Project seeks out providers. Whilst this approach to gathering feedback has worked effectively in the past, consideration should be given to the benefits of undertaking a formal annual feedback survey of all partner and network organisations and stakeholders on the impact the contracts being delivered are having on the strategies of the commissioner(s) and to confirm that the make up of the supply chain continues to meet identified needs.

▲ *"...we have a stakeholder map in place."* – Inspira

Inspira has focused on internal improvements via the plan, do, review methodology and accreditation to ISO 9001:2008 and has only just embarked on seeking partner involvement in their continuous improvement plans. However, undertaking the process internally has had positive outcomes - an example being the production and sharing of a sub-contractor manual which clearly sets out for Inspira's own Contract Managers and sub-contractor organisations what is expected from both parties. When further engaging partners in the formal review process, ensure that the smaller, community-based organisations have a real opportunity to contribute.

Inspira keeps its supply chains informed of wider policy and strategy information of the commissioner(s) through a variety of platforms. For example a newsletter is shared and a variety of formal and informal meetings allow information sharing. The NCS Trust regularly shares 'NCS Express' with news and developments and this is cascaded to partners as appropriate. To support a changing strategy of one commissioner the increased focus on early help and sooner intervention with young people and families was put on agendas for discussion at contract review meetings. As a partner in Cumbria Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Inspira are represented on a number of sub-groups including the Chief Executive being Chair of the Child Sexual Exploitation/Missing from Home sub-group. He is leading the development of policy and strategy across the county and as this key area of work has developed information has been shared across the full range of partnership members.

▲ *"...we get great stats from Inspira to measure success."* – Supply Chain Partner

A number of partners had an understanding of the wider policy and strategy of the commissioner/funder, and how they impact on some elements, for example reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training, increasing employability skills and abilities, improving well-being through activities and a greater understanding of the benefits of healthy eating – thus supporting a reduction in the numbers of obese young people. As well as anecdotal examples, there are measurable impact outcomes being achieved, including for example a clear link being made between the establishment of a Friday Night Club in a community, and the reduction of anti-social behaviour in that community. Cumbria is also leading the way nationally in the number of young people taking up apprenticeships. At 8.4% of the cohort this is the highest of any local authority area with the average in England being just 3.6%.

Inspira continue to review and develop the supply chains to ensure they are fit for purpose and contribute to the measurable outcomes, which have resulted in some changes in the make-up of networks, geographical delivery and additional specialist partners being introduced. In the NCS contract Inspira are currently investing some time and money in the further development of their youth board. This is made up of young people who have already taken part in and have graduated from NCS, who will further influence the design and delivery of the contract.

- ▲ *"...from the original 44 organisations involved in youth work contract we now have 28 partners."* – Inspira

By the very nature of the work of Inspira and the contracts they and their supply chain deliver, there is a positive impact on the individual, their families and their communities. Traditionally staff working in this area enjoy high levels of motivation and satisfaction in their work because of the positive impact they have. The NCS Graduation events provide evidence of the positive customer experience. All stakeholders, including parents, are invited to these events which gives all NCS partners the opportunity to promote their services to a wider audience and customers the opportunity to access new provision. Inspira and partners work together to deliver the services to gain positive outcomes for young people and contribute to the commissioners' wider social objectives. Whilst a level of anecdotal evaluation takes place regarding the impact on the wider social objectives/policy intent, consideration could be made to developing a more robust, formalised approach to measuring the impact that the activities of the supply chain are having on external stakeholders, customer well-being and particularly, environmental sustainability.

- ▲ *"...important information is fed up to our Board – they get a performance report every quarter so they are fully aware of what we are achieving."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...we get 'feel-good' feedback on our impact – getting people ready for work for example."* – Inspira
- ▲ *"...21% reduction in crime on Friday nights."* – Supply Chain Partner

Conclusion

Inspira has exhibited behaviours that fully meet the requirements of the Merlin Standard, and some areas of good practice have been demonstrated.

Working towards accreditation against the Merlin Standard has clearly brought benefits to both the organisation and its supply chain. The challenge for Inspira has been developing process, policies and practices that are proportionate to the level of contract being delivered – and while some are still being refined, it appears that in the main this has been achieved.

As one member of the supply chain said, "*...their ability to manage large contracts and keep all those involved engaged and onboard and achieving is excellent*".