

Withdrawn

This publication is withdrawn.
The publication is no longer current.

Chapter 14 - Quality, Continuous Improvement, Assessment and Evaluation

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This Section pertains to all referrals to SES provision during the contracts' extension period nationally from November 2018. For guidance pertaining to all referrals to SES made prior to this extension period please see the previous versions of SES Provider Guidance which has been retained on GOV.UK for reference:

SES Stage 2

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specialist-employability-support-provider-guidance-effective-from-september-2017>

SES Stage 1

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specialist-employability-support-provider-guidance>

Introduction

- 14.01 You must ensure you read and are familiar with all DWP Generic Provider Guidance including [Chapter 2 – Delivering DWP Provision](#), [Chapter 7 - Self Assessment](#) and [Chapter 3 - Provider Engagement](#). These contain a comprehensive guide to standards required from a DWP Provider e.g. Induction Standards; Quality; Health and Safety; Legal Requirements; Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups; Contract Maintenance; Working with Sub Contractors; Improving Programme Performance.
- 14.02 This chapter contains some further information, specific to the SES programme, which must be read in conjunction with the above Generic Provider Guidance.

Quality

- 14.03 Providers delivering SES are required to deliver a quality service to our individual customers. This includes the requirement for SES Providers to continuously self-assess across the whole of their supply chain, and report on this activity annually.
- 14.04 Our expectation is that you will invest in, and be active in, your own improvement and development through a process of continuous self-assessment and action planning. Your processes will be reviewed as part of the Provider Assurance Team (PAT) review, who will assess their adequacy and effectiveness.
- 14.05 More information about the PAT Team can be found below.
- 14.06 More information about self-assessment and development planning can be found in [Chapter 7 - Self Assessment](#).

Contracted Employment Programmes (CEP) Provider Assurance Team

- 14.07 The primary purpose of the CEP Provider Assurance Team is to provide the DWP Contracted Customer Services Director with an assurance that payments to contracted employment provision providers are in accordance with DWP and Treasury requirements; Public funds and DWP data are protected and Value for money has been obtained.
- 14.08 This work is carried out by reviewing providers' internal control systems to assess their ability to manage risk across four key areas:
- **Governance Arrangements** – covering the Provider's governance arrangements, systems for tracking and reporting performance and their anti-fraud measures;
 - **Service Delivery** – includes the Provider's systems for starting, ending and moving Customers through provision and generally looks to ensure that DWP is getting the service it is paying for. This chapter also covers management of sub-contractors;
 - **Financial Procedures** – looks to ensure that Providers have in place effective systems to support their claims for payment, including appropriate segregation of duties; and
 - **Data Security** – looks to ensure that Providers have in place adequate systems to safeguard DWP data whilst it is being stored and/or transmitted around their organisations.
- 14.09 The Provider Assurance Team operate at a national level enabling them to present SES Providers operating across regions with a single view of the effectiveness of their systems – each Provider will have a Senior Provider Assurance Manager and therefore a single point of contact within DWP for management of assurance related issues/concerns.
- 14.10 On completion of each review, Providers are awarded an assurance rating from the following four categories – weak, limited, reasonable and strong.

They are also sent a formal report which details the review findings including key strengths and areas for improvement; where weaknesses have been identified they are asked to complete an action plan setting out appropriate steps for improvement and this is followed up at an agreed point.

- 14.11 The rating awarded will determine the timescale for subsequent visits and this ranges from within 3 months, where the assurance level is weak up to 12-18 months where the assurance level is strong.
- 14.12 Findings from each review are routinely reported to the relevant contract manager/Category Manager and other DWP stakeholders but specific action is also taken in the following circumstances:
- Where a Provider fails to improve on a weak or limited assurance level, the Category Manager will take remedial action which may lead to breach activities if the Provider fails to improve;
 - Where there are suspicions that a Provider (or employee, sub-contractor, volunteer mentor etc.) may be acting inappropriately the team will refer to Internal Investigations as the experts trained in the legalities and techniques required to undertake formal investigations; and
 - Where there are serious concerns around data security these are reported through the respective channels to colleagues in Supply Chain Information Assurance Team.
- 14.13 The results of any investigations carried out by these teams are subsequently fed back to the Provider Assurance Team and this information in turn used to inform future reviews and target specific areas for testing.
- 14.14 The Provider Assurance Team will work with Providers, particularly those new to DWP business, to ensure that they understand what is expected of them and are, therefore, adequately equipped to develop robust systems to support their service delivery model.
- 14.15 Our expectation is that Providers will invest in and be active in their own improvement and development through a process of continuous self-assessment and action planning. This process will eventually be reviewed as part of the provider assurance process.

Programme Evaluation

- 14.16 Evaluation of the programme will seek to determine the success of SES provision. DWP will analyse MI and conduct qualitative research with JCP/DWP staff, customers and Providers to build up a picture of the support delivered.
- 14.17 Researchers will wish to visit and interview Providers as part of the evaluation. Providers will be contacted in advance of any fieldwork. Providers are expected to fully co-operate with SES evaluation activity commissioned by DWP.

14.18 DWP may conduct evaluation in-house, may commission research, or a combination of both.

Complaints Process

- 14.19 You must have an appropriate complaints process across your whole supply chain to resolve customers' complaints. You must explain your complaints process to the customer in your first contact with them. Please see [Chapter 2 – Delivering DWP Provision](#) for a guide to complaint resolution.
- 14.20 You may also be interested in looking at the [Complaint Resolution Core Briefing Pack](#) for providers and the [DWP Customer Charter](#) when reviewing your processes.
- 14.21 Where a customer is unhappy about the service they receive from you and raises a complaint you should ensure that you follow each step of your detailed process robustly in order to bring the complaint to a satisfactory conclusion.
- 14.22 After following all steps in your process you must include, in your final response to the customer, a standard text which signposts the customer to contact the **Independent Case Examiner (ICE)** should they wish to pursue their complaint.

The Independent Case Examiner (ICE)

- 14.23 **ICE** will mediate between you and the customer to broker a resolution. If a resolution cannot be agreed between either party, **ICE** will ask to see the evidence. You **MUST** provide all the papers which relate to the complaint. ICE will again attempt mediation between you and the customer (known as a 'settlement' if the evidence is needed to broker an agreement). If this cannot be achieved, ICE will undertake a full investigation of the complaint.
- 14.24 If the complaint is upheld at this stage, in part or in full, then the Provider will be charged a fee of £5,000 and will also be liable for any financial redress recommended by ICE. In the event that the complaint against the Prime Contractor or Sub-contractor is dismissed, no fee shall be payable. Any fees in respect of complaints that have been upheld against the Prime Contractor or the Sub-contractor and any financial redress due to the customer shall be paid within four (4) weeks of the date of the ICE final investigation report.
- 14.25 To ensure that a thorough investigation can take place, you **MUST** provide all the papers which relate to the complaint. The ICE office will ask for these when required [Chapter 2 – Delivering DWP Provision](#) (Annex 2) contains a full description of the ICE escalation process.

14.26 Further information regarding complaint resolution can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261107/core-briefing-pack-for-Providers-complaints-resolution.pdf

Data Storage and Security

14.27 Providers are required to comply with overall DWP data storage and data movement requirements. These obligations are included in the standard T&Cs for all provision and will be made available to a Provider's planning and IT departments. More information can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/procurement#terms-and-conditions> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/provider-referrals-and-payments-prap-system-for-dwp>

Data Protection

14.28 In order to protect Departmental information appropriately, Providers must put into effect and maintain the security measures and safeguards appropriate to the nature and use of the information throughout their supply chain. All Providers of services to the Department for Work and Pensions must comply, and be able to demonstrate compliance, with the Department's relevant policies and standards including the DWP Information Systems Security Standards. The Standards are based on, and follow, the same format as International Standard 27001, but with specific reference to the Department's use. Departmental information must not be processed outside the United Kingdom without the express written permission of DWP in line with the DWP Security Policy for Contractors and DWP call off T&C's.

14.29 Security assurance for Providers and their supply chain is through completing a security plan. Providers submitted their draft security plans as part of the Framework competition and are expected to maintain this. This set out the security measures to be implemented and maintained by the prime Provider throughout the entire supply chain in relation to all aspects of the service, including processes associated with delivery. Providers will have sent an updated Outline Security Plan as part of their bid for SES.

14.30 Data security is one of the areas risk-assessed by the CEP Provider Assurance Team (PAT). In addition, data security will remain subject to spot checks by the Supply Chain Information Assurance Team (SCIAT). Furthermore, the Head of Compliance will continue to regularly report the number and outcomes of data security checks carried out during the previous quarter to the DWP Permanent Secretary.

14.31 In the event of any breach of information security resulting in an investigation by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), DWP will consider whether a major breach of contract has occurred within the T&Cs of the contract. Providers will be responsible for paying any fine levied on DWP following an investigation by the ICO.

Legal Requirements and Minimum Standard

- 14.32 Providers must ensure they remain compliant with current and future changes in the law, supporting the Secretary of State in meeting all obligations under the relevant legislation and principal regulations as set out in your Terms and Conditions, and fraud prevention covered in your contract at Clause A8.
- 14.33 Additionally, Providers will need to have met the minimum standards for equality, diversity and equal opportunities including support and diversity plans throughout the supply chain.
- 14.34 Providers must ensure that they remain compliant with current and future changes in the law and DWP Policy. For example:
- Ensuring the SES supports the DWP's Public Sector Equality Duty as outlined in the [Equality Act 2010](#);
 - Providing appropriate services to ensure compatibility with the Equalities Act; for example, to enable communication with Customers who do not speak English as a first language or who are deaf, hearing impaired or have a speech impediment; and
 - Where the Provider is operating in an area with a high minority ethnic population, materials in the appropriate ethnic minority language must be made available on request.

Code of Conduct and Merlin Standard

- 14.35 Providers must ensure that all sub-contractual relationships adhere to the DWP Code of Conduct and they attain the Merlin Standard.
- 14.36 Providers will be assessed against the Merlin Standard by a third party organisation within a year of contract go live and potentially every three years thereafter. For further information on the Merlin Standard, please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-merlin-standard-guide-for-dwp-providers>