



merlin

promoting supply chain excellence

Assessment Report

For

PERTEMPS PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PPDG)

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On behalf of emqc Ltd

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About the Organisation

Pertemps People Development Group (PPDG) is a member of the ESH Group, one of the world's leading providers of Welfare to Work, training and recruitment services to an extensive number of Government and private companies across Australia and the United Kingdom.

PPDG, established in 1997, have been delivering the Work Programme in Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country Contract Package Area 14 (CPA) on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions since it went live in June 2011. Since September 2012 Youth Contract delivery has taken place in the North East of England and since January 2011 the Ministry of Justice managed National Offender Management Service (NOMS) contract has been delivered in the West Midlands and North East areas of England.

The Work Programme contract is part financed by the European Social Fund. PPDG subcontract approximately 30% of all front-line delivery to a network of 3 providers from the private and charity sectors. PPDG provide specialist self-employment support for customers through 2 providers. A small number of other organisations provide specialist support to meet the holistic needs of the customer. The Youth Contract is funded by the Education Funding Agency and is delivered in the North East of England by PPDG, who subcontract approximately 60% of delivery to a network of 8 partners. The NOMS contract is funded using European Social Fund monies and PPDG sub contract approximately 30% of delivery to a network of 17 Partners.

Assessment Methodology

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

During the assessment 100% of supply chain partners in CPA 14 (Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country) in which PPDG deliver the Work Programme were spoken to. Supply Chain Partners delivering Youth Contract and NOMS partners were also spoken to. During the assessment, assessors reviewed a range of documentary evidence and IT systems provided by PPDG, interviewed a wide range of staff, including senior managers and customer facing staff from the Supply Chain Network and a range of staff from PPDG.

A total of 30 representatives from 22 Supply Chain Partners were interviewed. All principles of the Merlin standard were fully assessed by a team of 3 assessors; Rob Mottram (Lead Assessor), Hayley Allen and David Folland who spent a total of 12 days onsite.

Assessment Outcome

Overall %	77%
Overall Outcome	Good
Supply Chain Design	Good
Commitment	Good
Conduct	Good
Review	Good

Strengths

A number of strengths were identified during this Merlin assessment and summaries of these are given below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard to which the areas relate.

- Clear communication channels, which ensure that there is no ambiguity regarding the business relationship underpinning supply chain relationships. (2a.4)
- Culture is open, frequent, honest, consistent and 2 way, partners feel confident to communicate with the prime contractor, reflected in the quality of the interactions which are positive and supportive. (2a.5)
- Contracting and funding is carried out in an open and transparent manner, for example the rationale behind market share, management fee arrangements, favourable service fee structures and flexible approach is seen by partners as very positive. (2c.2, 2c.3, 2c.4, & 2c.8)
- Interactions between PPDG and its Supply Chain Partners are very strong. Positive and supportive relationships exist between staff at all levels of PPDG and its Supply Chain Partners. (3a.3)
- Effective and well-designed supply chains, comprising of a good mix of diverse organisations, which meet customers holistic, needs and support commissioners, procurers and other partners in meeting and delivering comprehensive specialist support. (1a.1, 1a.2, 1a.3, 4a.5, & 4a.6)
- Experienced and credible Supply Chain Managers – their approach to ensure positive and supportive interactions with the partners they support, whether in a developmental capacity within the organisation or encouraging collaboration between partners. (2b.1, 2b.3, 3a.3 & 3d.1)

Areas for Improvement

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

- In consultation with its Supply Chain Partners, develop a set of business principles which will form the PPDG Supply Chain Code of Conduct in order to produce a *'unique and partner driven code that the behaviour of PPDG and all partners can be measured against'*. (3a.1)
- Develop a sufficiently robust procedure to support and maintain legislative and regulatory requirements, and ensure that Supply Chain Partners and their staff are kept up to date with changes in legislation and contractual/statutory requirements in a timely manner. (3a.4)
- Improve PPDG's quality assurance and compliance arrangements which are currently insufficiently effective to monitor and ensure the quality of delivery and customer experience within the supply chain. Ensure the findings from any quality assurance activities are used to improve the quality of service. This area was identified at the last assessment and remains an area of improvement for PPDG. (3b.1 & 3b.2)
- PPDG need to ensure that all partners delivering information, advice and guidance are working to both contractual requirements and to PPDG's own quality standards, to satisfy themselves of the quality, consistency and appropriateness of all customers' journey and experience, regardless of contract. (3b.3)
- Ensure that all partners have appropriate and proportionate targets relevant to the level of delivery, to help raise awareness and understanding of environmental sustainability amongst Supply Chain Partners (3b.7)
- PPDG need to further explore how to support the sharing of information relating to excellent practice across contracts, and employ appropriate methods to monitor its effectiveness. (3b.8)
- As identified at the previous assessment, Partners can request reports from their supply chain manager but have indicated they would prefer to have access to 'real time' data to better support Supply Chain Partners ability to manage performance more effectively (3d.4)

- As identified at the previous assessment, the systematic collection and use of feedback from all stakeholder groups is insufficiently developed to inform and improve practices. Therefore proactive and systematic collection from a range of stakeholders, including customers, is required (4a.1)
- PPDG are efficient in collecting views that contribute to their own self-assessment process, however PPDG need to consider a more robust approach to collecting the views of its Supply Chain Partners and ensure that it is both sufficiently inclusive and leads to continuous improvements (4a.2)
- Collate and develop of a directory of support services to signpost customers to, as appropriate. (1a.3, 3b.3)
- PPDG may wish to consider utilising industry specific websites (other than their own) to promote future partnership opportunities to help them reach as wide a range of partners as possible (1a, 2a.1 & 2a.3)

Areas Requiring Further Development

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

Assessment Findings

1 Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply chain design

PPDG have developed and deliver a wide portfolio of employment initiatives and skills development programmes, from large-scale mainstream provision to localised neighbourhood delivery. This delivery experience has been valuable in allowing PPDG to develop a wide and diverse supply chain, the approach to which has been developed over the organisation's 17 years of delivery. PPDG's localised knowledge and strong strategic links enables it to draw on past experience and use current market intelligence to support a range of customers in its delivery of an extensive range of provisions across a number of geographical locations. PPDG have successfully supported new entrants to the welfare to work market to become experienced and highly effective providers. PPDG's Senior Management Team believes passionately about the importance of making long-term commitments to the partner organisations they work with and the importance of improving customers' lives.

Between 30-60% of delivery is subcontracted to a range of partners who provide both 'end to end' and specialist support, for example, identified groups of customers such as ex-offenders with links to gun and gang cultures receive specialist support from niche providers to help them gain qualifications and move towards employment. PPDG's supply chain brings together a range of private, public and third sector organisations that deliver across a number of contracts on PPDG's behalf. PPDG continues to deliver a significant proportion of its front line services via its own network of delivery sites. PPDG's high level of understanding of both the customer and the supply chain which it supports is seen as a significant strength by Supply Chain Partners questioned during the assessment, who feel it contributes greatly to PPDG's approach to supply chain management.

"...they understand us and the customer really well – as they also deliver contracts themselves they have a good handle on the issues we face"... Supply Chain Partner

In consultation with partners, PPDG have developed and recently launched a Supply Chain Management Framework (SCMF) to further enhance their approach to supply chain management, promote consistency and allow for prospective Supply Chain Partners to become pre-qualified to engage with PPDG which will streamline the process for partners as well as enabling PPDG to mobilize quickly when required to by commissioners/procurers. It is also recognised by PPDG that this approach to supply chain management will allow them to be even more responsive to the needs of customers. PPDG may wish to consider the use of alternative websites, other than their own, to reach as wide a possible range of partners.

PPDG use very effective strategies to support the delivery of comprehensive services to customers and stakeholders through the use of wider networks, for example for customers to require specialist self-employment support. Good use is made of alternative funding, for example Adult Skills Budget (ASB) in developing customers and increasing their employability prospects. This area will be further enhanced through the development of a directory of specialist services, which is planned by PPDG.

2 Commitment

2a) Collaboration, cooperation and communication

Supply Chain Partners readily confirmed that during all stages of the procurement processes, communications were clear and transparent; Supply Chain Partners described this as very useful in helping them make business decisions. A range of communication methods were used including face-to-face and telephone discussions with key contacts within PPDG. Many partners described how using webinars proved highly effective in supporting open conversations with minimal disruption to their day-to-day business activities. Since the last assessment, PPDG have developed a more robust approach to procurement activities; these changes are acknowledged and recognised by the Supply Chain Partners. The clarity over the segregation of identified activities between the head office functions which support the procurement and the handover to operational teams works well.

"...it was great, PPDG arranged webinars which meant I didn't have to travel all the way to London for a one hour meeting, which when you're travelling from the North of England takes you out of the business for a whole day" – Supply chain partner

Partners were able to describe a number of examples of where PPDG have consulted with them to inform decisions, particularly over the design and improvements to systems and processes. Examples include working with Supply Chain Partners to agree a marketing rebrand for Youth Contract delivery, and with Partners to make improvements to the Client Tracking System (CTS), which has improved data accuracy and eliminated issues with claims. The availability and visibility of supply chain managers allows for the flow of informal feedback, which also contributes to PPDG's decision-making processes. PPDG continue to listen to their partners as well as learning from their experiences as members of other prime organisations' supply chains.

Supply Chain Partners confirm that collaboration across the supply chain is an important aspect and feature which PPDG supports. PPDG are fostering these behaviours through a range of methods and meetings, where partners discuss and share good practice, and look at improving processes and performance data. Job vacancies are also being shared between partner organisations, which increases participation and contributes to delivering comprehensive services to customers.

Much of the clear communication channels which are valued greatly by the Supply Chain Partners are attributable to the investments made by PPDG in recruiting supply chain managers across all contracts. Many managers within PPDG are 'home grown' and are experienced practitioners who understand what is required in order to support performance. PPDG have also recruited managers who have experience of managing other supply chain networks; this has allowed PPDG to build capacity and develop a greater understanding of what works well with partners. This team of supply chain managers continues to test approaches and processes, and there are efforts being made to spread learning across all contracts.

Frequent communications and highly responsive supply chain managers are contributing to an open culture which is described by partners as two-way and very productive. Partners also find network meetings foster relationships, as does the sharing of performance figures and management information.

'...it's great, we get to see how our performance ranks against the other partners, including the prime contractor, we particularly like it when we are top of the table!' – Supply Chain Partner

'...PPDG do listen – they respect your views' – Supply Chain Partner

2b) Developing Supply Chain Partners

PPDG support and encourage the development of Supply Chain Partners well, and the openness in which information is exchanged acts as a driver for this. Monthly review processes are now more structured; the recruitment of dedicated supply chain managers has made a significant difference in building capacity within the supply chain.

PPDG encourage partners by providing one to one mentoring, facilitating job-shadowing opportunities and encouraging the exchange of excellent practice. Where appropriate, Supply Chain Partners benefit from subject area specialists employed by PPDG who offer very useful consultative approaches to develop partners' knowledge. These interventions are provided at no additional cost and cover areas such as Health and Safety, and Data Security.

'...they work with you to succeed – we've been well supported' – Supply Chain Partner

At the previous assessment it was noted that PPDG had made a substantial commitment to the development of a new entrant to the UK Welfare to Work market. This development has continued and has resulted in some significant successes, with the partner becoming a valued and very effective partner within the supply chain. PPDG continues to provide a PPDG member of staff 'seconded' to a supply chain partner, to the benefit of both parties.

PPDG continue to support organisations by analysing, scoping and sharing funding opportunities with its partners. Internal weekly meetings identify appropriate opportunities and these are cascaded to the Supply Chain Network with the added promise that if partners wish to pursue these business opportunities PPDG will support them with their subsequent tender application.

'...we are looking at tendering together for future opportunities, which is really exciting for us – PPDG are opening doors for us with partners which previously we had no success at working with.' Supply chain partner.

Specialist relevant training has been delivered to Supply Chain Partners by PPDG; all partner staff that have access to IT systems have received data security training delivered via an e-Learning package. Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP) membership is offered to supply chain partner staff and this offer has been adopted by around 40 staff employed within the supply chain network.

'...the recent training has been good, its online, which suits us as you don't need to travel' – Supply chain partner

2c) Contracting and funding

Supply Chain Partners confirmed the procurement processes used by PPDG were fair and transparent and partners described a flexible, but effective, approach to communication. The recently launched SCMF supports this area further and will build and maintain already excellent working relationships. The SCMF model consists of the following stages;

- Stage 1 – Pre Approved Suppliers List
- Stage 2 – Mini Tender
- Stage 3 – Negotiation and Contracting
- Stage 4 – Implementation
- Stage 5 – Contract Management
- Stage 6 – Contract Exit

The approach taken by PPDG to contracting and funding has greatly improved since the last assessment, with partners enjoying face-to-face discussions with the senior management of PPDG, and being kept fully informed during the contracting phase. PPDG continue to use their extensive knowledge of the welfare to work sector to allow them to assess the suitability of organisations with which they chose to partner with, forming strong and effective working partnerships.

'...I've just joined the partnership and I can't fault the process, straightforward and simple' – Supply Chain Partner

PPDG use a range of funding arrangements based on the contracts being delivered, in some instances providing very favourable payment structures that in some cases minimise risk, front loading payments and paying a monthly service fee to Supply Chain Partners delivering on their behalf. During the 'on-boarding' process PPDG provide as much information to partners as possible, as it becomes available to them as the prime contractor from the commissioner. Supply Chain Partners indicate the arrangements are as expected and that they feel PPDG would support, where possible, in ensuring funding volumes and contractual arrangements made business and commercial sense. There remain no fixed funding arrangements in place with those suppliers engaged on a call on/call off basis.

PPDG have devised contractual documentation which clearly defines both PPDG's and its Supply Chain Partners' obligations. Contracts define minimum performance and service levels for partners and replicate commissioners flow down. As identified at the previous assessment contractual documentation used by PPDG broadly reflects that of the commissioner; however some terms and conditions have been amended to make them more favourable to the Supply Chain Partners.

'...the contract is clear, we ask for what we would like, we negotiate and come to agreement, it's very straightforward' – Supply Chain Partner

Market share is clear, allocation is agreed and based on a number of factors, including market share, demographics, supply chain partner capacity and areas of specialism. Allocations agreed are as expected by partners, who seem to fully understand how they contribute to the overall performance and success of the contract.

'...PPDG are not cherry picking the clients or area, the numbers allocated make sense and reflect the commissioner need' – Supply chain partner

There is a successful strategy to manage the transfer of funds within the supply chain, partners benefit from dedicated teams of PPDG staff who support contractual claims and validation processes and ensure payments made meet the needs of Supply Chain Partners. A small number of partners have experienced delays to payments, however these delays are attributable to the IT system used which the prime contractor has no control over.

'...some of our payments have been delayed, which is frustrating for us – it's no fault of PPDG mind you, it's just the system' – Supply chain partner

Supply Chain Partners were clear on the management fee, which Supply Chain Partners indicated was lower than other prime contractors, they feel very positive about the amount they pay and the support they receive for it. Fees are discussed and explained to partners during the contracting process.

'...we get a lot for our money – especially when you include the supply chain manager's support'
Supply chain partner

'...PPDG gave us some money back from our management fee when they got something wrong and mismanaged it' – Supply chain partner.

3 Conduct

3a) Demonstrating commercial and business integrity

As in their previous assessment, PPDG continues to behave in a way that demonstrates high levels of integrity underpinned by a strong ethos of values, which centre on PPDG's philosophy of 'unearthing the spark of brilliance in everyone'. The procurement process ensures an alignment of values between PPDG and its Supply Chain Partners with which they work, with customers' lives being improved central to activities. Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to retain their individual values, which supports PPDG's very positive and effective business relationships. As an organisation PPDG have consulted with partners and a proposal has been made to develop a set of business principles which will form the PPDG Supply Chain Code of Conduct, this document will gain input from all partners in order to produce a *'unique and partner driven code that the behaviour of PPDG and all partners can be measured against'*.

'...we are very much on the same page as PPDG, our values are aligned' – Supply Chain Partner
'...they've got integrity, they are a fair organisation' – Supply Chain Partner

As identified during their last assessment in 2012, PPDG have used a very open and transparent approach to the management of the TUPE and meet all legal requirements. Partners are signposted to specialist legal experts whom PPDG have previous positive experience of working with in TUPE matters. Meetings bringing together affected parties were facilitated and PPDG's approach to TUPE is in line with their values and ethos. PPDG provide partners with an Employee Liability Information spread sheet which is helpful to partners. During the assessment partners were able to confirm where staff had been transferred into PPDG, they were treated very well and terms and conditions were brought in line with PPDG staff, which in some cases resulted in more favourable terms for the employee.

Interactions between PPDG and its Supply Chain Partners are very strong. Positive and supportive relationships exist between staff at all levels of PPDG and its Supply Chain Partners; this is particularly well developed where supply chain managers provide professional and credible support. Supply Chain Partners feel that one of the key elements to this area being so strong is that PPDG are also delivering front line services themselves and therefore have a good understanding of the operational challenges faced.

'...one of the best primes I work with, regular communications help' – Supply Chain Partner

'...the way they work with us is good, they are deliverers as well, that helps, they really understand the difficulties we may be having and support us in a practical way' – Supply Chain Partner

PPDG have a number of methods in place to ensure that all Supply Chain Partners receive timely updates to legislative and contractual requirements, including a weekly email communication log which contains documents and direct links to any relevant information, newsletters, regular telephone contact between supply chain partner staff and PPDG's staff, free access to training in areas such as the Data Protection Act and changes to CRB/DBS checking of staff. A revised process to ensure all appropriate changes, for example communicating the recent changes to the Government Security Classifications has been identified by PPDG which will provide a more robust approach.

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

PPDG's quality assurance and compliance arrangements are currently insufficiently effective to monitor and ensure the quality of delivery and customer experience within the supply chain. This area was identified at the last assessment and remains an area of improvement for PPDG. A recently developed self-assessment audit tool has been launched and has been used by a small number of Supply Chain Partners, with the initial feedback gathered by PPDG being positive. This tool will review a number of areas, including quality, health and safety, environmental sustainability and compliance. This will be used to measure all Supply Chain Partners and will provide assurances to PPDG. A small number of formal observations have been carried out by PPDG by experienced and trained members of staff with its supply chain, and whilst most Supply Chain Partners are accredited to the **matrix** standard, PPDG need to ensure that all partners delivering information, advice and guidance are working to both contractual requirements and PPDG's own quality standards to satisfy themselves of the quality, consistency and appropriateness of all customers journey and experience, regardless of contract.

PPDG have provided the Supply Chain Network with comprehensive support to ensure they maintain security of all data and assets within the supply chain. PPDG achieved ISO 27001:2008 in September 2011 and ensure that during the provider validation process all partners meet a required standard. PPDG use an electronic incident log which acts both a tool for tracking incidents and as a way of helping identify any trends which informs subsequent actions. As with other areas, appropriate support from skilled specialist staff support any provider who doesn't meet the standard by providing practical advice and cost effective solutions. Partners see this type of practical support as very helpful.

Healthy and safe work environments are assured by PPDG and form part of the partner verification process. Partners submit a rigorous assessment document and a site visit of the delivery location is made by a specialist member of staff from PPDG. Site audits are completed, where required an action plan is devised and appropriate support is provided by skilled specialist PPDG staff to work with the provider to help them meet the standard required. PPDG apply an eyes and ears approach when conducting site visits which identify across a range of areas, including, health and safety, environmental sustainability and data protection.

Supply Chain Partners are also reminded of their commitment to health and safety during monthly reviews and the periodic assessments of partners premises ensure on-going monitoring.

People at risk and vulnerable groups are appropriately safeguarded by PPDG through processes carried out during the partner verification process. All Supply Chain Partners are vetted and monitored to ensure that they meet the Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) in accordance with contractual provider guidance. Should any changes occur to personnel, PPDG require them to be informed of the changes to ensure their continued adherence to the security standard. The recently launched customer feedback questionnaire also asks customers 'do you feel safe?'

PPDG achieved ISO 14001 in February 2012 and remain currently registered to the standard. The promotion and awareness raising of the importance of environmental sustainability is evident. Supply Chain Partners provide PPDG with details of their commitment to supporting environmental sustainability during the contract validation stage; through this process PPDG have identified that Supply Chain Partners are at different stages of their development against this area and are working with their partners to ensure that all partners have appropriate and proportionate targets relevant to the level of delivery.

Excellent practice is currently identified, monitored and shared with the supply chain through a variety of methods. The monthly performance review process which is carried out by the Supply Chain Manager enables them to collate and discuss with partners their approaches to contract delivery and identify areas of excellent practice. Partnership meetings also provide a very useful forum for partners to meet, learn from each other and share ideas. PPDG need to further explore how to support the sharing of this information across contracts and employ appropriate methods to monitoring its effectiveness.

3c) Honouring Commitments

Supply Chain Partners confirm that contract negotiations were clear and open, and partner expectations have been managed effectively. Where possible, expectations are made clear from the outset, however in some instances PPDG do not have total clarity from the commissioner/procurer and as such offer Supply Chain Partners all the information available to them at that time. Partners understand this approach and don't feel it to be something which undermines the strength of the relationship. Documentation supports verbal communications and provides partners with additional clarity.

'...PPDG didn't have all the answers when we first sat down, they told us that as soon as they know more they would tell us – you can't be fairer than that' – Supply chain partner

As at the previous assessment, partners feel that they were given adequate information and time to consider funding models. Contractual changes are communicated clearly to Supply Chain Partners using the weekly communication log and supported by verbal feedback to ensure Supply Chain Partners are clear as to why changes have been made.

Supply Chain Partners are aware of PPDG's formal dispute resolution process. At the time of assessment there had been no formal complaints from the supply chain, however it is likely that the strong communication channels which exist would allow issues to be discussed honestly and openly, which is testimony to the strength of the relationships between PPDG and its partners.

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

Processes and good communication at every level within supply chains ensure that all parties have clarity on a wide range of expectations. Service level agreement and contractual documentation is clear, drawn up and agreed through negotiated discussions. There is plenty of opportunity for partners to discuss with PPDG and seek clarification if required. Partners also understand what their partner colleagues are delivering, which reinforces PPDG's strength in this criterion of the Merlin Standard.

3d) Performance

PPDG have a contract based approach to managing their Supply Chain Partners with supply chain managers supporting regional delivery. Partner contact with their supply chain manager is bespoke and tailored to meet the demand of the contract and the supply chain partner. Partners like the fact that they have one point of contact who provides very responsive support. Regular one to one meetings between supply chain manager and partners contribute significantly to this area, where a useful template ensures the session keeps discussions focussed on improving performance. This approach allows supply chain managers to identify trends or areas that require additional support.

On a regional basis providers meet to discuss good practice, develop new approaches and exchange ideas at partnership meetings or 'away days'. These sessions provide useful opportunities for partners to meet and establish stronger working relationships. Comparative performance data of Supply Chain Partners is shared via daily, weekly and monthly updates and allows partners to deliver more effectively. Less well performing partners continue to be encouraged to work with higher performing partners to better understand, recognise and develop effective working practices. Opportunities to shadow high performing staff are encouraged and shared across the partnership.

Open and frequent discussions between supply chain managers and their partners allow for clear performance expectations. These targets are agreed and understood by all parties. When performance improvement is needed PPDG work with the organisation in a supportive manner. A formal performance management route is available to PPDG, however PPDG prefer to adopt a less formal, more developmental and joined up approach which is proving effective in improving performance and liked by partners who confirmed its value in both achieving improved performance and fostering strong relationships.

PPDG have developed a bespoke Management Information system (Client Tracking System) for use by the partners who deliver Work Programme and Youth Contract.

Supply Chain Partners who deliver NOMS are contractually required to use a Ministry of Justice management information system known as CATS. The Client Tracking System produces a set of standard reports which give key information pertaining to a range of key performance indicators, such as job starts, attachments and job sustainment. Partners can request reports from their supply chain manager but have indicated they would prefer to have access to 'real time' reporting which is something PPDG have acknowledged and are due to launch this option to Supply Chain Partners imminently.

PPDG demonstrate value for money across the contracts it holds, both in the value it adds to customers by supporting them to access funding to support skills development but also to its Supply Chain Partners who benefit from free of charge access to training, specialist support and IT systems. Signposted partners also provide customers with support, at no cost to either themselves or PPDG.

3e) Promoting Diversity & Equality

PPDG have arranged a Supply Chain Network that is made up of a range of organisations that align very closely to their own commitment to Diversity and Equality. Arrangements meet the needs very effectively of a range of diverse customers and PPDG ensure through review strategies ensure that customers are supported regardless of background. PPDG have reviewed and made suitable changes to their supply chain to ensure marginalised groups are supported. PPDG's revised approach via the SCMF will continue to support the validation of Supply Chain Partners commitments to diversity and equality. Partners are required to submit details relating to diversity and inclusion which is subsequently monitored at monthly review meetings and Supply Chain Partners have developed and submitted diversity and equality action plans.

PPDG continue to develop appropriate methods to ensure that an effective monitoring and promotion of diversity and equality throughout the supply chain takes place. PPDG use management information well, which helps them with their bids for future tendering opportunities and for helping them to develop their current supply chain arrangements to meet commissioners and customers' needs. Partners with specialist skills and understanding in diversity and equality are encouraged to deliver sessions to the supply chain at partnership forums.

4 Review

4a) Supply chain review

As identified at the previous assessment, the systematic collection and use of feedback from all stakeholder groups is insufficiently developed to inform and improve practices. PPDG collects a range of feedback on an informal basis from its partners via its performance management activities, however proactive and systematic collection from a range of stakeholders is not developed enough to collect views of other stakeholders, including customers. A recently implemented approach to surveying stakeholders has collected views

from Supply Chain Partners and is due to collect customer feedback, however this is underdeveloped and as such it fails to inform and contribute to improvements.

Good news stories regarding the customer journey continue to be collected by PPDG at performance management reviews and these are collected and shared with partners via weekly communications logs and the PPDG intranet. These successes are celebrated and shared with all partners. Customer complaints and compliments are tracked through a clear process which is overseen by an experienced manager to resolution. PPDG participate fully in external auditing and assessment activities, such as Ofsted inspections and DWP Provider Assessment Tests (PAT), the results of which they use to inform and improve practices.

PPDG are efficient in collecting views that contribute to their own self-assessment process, however PPDG need to consider a more robust approach to collecting the views of its Supply Chain Partners and ensure that it is both sufficiently inclusive and leads to continuous improvements. PPDG have a very realistic view of themselves, which was demonstrated in the accuracy of the self-assessment questionnaire submitted in preparation of the Merlin assessment. PPDG had identified the majority of the areas for improvement identified by the Merlin Standard assessment team and had already put in place actions and activities to make these improvements.

PPDG keep Supply Chain Partners informed of wider social policy objectives via the Supply chain managers who regularly communicate with partners, the review and revision of appropriate partners' suitability to deliver against procurer and commissioner objectives allow PPDG to ensure that changes are made and supply chain partner activities are strategically aligned.

PPDG have a number of positive initiatives in place to improve the community within which it works, such as a 'Give As You Earn' scheme and encouraging volunteering for staff which is promoted to the Supply Chain Network in an active manner via its newsletters and extranet.

PPDG are very effective in ensuring through the design and review of supply chain activities have a positive impact on external stakeholders and during the assessment were able to provide a good range of case studies to demonstrate how the activities have impacted positively on its customers. A number of customers, particularly those participating on NOMS contracts gain useful skills in employability, job search and improvements to their literacy skills. PPDG use a range of health and well-being interventions with customers, which also impacts positively on customers.

Conclusion

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

It was evident to the assessment team that since their last assessment PPDG has committed fully to the management of its Supply Chain Partners and continues to develop their approach, striving to a more consistent and structured model.