



merlin

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report

For

MAXIMUS HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES LTD

By Andy Richardson

On behalf of emqc Ltd

Assessment Dates: 16/06/14 – 19/06/14

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About the Organisation

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

Services offered under contract to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are entirely focused on the Work Programme (WP), and is delivered through its centres in West London (Contract Package Area (CPA) 3) and in CPA 9, which covers Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire. These centres provide practical training for many job functions and tailored support to help unemployed people back into sustainable employment. The Maximus centres are supported by an extensive supply chain, driven by Tier 2 end-to-end providers, who work alongside Maximus' own direct delivery provided through its centres. Supporting Maximus and the Tier 2 providers (referred to within Maximus as 'Delivery Partners', or DPs) are a number of specialist organisation, referred to throughout this report as Menu Partners (MPs).

Maximus has over the last two years experienced significant organisational and cultural change, including the appointment of a new Managing Director and other senior level executives. The purpose of these changes was to create a wholly more effective approach to performance management and service delivery, through improving communications, greater transparency within systems and a wholly more partnership based approach to doing business across its supply chain.

Maximus are regularly audited and assessed by a number of external agencies and bodies and are currently recognised against the following standards: Investors in People, **matrix**, ISO 27001, Two Ticks and Mindful Employer. The Organisation has also been recently successfully audited by the Provider Assurance Team (PAT), is recognised as an "Age Positive Champion" and was commended in last year's Sunday Times Best Companies Awards as "One to Watch".

Assessment Methodology

This assessment is Maximus' second assessment against the Merlin standard, having been first assessed in June 2012. The scope of this assessment was based wholly on Maximus' Work Programme contract and factored in the Organisation's wide range of work, including their approaches to enterprise development, skills and training and the provision of advice, guidance and support centered on the health and wellbeing of customers.

The team comprised of Andy Richardson (Lead Assessor) and two team assessors: Neil Potentier and Kim Howard

At an initial planning meeting between the Lead Assessor and senior representatives of Maximus, including the person acting as Coordinator for this Merlin assessment, a sample of SCPs were identified that suitably reflected the make-up of Maximus' supply chain. In reality, this sample represented around 90% of the entire supply chain, due to the low numbers of SCPs. From this sample, the Coordinator created schedules for each of the

assessors, modified marginally over subsequent weeks to accommodate the availability of individuals.

During the assessment, assessors reviewed a diverse and substantial range of evidence, including written documentation and electronic systems. This was supported by face-to-face and phone interviews with representatives of Maximus, including the direct delivery offices and the Tier 2 and Tier 3 SCPs within the two CPAs covered.

Each assessor completed the schedule of interviews over the first three days of this assessment, convening on day four to share findings and agree scorings for each criterion within the Merlin standard. These detailed findings were provided to Maximus' Supply Chain Team, including the Supply Chain Director, at a feedback session on the afternoon of the fourth day. This feedback included the final outcome of the assessment, as well as providing an overview of the key areas of strength and areas for consideration when it comes to continuous improvement moving forward; see below.

Assessment Outcome

Overall %	86%
Overall Outcome	Excellent
Supply Chain Design	Excellent
Commitment	Excellent
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.

Supply Chain Design

- ▲ Supply chain design has been shown to be of a high standard throughout all criteria of Principle 1. The scope and range of Maximus' provision and its links with wider networks has allowed for some very effective relationships to be established with local councils, employer networks, the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA), voluntary and third sector organisations and major pre-existing providers, enabling a diversity and depth to its provision. Worthy of particular note are the relationships established with pre-existing partnership agreements, for example across the boroughs of London.
- ▲ In particular, the use of pilots and feasibility studies at a number of stages of establishing a supply chain has proven to be effective, establishing as they have the viability of propositions. It will obviously serve Maximus well to maintain such alliances moving forward as these will play a major part in future stakeholder analysis and supply chain review.
(1a.1, 1a.2 & 4a.1)

Communications and Relationships

- ▲ Good up-front communications, through presentations, group discussions and one-to-one dialogue, enabled prospective SCPs to see exactly what would be on offer throughout the contract in a transparent fashion. This included helping SCPs to understand the processes, relationships and reporting lines throughout the supply chain and SCPs in particular commented positively on the support available through the Supply Chain Managers (SCMs) as part of the onboarding processes. Many SCPs commented that they have found there to be a much more open and flexible approach to the relationships over the last 18 months or so, giving rise to a more partnership orientated culture that better addresses the needs of individual SCPs.
- ▲ Nor are the positive relationships experienced confined to the supply chain; Maximus' relationships with other Prime contractors has enabled them to enter into joint working agreements, for example in presenting a cohesive approach in working within the London Partnership.
- ▲ There has also been significant investment made by Maximus in the strategic development of a number of SCPs, enabling the SCPs to remain viable and to perform to the standards expected within the contract. These SCPs were highly complimentary in describing the support made available to them over time.
(2a.1, 2a.4, 2a.5, 2b.1)

Contracting & Funding

- ▲ All SCPs commented that they have found the contracting processes to be open and transparent. All pre-contracting terms agreed with the SCPs had been honoured in the final documentation and any variations had been negotiated and agreed between the respective parties.
(3c.1)
- ▲ The transfer of funds throughout the supply chain network was favourably commented upon by all SCPs interviewed. Any delays in payment were fully briefed and there appeared to be a collegiate approach to resolving any issues. In some cases there was evidence of Maximus absorbing financial liabilities, rather than passing them on to the supply chain, for example with extrapolation costs. (2c.7)

Performance Management

- ▲ The effective communications and positive relationships also support a robust approach to performance management of the supply chain, allowing for effective resolution of any problems arising. These mechanisms support clear performance expectations and all SCPs are clear as to the expectations that Maximus have of them and that they can reasonably expect from Maximus in turn.
- ▲ A phrase used by one of the SCPs sums up the general impression of the supply chain towards Maximus and their staff: **"they go the extra mile"**. Many SCPs interviewed were able to describe additional support and a partnership approach taken by the SCMs

in helping to improve performance all round.
(3d.2 & 3d.3).

Areas for Improvement

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

Commitment

Collaboration, Cooperation and Communications

- ▲ It is recognised that all applicants to the supply chain are offered feedback should they wish however, it is recommended that the default response be moved to one in which an overview of the results and brief comments be provided to all applicants, be they successful or not.
- ▲ Whilst very effective relationships exist between Maximus and the SCPs, a small number of those partners interviewed commented that they felt more could be done to encourage collaboration and to 'consult' with the Tier 3s. This would help broadened the range of views having input into the design and development of systems and processes.
- ▲ It is clear that the supply chain works together in a very effective manner, however it became apparent during this assessment that benefits could be gained from creating additional opportunities for SCPs to collaborate, even where this does not include Maximus directly.
(2a.1, 2a.2 & 2a.3)

Developing Supply Chain Partners

- ▲ As identified above, good examples exist of where Maximus staff have aided and supported the strategic development of some SCPs. It is recommended that this support could now be further extended the Tier 3 SCPs, as these could well become the Tier 2s of the future and, in some cases, the withdrawal of key partners from the supply chain could have an extended negative effect.
- ▲ Allied to the development of SCPs is the opportunity to raise their awareness of the various funding streams that come available from time to time, either from within or outwith the welfare to work sector. In some cases, the local councils are awarded monies that supply chains could bid for if they are made aware of the opportunities. Here it is recommended that Maximus act as 'facilitator', rather than 'activist' by helping SCPs to be aware of funding that Maximus itself may not necessarily want to access directly.

- ▲ The vast majority of SCPs provided positive feedback regarding the levels and approaches to staff development taken by Maximus. A couple of SCPs however, commented that they would like to be able to access a 'menu' of training options, in order that they can choose what they might wish to take advantage of.
- ▲ There may also be advantages to be gained from looking to provide a little more personal development for SCP staff around such aspects as; data security, safeguarding and environmental sustainability etc., possibly through the introduction of a virtual learning platform, in order that SCP staff can undertake self-directed learning.
(2b.1, 2b.2, 2b.3 & 3b.5)

Contracting & Funding

- ▲ Discussions with Maximus clearly demonstrate that flexibility exists for SCPs to seek alternative payment models, though in reality, none have thus far. It is recommended therefore that Maximus makes this option more transparent to delivery partners at all levels.
- ▲ A couple of SCPs commented that they were not clear on how the overall reduction of referrals has been fairly distributed across the supply chain. A 'dashboard' similar to those already provided to SCPs would be a relatively quick and effective way to demonstrate equality and fairness across referrals throughout the supply chain.
- ▲ The management fee was discussed at length with both Maximus and SCPs, with a conclusion that more could be done to help SCPs understand just what they get for the money. Not only would this help them in their 'value for money' calculations, it may also provide Maximus with an opportunity to gain greater recognition across the supply chain of all the 'added value' services that it provides – currently at no additional cost.
(2c.2, 2c.4, 2c8)

Conduct

Business and Commercial Integrity

- ▲ There is no doubt that SCPs share many of the values defined by Maximus in a number of forms. It is recommended that as Maximus looks to move forward with a number of other funded contracts, these values and operating principles be reviewed and refreshed where appropriate in partnership with the SCPs. This will help to create both a common understanding and an increased degree of ownership, as well as ensuring these principles are current and fit for purpose.
(3a.1)

Quality Assurance and Compliance

- ▲ With direct communication and reporting lines, Delivery Partners are able to collect and collate data regarding customer experience at the point of delivery and share this with Maximus. What is less clear however is the robustness of equivalent processes for the

Menu Partners, as a couple of SCPs commented that they are unaware of any quality assurance process as far as they are concerned. Having a more robust process to capture customer experience could help to develop a better understanding of the customer journey that takes place beyond the immediate control of Maximus. With Menu Partners offering a degree of the information, advice and guidance available, it is also recommended that the senior team consider how quality IAG can be more robustly and comprehensively assured at this level.

(3b.1 & 3b.3)

- ▲ Discussions with Maximus' specialist in regards to environmental sustainability revealed that some good early work has been done. It is therefore recommended that parameters already under consideration, including carbon emissions, business mileage and energy consumption, for example, be rolled out across the supply chain in the form of specific targets to be achieved. These simple measures will help Maximus to describe in real terms the impact that the supply chain in all its forms is having on environmental sustainability and allow for ongoing monitoring to take place.

(3b.7)

Performance

- ▲ The performance dashboards by several of the SCPs interviewed as valuable tools with which to monitor and benchmark performance. It is now recommended that Maximus explore further the options for sharing management and performance information with the Menu Partners, as a number indicated that they would find this useful.

(3d.3)

- ▲ The perception of what represents Value For Money (VFM) is currently left to SCPs to determine. In reality, this forms a key part of the 'decision to buy' and it is recommended that Maximus set out to more clearly define what it sees as VFM for all principle stakeholders, including the commissioner, the service user and the SCP, as well as for Maximus. This clear picture should then be communicated to the supply chain in a consistent fashion over the next few months and again this could help inform decisions going forward. A clear message on how the contracts and the options represent VFM would also help to attract new SCPs as additional supply chains are assembled for any future contracts awarded. It would also help to identify where 'added value' plays a part and could be factored in to the Management Fee for new contracts.

(3d.5)

- ▲ The recently developed Progress to Success service model provides an excellent opportunity to refine and monitor the 'distance travelled' by customers. Key metrics with which to measure performance along the journey for Maximus and the SCPs could include volumes of customers at each stage, conversion rates, attrition rates and average length of time for each stage. These metrics would then allow SCPs and Maximus to identify where good performance exists and to share effective practices across the supply chain.

(3d.6)

Supply Chain Review

- ▲ Recognising that the Maximus Top Co Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) emanating from the annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) could contain commercially sensitive information, it is nonetheless recommended that a lower level QIP, targeted specifically at the supply chain, be produced in order to create an effective understanding of the common areas planned for development over the course of the coming year and that will impact on SCPs directly
(4a.2)
- ▲ With the supply chain having been developed to meet the wider needs of the commissioner, it is strongly recommended that Maximus look to establish more *measurable* data on the impact activities are having on these social objectives, in particular Environmental Sustainability (see above). Driving these down to all SCPs will help them to identify their own contributions, as well as allowing Maximus to create a corporate view. It would also be prudent to look to other wider stakeholders to gain impact data, for example the National Housing Federation for homelessness data, NHS trusts for data on the impact on health and wellbeing and the judicial system for data on criminality, etc.
(4a.3, 4a.4 & 4a.6)

Areas Requiring Further Development

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

Assessment Findings

1 Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply chain design

The scope and variety of the supply chain was found to be of a very high standard with a good representation of public, private and third sector organisations forming the network used to deliver services. This use of a diverse range of delivery partners, including national associations, local collectives and other Prime contractors, enables the commissioner's objectives to be addressed effectively, for example in the areas of employability, health and well-being and financial hardship. Particularly worthy of note is the relationship held with the London boroughs' partnership arrangements and with a major provider of transport in the capital city.

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

There is clear evidence that Maximus undertook effective research and consultation regarding local demographics and existing supply chains and delivery models, as well as employer and customer needs. In addition to an analysis of their own experiences in delivering a range of contracts, this research consisted of discussions with various Local Authorities, government departments, existing providers, Job Centre Plus, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), ERSA and other key players in the areas covered by the various contracts. Particularly worthy of note are the relationships with the other Primes in the London area and successfully presenting a coordinated approach in working with a major transport provider with regards to job vacancies.

“They reflected the local needs by recognising the stability that existing players would give to the supply chain”. (SCP)

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

“Maximus did their homework on us and knew we could bring something to the table”. (SCP)

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

“There haven’t been too many changes over the course of the last couple of years, but I think it is clear that the design of the supply chain continues to meet the wide range of customer needs”. (SCP)

“I think Maximus are very good at monitoring and making changes where they are indicated. This applies as much to the design of the supply chain as it does to the systems and processes they use”. (Wider stakeholder)

2 Commitment

2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

The procurement processes for SCPs within Maximus were found to be highly effective and transparent. SCPs commented that they found the communications throughout the procurement process to be of high order and that there are good links to established best

practice, for example the weighting of responses. The communication processes included a number of presentations and workshops for all interested parties, together with emails, face-to-face discussions with existing networks and individual organisations. Potential Delivery Partners have also been brought in to 'meet the team' at Maximus' Head office in London and this session included an overview of the delivery model.

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

"The up front communications were good. We knew exactly what we were getting in to from the very beginning". (SCP)

"They were very proactive from the outset". (SCP)

Following procurement, communications continue to be good, with SCPs citing the effectiveness of discussions with their SCM during Monthly Monitoring Reviews (MMRs) and Quarterly Monitoring Reviews (QMRs), as well as ongoing emails and networking events. SCP quarterly meetings in particular received very positive comments, with SCPs commenting that they found them to be open, honest and effective at challenging processes and identifying good practice currently in effect.

Discussions with unsuccessful supply chain applicants as part of this Merlin assessment indicated that they have been offered the opportunity to get feedback regarding their application should they wish (see recommendations earlier in this report).

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

Examples of feedback and consultation opportunities include Regional Supply Chain fora, QMRs and MMRs and ongoing dialogue with the SCMs. This consultation has impacted on many aspects, including training to better meet the needs of the SCPs and their staff, the application of DWP changes across the supply chain and the development of various system and processes to best meet the needs of SCPs, for example the Supply Chain Handbook and the changes to the reporting of job outcomes.

"If they want to change something, they will always try to get us involved". (SCP)

"From my point of view, they are very proactive at seeking our comments and inputs. Not only do they ask our opinions, they're also quick to take action". (SCP)

"We can challenge things and always try to meet on the middle ground". (SCP)

"There is a think-tank philosophy with us and Maximus" (SCP)

There are many examples of SCPs working and collaborating for mutual benefit and the comments above are a clear indication of this. There are also examples of Maximus working

with other Primes, for example in the work with the London transport organisation, the work with the London boroughs and in endeavours with health based organisations. Supply Chain Meetings are well received by SCPs as a vehicle to collaborate and have open participation and many commented on the participative efforts taken to develop the various systems and processes. Other examples of collaboration include the partnership approach to working with another large provider and the sharing of approaches to address common issues, such as lost customers and attendance.

“We (menu partner) sometimes feel our relationships with work programme providers are one sided but this has not been the case with Maximus. They seem to be about ongoing relationships”. (SCP)

“ I think Maximus go out of their way to encourage us to collaborate, for example through the sharing of premises and other resources”. (SCP)

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

All those SCPs interviewed within this assessment were clear as to the business relationships underpinning supply chain arrangements now in place and there was no ambiguity evident. All Tier 3 SCPs operate under a Service Level Agreement (SLA), where they contract with Maximus directly through one of their delivery centres. Delivery Partners all offer end-to-end provision and do not sub-contract to Tier 3 Menu Partners, though they may signpost customers to other providers, especially effective where additional funding may be available from other sources to support this alternative provision.

“The communications from the very start and the ongoing meetings and discussions we have, all make the relationships clear”. (SCP)

“By being clear on who was in the supply chain, it has stopped us treading on someone else’s toes”. (SCP)

With very effective working relationships in place at both senior and operational levels, the cascade of information was cited by all SCPs to be of high order. In addition to face-to-face discussions, for example at the monthly performance reviews and the quarterly audits for compliance purposes, Maximus has introduced a number of guidance and support materials, for example the contractor portal and monthly newsletters for both Delivery Partners and Menu Partners, to help keep SCPs up to date with a wide range of developments and emerging issues. Alongside this run the daily and weekly email and phone contacts.

All SCPs questioned commented that they found the communications to be open and honest, with some commenting on the ‘performance focussed’ approach taken by Maximus. Many SCPs commented that communications have improved over the last couple of years or so, citing the new management structure, the work of the SCMs and the introduction of various new processes as major contributory factors.

“The SCMs are very supportive and open and are a great example of being ‘solutions driven’. Communications are always clear and they always check to ensure we have understood what’s been said and what we have to do as a result”. (SCP)

“Openness and honesty are their biggest strengths and have been there from the outset” (SCP)

2b) Developing supply chain partners

With pre-existing providers in the supply chain, many SCPs are already well established and at an advanced state of organisational development, requiring little in the way of further development by Maximus. That said, Maximus did provide examples of working with their Tier 2 SCPs in order to help build capacity and to develop strategically. In one case, an SCP received hands on support to develop as a fully functioning Tier 2 provider following significant staff losses and several SCPs commented on the support they have received in order to build capacity. Others cited personal development of senior staff in order to develop strategically, talking of staffing structures, financial modeling and performance management amongst other aspects.

“They wanted us to develop and reassured us we could cope with growth with their support”. (SCP)

“I don’t think we would have survived had we not had the support of ** (SCM) and the others at Maximus. They’ve been really great at understanding our business and showing us how to structure things to our best advantage”. (SCP)**

For others at Tier 3, encouragement and support is less evident and this could be an area where further development by Maximus could bring dividends, for example in identifying potential SCP failure earlier than that indicated by any financial ‘Red Flag’, as often, this is too late to effect a remedy.

There is good evidence to show that additional funding streams have been brought to the attention of SCPs, e.g. through the contractor portal and newsletters that carry contact details and links to major funding streams. Several SCPs commented that they had been able to identify alternative funding streams of their own accord and in some cases they had shared this with other members of the supply chain. There was also some evidence to suggest that some of the SCPs themselves had accessed additional funding and that this had also been made known to the rest of the supply chain, leading to referrals increasing.

In regards to developing the staff within the SCPs, there are many examples of training being offered, in the main associated with systems and processes, but also including wider aspects such as data security and customer service, etc.

The training offered thus far has been without cost to the SCPs and has been delivered either by Maximus’ own training staff, or by drawing in internal specialists as required, for example to brief on data security issues. There are also examples of Maximus providing coaching and mini training sessions during meetings to help SCPs to fully understand processes and staff

from both SCPs and Maximus have met up to share experiences. SCPs are also actively encouraged by their SCM to raise areas where they considered that their staff would benefit from training or development activity not already planned by Maximus and several referred to a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) being done recently, though outcomes have yet to be released to the SCPs.

“The refresher training we had was really useful and it was well delivered too “. (SCP)

“I have had more meetings with ** (SCM) than I’ve had with my Regional Director.” (SCP)**

“We also have mini-sessions with ** (SCM) at our offices and they’ve been really useful for staff to be able to see things in action and address their particular needs and niggles”.**

With a number of developments planned, opportunities exist for Maximus to expand the range of staff development available to supply chain personnel (see recommendations), in particular at Tier 3 for whom this could provide a valuable source of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

2c) Contracting and funding

The contracting processes have continued to evolve over time and are now considered to be fair and equitable by all those SCPs interviewed and, as identified above, communications are good throughout the process.

Potential supply chain partners are identified through an established Expression of Interest (EoI) process and applications are scored against a matrix that includes location, experience, infrastructure and previous performance. Best practice is demonstrated in that this scoring process also factors in the priorities and relationships between the criteria through a weighting system and that an independent procurement team considers all applications.

Successful applicants are then put through a standard due-diligence process that included financial stability and this process was applied to all SCPs on direct contract to Maximus, including Tier 3 Menu Partners.

All applicants are invited to seek feedback should they wish, regardless of them being successful or not. Maximus were able to give anecdotal evidence regarding just such feedback to a couple of unsuccessful supply chain applicants, though this report carries a recommendation that all applicants get a brief written feedback, in order that they can build capabilities for future opportunities.

SCPs commented favourably on the fact that the communications had made the funding arrangements and payment structure clear from the very start. There were several examples of the funding/payment structures being varied to help mitigate any undue financial risks for specialists, e.g. ensuring training courses achieve the minimum number of delegates to secure funding. The move from Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) clients to Employability Support Allowance (ESA) clients presented a real challenge for some SCPs, though they were quick to

point out that Maximus had provided them with high levels of support to overcome this challenge and to be successful.

“They appreciated our rationale and offered extra resource and support” (SCP)

SCPs confirmed that Maximus has devised and distributed effective and robust contract and guidance documents that clearly define the obligations of both Maximus and its SCPs. Menu Partners confirmed that they are operating under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Maximus and are clear on the obligations of all parties.

“I’ve read and understood both the Handbook and the Contract, so I’m very clear on the obligations”. (SCP)

“Contracts are detailed and you know just what is expected of you in terms of both minimum service levels and minimum performance levels.” (SCP)

Market share has been defined and agreed largely based on geographic areas, with a degree of flexibility when it comes to boundaries. Specialisms also play a part and, as a result of the presentations and up front discussions in advance of contracts being issued, in which the delivery model was outlined, SCPs are aware of how market share was allocated. SCP awareness of market share is reinforced through the monthly performance statistics (dashboards) that are published and accessible to all SCPs at Tier 2. The Menu Partner Newsletter has started to include some of the performance statistics, though this is early days as yet.

“We always knew that Maximus was a bi deliverer in our CPA, so that didn’t pose a problem to us”. (SCP)

“ I think we are all clear on the market share out – Maximus have been very transparent from the very start. If there’s any details you want, you just have to ask”.

There is also evidence to show that proactive negotiation took place regarding volumes and expectations, with examples being provided where numbers have been adjusted under contract variations to better reflect demand and capacities/capabilities. These include the moves to better cater for the ex-offender payment group (PG9) and people with disabilities (PG6). Whilst the payment structure is described by Maximus as having “the opportunity to discuss payment options”, there are no examples available where this option has been taken up by SCPs.

“We agreed the terms right at the very beginning and I’m happy to stay with them until the contract ends. I’m sure they would be flexible if we asked them though”. (SCP)

“They were proactive in offering us a tier 2 contract and pre-empted some of our worries”. (SCP)

“They showed empathy in reducing our lead times”. (SCP)

The transfer of funds throughout the supply chain is working effectively with no examples identified within this assessment of inaccurate, or late payments being made. Evidence shows that the incidence of withheld payments has reduced over the last 2 years as SCPs become more adept at submitting payments through the management information system and relationships have developed in which issues can be resolved professionally and amicably. Self-billing appears to be a success for the vast majority of SCPs and many cited the faster than average/anticipated turnaround time for payments as a plus point.

“Maximus is business-like in an ethical way”. (SCP)

“Very prompt payers and always keen to sort out any problems as quickly as they possibly can”. (SCP)

“As a result of our payment structures and the support offered to Partners, we’ve seen extrapolation rates drop from significantly over the course of the year”. (Maximus Staff)

The initial presentations and discussions around procurement have done an effective job and the vast majority of Tier 2 providers are aware of the level of management fee and its purpose in quite specific terms, citing the management information system, staff training, Maximus’ infrastructure, the development of systems and processes, quality and compliance audits, communication tools and Maximus support generally. At least one SCP was unaware of the level of the Management Fee (understating it in his description) and the whole area of Management Fee is the subject of a recommendation earlier in this report.

“I think they earn their fee, they never seem to be able to do enough for us” (SCP)

“It does represent good value for money. We get lots of support and guidance from both our Manager (SCM) and others at Maximus”. (SCP)

“It was a massive opportunity to start afresh. We changed the delivery model and staff to move from JSA to ESA clients. I am amazed at how supportive Maximus were.” (SCP)

“Maximus asked the right questions at the right time in the right place”. (SCP)

3 Conduct

3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity

The working relationships between Maximus and its SCPs are clearly effective at all levels and much improved since the initial assessment in 2012. There are particularly good relationships between the SCMs and SCPs and feedback from Delivery and Menu Partners suggests that these relationships are fundamental to the effective working of the supply chain. The core principles and operating philosophy of Maximus have been presented to the supply chain as part of the workshops and support provided to SCPs during the onboarding process. Over the last 18 months, work has been done to create a Supply Chain Handbook

that encompasses these business principles, though consultation on the values that drive the supply chain have tended to be more implied than explicit. Some SCPs described a “Core Set of Guiding Principles” and having discussed these at supply chain meetings. This then is an area where Maximus may look to develop further as described earlier in this report.

“We turned down the chance to work with other Primes as they were not on the same wave length”. (SCP)

“Maximus are onside with our ethos”. (SCP)

“It is easier to work with a Prime when you feel you are in it together”. (SCP)

SCPs equally have their own sets of values and several commented that these are now more closely matched by Maximus’ own and have clearly become embedded within daily working practice throughout Maximus at both strategic and operational levels.

With significant experience under their belt and the support of HR related “Subject Matter Experts” (SMEs), Maximus has demonstrated a good understanding of the TUPE processes and requirements and the transfer of staff between organisations have been effectively managed. Regular meetings and discussions and workshops, together with a nominated Subject Matter Expert within Maximus that acted as the focal point for enquiries and provided one-to-one support, all helped TUPE’d staff to make the transition effectively and allayed any concerns they might otherwise have had. The support was also extended to those SCPs who exited the supply chain and, in some cases, Maximus worked with SCPs to help them to create new roles and transfer staff in order to avoid redundancy situations.

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

“This is definitely one of Maximus’ strengths – even when we were on an improvement notice, the relationships and support we got never faltered”. (SCP)

“The best supply chain I have come across. I feel part of Maximus” (SCP)

“Told ** (SCM) I couldn’t do something on the system - he then rang me back to say he had done it for me!”. (SCP)**

“The easiest Prime to work with. We seem to think alike”. (SCP)

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

Changes in legislation and statutory requirements are notified effectively through discussions and emails and these are again reinforced within the monthly performance reviews and discussions with Maximus' SCMs. The Newsletters, Change Brief meetings and contractor portal also play a large part in helping SCPs to keep up to date with latest legislative and regulatory requirements, as do DWP's Exchange updates. The effective relationships and open dialogue provide for a high degree of understanding amongst SCPs regarding interpretation and implications of funding, regulatory and legislative changes.

"We were so inspired by the new newsletters for Menu Partners, that we've decided to produce our own and send them to our referral partners!" (SCP)

"They are now much better at giving us updates". (SCP)

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

From discussion with Maximus staff and Delivery Partners, Quality Assurance (QA) processes and practices are good. Quality assurance is largely driven by the Supply Chain Managers through the MMRs and QMRs and these are supported by annual full on-site audits by the Quality Team for the Delivery Partners and each SCP has their own quality action plan that forms the basis for ongoing review. Customer progression and feedback is also considered as part of the assessment to determine whether or not a quality product is being delivered and throughout these methodologies, the SCP has the opportunity to provide additional material for consideration and to suggest opportunities to improve performance where appropriate. Customers are also provided with the opportunity to have their say and each site, including SCPs, have suggestion boxes and feedback sheets and there is an on-line survey option for those customers who are more comfortable using this medium. Whilst these processes are proving effective for DPs, it is recommended that the approach to quality assuring MPs is reviewed, with a view to improving robustness and consistency, as around 10% of Menu Partners felt that this can be improved.

"Maximus have a performance culture that is KPI driven but the seven step model clearly sets out the (quality) process that underpins it". (SCP)

"It is corrective not punitive". (SCP)

"Maximus is becoming more transparent with the hows and the whys". (SCP)

"QA has been largely around course evaluations and has helped me address issues with tutors". (SCP)

All results of QA activities and feedback are channeled through Maximus' Quality Team, in order to identify trends and areas for development. DPs commented that they find the annual quality and compliance audits to be well managed, effectively conducted and valuable in identifying additional areas for development.

"The observations we had were really useful for improving our teaching and learning and we're seeing much better results from our learners". (SCP)

“Quality is always reviewed and discussed at our monthly meetings with ** (SCM). If there are any examples of good practice that she’s come across, she’ll share it with us and that helps our quality to improve” (SCP)**

With well established supply chain partners, many of whom having a long history in the field of Information, Advice and Guidance, Maximus is able to demonstrate that access to good quality provision is made available and promoted to customers at the point of delivery, where this takes place at Tier 2 and through the Maximus direct delivery offices. Maximus itself has been assessed and accredited against the matrix Standard and all SCPs are being encouraged to hold this accreditation, though this is not mandatory at this present time. For any SCP working under Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding, accreditation against the **matrix** Standard is obligatory.

Through the various communication channels, networking approaches and one-to-one dialogue, all SCPs are aware of the IAG available in their geographic areas. A small number of SCPs commented that they would like to see some form of ‘directory’ of providers, in order to ensure they are fully aware of the local provision. With MPs offering a degree of the information, advice and guidance available, it is also recommended that the senior team consider how the quality of IAG can be more robustly and comprehensively assured at this level.

As part of procuring new SCPs, Maximus provides detailed information through workshops and general communications on the various system requirements for SCPs and this includes data security. Data security within Maximus meets ISO 27001 standards and is closely monitored and implemented during the Due Diligence process at the outset and at frequent intervals thereafter as part of the performance, QA and compliance audits. The IT Department within Maximus have a responsibility for ensuring that all parties are compliant and the overwhelming feeling amongst SCPs is that measures to ensure information security are robust. Observations undertaken by Maximus whilst on site, for example during performance reviews, are used to determine the degree of compliance with requirements. Such visits are also used to determine the degree to which SCPs are protecting data by ensuring that computer screens are cleared and locked down when SCP staff leave the position where they are viewing information and how hardcopy information/records are maintained. Each Tier 2 SCP is also required to have an annual Penetration Test, undertaken by a reputable external agency and again this is reviewed as part of the onboarding process and monitored through performance reviews.

“In a couple of cases, Maximus have brought details of a breach of security to one of the supply chain meetings and discussed it with us. This was really useful and was far better than just talking to us about what might happen. We were able to compare what had happened to our own situations and take action to ensure it wasn’t repeated. That was quite brave of them I think and shows just how transparent they are these days”. (SCP)

Health and Safety policies are equally assessed at the initial stages by Health and Safety (H&S) Subject Matter Experts as part of the procurement process and again reviewed as part of the monthly performance discussions between the Tier 2 SCPs and their SCMs and by the QA and compliance teams in their annual audits. In the event of any shortfall, or corrective

action being required, an action plan is drawn up by the SCP and agreed with their SCM, supported by Maximus' specialist H&S advisors.

Discussions with the SCPs in this assessment would indicate there has been some specific training made available to SCPs on health and safety and further guidance is available through the Contractor Portal and specialist team as required and requested.

A similar situation exists for safeguarding, with initial checks on policies in place through the procurement processes and ongoing monitoring of SCPs for effective practices during the reviews and inspections by Maximus staff. A specified member of Maximus staff effectively acts as a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) and a specified colleague supports the role at more local level in each site. With safeguarding having a high profile, many SCPs have developed their own approach and policies and many have undergone specific training in this regard, though several SCPs commented that despite some training being offered, this is a topic where further guidance and support could be made more widely available to them by Maximus.

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

There are policies in place throughout the supply chain related to Environmental Sustainability (ES) and this forms part of the selection criteria for all supply chain applicants and is an integral part of the structured reviews, audits and inspections undertaken by Maximus. Maximus itself is subject to DWP audits on a regular basis and these factor in their approach to environmental sustainability. Whilst Maximus has made some good strides forward in starting to understand its own approach to ES, for example in recycling, there are currently no targets defined to improve performance against any broader metrics, such as carbon emissions, business mileage or energy usage. Nor have any targets been defined for SCPs specifically related to ES issues, beyond those that the SCP organisations may have in place of their own volition. The collation and analysis of this data is also in its infancy at this time, although this forms part of the plans for Maximus moving forward over the next few months. A recent development has been the inclusion within the DP and MP newsletters of a "Sustainability Tip of the Month" and a couple of SCPs commented that Maximus have worked with them to improve their ES approach, whilst others commented that they have share their sustainability policies with Maximus as part of an in depth study regarding this issue, though outcomes have yet to be published.

"Maximus promotes the green agenda including re-cycling, sharing journeys and cycling to work". (SCP)

"We have their Environmental Policy. They have ours". (SCP)

Throughout this assessment, there are various examples of 'excellent practice' being shared and demonstrated, e.g. the exchange visit to each others' sites, the collaborations with stakeholders and the partnership arrangements entered into with a number of other Primes, Maximus at this time has not set out to define what the term actually means and consequently has not communicated with the supply chain in this respect. This leaves supply

chain partners identifying what they believe to be good practice and sharing the same through the various formal and informal networking opportunities, such as the quarterly SCP meetings. Despite this lack of definition, comments made by SCPs were very positive when describing Maximus' approach to identifying and sharing good/excellent practice, though a small number commented that they feel there is a tendency to focus on Delivery Partners, rather than including Menu Partners. This then may be worthy of further review by the management team within Maximus.

"It was very useful going to see Maximus' call centre. It gave you a good insight". (SCP)

"We've done visits to other partners too to see what they do and that's been really useful. I picked up a couple of good things there that I've brought back and put in place here". (SCP)

"Best Practice was on the agenda at my very first meeting". (SCP)

3c) Honouring Commitments

Maximus has managed SCP expectations well with effective communication throughout the procurement phase and during live running. Expectations have been clearly defined from the outset and these have been communicated in both written format within the contracts, SLAs and Handbooks and verbally through discussions. Within this assessment, SCPs confirmed their understanding of these expectations and that post-contract arrangements reflect pre-contract agreements, though some SCPs reported that the shortage of referrals has started to pose them some problems. All parties agreed that there is now an open culture for communication that encourages and allows both the Prime and SCPs to voice their opinion and/or seek clarification where required. Any changes to the original agreements are covered diligently by variations to contracts, for example where original targets have had to be revised downwards due to lower than anticipated referral numbers. Comments from the SCPs indicate that reducing referrals are being dealt with sympathetically, whilst retaining a hard line on performance expectations through Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs).

"I am fine with their tough stance on PIPS outcomes. After all this is a PBR business and we shouldn't shirk from this" (SCP)

At the time of this assessment, there have been no formal disputes registered through Maximus' dispute resolution process. This process is included in all SCP Welcome Packs and is reiterated on the Contractor Portal. Only a couple of formal complaints have been raised by the SCPs at the time of this assessment and discussions with the SCPs concerned indicated that the issues did not require the need to escalate it to a higher authority. Otherwise, SCPs were generally aware of the dispute resolution processes and how to access it through their SCM typically should the need arise.

The lack of formal complaints is due largely to the positive relationships existing between Maximus and its supply chain partners, with any concerns being addressed as they occur by the SCMs, drawing in senior Maximus staff as appropriate, where the issue determined that it be escalated to a more senior level, for example related to contracting or funding issues.

Again, all the SCPs interviewed indicated a good level of satisfaction with regards to concerns being quickly addressed and in a positive manner, though it may benefit Maximus to drive this level of understanding down to Menu Partners.

Maximus senior staff also indicated that they would abide by any decision made by the Merlin Mediation Service (MMS). Both the MMS and the Independent Case Examiner service were generally unknown to the SCPs, though in reality, these options have not been required to this point in time by any SCP.

As identified earlier in this report, expectations regarding processes, practices and standards formed part of the pre-contract presentations, workshops and dialogues with potential SCPs and these have been built into the contracts as minimum service and performance levels and service guidelines. These expectations are also defined in the Maximus Values and Supply Chain Handbook, being largely behavioural in nature. These expectations continue to drive the performance and quality reviews and are a key feature of the monthly and quarterly SCM reviews and SCP meetings and audits by Maximus staff. As identified earlier, MPs receive an SLA that includes the expectations and obligations of both parties, though it may be prudent to dip sample Menu Partners in order to ensure robustness and consistency.

“We were on three PIPS in one quarter. Maximus gave 360 degree support including a staff member on-site two days a month. Performance exceeded targets in all three areas during that period” (SCP)

“Expectations were very clear from the outset and I think both parties have honoured promises and expectations very well – it’s a good relationship that’s actually more like a partnership”. (SCP)

3d) Performance

It is clear that the supply chain has been encouraged to work collaboratively, e.g. in the cross referral of customers to vacancies, the partnership approaches and in the sharing of facilities and best practice through the mechanisms mentioned earlier. The regular email and phone contacts, monthly review meetings and attendance at SCP meetings also evidence Maximus’ approach to working in partnership and collaboration with its SCPs. This meetings infrastructure provides for SCPs to review and discuss developments and requirements across the network, though there is a tendency for this to be predominantly Delivery Partners, rather than the Menu Partners. Further encouragement by Maximus for SCPs to collaborate in joint funding bids and share resources could also reinforce this supportive approach to supply chain development and position Maximus as a catalyst for change and improvement in the eyes of the supply chain.

“Maximus are always looking at how partners can work better together, whether it’s through sharing resources or working together to gain funding”. (SCP)

“The sharing of vacancies with other partners is a good example of how we collaborate and we have some menu partners that come in and use our premises to deliver their

services to our customers". (SCP)

Maximus has demonstrated effective performance management processes and practices, primarily through the monthly and quarterly monitoring reviews with Maximus' Supply Chain Managers and quality and compliance team staff. These reviews are used to determine progress against contracted Minimum Service Levels and Minimum Performance Levels. Opportunities exist for SCPs to raise issues and discuss concerns at these meetings and these are shared across the operational teams within Maximus in order to resolve them effectively. Lessons learned are also noted and shared across the network through weekly emails, ongoing discussions and the monthly newsletters for MPs and DPs; though at this time there is no central log of lessons learned in this fashion.

"The agenda for MMRs is wide ranging and not just about being hard-nosed on performance". (SCP)

"Innovation is encouraged. Maximus is not dictatorial; they prompt the agenda, but allow Delivery Partners to deliver to their strengths and maximize their expertise". (SCP)

Any under-performance identified within an SCP results in a targeted Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) being drawn up and agreed between the SCP and their Partner Manager and this drives any subsequent reviews, audits and inspections until such time as the shortfall is addressed. Innovation is discussed where it occurs, for example in the use of 'eased-in' work patterns for ESA customers (this model has been shared to good effect across other SCPs). The clarification of just what innovation is within the contracts offered could well help Maximus to raise SCPs perceptions and understanding, leading to greater dialogue in this regard.

"Being on a PIP doesn't necessarily feel nice, but it was a very useful process and we've seen our performance figures increase significantly. We now know what to do to avoid slipping back into a PIP situation again in the future". (SCP)

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

"We have been PIP free for a year. Maximus have designed a system without gaps. It was not a harsh conversation. They were proactive and motivational". (SCP)

"Consistency is the Maximus message". (SCP)

"We know we have to hit targets in this industry. It's a given". (SCP)

The WorkQwest management information system is a well established piece of technology that has developed over time with input from the supply chain and now has the capability to store, analyse and report information in a comprehensive manner. SCPs commented that it

allowed for accurate data to be maintained and reported upon and several commented that they had used the reporting features to good effect in analysing their own performance. Performance information is shared across the supply chain during network meetings and is also available through the SCM's meetings with their respective SCPs. As with any system, there were a small number of SCPs who indicated that they found it to be difficult to navigate and that the constant updates and adaptations could actually inhibit effectiveness, though it is evident that Maximus is working to overcome these issues. In the main however, SCPs indicated that WorkQuest was giving them good solid information in the form of data and charts with which to monitor and analyse their performance.

"It generates good pictorial presentations of data". (SCP)

"The drop-down menu is fantastic". (SCP)

"It falls over occasionally, but most system do. You always feel that Maximus are working hard to sort it out when it happens and we're always well informed. It's usually resolved pretty quickly". (SCP)

With the focus of the payment system being attachments, progress measures, job outcomes and sustained employment for the customers, those SCPs questioned were very clear that this is how they calculate value for money in their own minds, when compared to the cost of achieving these key performance indicators. In some cases SCPs have used "better off" calculations and one SCP feels that VFM is now more evident due to reduced referral numbers, helping them to be more able to give better specific client service, e.g. improving ESOL targets. They feel all round that they are able to assess, design, deliver and evaluate specific tailored approaches due to reduced pressures of time coming from reduced volume. There were also many discussions with SCPs around what can better be described as 'added value', rather than 'value for money'. Here SCPs talked amongst other things about the support gained from the In-Work Team at Maximus, the vacancies created by the employer engagement team and the strategic level of support identified earlier in this report.

"When you take it all together, I think they really do offer good value for money". (SCP)

"I could not operate without them. I have access to a dedicated call centre, IT support, an in work support team, MAPPA, an outcome verifier as well as a receptive supply chain manager. This all adds value to my team". (SCP)

In looking to measure and encourage demonstrable outcomes and performance improvements, the main criterion is the customer journey. This is monitored against the progress measures for all contracts through the WorkQwest system and, as such, Maximus has established effective processes to determine 'distance travelled'. Initial assessment of various factors including confidence and motivation, is undertaken and regular customer reviews by Maximus' advisors continue to monitor an individual's progression and development, with personal goals being agreed and monitored through the system. Work has just been completed by Maximus on a new seven-stage process, known as Progress to Success. This model maps out the key stages of progression and roll-out plans include the creation of a performance dashboard specifically focused on this customer journey map and the opportunities to determine distance travelled more accurately.

3e) Promoting Diversity and Equality

Diversity and Equality (D&E) is seen as a key issue for all customers and stakeholders aligned to Maximus. All those within the supply chain are required to have and maintain a D&E policy that at least matches that of Maximus and compliance with this requirement is confirmed during the procurement process and is subject to audit during the QA audits and the MMRs and QMRs undertaken by the SCMs. Thereafter, SCP inductions and training sessions have helped to define expectations all round and copies of model policies have been provided to some SCPs who were struggling to develop their own versions.

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

The Maximus WorkQwest system is designed to capture diversity and equality data and there are several examples of this data being reviewed by both Maximus staff and SCP staff. In one case for example, support was provided to a Tier 2 SCP in order to help them to review and develop their E&D policy. Training modules have also been provided on equal opportunities as a subject and support is provided at review and SCP meetings on an ongoing basis.

"I've attended some of the supply chain meetings and given presentations and led discussions on equality and diversity". (Maximus SME)

"We've had pretty regular discussions around E and D and I'm clear that Maximus are looking to promote and develop it across the supply chain". (SCP)

"E&D forms part of our quality action plan, so it's clear that Maximus are keen to promote and monitor it". (SCP)

With this as an emerging strategy, many SCPs are, as yet, unaware as to how Maximus will analyse this data to inform future service delivery, or how it links to the wider policy and objectives of the commissioner and this may be worthy of making a priority for the future.

4 Review

4a) Supply chain review

Feedback has been collected from a wide range of stakeholders such as customers, employers, SCPs, staff, local authorities, Local Employer Partnerships (LEPs), Strategic Partnerships, ERSA, third sector organisations and of course, DWP and central government, through formal processes such as performance review meetings, national and local networking or through informal situations. Customer focus group outcomes, complaints and compliments and surveys results also feed in to the supply of review data to good effect.

Effective relationships with these stakeholders all provide for a rich vein of information and feedback and there were several examples of this information giving rise to improvements being made to both practices and processes throughout the supply chain.

“A need was identified to improve the initial assessment of candidates, prior to them agreeing their personal plans. Several of us worked together and came up with an improved system that has now been introduced to all partners”. (SCP)

“We had an issue with one of the Maximus departments only starting at 9.00am, though often we needed to get hold of them earlier than that. As a result they now at 8.00am and that’s helped us a lot”. (SCP)

“Induction forms have also developed as a result of feedback from stakeholders”. (Maximus Staff)

“We are routinely audited and inspected against a range of external standards. This gives us a great opportunity to improve our working practices and processes and our whole way of working in partnership with the Delivery and Menu Partners is indicative of this”. (Maximus Manager)

In keeping with DWP requirements, Maximus has developed and produced a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) on an annual basis. Contributing to this report are the discussions held with SCPs during the performance reviews and the requirement of all Delivery Partners to complete and submit relevant information that will contribute to the generation of the SAR. The outcome of this process is an all-encompassing SAR and action plan, used by Maximus to drive development and improvement activities. The overarching report and plan are not currently shared across the supply chain network, however highlights are shared through the various communication routes, e.g. the website, the newsletters and the performance review and quality meetings as appropriate.

“I know we produce data and information that goes towards Maximus’ SAR, though I’m not aware of what gets produced”. (SCP)

“I’ve had conversations with my (Supply Chain) Manager and he’s given me a run down of the main findings and that’s been a help in knowing what’s down the road”. (SCP)

Producing a supply chain SAR and Quality Improvement Plan and publishing them for access by SCPs could help to further the transparency of Maximus’ approach. Providing an opportunity to include more Menu Partners in the process however could also effectively support this ‘bottom up’ approach, in order to increase the diversity and richness of the information collected.

There is a clear commitment within Maximus to the wider policy and objectives of the commissioner. This is evident in the design of the supply chain and the use of specialist providers and in the various new initiatives being explored and delivered. Many of those SCPs interviewed showed a good understanding of the commissioner’s wider objectives, as well as the part they will be playing in contributing towards them in a demonstrable fashion, although this tended to some degree to relate to their own area of expertise and interest,

rather than across the piece. Many SCPs commented on the usefulness of the supply chain meetings, Change Briefings and the discussions with SCMs as vehicles for keeping them updated on the wider policy and strategy of the commissioner and affirmed that this is a subject often discussed at the supply chain meetings and performance reviews.

"I always feel we are in the know". (SCP)

"Commissioner objectives are our objectives". (SCP)

"A lot is suggestion. Maximus is not dictatorial but they don't need to prompt us. We are also working towards Social Justice - Transforming Lives". (SCP)

"We've started to work with the health sector more now and we have our links with the various strategic alliances in and around London. That looks set to be able to give us some good information about impact". (Maximus Staff)

All SCPs interviewed were clear on how they contribute to these wider objectives and many were able to give specific individual examples of impact. With the contacts and connections across a wide range of stakeholders, Maximus is now well placed to further develop this understanding of impact. (see recommendations).

The introduction of various specialists into the supply chain over the previous year or so, for example to better meet the needs of ex-offenders and those with health challenges, are clear demonstrations of how the supply chain has evolved over time to better meet the changing needs of stakeholders of all types. Indicative of this evolution is that ESA working group has been established across the supply chain to determine how all SCPs can work more effectively for the benefit of this client group and more partnerships are developing outside of the deliver network, for example London transport companies and public sector consortia.

"You can see how the supply chain has developed. We've had new specialists brought in as Menu Partners and we've worked hard to keep other partners moving forward". (Maximus Manager)

"We've also created some effective joint working arrangements, for example the London Boroughs and the other Primes to create a common approach to tackling some of the wider social issues associated with unemployment". (Maximus Staff)

The design and activities of the supply chain have without doubt had a positive impact on such aspects as customer health and wellbeing, employability and homelessness, though as identified above, the positive outcomes tend towards the anecdotal. Opportunities therefore now exist to extend the range of data collection to other stakeholders, e.g. the NHS, the National Housing Federation, environmental groups and the various Police Authorities, in order to better understand the wider impact of the supply chain on these key social objectives.

Conclusion

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

It was evident to the assessment team that Maximus has, over the last 12 to 18 months, developed a much more partnership-based approach to managing its supply chain and that this has resulted in improved working relationships at all levels. These improved relationships have been accompanied by ever evolving systems and processes, all developed with good consultation with SCPs and this has led to improved performance all round.

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

Good use has also been made of the wider stakeholders in helping to inform the development and evolution of the supply chain and the support offered to supply chain partners has been instrumental in keeping them within the supply chain and, in some cases, keeping them in existence as an entity.