Minutes of the NERS Provider Forum

Microsoft Teams Meeting on 12th March 2024 10:00am

Attendees:

Paul Costelloe
Karl Miller
Abs Manneh
Adrian Johnson
Andrea Moir
Andrew Currie
Andy Barnes
Andy Billings
Ben Brownbill
Ben Webb
Bill Jones
Bill Robertson
Simon Burnett
Charmaine Boddington
Chay Rees
Chris Clark
Chris Lee
Graham Commons
Craig Lloyd
Martyn Crocker
Dan Hartup
Daniel Miller
Danielle Sweeney
Darren Manton
Dave Morgan
David Butler
David Tong
Davie Callaghan

Debbie Heary
Divyesh Jansari
Jason Everall
Kevin Freiter
Gareth Wilson
Gary Madgwick
Dave Daintree
Huw Crocombe
James Barker
James Burnett
Jason Johnson
Jenny Salt
John Evans
Julia Cotogno
Keith Montague
Kelly McLaughlin
Kevin Wilkinson
Kyle Morgan
Lee Hewett
Lee Windsor
Alan Marshall
Grant Massie
Andrew McAllister- Brown
Mike Webb
Neil Briody
Neil Crawford
Steve Owen
Paul Ingram

Paul Phelps
Paul Swift
Paul Wragg
Peter Salmon
Rebecca Lewis
Richard Connaughton
Rob Peters
Robert Vernon
Rupinder Sandhu
Sarah Cannon
Scott McQuaide
Scott Meek
Steve Ellis
Steve Harvey
Steve Mander
Steven Reid
Stu Hunter
Paul Thomas
Tony Jackson
Vibin Kakkade
Zoe Close
Philip Henderson

1. Introductions

Paul Costelloe (PC) of LRQA thanked everyone for their attendance and reiterated that due to the number of attendees, formal introductions were foregone. The agenda was reviewed and the arrangements for this Teams Meeting were described. PC advised that the meeting was being recorded on Microsoft Teams for the purposes of accurately capturing discussions for the meeting minutes.

2. Apologies

As this was a Teams meeting and there were no restrictions to numbers, over 400 invitations had been sent and there had been 77 acceptances and 23 declined. With 78 attending on the day, due to the nature of the open invitation, only attendees are identified in the minutes.

3. Acceptance of Previous Minutes

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

4. Review of Minutes & Actions from NERS Providers Forum Meeting of 7th November 2023

A brief overview of the various topics documented in the minutes was provided and the actions discussed below:

4.1 Version 10 of the NERS requirements document.

Paul Costelloe advised that v10 was currently being drafted and that an internal LRQA meeting to review the proposed changes was planned for 14th March and the changes would be centred around Project Management. PC invited suggested changes from the ICP community.

4.2 Certificates of Competency

Paul Costelloe advised that there had been discussion about inclusion of competencies for which the employing organisation does not have NERS accreditation for. The consensus was that some organisations could not cope with having separate competency certificates and so it would need to made clear which competencies related to contestable and non-contestable works on a single certificate of competency.

Huw Crocombe commented that his organisation was building into their work issue system some safeguards to prevent a person being set to work which, while competent, their employer did not hold NERS accreditation for.

Dave Morgan stated that it was up to the work scheduler not to set staff to work for which NERS accreditation was not held, but that there should be recognition of an employee's competence on their certificate of competence nonetheless. Graham Commons agreed.

4.3 Competition in Connections Code of Practice

Paul Costelloe advised that there had previously been a question about IDNO's commitment to the principles of the Competition in Connections Code of Practice principles and that he had contacted the Independent Networks Association (INA) to establish this. The INA confirmed that all of their members were committed and in fact it was a condition of their respective licenses that they adhere to it.

4.4 Pre-Inspection Prior to Handover of Assets to Network Operators

Paul Costelloe advised that there was a common theme with Network operators being concerned with the timeliness and quality of documents relating to handover, and that one IDNO had commented that, in the case of some ICPs, the IDNO would stop working with them if improvements were not made.

Dave Daintree commented that there were equal problems in obtaining information from some Network Operators. Huw Crocombe commented that specific examples need to be given as examples.

Paul Thomas of Scottish Power Energy Networks commented that he recognised the point that Dave Daintree had made but that there are some ICPs that are not performing satisfactorily in this respect and that there are legal obligations which mean that the Network Operator needs to keep accurate records.

Martyn Crocker confirmed that there needed to be consistency.

4.5 Perceived 'policy changes' in NPg

PC advised that discussion took place in the last meeting and that those raising concerns were asked to raise these offline. Bill Robertson stated that there was an inconsistence in interpretation of NPg requirements by NPg. Martyn Crocker asked that this be taken up with NPg.

5. Review of Minutes & Actions from NERSAP Meeting of 21st November 2023

A brief overview of the various topics documented in the minutes was provided and the actions discussed below.

5.1 New Chairperson Elected

PC stated that the new Chairperson had been elected (Martyn Crocker) and that he was leaving employment with UKPN and therefore stepping down. The Deputy Chairperson (Paul Wragg) would be stepping up to Chairperson and NERSAP would now need to consider, at the next meeting the election of a new Deputy Chairperson to replace Paul Wragg.

5.2 V10 of NERS Requirements

Paul Costelloe reiterated that v10 was currently being drafted and that an internal LRQA meeting to review the proposed changes was planned for 14th March and the changes would be centred around Project Management. PC invited suggested changes from the ICP community.

5.3 Certificates of Competency

This had been discussed fully during this meeting while reviewing the previous Forum minutes.

5.4 ICPs Which Have Ceased Trading

Paul Costelloe advised that LRQA had been asked by NERSAP what the arrangements were for LRQA advising the NERS community when an ICP cease trading. It had been advised to NERSAP that whilst it is a requirement of NERS that ICPs advise us when they cease business, this is not always their priority when the business closes. Further, LRQA are not advised by Companies House and therefore are in no better position than anyone else to learn of an ICP which has ceased trading when the ICP does not advise LRQA direct. LRQA do undertake however, to act on intelligence from the NERS

community to investigate information received before advising interested parties of an ICP which has ceased trading.

5.5 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Changes Proposed

Paul Costelloe advised that changes were being made to allow for ICPs who are members of NERSAP to stand for Deputy Chairperson and ultimately Chairperson. He also advised that since more IDNOs were now attending NERSAP and there is a requirement to keep a defined ratio of network Operators to ICPs there may also be a need to recruit more ICP's to NERSAP.

Other changes to the MoU include replacing the principle of 'unanimity' with 'majority' when voting takes place during NERSAP meetings. The size of majority is to be discussed. Paul Costelloe advised that this had been the reason why one DNO had not signed the MoU, so once this change has been made, the obstacle to signing would be removed.

6. Update on NERSAP Strategic Working Group

Paul Costelloe advised the main issues being discussed were v10 of the NERS Requirements and complaints about ICPs to LRQA from the ICPs clients. The subject of difficulties with LRQA's office had previously been raised and Paul Costelloe invited comments in order to ascertain if problems still persisted. Paul Wragg commented that things were much improved and no other complaints were forthcoming.

Bill Robertson stated that it was sometimes difficult to programme surveillance visits on dates that aligned with the LRQA assessor's availability such was the short-notice nature of some ICPs work. Paul Costelloe reiterated that is the ICPs responsibility to facilitate surveillance visits not LRQA's to chase the ICP. Graham Commons confirmed that re-certification after 3 years was much easier if the ICP had been pro-active with the surveillance visit programme. Paul Costelloe advised that some ICPs put the surveillance visit programme on their external (e.g. ISO9001) audit schedule so as not to lose sight of them.

Discussion took place on the lack of young persons coming into the industry and the difficulty in finding training. Alan Marshall stated that more needs to be done on apprenticeships. Divyesh Jansari stated that his business was working with universities but there was a disconnect between theory and practical knowledge.

Refresher training was discussed an Paul Costelloe advised that ENA and HSE were in discussion about suitable time periods for refresher training.

Paul Costelloe raised the issue of complaints to LRQA from, for example developers about the performance of the ICP they had employed. Discussion had previously taken place about a 'Code of Conduct' for ICPs because the complaints procedure was intended for complaints about LRQA.

7. NERS Report

Paul Costelloe gave a presentation showing the Surveillance Visit activity and deficiencies noted, in the period since the last meeting (i.e. November and December 2023 and January and February 2023). 158 surveillance visits had been carried out over this period with the largest number of visits in the UKPN footprint. In terms of deficiencies, 5 major deficiencies had been identified which would be discussed in detail with NERSAP. It was advised that LRQA were looking at a 'frequency rate' for deficiencies per surveillance visit.

Graham Commons asked that more detail of deficiencies would be a good idea.

Paul Costelloe advised that the subject of NERS passports always seemed to be the top deficiency.

Huw Crocombe asked if the data could be broken down in to the licensed areas of each DNO. Paul Costelloe advised that this would be more long term because changing the reporting criteria could cause confusion.

Graham Commons asked how the industry would know of the currently suspended ICPs. Paul Costelloe advised that they are shown on the NERS website as suspended and the Network Operators are advised. Divyesh Jansari commented that there was a risk with working with suspended ICPs and that there needed to be more clarity on what suspension actually means. Paul Swift asked if the website could be searched for 'suspended' companies.

8. Any Other Business (AOB)

8.1 Turnaround Time for Remote Surveillance Visits

Dave Daintree asked what the expected time period was for receiving a surveillance visit report where ICPs had submitted evidence remotely. Paul Costelloe explained that only once evidence was received could the assessor diarise some time for assessing it and to produce the surveillance visit report as there would be no point reserving time to do this in case, as often happens the evidence is not sent immediately due to the ICPs work schedule or other reasons.

8.2 Format of Future meetings

Karl Miller asked the group if a 'hybrid' form of meeting where it was held via a mixture of 'in-person' and Teams was desirable. Paul Wragg reminded the group that the last time this was tried it was unsuccessful. Karl advised that he would try this at the next GIRS Forum which is to be held at IGEM Kegworth.

9. Dates of Next Meetings

Dates for 2024 Meetings

- NERS Provider Forum   16th July, 12th November
- NERSAP   26th March, 30th July, 26th November

Paul Costelloe advised that Nigel Evans would chair the next NERS Forum on 16th July.