



THE MERLIN STANDARD

2018

A GUIDE FOR ORGANISATIONS MANAGING A SUPPLY CHAIN

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1. INTRODUCTION

This guide is for Organisations that are:

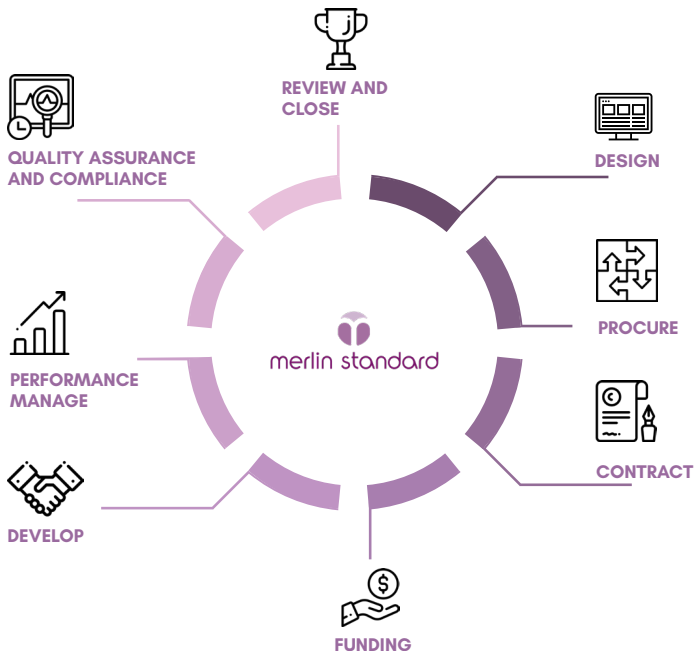
- Working with the Merlin Standard to improve their supply chain management activities, and / or preparing for a Merlin Standard assessment or review; and / or
- Engaged as a Supply Chain Partner and want to understand how the Merlin Standard supports the development of sustainable excellence, and positive partnership working within supply chains.

It should be read in conjunction with the Merlin Standard which includes descriptors of the 8 Principles and 36 Criteria against which Organisations are assessed.

The Merlin Standard

The purpose of the Merlin Standard is to support the development, recognition and promotion of sustainable excellence, and positive partnership working within supply chains.

It is built upon 8 fundamental and integrated Principles:



The Criteria

Within each Principle there are a number of Criteria which provide a structured approach to assessing the overall effectiveness of supply chain management. There are 36 Criteria in total which underpin the assessment process used by Merlin Assessors, as well as guiding any self-assessment activity.



2. PEOPLE INVOLVED

There are a number of people and organisations involved in delivering the Merlin Standard as well as those who are engaged in any assessment against the Standard.



**MAB
Advisory Board**



Department
for Work &
Pensions

**Owners of the
Standard**



**Provider of Merlin
Assessments**

- ✓ **The Merlin Advisory Board (MAB):**
Chaired by DWP, the MAB is an advisory and consultation group made up of representatives from interested parties. For current members, please refer to the Merlin website:
www.merlinstandard.com.
- ✓ **The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP):**
The Merlin Standard is owned by DWP who were instrumental in developing the original Standard back in 2012 to support their commissioning strategy when introducing the concept of the Prime Provider to deliver the Work Programme.
- ✓ **Assessment Services:**
appointed by DWP to deliver the Merlin Standard Assessment and Accreditation Service, and to set and promote a standard of excellence in supply chain management. They uphold the Standard and maintain the Register of Quality Assured Merlin Assessors. Within Assessment Services people fulfil a number of important roles:
 - **Customer Service Specialist:** administer Merlin Assessments and are available to answer queries regarding the Standard and assessment process.
 - **Registered Merlin Lead Assessor:** the person appointed by Assessment Services to work with the Organisation to plan the assessment and to lead the Merlin Assessment.
 - **Registered Merlin Team Assessor:** individuals who will join the Merlin Lead Assessor to undertake any formal assessment against the Merlin Standard.
 - **Merlin Assessment Team:** as a minimum, a Merlin Lead Assessor and one Team Assessor will undertake each assessment.

NB: Assessment Services will endeavour to identify any potential conflicts of interest before assigning Assessors to become members of the Assessment Team. However, if the Organisation has any concerns about any member of the allocated Assessment Team they should contact Assessment Services immediately.



0044 (0) 20 3880 5059



merlin@assessmentservices.com



www.assessmentservices.com



Commissioner:

This is, for example, a Government Department such as DWP, the Cabinet Office, the Education, Skills & Funding Agency (ESFA), or a non-statutory partnership body such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, Commissioning Councils within local government etc.

All are responsible for planning, purchasing and monitoring the delivery of goods and/or services through quality assured third-party organisations.



The Organisation:

Sometimes referred to as the Prime, is the **legal entity** with whom a Commissioner has contracted to deliver the required goods or services and is using a supply chain to do this.

It is the Organisation that is assessed against the Merlin Standard to evaluate the effectiveness of their supply chain management.



The Organisation's Assessment Coordinator:

The Assessment Coordinator has a pivotal role in managing the assessment process for the Organisation being assessed, and careful consideration should be given to who undertakes this role. The individual who fulfils this role should have a good knowledge of the Organisation and its approach to supply chain management, and also needs effective planning skills.

The Assessment Coordinator will be the key point of contact for the Merlin Lead Assessor and will have responsibility for the management of the assessment process from the Organisation's point of view.

This includes arranging the Pre-assessment Planning discussions, timetabling the onsite assessment schedule with Supply Chain Partners and employees, ensuring that the assessment is running smoothly, receiving feedback from the Merlin Lead Assessor at the end of each day and arranging the presentation of additional evidence should the Assessment Team require it.



The Staff of the Organisation:

During an assessment, evidence will be gathered through interviews with a selection of staff involved in the management and delivery of the Organisation's supply chain activities.

See Pages 20 & 21 for further details.



Supply Chain Partners:

These are businesses, individuals, charities, colleges, training providers etc. who are:

- presently actively engaged in the supply chain;
- potential members of the supply chain and are going through the procurement process; or
- past members of the supply chain leaving it within the last 12 months.

See Pages 9 & 17 for further details.

3.

TIMESCALES FOR ASSESSMENT

It is up to each Organisation to choose when they wish to undertake an initial assessment, taking account of any contractual or Commissioner requirement for the Organisation to be assessed within a particular timescale.

As a minimum, an online booking form needs to be submitted by the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator **at least 12 weeks before** any evidence gathering activity takes place. This can be found at the following web page: [Merlin Standard Online Booking Form](#).

On the booking form, Organisations can request preferred dates they wish the evidence gathering activity to take place - Assessment Services will endeavour to meet these wherever possible. However, depending upon demand for specific dates it may not be possible to accommodate all requests. The more notice given, the more likely it is that Assessment Services will be able to accommodate specific dates.

There is a three-week window either side of an Organisation's last onsite assessment date in which their review assessment needs to take place. However, Organisations can come forward for a review assessment at any time within the 2-year assessment cycle.

On receipt of a booking form, Assessment Services will notify the Organisation's nominated Merlin Lead Assessor of its receipt within two working days; the Merlin Lead Assessor will be in contact with the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator within a further two working days to make arrangements to discuss the planning process.





Timescales Involved in a Typical Assessment:

- ✓ A booking form requesting assessment needs to be submitted to Assessment Services at least 12 weeks before the start of any assessment evidence gathering.
- ✓ From submitting a booking form to the completion of the assessment and the outcome report being published on the Merlin website will be between 15 and 18 weeks.
- ✓ The time required for the evidence gathering activity are dependent on a number of factors including the:
 - Number of the Organisation’s past, present and potential UK based Supply Chain Partners;
 - Number of staff engaged in the management and delivery of supply chain activities;
 - Complexity of the Organisation including the number of different supply chains, geographical spread of Supply Chain Partners etc.;
 - Type of engagement and contract arrangements between the Organisation and their Supply Chain Partners; and
 - The number of responses by the Supply Chain Partners to the Merlin Standard Online Survey.

4.

THE SCOPE OF ASSESSMENTS

Any legal entity (“the Organisation”) that manages a supply chain can be assessed against the Merlin Standard.

The assessment and any subsequent accreditation awarded is not ring-fenced to any parameter such as contract type, area, programme, etc. It is the legal entity that is assessed – not just one aspect of that entity.

Organisations wishing to have an assessment that covers their supply chain management activities outside of the UK should contact Assessment Services directly to discuss.

The views of Supply Chain Partners at all stages of their engagement with the Organisation and across all tiers of the network will be captured and considered as part of the Assessment.



PAST



PRESENT



POTENTIAL

✓ **Past Supply Chain Partners:**

These are businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities etc. that have left the supply chain within the previous 12 months of the Organisation booking the assessment. Reasons for leaving could include being managed out for performance reasons, the Supply Chain Partner choosing to remove itself from an active supply chain, or the Supply Chain Partner leaving the supply chain due to a contract ending.

✓ **Present Supply Chain Partners:**

Businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities etc. that:

- Offer the full range of products or services are contracted for any Commissioner. If any of these Supply Chain Partners have their own supply chain delivering goods or services contracted by the Organisation, these will also be included within any Merlin assessment;
- Have a contract or service level agreement to deliver bespoke services;
- Deliver and are paid for one-off services as requested, but do not have any ongoing contract or service level agreement in place;
- Do not necessarily have anything formal in place such as a service level agreement but are part of the supply chain offering support services such as debt advice, housing advice, drug & alcohol support etc.; and / or
- Are engaged in second-tier subcontracting – those organisations are also considered as part of the Prime’s supply chain.

✓ **Potential Supply Chain Partners:**

These are businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities etc. who have engaged with the Organisation either orally or in writing about the potential of joining the supply chain. They must have done more than just fill in an Expression of Interest; there needs to be evidence of them being engaged in the procurement process and the beginnings of a dialogue between them and the Organisation.

The scope of the Supply Chain Partner includes all tiers of delivery. For example:

Tier 1:

The Prime Contractor (Organisation) with whom the commissioner/procurer has exchanged contracts and who is working with Supply Chain Partners in order to deliver the contract(s).

Tier 2:

Businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities etc., contracting with the Organisation to deliver 'end to end' provision. *

Tier 3:

Businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities etc., who are typically specialists in their field delivering one-off services on behalf of the Organisation and/or Tier 2 Supply Chain Partners as and when required. They will have a contract/service level agreement/purchase order in place and may also provide spot purchase/ad-hoc delivery.

Tier 4:

Businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities etc., providing referral services. No contract, service level agreement etc., is in place and are likely to be considered as 'working in partnership' with the Organisation and the supply chain network.

*These businesses, enterprises, individuals, charities, may have their own supply chain delivering on behalf of the Organisation, and if so, these Supply Chain Partners will also be included within the Merlin Assessment. They may also choose to apply for Merlin Accreditation in their own right.

The Organisation coming forward for assessment is required to provide Assessment Services with a full list of all past, present and potential Supply Chain Partners, regardless of contract and Tier, and not just those involved in delivering government funded contracts. A Supply Chain Partner Proforma Spreadsheet will be provided by Assessment Services to enable all the required information to be provided.

All identified Supply Chain Partners need to be informed by the Organisation that the assessment is taking place, that they will receive an email from Assessment Services inviting them to complete the Merlin Standard Online Survey, and that they may be called upon to be interviewed by a member of the Merlin Assessment Team, but be reassured of the confidential nature of the evidence gathering activity of the assessment.

5. FEES

Predominantly, the fees associated with a Merlin assessment are based on the number of the Organisation's past (including any past Supply Chain Partners who were involved in, or embarked on joining a supply chain for a contract that is no longer operating), present and potential Supply Chain Partners.

Number of Past, Present & Potential Supply Chain Partners	Fees are inclusive of Assessor Expenses and a Full Report	Fees are inclusive of Assessor Expenses and a Compact Report
1-4	£3325.00	£2800.00
5-14	£4025.00	£3500.00
15-19	£4375.00	£3850.00
20-24	£4725.00	£4200.00
25-34	£5425.00	£4900.00
35-49	£5775.00	£5250.00
50-100	£6125.00	£5600.00
101-150	£7175.00	£6650.00
151-175	£7525.00	£7000.00
176-199	£7875.00	£7350.00
200 - 250	£8225.00	£7700.00
251-350	£10325.00	£9625.00
351-500	£11725.00	£11025.00
500+	Price on Application	Price on Application

All fees are subject to VAT at the current rate. See Page 24 for information about the different report formats.

NB: Before your fees are confirmed other considerations will be taken into account including:

- The number of staff employed by the Organisation to support the supply chain network;
- The number and diversity of the supply chain(s);
- The geographical spread of the supply chain(s); and
- Should fewer than 25% of Supply Chain Partners respond to the Merlin Standard Online Survey, the scope of the verbal evidence gathering activity may need to be increased, and subsequently the assessment fee increased accordingly.

The Merlin Standard Booking Form and subsequent Supply Chain Partner Proforma Spreadsheet (see Step 3 Page 16 below) asks the Organisation to provide details about the extent of their supply chain(s), their location, the number of employees engaged in supporting Supply Chain Partners etc., all of which will form the basis of the initial quotation for the assessment fee.

Payment of Fees:

Once the fee banding has been confirmed, a sales order will be sent to the invoice contact nominated on the Merlin Standard Booking Form.

Fees are required to be paid **at least seven weeks before** the evidence gathering activity commencing and are subject to Assessment Services Terms and Conditions which can be downloaded from the Assessment Services web page:

<http://assessmentsservices.com/aboutus/> - policies.



6. COUNTDOWN TO ASSESSMENT - THE 10 KEY STEPS

The following 10 key steps need to be followed to ensure a successful assessment and ongoing accreditation process:



COUNTDOWN TO Evidence Gathering

WHAT TAKES PLACE

Step 1: Pre-Assessment Activity

Evidence Gathering
- 12 Weeks

Step 2: Online Booking Form Submitted

Evidence Gathering
-11 Weeks

Initial Planning Discussions Commence

Evidence Gathering
-10 Weeks

Evidence Gathering
-9 Weeks

Step 3: Supply Chain Partners Engaged & Informed

Evidence Gathering
-8 Weeks

Merlin Online Survey Issued to Supply Chain Partners

Evidence Gathering
-7 Weeks

Assessment Fees Paid

Evidence Gathering
-6 Weeks

Step 4: Self-Assessment Questionnaire Submitted
Merlin Online Survey Closed

Evidence Gathering
-5 Weeks

Step 5: Detailed Assessment Evidence Gathering
Planning Commences

Evidence Gathering
-4 Weeks

Evidence Gathering
-3 Weeks

Evidence Gathering
-2 Weeks

Evidence Gathering Schedule Completed

Evidence Gathering
-1 Weeks

Pre-Assessment Notes Shared

Evidence Gathering Assessment Week

Step 6: Evidence Gathering Takes Place

Final Day

Step 7: Assessment Outcome Decision

Evidence Gathering
+1 Week

Report Produced

Evidence Gathering
+2 Weeks

Report Quality Assured

Evidence Gathering
+3 Weeks

Report Ready for Factual Accuracy Check

Evidence Gathering
+4 Weeks

Report Published on Merlin Website

Evidence Gathering
+5 Weeks

Assessment Services Feedback Questionnaire Issued

Evidence Gathering Assessment
+6 Weeks

Step 8: Continuous Improvement Planning

Ongoing

Step 9: Ongoing Self-Review / Notification of Changes

24 Months on from Achieving
the Merlin Standard

Step 10: Two Year Assessment Review Takes Place



Step 1: Pre-Assessment Activity

Before making a booking requesting to be assessed against the Merlin Standard, the Organisation may wish to consider undertaking some form of self-assessment activity to enable them to gauge how the requirements of the Standard are being met – or not.

This activity is best undertaken with the support and engagement of Supply Chain Partners and can, for example, include:

- ✓ Listening to the pre-recorded webinar that will be available via the Merlin Website from 23rd January 2019;
- ✓ Arranging focus group meetings with a mix of Supply Chain Partners to get their direct feedback on how they believe you meet the requirements of the Standard;
- ✓ Undertaking a self-assessment using the same assessment and scoring Criteria used by Merlin Assessors; or
- ✓ Sending your Supply Chain Partners a questionnaire to get their feedback on your approach to supply chain management.

Alternatively, Organisations can look to engage an external Advisor to give an independent view of their current position against the Standard.

In the interest of impartiality, as the assessment and accreditation body Assessment Services cannot offer, provide or deliver products or services that are aimed at assisting customers to attain or maintain Merlin Standard accreditation. This is to ensure that Assessment Services can demonstrate a fully transparent and impartial assessment and accreditation service.

However, a range of individuals/organisations offer consultancy/ advisory support services for Organisations wishing to achieve the Merlin Standard. For example, all Merlin Lead Assessors work in an advisory capacity for Excellence Squared Ltd.



0044 (0) 20 3880 5059



advisory@excellencesquared.com



www.excellencesquared.com

For details of individuals/organisations offering consultancy/advisory support, please contact Assessment Services.





Step 2: Online Booking Form Submitted

The booking form is a key document as it enables Assessment Services to scope the assessment in terms of the assessment team, fees and timescales.

As a minimum, an online booking form needs to be submitted by the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator **at least 12 weeks before** any evidence gathering activity takes place. This can be found at the following webpage: [Merlin Standard Online Booking Form](#).

Once submitted, Assessment Services will formally allocate a Merlin Lead Assessor who will contact the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator to begin to gain an understanding regarding any specific requirements, the make-up of the supply chain(s) and when the assessment needs to take place etc.

Preferred dates for the evidence gathering activity to take place can be suggested by the Organisation, and Assessment Services will endeavour to meet these requests wherever possible. However, it may not be possible to accommodate all requests depending upon demand for specific dates. The more notice provided, the more likely Assessment Services will be able to accommodate these requests.

Assessment Services endeavour to identify any potential conflicts of interest before assigning Assessors to an Organisation. However, if the Organisation has any concerns about any member of the Assessment Team, these should be raised with Assessment Services immediately.



Step 3: Supply Chain Partners Engaged & Informed

The Organisation must ensure that **ALL** past, present and potential Supply Chain Partners are made aware that a Merlin Standard assessment is being planned and the date the assessment is scheduled to take place. Supply Chain Partners can, for example, be signposted to the Merlin website for further information.

They need to be informed that they will **all** be receiving an invitation to complete the confidential Merlin Standard Online Survey from Assessment Services and **may** be invited to further contribute to the assessment through an oral discussion/interview with a member of the Merlin Assessment Team.

Planning the Involvement of Supply Chain Partners:

The Organisation's Assessment Coordinator will be provided with a Supply Chain Partner Proforma Spreadsheet to populate the details of ALL their past, present and potential Supply Chain Partners. These details are used by:

- ✓ Assessment Services to email out the Merlin Standard Online Survey; and
- ✓ The Merlin Lead Assessor to select a representative sample of Supply Chain Partners to be invited to talk to a member of the Merlin Assessment Team. The Merlin Lead Assessor will ensure that this sample is reflective of the Organisation's supply chain activities. The sample will include the past, present and potential Supply Chain Partners.

To ensure confidentiality, the Merlin Standard Online Survey is sent to all Supply Chain Partners directly by Assessment Services. The Assessment Coordinator needs to consider who within each Supply Chain Partner organisation the Survey should be sent to and ensure that this information, together with an up-to-date email address and contact information is included on the Supply Chain Partner Spreadsheet.

The Organisation's Assessment Coordinator will be notified when the Merlin Standard Online Survey will be sent to the Supply Chain Partners who will then be given 14 working days to complete and return the survey to Assessment Services.

NB: It is expected that all Supply Chain Partners will automatically opt to take part in the assessment. Any that choose to opt out need to do so in writing by informing both the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator and Assessment Services via the email address merlin@assessmentservices.com.





Step 4: Self-Assessment Completed & Submitted

The Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) contains a series of 36 fields – one for each of the Merlin Criterion. In completing the SAQ, the Organisation should provide an accurate, factual, honest and realistic description of how they perform against the requirements of each of the Criterion.

It is perfectly acceptable to reference other sections of the SAQ where information might otherwise be duplicated (for example where a single activity might be relevant to more than one Criterion).

It is vital that the Merlin Assessment Team have a clear understanding of how the supply chain(s) work and that they can form an understanding of the Organisation and its approach to supply chain management before the evidence gathering commences.

The following guidance has been created to support the production of an effective SAQ. However, the Assessment Coordinator should also discuss any questions with their Merlin Lead Assessor. The Organisation should:

- Read all the questions before starting to populate the SAQ;
- Describe and evaluate supply chain management activities in relation to the requirements of the Criteria within the Standard – ensuring the key words within each criterion have been answered;
- Highlight areas of strengths as well as areas that may need improvement, and improvement plans that are in place;
- Provide examples rather than just descriptions of the processes used;
- Provide references to documents or other sources of evidence that may be useful for the Assessment Team to consider during the evidence gathering activity; and
- Keep the word count to **no more than 300 per Criterion** where possible.

NB: It is recommended that the Organisation drafts their response to five or six of the criteria and then shares this with their Merlin Lead Assessor who will provide feedback on the narrative.

In the case of an Organisation undertaking a review assessment, consideration could be given to improvements made as a result of the feedback provided in previous assessments.



As part of the self-assessment, the Organisation needs to score each Principle using the following five-point scale:

- ① **Insufficient Evidence** – Insufficient credible evidence to support this Criterion
- ② **Limited Evidence** – Significant areas for development identified
- ③ **Satisfactory** – A balance of areas for development and strengths identified
- ④ **Good** – Strengths and some satisfactory areas identified
- ⑤ **Excellent** – Significant strengths and areas of excellence identified

The Merlin Lead Assessor will confirm with the Assessment Coordinator the date by which the SAQ needs to be submitted.



Step 5: Detailed Assessment Evidence Gathering Planning Commences

Using the survey results, the information shared in the SAQ and the contract information provided in the Supply Chain Partner Spreadsheet, the Lead Assessor will begin to plan the evidence gathering process and provide an indication of the interviewees: the Organisation's staff, and Supply Chain Partners.

Pre-Assessment Planning: Whilst completing the SAQ the Assessment Coordinator should also be in contact with the Merlin Lead Assessor to arrange the pre-assessment planning activities. The information/documentation the Organisation may be asked to share with the Merlin Lead Assessor as part of this pre-assessment planning activity can, for example, include:

- An organisation chart;
- An overview of the supply chain delivery model; and / or
- Details of any key terminology which is unique to the Organisation (and not previously included in the SAQ).

The Merlin Lead Assessor will discuss with the Assessment Coordinator details of the evidence gathering activity and will ensure that the assessment approach is clear and understood. They will explain the process and what is involved. They will also clarify responsibilities and note any particular requirements that may impact on the assessment approach.



Planning the Evidence Gathering

- ✓ **The Involvement of Supply Chain Partners:** The representative sample of Supply Chain Partners invited to talk to a member of the Merlin Assessment Team will take into account the size of delivery, nature of provision and geographical area.

It is the Organisation's responsibility to ensure that Supply Chain Partner representatives know what to expect during the Merlin Assessment and that they make themselves available for interview.

- ✓ **The Involvement of the Organisation's Staff:** Interviews of the Organisation's staff are also a vital part of the evidence gathering activity, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the Merlin Lead Assessor to decide who exactly needs to be interviewed in order for the Merlin Assessment Team to gather a robust understanding of the approach taken to supply chain management.

However, there needs to be close collaboration between the Assessment Coordinator and the Merlin Lead Assessor to ensure that the right mix of people are made available for interview.

Typically, staff who fulfil the following roles or can explain how the following is accomplished will be interviewed:

- Communications & Culture
- Complaints Process
- Compliance
- Contract Management
- Contracting
- Environmental Sustainability
- Equality & Diversity
- Feedback Activities
- Finance / Funding Arrangements
- Health & Safety
- HR (TUPE)
- Information Advice & Guidance
- Impact on Wider Social Objectives etc.
- Information Security
- Legislative Requirements
- Management Information
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Performance Management & Improvement
- Quality Assurance
- Safeguarding
- Senior Leadership
- Supply Chain Design
- Supply Chain Development
- Supply Chain Management
- Supply Chain Partner Selection.

- ✓ **Scheduling the Interviews:** The following should be taken into consideration when beginning to plan the evidence gathering interviews.
 - Unless requested by the Organisation, or the Merlin Lead Assessor has any reason to request otherwise, all interviews undertaken by the Merlin Team Assessor(s) will be carried out over the telephone by Skype, GoToMeeting or similar from the Assessor's own office.
 - In the majority of cases, it is anticipated that the Merlin Lead Assessor will be on-site with the Organisation at their head office (or where the feedback meeting will be held).
 - The opening meeting will be held via Skype, GoToMeeting or similar and wherever possible all members of the Merlin Assessment Team will take part
 - Both Merlin Lead and Team Assessor(s) will have the opportunity to interview. both representatives from the supply chain and staff of the Organisation.
 - The Merlin Team Assessor(s) will travel to the Merlin Lead Assessor for the consensus scoring meeting which will be followed by the feedback to the Organisation.
 - Wherever possible, the most senior person engaged in the delivery of the contact(s) / leading on the supply chain strategy should be interviewed
 - Interviewees will need to be informed in advance of the nature, length and overall

purpose of their interview.

- Specific time slots will need to be booked for each interview. Therefore, interviewees will need a degree of prior notice.
- Confidentiality is a vital ingredient of successful interviewing, and when booking time with people, care should be taken to book private rooms that may be needed in advance.
- Both the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners should be encouraged to consider contingencies in case their chosen interviewee is unavailable on the day(s) of the evidence gathering activity, or telephone numbers provided are engaged etc.

Assessment Schedules / Timetables: The Merlin Lead Assessor will discuss the outline of the assessment schedule with the Assessment Coordinator as well as provide guidance regarding activities that will require incorporating, timings of interviews, reflection time and end of day feedback, etc.

The Assessment Coordinator should continuously liaise with the Merlin Lead Assessor to ensure that the schedule is appropriate and that it is **finalised no later than two weeks before** the start of the evidence gathering activity.

Pre-Assessment Notes: At least a week before the evidence gathering activity commences, the Merlin Lead Assessor will share their Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) with the Assessment Coordinator and the Merlin Team Assessors.





Step 6: Evidence Gathering Takes Place

In support of the SAQ and the responses to the Merlin Standard Online Survey, the majority of other evidence gathered will be through the interviews. The Assessment Team will use what they see, hear and experience with the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners to inform them whether the Criteria of the Standard are being applied in practice.

The evidence gathering activity undertaken by the Assessment Team include:

- Discussions with staff from the Organisation working with the supply chain;
- Discussions with representatives of the supply chain at both an operational and strategic level; and
- A review of relevant documents and / or systems and processes as requested by the Merlin Lead Assessor.

There is no need to produce a portfolio of evidence however, the Merlin Lead Assessor will request documentation where they believe this is necessary to support the evidence findings. Any evidence reviewed will be either left with the Assessment Coordinator or destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

Notes will be taken by the Merlin Assessment Team during the evidence gathering activity but remain confidential. On completion of the assessment, all notes relevant to the assessment are kept securely by Assessment Services and destroyed after 12 months.

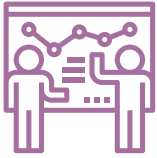
The Merlin Assessment Team will endeavour to ensure there is minimum disruption to the Organisation and the Supply Chain Partners; however, they will need to gather sufficient evidence for each of the Criteria of the Standard to be able to make an effective assessment decision. The onus is on the Merlin Assessment Team to seek and collect the evidence with the support of the Assessment Coordinator of the Organisation.

Assessor Support: It is important to ensure that each Merlin Team Assessor (regardless of their location during the assessment) has someone to directly liaise with. This might be the Assessment Coordinator; however, it could be an additional member of staff if that is more suitable. This is to ensure that should there be any problems or any concerns with regards to interviews, each Assessor has a point of contact for help and support.

Ongoing Feedback: The Merlin Assessment Team will also require time to be built into the assessment schedule for them to have an end of day feedback discussion together. Consideration could be made to providing a suitable means for this discussion to take place, for example, conference call facilities.

Following this discussion, the Merlin Lead Assessor will feedback to the Assessment Coordinator with regards to how the assessment schedule has been going, how the assessment is progressing, as well as identifying any additional evidence that the Merlin Assessment Team would benefit from. This may be through the provision of supporting evidence and/or the identification of further individuals to interview. It is the responsibility of the Assessment Coordinator and the Organisation to provide the additional evidence requested where available.





Step 7: Assessment Decision & Reporting

On the last day of the evidence gathering activity, the Merlin Assessment Team will meet to discuss the evidence presented and agree on the assessment outcome. Following this meeting, the Merlin Lead Assessor, with the support of members of the Assessment Team, will deliver the final feedback meeting to the Organisation.

The feedback will be constructive, supportive and tailored to the Organisation and is one of the most valuable aspects of the assessment. It will include the outcome of the assessment as well as strengths, suggested areas for improvement and, if the outcome is 'unsatisfactory', any areas that require further development to meet the requirements of the Merlin Standard.

Wherever possible, all members of the Merlin Assessment Team will be present in person at this meeting. If for any reason they are unable to attend they will join the meeting via Skype, GoToMeeting or similar. It is down to the Organisation to decide who they wish to attend. It is important that the right people are invited, and the Organisation should give this careful thought from the very beginning of the process. For example, it may be beneficial for those individuals who have responsibility for leading on supply chain management activities to attend – either in person or virtually.



While the outcome of the assessment will usually be provided on the last evidence gathering day, there may be occasions where the decision is not straightforward and the Merlin Lead Assessor may wish to discuss the assessment further and in greater detail with Assessment Services. In these rare circumstances, the Organisation will receive a decision within five working days of the last assessment day.

In all cases, verbal feedback from the assessment will be followed by a written report, regardless of the assessment outcome. The assessment report will, after it has been quality assured by Assessment Services and reviewed by the Organisation for factual accuracy, be published on the Merlin Website and will be in the public domain.

All accreditation results are published, including where any changes to accreditation status are made, e.g. where accreditation is withdrawn or expired.

The Outcome of the Assessment: The Assessment Team use the following five-point scale scoring system to evaluate evidence gained during the assessment.

- ① **Insufficient Evidence** - The evidence from both the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners does not confirm that the requirements of this Criterion have been met.
- ② **Limited Evidence** - The evidence from both the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners confirms that the requirements described within the Criterion (behavioural and procedural) are being applied inconsistently or have not yet been in place for a sufficient amount of time to confirm that they are embedded and effective and as a result require significant improvement
- ③ **Satisfactory** - The evidence from both the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners confirms that the requirements described within the Criterion (behavioural and procedural) are being applied satisfactorily but would benefit from further development.
- ④ **Good** - The evidence from both the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners confirms that the requirements described within the Criterion (behavioural and procedural) are being applied consistently and are embedded. Any areas for further development are minimal.
- ⑤ **Excellent** - There is robust and consistent evidence from both the Organisation and Supply Chain Partners that confirms that the requirements described within the Criterion (behavioural and procedural) are embedded, applied creatively, innovatively and consistently, and are perceived as being over and above the norm.

Each Criterion is given a score, and the total score for each Principle is then simply converted into a percentage outcome score for that Principle.

Each Principle score contributes equally to the overall outcome and percentage score of the assessment as described below:



Excellent 85%+

The Organisation has exhibited behaviours that demonstrate significant strengths and areas of best practice in relation to the requirements of the Merlin Standard.



Good 70% - 84%

The Organisation has exhibited behaviours that fully meet the requirements of the Merlin Standard and some areas of good practice are demonstrated.



Satisfactory 55% - 69%

The Organisation fully demonstrates the behaviours that are required to meet the Merlin Standard with areas for improvement being identified.



Unsatisfactory 0% - 54%

The Organisation has areas that are not currently meeting the requirements of the Merlin Standard and there are areas that require improving in order to meet the Merlin Standard.

It is possible to have limited evidence for one specific Criterion but excel in all other Criteria within an individual Principle, and as a result will still achieve a positive outcome overall.

However, if a score of between 0% and 54% is achieved for **one or more Principle**, the assessment outcome will be **'Unsatisfactory'**, as it is imperative that the Organisation is demonstrating positive behaviours across all Principles to gain accreditation to the Merlin Standard.

Impact of an Unsatisfactory Initial Assessment Outcome: In the event an Organisation does not achieve at least a Satisfactory outcome at their initial assessment, they will be required to produce an action plan to identify what, how and by when they will undertake actions to correct any unsatisfactory areas identified.

- ✔ The Merlin Lead Assessor will work with the Assessment Coordinator to ensure that the action plan is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.
- ✔ The action plan should be submitted to the Merlin Lead Assessor no later than three weeks after the date the report was published by Assessment Services.
- ✔ The Merlin Lead Assessor will then review the action plan and once satisfied that it will address the areas for development, they will submit a copy to Assessment Services. Should the Merlin Lead Assessor feel that the action plan is not fully reflective of the areas of the Standard that have been identified as requiring development, they will provide constructive feedback to help improvement.
- ✔ The Organisation can re-apply for assessment at any time but should be mindful of any contractual obligations.
- ✔ Once ready for reassessment the Organisation will need to complete and submit a new Merlin Standard Booking Form, forward an updated copy of their action plan to the Merlin Lead Assessor (who will forward a copy on to Assessment Services) together with an updated SAQ to begin the assessment process.
- ✔ There is no limitation as to how many times an Organisation can undertake an initial assessment; however, there may be implications with the commissioning body (if relevant).



Impact of an Unsatisfactory Review Assessment Outcome: In the event an Organisation does not achieve at least a Satisfactory outcome at their 2-year review assessment, they enter a 'Retaining Recognition' stage.

- ✓ This requires them to produce an action plan to identify what, how and by when they will undertake actions to correct any unsatisfactory areas identified **AND** have a full assessment **within six months from the date the unsatisfactory outcome decision was made.**
- ✓ If the outcome of the Retaining Recognition assessment is still **Unsatisfactory**, accreditation to the Merlin Standard will be withdrawn and the Organisation will have to reapply for an initial assessment.

Assessment Feedback Report: The Merlin Lead Assessor will complete a report of the Assessment Team's findings. Organisations have the choice of report formats.

A Full Report:

This report format contains:

- ✓ A short narrative around the evidence collected against each of the 36 Criteria;
- ✓ Examples of excellent practice identified by the Assessment Team indicated within the report under the heading **Areas of Significant Strength;**
- ✓ Conversely, where limited evidence was found, these Criteria will be reported under the heading **Areas Requiring Significant Development;**
- ✓ Areas that meet the Standard, but may benefit from further development will be included in the section headed **Areas for Improvement;**
- ✓ The overall outcome of the assessment and conclusion.

A Compact Report: This report format, available for review assessments only, contains all of the above except the short narrative around the evidence collected against each of the 36 Criteria.

Should the overall outcome be 'Unsatisfactory', both report formats will also include clear areas for development to support the journey to accreditation.

In all cases, a draft copy of the final report will be sent to the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator before publication to provide an opportunity to check it for factual accuracy.

Achievement Certificate: All Organisations that meet the stringent requirements of the Merlin Standard have certainly achieved something worth celebrating. Consequently, Organisations either gaining or maintaining accreditation will receive a Merlin Accreditation Certificate stating the outcome level achieved.

Case Studies: Assessment Services will ask Organisations to produce a case-study highlighting their experiences of working with and being assessed against the Merlin Standard.

Additionally, Assessment Services may contact the Organisations to invite them to participate in a recorded interview discussion to promote the benefit(s) gained from undertaking the Merlin assessment.

Assessment Feedback Questionnaire: The Organisation will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on their assessment experience. This feedback will help Assessment Services to improve the assessment process.



Step 8: Continuous Improvement Planning

It is recommended that following the receipt of the final report Organisations review the feedback given and consider the areas for improvement highlighted. Any actions identified should be included within the Organisation's current continuous improvement plans, or a specific Merlin plan can be created.

Consideration should also be given to discussing the feedback with members of the supply chain and gaining their input into any areas for improvement and/or development.





Step 9: Ongoing Self-Review and/or Notification of Organisation Changes

The Standard, and as such accreditation, should be used as a continuous improvement tool. It is recommended that the Organisation continually reviews its practices against the requirements of the Standard to ensure that supply chain management activity continually improves and develops.

- ✓ **Strategic Review Assessments:** To maintain the conditions of accreditation, Merlin Accredited Organisations are required to notify Assessment Services of any major changes within their organisation and/or supply chain management practices such as:
- Mergers or Acquisitions
 - Changes in service delivery
 - Change of identity / legal ownership or structure
 - Additional significant contracts being awarded
 - Contracts being lost / ending
 - Feedback received from third parties which indicate that the integrity of the Standard is at risk
 - Changes of personnel at a strategic level
 - Changes which could impact upon the values, strategy or culture of the organisation.

Each change will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis however it is anticipated that in the majority of mergers and takeovers a full initial assessment of the new legal identity will need to take place within six months of the date of the change taking place.

If on completion of an '**Organisational Changes**' proforma by the accredited Organisation (which can be accessed via the Merlin website: [Merlin Documents Download](#)) Assessment Services believes that the change does not require a full initial assessment because the makeup, working relationships, procedures, delivery methodology, contract levels and financial arrangements with the Supply Chain Partners should not materially change, a **Strategic Review Assessment** will be undertaken.

The purpose of any Strategic Review Assessment is to gain clarification and confirmation from Supply Chain Partners that the associated change process was communicated and implemented effectively and what impact, if any, this has had on their working/contractual relationship with the Organisation.

NB: If Assessment Services believe that a Strategic Review Assessment is required as opposed to a full initial assessment then it must take place within three to six months of the change taking place. If this is not completed and/or the outcome of a Strategic Review Assessment gives concern that any Criteria within the Merlin Standard are no longer being satisfactorily maintained, a full initial assessment needs to take place or the accreditation will be withdrawn.

The fee for a Strategic Review Assessment are £600 (+VAT) per day + associated expenses capped at £100 (+VAT) per evidence gathering day.



Step 10: Two Year Review Assessment

There is a three-week window either side of an Organisation's last onsite assessment date in which their review assessment needs to take place. However, Organisations can come forward for a review assessment at any time within the 2-year assessment cycle.

Each review will cover all aspects of the Standard and will be undertaken following the same process as an initial assessment.

The Merlin Assessment Team will also be looking to see how the Organisation has developed and improved since the last assessment. Whilst there may be an 'expectation' that the Organisation will improve, there may be a number of contributing factors that mean that a higher assessment outcome isn't necessarily achieved.

The Merlin Standard is a benchmark for good practice, and as such it is conceivable that what is recognised as excellence will change as that excellence becomes the norm. Organisations are therefore encouraged to continually improve their performance against the Merlin Standard.



7. CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

Assessment Services has a duty to maintain the integrity of the Standard and reserves the right to withdraw accreditation under certain circumstances. Changes in, or expiry of, accreditation will also be published.

✓ **Conditions of the Merlin Standard Accreditation:**

Holders of the Merlin Standard must:

- Maintain and if possible improve their services;
- Inform Assessment Services of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation);
- Inform Assessment Services of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation;
- Inform Assessment Services if they have a requirement to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation at any time;
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services and/or the Merlin Standard to be brought into disrepute;
- Only use the Merlin Standard for the confirmed legal entity and in accordance with the branding guidelines;
- Respond to requests for information as required by Assessment Services from time to time; or
- Participate in any assessment/review process in an open and honest manner, and enable Supply Chain Partners to do the same.

If any of these conditions are not maintained, Assessment Services may require either a Strategic Review Assessment (see Step 9 above) or full reassessment against the Merlin Standard to be undertaken.

✓ **Merlin Assessment Appeals Process:** The Merlin Standard has its own Complaints Policy and Appeals procedures. These can be found on the following page of the Merlin Website: merlinstandard.co.uk/ccc/.

There is also a Merlin Mediation process which can also be found on the following page of the Merlin Website: merlinstandard.co.uk/mediation/.

8. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following are just a selection of the frequently asked questions Assessment Services have received about the Merlin Standard. If you have questions about the Merlin Standard not covered in this Guide then please do not hesitate to contact Assessment Services.



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Q1 | What is the purpose of the Merlin Standard?

At its simplest, the purpose of the Merlin Standard is to develop, recognise and promote sustainable excellence and positive partnership working within supply chains.

Q2 | Can contracts included in any assessment be 'ring fenced'?

No. It has always been the case that it is the legal entity that is assessed and therefore all Supply Chain Partners have been included in a Merlin assessment. Organisations cannot limit the scope of partners involved. Organisations must provide a complete list of **ALL** their past, present and potential Supply Chain Partners and not to do so puts any accreditation at risk.

Q3 | What should an Organisation do when they want to be assessed?

To enable Assessment Services to start to work with an Organisation to plan their assessment, they need to complete an online booking form. This can be found at merlinstandard.co.uk/online-booking-form/

Once Assessment Services have received the booking form, a Merlin Lead Assessor will contact the Organisation to start the planning process.

NB: At least 12 weeks is required between submitting a booking form and when the evidence gathering starts.

Q4 | Who from an Organisation needs to be involved in the assessment process?

Information will typically be gathered through interviews with a selection of senior managers and other staff involved in the management and delivery of the supply chain activities. However, someone from within the Organisation needs to act as the Merlin Assessment Coordinator, who will liaise with the Merlin Lead Assessor to plan the assessment.

Q5 | What will Supply Chain Partners need to do to prepare for our assessment?

Nothing. However, it is the Organisation's responsibility to make sure all their Supply Chain Partners are aware of the forthcoming assessment and that they will be receiving an invitation to complete the confidential Merlin Standard Online Survey and may be called upon to talk to a member of the Merlin Assessment Team. It is however important that the Supply Chain Partner considers who is best placed to complete the Survey, and if asked to do so, talk to the Assessment Team.

NB: It is expected that all Supply Chain Partners will automatically opt to take part in the assessment. Any that choose to opt out need to do so in writing by informing both the Organisation's Assessment Coordinator and Assessment Services.

Q6 | Will the discussions between Supply Chain Partners and the Assessment Team be made public?

No. All evidence gathered will be received in confidence and will not be attributed to the Supply Chain Partner or individual interviewed at any time during the assessment process or in the feedback and reporting.

Q7 | How much written evidence is required – will the Assessment Team expect to see a portfolio of evidence?

There is no requirement to produce a portfolio of evidence. The Organisation has to complete a Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) explaining how what they do reflects the requirements of the Merlin Standard, and Supply Chain Partners are asked to complete the Merlin Standard Online Survey, but all other evidence is in the main gathered via interview.

However, some Organisations choose to share a range of key documented evidence with their Merlin Assessment Team: this may be through hard copy evidence that you already have printed or via your intranet / electronic systems.

Q8 | How is feedback provided?

For the Organisation to be kept fully aware of how the assessment is progressing, during the evidence gathering activity, the Merlin Lead Assessor will provide daily feedback to the appointed Assessment Coordinator. At the end of the assessment, there will be a final feedback meeting. If possible, it is helpful for the Organisation to decide during the planning process who will be attending.

Q9 | When will the outcome of an Assessment be known?

The outcome of the assessment will usually be provided on the last assessment day. However, there may be occasions where the decision is not straightforward and the Merlin Lead Assessor may wish to discuss the assessment further and in greater detail with Assessment Services. In these rare circumstances, the Organisation will receive a decision within five working days of the last assessment day.

Q10 | Is the report published in the public domain?

Yes. All reports of successful accreditation decisions will be published on the Merlin Website and will be available within the public domain.

Q11 | Will Assessment reports be published if an appeal has been submitted?

No. A report would not be published until an associated appeal has been concluded.

Q12 | When can the Assessment outcome be shared and celebrated?

Although the assessment outcome is unlikely to change, it is provisional until the final report is published on the Merlin Website. It is therefore recommended that press releases and other publicity are withheld until the Organisation receives official confirmation of the assessment outcome in writing from Assessment Services.

Q13 | How is an Assessment paid for?

Once the scope of the assessment has been confirmed by the Merlin Lead Assessor a sales order will be sent to the invoice contact nominated on the booking form. Fees are required to be paid at least seven weeks prior to the evidence gathering activity commences, and are subject to Assessment Services Terms and Conditions.

Q14 | Will an existing Merlin accreditation cover any new contracts we gain?

Not automatically. Whilst it is the legal entity that is accredited, any significant change that may impact on an Organisation's accreditation should be reported to Assessment Services as soon as possible. This includes the gaining of new contracts. A Merlin Lead Assessor will review the impact of any changes and may require a Strategic Review to take place to ensure the integrity of the Standard is maintained.

Q15 | Who are the Registered Merlin Assessors?

Assessment Services have an established network of experienced specialist business practitioners who work throughout the country. Only practitioners who have undergone stringent initial training, maintain a record of continuous professional development and continue to meet the required quality assurance standards set by Assessment Services are registered as Merlin Assessors. Assessment Teams are allocated by Assessment Services based on a number of criteria; including taking into account any conflicts of interest, assessment location, sector specialism etc.

Q16 | How are the Registered Merlin Assessors quality assured?

All Registered Merlin Assessors are quality assured against a rigorous framework of skills, competencies and behaviours. This includes Assessors being observed during interactions with Organisations by representatives of Assessment Services. As such members of your Assessment Team may be observed while they are gathering evidence. Please be assured that this activity does not form part of the assessment process or findings.

In order to ensure that Assessment Services has sufficient resources, there may be times when Trainee Merlin Assessors accompany Registered Merlin Assessors while evidence gathering. However, Assessment Services and the Merlin Lead Assessor will ensure that the Organisation is aware of any observation activity that will be taking place during the assessment and the observer and trainee will ensure that they do not impact on the assessment.

Q17 | Are Organisations expected to move up a level in terms of the Assessment outcome during a review?

The Assessment Team will be looking to see how the Organisation has developed/improved since the last assessment. However, whilst there may be an expectation that the Organisation will improve the Assessors will appreciate that there may be some contributing factors that mean a higher level of achievement may not be reached.

Q18 | If an Organisation changes ownership will another Assessment be required?

In the event of a change of ownership, novation of contracts, takeovers, mergers, etc., Assessment Services needs to be notified and may require the Organisation to undergo a Strategic Review Assessment or a full assessment where deemed necessary.

Q19 | Organisations might need advice to support them achieve the Merlin Standard - who can help?

In the interest of impartiality, as the assessment and accreditation body, Assessment Services cannot offer, provide or deliver products or services that are aimed at assisting customers to attain or maintain Merlin Standard accreditation. This is to ensure that Assessment Services can demonstrate a fully transparent and impartial assessment and accreditation service.

However, you may wish to consider undertaking some form of self-assessment activity to enable you to gauge how you meet the requirements of the Standard.

Alternatively, an Organisation can look to engage an external Advisor to give an independent view of their current position against the Standard. A range of individuals/organisations offer consultancy/advisory support services for Organisations wishing to achieve the Merlin Standard. Please contact Assessment Services should you wish contact details.

Q20 | If already accredited, can Organisations come forward early for a review?

Yes. They should contact either their Merlin Lead Assessor directly or Assessment Services.



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9. GLOSSARY

Commissioner: This is, for example, a Government Department such as DWP, the Cabinet Office, the Education, Skills & Funding Agency (ESFA), or a non-statutory partnership body such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, Commissioning Councils within local government etc. All of whom are responsible for planning, purchasing and monitoring the delivery of goods and/or services through quality assured third-party organisations.

The Organisation: Sometimes referred to as the Prime, the Organisation is the legal entity with whom a Commissioner has contracted to deliver the required goods or services and is using a supply chain to do this. It is the Organisation that is assessed against the Merlin Standard to evaluate the effectiveness of their supply chain management.

Supply Chain Partners: These are businesses, individuals, charities, colleges, training providers etc. who are:

- presently actively engaged in the supply chain;
- potential members of the supply chain and are going through the procurement process;
- past members of the supply chain leaving it within the last 12 months.

Registered Merlin Lead Assessor: The person appointed by Assessment Services to work with the Organisation to plan the assessment and to lead the Merlin Assessment.

The Merlin Principles: The Merlin Standard is built upon eight fundamental and integrated Principles:

1. Design
2. Procure
3. Contract
4. Funding
5. Develop
6. Performance Manage
7. Quality Assurance & Compliance
8. Review & Close

These Principles have been designed to explore key areas of the relationship between an Organisation and its Supply Chain Partners.

The Merlin Criteria: Within each Principle, there are a number of Criteria, which provide a structured approach to achieving excellence in supply chain management. There are 36 Criteria in total and they support the assessment process used by Merlin Assessors, as well as providing guidance for each Prime Contractor's own self-assessment.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015

Every organisation carrying on a business in the UK with a total annual turnover of £6m or more will be required to produce a slavery and human trafficking statement for each financial year of the organisation. A focus on tackling modern slavery not only protects vulnerable workers and helps prevent and remedy severe human rights violations, it can bring a number of business benefits too.

These include:

- Protecting and enhancing an organisation's reputation and brand;
- Protecting and growing the organisation's customer base as more consumers seek out businesses with higher ethical standards;
- Improved investor confidence;
- Greater staff retention and loyalty based on values and respect; and
- Developing more responsive, stable and innovative supply chains.

The Home Office have produced [A Practical Guide - Transparency in Supply Chains etc.](#)

