



merlin

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report

For

Prospect Training Services Ltd

By Rob Mottram

On behalf of emqc Ltd

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About the Organisation

Prospect Training Services Limited (PTS) is a privately owned company established in 1997. The organisation has experience in successfully delivering contracts for a range of commissioners including Learning & Skills Council (LSC), European Social Fund (ESF) and Department of Work and Pension (DWP), Skills Funding Agency (SFA), EFA & YPLA covering age groups from 13-65+.

In 2012 the Education Funding Agency (EFA) awarded Prospect the Youth Contract (YC) for the South West of England, due largely to their significant experience of previous delivery to NEET groups of individuals.

As the prime contract holder, Prospect manages a range of 19 partners who deliver the contract on their behalf over 16 local authority areas across a large and diverse geographical area.

The stated learner focused objectives of Prospect Training Services are:

- To support 16 to 17 year olds who are not in education, training or employment who have low attainment (1 GCSE A – C) are in care/care leavers, young offenders released from custody, with training to help move those persons into education, training or employment with training and to sustain this outcome.
- Increase these young people's experience and qualifications so that they have the opportunity to continue in education and successfully find work, reducing the proportion who become unemployed in adult life.

The stated objectives for Prospect Training Services of their supply chain design are:

- To successfully bring together the values, strengths and experiences of the private, public and VCS.
- Create an operating environment where a broad and diverse supply chain can be successful and sustainable.
- Bring together partner organisations that make a major difference to our learners, delivering sustainable, positive social outcomes.
- To help build capacity in our partners and facilitating access to additional provision and resources aimed at supporting the hardest to help.
- To ensure effective delivery of the procurement objectives and contractual requirement.

Prospect has 7 training centres across Gloucestershire delivering a variety of different sector skills such as Building/Construction Skills, Car maintenance, Health & Social Care, Hair & Beauty, Warehousing, Forklift, CSCS Cards, Functional Skills, Health and Safety, IT, Job search, CV workshops, Sports Development and In Car Entertainment. Prospect are a Functional Skills Test Centre which allows them to address literacy and numeracy deficiencies by embedding this within the vocational training.

Prospect Training Services are the originators of the highly successful Young Mums to Be (YMTB) and Parents with Prospects (PWP) - these are now marketed and quality assured through a charity: Nationwide Community Learning Partnership (NCLP) and the courses are delivered in over 150 centres across the country. These awards have now been mapped into the QCF in partnership with awarding body Edexcel.

It was a requirement by the funder, the Education Funding Agency that all prime contract holders of the YC undertake an assessment against the Merlin Standard, which included Prospect Training Services.

Assessment Methodology

Before the assessment, an initial planning meeting was held between the Lead Assessor and representatives of Prospect Training Services including the assessment coordinator, to gain an understanding of the business, the delivery model and to provide support to Prospect in preparing for the assessment. The scope of the assessment and Supply Chain Partners who were to be involved were agreed during the meeting and following this, Prospect created schedules for the Assessors. Subsequent communications provided the opportunity to review the plans and logistics of the on-site activity.

The assessment covered much of the South West of England and included Wiltshire, Swindon, Bristol, Gloucestershire, Devon and Cornwall. During the assessment, Assessors reviewed a wide range of IT systems and documentary evidence provided by Prospect, interviewed a range of staff, including senior managers and customer facing staff from the Supply Chain Network and a range of staff from Prospect. All principles of the Merlin standard were fully assessed by a team of 3 assessors; Rob Mottram (Lead Assessor), Stuart Morgan and David Folland. The assessment team spent a total of 12 days on-site reviewing documentary evidence, IT systems and undertaking interviews with Prospect Training Services personnel and a total of 17 partners; which represented nearly 90% of their supply chain.

Assessment Outcome

Overall %	79%
Overall Outcome	Good
Supply Chain Design	Good
Commitment	Good
Conduct	Good
Review	Good

Strengths

A range of strengths was identified during this Merlin assessment and a summary of these is given below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard to which the areas relate.

- ▲ Prospect are particularly good at developing Supply Chain Partners. A tailored and personalised approach is taken to the development and support for Supply Chain Partners and their staff.(2a.1, 2a.2, 2a.3)
- ▲ Prospect demonstrate business and commercial integrity very well. They manage their supply chain with high levels of integrity. Processes and approaches have been developed and refined over 18 years and are used across the supply chain network to very good effect. Highly operationally skilled staff are engaged at all levels of the organisation, providing support to Supply Chain Partners. Personal, professional credibility.(3a.1, 3a.3, 3a.4)
- ▲ The core values of Prospect are both shared and embraced by Supply Chain Partners, these values compliment a strong desire and passion in which the approach Prospect adopt places the young person at the centre of all their activities.(3a.1, 3a.3, 3e.1,)
- ▲ Excellent promotion of diversity & equality by dedicated staff to all Supply Chain Partners.(3e.1, 3e.2, 3e.3)
- ▲ Quality assurance & compliance measures are strong and Prospect take an active role in supporting organisations to comply through its personalised provision of high quality guidance. (3b.2, 3b.3, 3b.5)
- ▲ Prospect's ethos of empowerment stretches between their own staff and Supply Chain Partners to encourage decision making and effective delivery at local level. (2a.3, 2a.5, 3a.3)

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 by the assessment team.

- ▲ Further develop and build upon collaboration between Supply Chain Partners to allow for increased transparency across the network and in support of the relationship that PTS has with individual Supply Chain Partners. (2a.3, 2a.4, 3b.8, 3d.1, 4a.2.)

- ▲ Ensure that all Supply Chain Partners are made fully aware of any appropriate and agreed Merlin mediation services, for example as delivered by the Independent Case Examiner. (3c.3)
- ▲ Ensure that all information shared focuses not only on performance but also indicates the quality of service provided and compliance levels reached or exceeded. (3d.2)
- ▲ Consider encouraging partners to introduce effective measures to identify value for money across the various contracts they hold and this will demonstrate the wider value for money aspects of the youth contract. (3d.5)
- ▲ Consider the ways in which Prospect can improve the transparency and communication of fees, including where appropriate management fees, and other costs and the way they are explained, discussed and agreed. (2c.8)
- ▲ Ensure that all the planned review activities, including the development of Self-Assessment Report are implemented, this activity will allow Supply Chain Partners to make valuable contributions to meet qualitative and performance objectives. (4a.2)
- ▲ PTS needs to adopt a more proactive approach in agreeing specific environmental sustainability targets for Supply Chain Partners and ensure that partners are clear about how sustainability targets link to the commissioner's wider policy and objectives. (3b.7)

Assessment Findings

1 Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply chain design

Prospect Training Services (now referred to as PTS) had previously been successful in delivering a range of services and provision to the (Not in Education, Employment and Training) NEET customer group. Using this significant experience, PTS were very well placed to understand the commissioner's key objectives for the successful delivery of the Youth Contract. PTS had very limited experience of using formal Supply Chain Partners, instead tending to use range of local and national partners on a less formal basis to complement their services.

The senior management team of PTS recognised and has ensured that the supply chain developed to support the delivery of YC is a diverse mix of partners and include private, public and charitable organisations. A series of key objectives for the supply chain design were agreed which included bringing together the values and strengths of private, public and charitable sectors along with engaging partners who shared their desire and passion to 'make a major difference to young people'.

"Prospect were quite clear about the sort of providers they wanted to engage with, the most important aspect was the need to be fully committed and passionate about helping NEETs."

PTS currently deliver a small percentage of the contract via its delivery arm in the Gloucestershire area, which forms an important part of the Supply Chain Partnership and allows PTS to retain a clear understanding of the contract, its delivery and the challenges encountered by Supply Chain Partners and the young people in which they support. PTS used a wide range of methods to support the design and selection of the supply chain, significant analysis of local authority and NOMIS data, regional intelligence and their own previous experience of working with the customer group.

PTS worked closely with the 16 Local Authorities (LA's) to identify a range of locally based partners with a track record in the deliver of similar programmes to who could support the 'end to end' delivery of the contract to young people, with organisations being encouraged to use their previous experiences, local level knowledge and range of stakeholders.

PTS employed a strategy to encourage Supply Chain Partners to retain ownership and links with their existing networks of stakeholders, which is Supply Chain Partners appreciate. PTS monitor the range of stakeholders that support across a range of issues which young people face including homelessness, debt advice, alcohol and drug abuse and the development of their health and well-being. Currently PTS have no plans to formalise arrangements with the extended network, instead encouraging local partners to maintain these relationships for the benefit of the young person receiving support.

"their approach is not dictatorial; we are treated as a partner"

"we were quite comfortable in applying to work with Prospect in supporting them to deliver this contract because we had the track record of successfully working with this group and producing good results."

"I know it is a much overused word but they truly empower you to get on with the job. Of course there are checks in the system but they didn't try to make us clones of them or anybody else."

2 Commitment

2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

Supply Chain Partners were able to confirm that during the procurement process communication was highly effective. Discussions between senior managers of organisations involved were facilitated via a range of local networking meetings where an overview of the contract and its complexities were communicated both face to face, and backed up by unambiguous written documentation.

Discussions between parties were open, straightforward, and allowed for rapid and informed decisions over the viability of joining the supply chain to be made. Supply Chain Partners found the senior management team to be responsive and helpful.

"I had a number of meetings and discussions prior to signing a contract. Their approach was commendable throughout, nothing was secretive and they were clear about what they expected from us."

As the relationship with the supply chain matures, consultation between Supply Chain Partners is increasing; Supply Chain Partners are being encouraged to contribute to suggest improvements and changes to paperwork and processes to improve service delivery via both the monthly 1:1 performance reviews and the quarterly provider meetings. In addition, Prospect have developed and designed systems and processes using feedback gathered over 16 years of delivery and their experience of delivery of similar contracts on behalf of other prime contracting organisations.

Prospect are encouraging partners to work collaboratively to deliver comprehensive services to customers, however consideration needs to be given to further enhance and develop this to ensure all Supply Chain Partners are made fully aware of contractual volumes and expectations.

Prospect have assigned performance managers to support Supply Chain Partners in the delivery of the YC. This role is invaluable and provides high levels of consistent and practical operational support. The individuals who provide this support retain practitioner, operational and customer facing responsibilities; these factors contribute greatly to the professional credibility of the support and advice they offer to Supply Chain Partners and

their staff. The support is personable and efficient with Supply Chain Partner's operational questions answered promptly by experienced staff.

Supply Chain Partners value and enjoy the Supply Chain Partner's events which have taken place, where Supply Chain Partners are encouraged and offered places to enable staff to attend. Very practical operational issues and challenges are discussed and activities undertaken to develop delivery staff strategies and skills to overcome these. Similar events are planned to take place on a regular basis in the future and Prospect have identified the importance of the event being attended by the most appropriate staff members to ensure that the events have the maximum impact possible.

"the partner events were really good, I found the activities interesting and fun, it's a great opportunity network with other people who are delivering the contract and put names to faces"

"it's really important that the right people attend the quarterly events, some of it was too operational based for me"

The Prospect approach to supply chain management rapidly created a very honest and open culture. This is fostering and supporting the identification of best practice and a culture where operational questions or queries are raised without fear, this is having a positive effect on developing the provision to best support young people.

"XXXXX has been so helpful, she's consistent and always available, if she doesn't know the answer there and then, she goes away and finds out, if they say they are going to get back to you they do.....that's really important when you work remotely and need answers quickly"

"XXXXX speaks with experience of delivery in the sector, she can empathise in a way that only practitioners can... it helps us to deliver appropriate outcomes."

2b) Developing Supply Chain Partners

Prospect have taken considerable steps to ensure the rapid development of their Supply Chain Partners through a number of methods. Due diligence processes and regular performance management meetings allow PTS to satisfy themselves of Supply Chain Partners current capacity and how PTS may be able to support their development. Partners receive significant support from Prospect staff, who advise and support the development across a range of areas including Health & Safety, Diversity and Equality and Safeguarding. There was evidence of a staff member of the supply chain receiving assistance directly from PTS regarding a safeguarding issue affecting one of her customers. The staff member met the safeguarding officer at Prospect offices where discussions and supportive suggestions of how the incident may be best dealt with. The impact of this session was that the young person received guidance with physical and strategic approaches to the particular issues.

"I felt really well supported in this. The learner was able to carry on with her work because she had security and recognised that she wasn't on her own."

For many of the partners the YC compliments existing service delivery, however Prospect feel confident that as future funding opportunities become available they will share these with the supply chain network and encourage further collaboration on future bid's and business activities. Many of the claim related activities are managed and administered by Prospect which allows Supply Chain Partners to concentrate on delivering comprehensive services to the young people they support.

"the delivery of this contract doesn't give us a huge financial contribution, but it's really important, and we are learning so much from Prospect, it's worthwhile, and we'd definitely want to work with Prospect again"

"it's great, they do a lot of the admin, leaving us to get on with supporting the young person.....which is what we want to do, we don't want the hassle of all that paperwork"

Staff employed within the supply chain network benefit from the promotion and importance PTS place on the development of individuals. PTS very effectively utilise the considerable knowledge of their performance managers who regularly spend time in the network working with partners providing bespoke and in many cases 1:1 support to delivery staff which helps them develop skills and strategies based on experience. PTS provide opportunities to Supply Chain Partner staff to attend quarterly provider network events where mini training sessions are delivered to further develop relevant skills, such as how to write SMART targets, Health & Safety and completing paperwork to meet strict compliance standards. In many instances Supply Chain Partners provide their own comprehensive formal training for staff delivering a wide range of varied programmes, and feel that the level of support received from PTS has complimented this very effectively and is proportional to the size of the contract.

Planned observations of interactions between customers and Supply Chain Partner staff will further enhance PTS ability to identify and deliver appropriate staff development activities.

2c) Contracting and funding

PTS approach to contracting and funding is good. PTS attended local networking meetings where an overview of the contract was communicated to prospective partners. This enabled PTS to rapidly reach a wide range of potential Supply Chain Partners. Discussions with the organisations that expressed a verbal interest took place and consideration given to the appropriateness of their involvement in delivery of the contract. Opportunities to deliver on PTS behalf were advertised on the Prospect website where Expression of Interest forms were available, however this channel of communication was not widely adopted by partners, PTS need to consider alternative methods which may be available for attracting potential Supply Chain Partners in subsequent procurement processes.

Expressions of interest were completed by interested parties and scored against a weighted scoring matrix which identified key areas that PTS felt would ensure an appropriately diverse and effective supply chain network. Supply Chain Partners valued the availability of senior managers to discuss concerns and answer questions during the procurement process, which helped partners make decisions confidently.

PTS have ensured that funding arrangements are reflective of the payment by results model that the EFA apply to the prime organisation. PTS have communicated to Supply Chain Partners that where there is an over performance against the contract this will attract additional payments. Due to the scale and nature of the contract, there is no undue financial risk for Supply Chain Partners.

Contractual documentation used by PTS is particularly clear and easy to understand. Contractual expectations, payment terms and requirements to meet compliance standards are detailed in the contract which Supply Chain Partners report finding easy to understand and ensures the obligations of all parties are easy to meet and follow.

Market share allocation within the supply chain network was based on available data and Supply Chain Partners capacity and desire to deliver services to young people. Partners accepted the volumes with a clear understanding that allocation may be 'shifted' should this be required at any stage during the life of the contract. Partners confirm that allocation, volume and performance expectations have been honoured as has PTS support with staff development, the availability of support to ensure contractual compliance and prospective opportunities to carry out additional delivery on behalf of Prospect.

PTS manages the transfer of funds in an efficient manner. A self-billing payment system is in place. Payment terms are 30 days; payments are prompt and timely. Payments made follow a series of validation and compliance checks, which are carried out by PTS head office based claims team, ensuring segregation of duties from delivery.

Some Supply Chain Partners were unclear in the way the fees, including where appropriate management fees, and other costs have been explained, discussed and agreed. The recently implemented IT based portal will contain more detail of the fee's and costs and PTS are to ensure that Supply Chain Partners are clear about what support they receive in return for the fees that they pay to PTS. All Supply Chain Partners indicated they are happy with the support they receive from PTS and didn't express concern over the payment of management fee's, there are no other direct costs associated with delivery for PTS, such as paying for access to IT systems and additional training.

"Although I'm not certain about the percentage charges for management fees I consider it good value for money. We have had what can only be described as a consultancy approach to Health and Safety which has helped us to make substantial improvements"

3 Conduct

3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity

The core values of Prospect are both shared and embraced by the Supply Chain Partners, these values compliment a strong desire and passion in which the approach of Prospect places the young person at the centre of all their activities. Supply Chain Partners who were selected to work with PTS are fully committed to these values and the young people which

they serve. Supply Chain Partners also signed a 'partnership pledge' that commits them to PTS core principles of professionalism, accountability, collaboration, customer focus and excellence.

"they put our young people first, if it suits the young person then PTS support us to make it happen"

TUPE processes under the YC are untested as there was no requirement for this during implementation of this contract. PTS have a clear position in relationship to TUPE, which would be to support the transfer when such a requirement was made. PTS engages the services of specialist independent HR legal advisors who provide support on such matters. PTS were able to provide assurance that they have previously successfully integrated staff into their organisation when TUPE applied to other contracts.

PTS approach ensures that its interactions with Supply Chain Partners on an individual and collective basis is very positive and highly supportive. This is a particular strength of PTS. Professional, personable and credible staff apply a consistent and regular approach at all levels of the organisation, Supply Chain Partners enthusiastically reported the prompt and effective telephone support of the centralised claim, audit and quality teams, which provide a very reactive service. This service will be enhanced as the use of the IT based portal where Supply Chain Partners will be able to access information via another channel.

"the telephone support is great, they usually know the answer there and then, if they don't, they go away and find out and if they say they will call you back they always do"

The Supply Chain Partner network is kept up to date with changes to legislation and contractual/statutory requirements in a timely manner using email, which is supported and reinforced by the performance management meetings, quarterly partnership meetings and ongoing telephone support. Partners feel the approach PTS take is proportionate and appropriate and wouldn't hesitate in asking if something was unclear or ambiguous.

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

PTS have a well-developed approach to ensuring quality and compliance assurance is resulting in improvements across the supply chain network. A series of due diligence activities took place before the contract 'go-live' date and a range of on-going activities continue to monitor and ensure that improvements are being made. Customer experience feedback is routinely collected from customers using both formal and less formal methods, 'good news stories' are also routinely gathered during the performance review process.

PTS have adopted a robust approach to ensuring compliance with 100% of all paperwork currently being subject to audit by a centralised head office function which also takes on the responsibility of process of inputting data into the PIC's system. Audit findings are being communicated to Supply Chain Partners indicating that error rates are reducing. A small number of formal observations of customer interactions have taken place with more planned, alongside the collection of customer satisfaction feedback via paper based and online surveys.

PTS are accredited to the **matrix** standard, as are 84% of its Supply Chain Partners. Further implementation of PTS observation programme and the analysis of sustainment outcome date will further enhance its monitoring of the effectiveness of information, advice and guidance. Supply Chain Partners were very complimentary and valued the information, advice and guidance received by them from PTS through the performance management process. A range of information, advice and guidance is available to Supply Chain Partners, for example Supply Chain Partners have been given copies of exempla customer files and have access to the recently launched Prospect services IT portal. (See example given at 4a.4)

PTS have ensured that all Supply Chain Partners meet all data security standards and are compliant with HMG Baseline security standards through the due diligence process carried out at contract set up. PTS may need to consider the appropriateness of working towards accreditation of ISO 27001:2008, which would provide an external validation of their processes and practices.

Healthy and safe working environments were assured and fully vetted as part of the due diligence work that was carried out. On-going support and compliance to PTS standards is monitored and maintained by a qualified and knowledgeable health and safety team. Supply Chain Partners receive regular health and safety emails which give valuable updates. PTS have provided Supply Chain Partners who required it with very tailored support which was described by one partners as *"invaluable"* and *"worth the management fee alone"*. Employing a consultative approach to ensuring healthy and safe environments is a significant strength of PTS. Supply Chain Partners are reminded of their commitment to health and safety during performance reviews and updates and additional training are provided during the partnership events. There is a strong focus on practices to support safe lone working, which is particularly important given the outreach nature of the delivery for this contract. One example given by a partner included the partner organisation receiving extensive 1:1 support to ensuring their staff were kept safe and PTS purchased a personal attack alarm for the staff member.

The young people accessing the services provided by PTS and the Supply Chain Partner network are from vulnerable customer groups, as such Supply Chain Partners policies and practice were checked during the due diligence process and on an on-going basis through the performance management review process. All Supply Chain Partners were asked to make declarations that their staff delivering the contract were in receipt of either satisfactory enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or satisfactory enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks and the adherence to this standard is monitored and maintained through the performance review process which identifies any changes in staffing for delivery of YC.

PTS have adequate policies and processes in place to ensure that its Supply Chain Partners are addressing environmental sustainability and dedicated staff who provide updates to Supply Chain Partners. Supply Chain Partners are however at differing stages of development against this area and PTS needs to take a more proactive approach in agreeing specific environmental sustainability targets for Supply Chain Partners. Supply Chain

Partners need to be clear about how sustainability targets link to the commissioner's wider policy and objectives.

Given the relatively short space of time since contract 'go live', significant areas of excellent practice are yet to have developed and as such current identification of excellent practice is limited to the production of good news case studies by Supply Chain Partners which are submitted to PTS and shared at partnership events. PTS have plans to extend the identification and sharing of excellent practice in future partnership events.

3c) Honouring Commitments

Supply Chain Partners confirm that contract negotiations were clear and open; partners feel that they received good levels of information which was usually face to face or by telephone, very rapid responses to requests and queries which where required were followed up by written communication. Partners received letters of intent and very clear contracts which they value.

PTS is open to challenges through its dispute resolution process, which mirrors the EFA dispute resolution process. To date this process remains untested; Supply Chain Partners felt that informal resolution would be a more likely approach given the supportive nature of PTS. Dispute resolution processes are detailed within PTS Supply Chain Partner contract documents.

Senior managers confirmed that PTS would fully respect decisions made as a result of the Merlin Mediation Service, should it be deemed to have not acted in accordance with the principle of the Merlin Standard; again this has not been tested. Supply Chain Partners were not fully aware of the Merlin Mediation Service.

Partners confirmed that at all stages of pre-contract award and once the contract had 'gone live' they were aware of expectations. Expectations were clearly defined and understood, meetings were regular and open, opportunities were made available for partners to seek clarification and information is presented as clear documentation.

3d) Performance

PTS have developed a supply chain that focusses on ensuring that the customer is fully supported to re-engage in education, training or employment. In some local authority area one Supply Chain Partner supports the entire delivery, in other local authority areas as many as five partners support delivery which tends to lend itself more naturally more effective collaborative working and the promotion of the performance of the entire network, which PTS is beginning to support and facilitate.

Use of comparative performance data is shared with Supply Chain Partners during partnership meetings that allow Supply Chain Partners to see how their relative outcome performance ranks against all of the networks other partners. Currently the information shared focuses only on performance and doesn't yet indicate the quality of service provided or compliance levels etc. PTS have successfully begun to facilitate and foster more

collaborative working across the wider network, however this is in its early stages and PTS need to continue with the strategies to support this, increase transparency and further identify and develop the sharing of excellent practices.

Very clear channels for the regular review of performance within PTS Supply Chain Partner network exist. Performance managers make consistently regular visits to the partners in their premises where a 'balanced scorecard' approach allows partners and PTS managers to review and discuss a range of areas, including any staff changes that have been made, audit feedback, good news stories (case studies), performance and safeguarding. Supply Chain Partners felt the approach taken by PTS was supportive and proportional (to the financial value of the contract). The development of action plans to address areas of improvement were effective in driving improvement and changes to practices, for example PTS managers supported partners to identify innovative and effective ways of engaging young people and improving progression made by young people into sustainable outcomes.

"the performance reviews are good, they come every month to review our performance, it's really consistent and as they are happy to visit us in our premises it means we can get on with supporting young people"

"the performance review process is really simple, the paperwork is easy to follow and the review is supportive"

Clear performance targets have been defined for the three year contract these targets are subject to review by both parties should it be felt that the figures require adjustment, where Supply Chain Partners look likely to exceed set targets the PTS have been very supportive in discussing adjusting targets and offering Supply Chain Partners additional volume.

PTS have implemented a industry recognised Management Information system, which effectively tracks customer progress against set measures, enables partners to evidence attendance of customers on the programme and support financial claims. It provides substantial and valuable data for all interested parties to use to enhance delivery, judge value for money and track distance travelled for customers. PTS provide administrative support to carry out all the inputting activities onto the system for all Supply Chain Partners. The approach adopted by PTS allows them to retain control of the quality of the data input and allow Supply Chain Partner staff to complete paper-based documentation when meeting with young people. This is particularly useful to delivery staff who do not need to be dependant on Wi-Fi connectivity, which is a common challenge given the 'outreach' nature of the delivery of this type of contract, where delivery takes place from a range of locations, including cafés or community based hubs.

Clear identification of value for money across the contracts held is currently underdeveloped. PTS need to consider encouraging partners to introduce effective measures to identify value for money across the various contracts they hold and how this will demonstrate the wider value for money aspects of the youth contract.

Customer's progress against agreed targets which are monitored effectively through weekly meetings, this information is captured using PTS management information system.

Customer satisfaction is also being collected at key milestones during the programme by the supply chain network.

3e) Promoting Diversity & Equality

PTS has a positive and proactive approach to diversity and equality. When procuring Supply Chain Partners a key criteria was that partners should align closely to PTS own diversity and equality commitments and ethos. Due diligence activities confirmed that all Supply Chain Partners had written policies to deal effectively with their commitment to Diversity & Equality.

Prospect have a nominated Equality and Diversity officer who monitors the information provided by Supply Chain Partners to ensure that all the appropriate information criteria is collected and collated, using the Prospect Management Information system. It is subsequently analysed by the Equalities officer who then ensures that all relevant information is circulated to Supply Chain Partners. The information identifies the age, gender and ethnicity breakdown of the learner group to facilitate future planning and focus for each Supply Chain Partner.

Equalities and Diversity is an agenda item on the meetings held by Prospect for Supply Chain Partners. The Equality & Diversity officer has used the meetings to make presentations to the group and ensure that they better understand the broader aspects of equalities and diversity and to widen their focus from the protected characteristics of the relevant acts. The approach ensured the need to understand that there is true equality in relation to the aspects of rural living that might impinge on the equal access to learning. This promotion of Equalities and Diversity and PTS use of data captured had the impact of benefitting learners who otherwise might be disadvantaged.

4 Review

4a) Supply chain review

PTS has a systematic approach to review, and seeks feedback from a range of stakeholder and partners. Feedback is routinely collected from customers using both formal and less formal methods, using online and paper-based questionnaires and also during the young person's review, the results of which are positive. PTS have also proactively sought feedback from Supply Chain Partners through questionnaires, which also indicate high levels of satisfaction. Feedback received following an audit by the commissioner also was very positive. On-going dialogue and opportunity with Supply Chain Partners and local authorities continues to support the review of the current programme and make improvements and changes, for example changes and refinements to paperwork have been made along with innovative approaches to engage customers.

PTS have a well-developed approach to the development of an effective and inclusive annual continuous improvement plan, which is supported by the self-assessment process. This process will include the use of all Supply Chain Partners self-assessment reports, but due to the contract delivery not yet reaching the 12 month trigger for this activity the effectiveness of this approach is untested. Subsequent actions, such as the development of quality improvement plans are also scheduled for year 2 which will be reviewed via the contract review process.

Prior to contract 'go live', Supply Chain Partners received documentation identifying and communicating the impact measures on the wider aims and objectives of the commissioner, the introduction of the supply chain portal will enhance PTS ability to share information rapidly and effectively with the Supply Chain Partners.

Supply Chain Partners and PTS were able to describe and give examples of where there has been measurable impact on the young people it works with, which supports to meet the wider social objectives of the commissioner, for example working with young people to address low levels of literacy and numeracy, homelessness and increasing their employability prospects. Specific examples include;

- The availability and quality of the advice and assistance received directly from PTS regarding a safeguarding issue affecting one of their customers. The staff member met the safeguarding officer in Prospect offices and discussions and supportive suggestions of how the incident may be best dealt with. The impact of this session was that the young person received guidance with physical and strategic approaches to the particular issues.
- The provision of a moped through a charitable organisation to facilitate a young learner being able to access learning activities despite living in an isolated rural community without any access to public transport or any other practicable method of transportation.

PTS continue to review and implement improvement strategies, for example where there have been changes in the supply chain, PTS have been able to use their extended network to attract organisations to ensure continued delivery of the contract and importantly ensure the continuity of support for the young people it helps.

The effective design and activities of the supply chain has allowed PTS to support many young people in developing a range of important life skills and increasing their overall well being and self awareness, PTS use sport well to attract and engage customers, enrich the young persons life and in the widest possible sense help improve communities.

Conclusion

The Principles of the Merlin Standard have been established to validate positive behaviors of a lead contractor organisation and its partners, in supporting healthy and high performing supply chains. Although new to the role of a prime contractor, Prospect have employed a

range of strategies which have been developed and refined over 18 years of contract delivery. The approach promotes positive behaviors and attitudes which focus on the needs of the customer.