



Impact Evaluation of the Workforce Development Fund, Individual Employer Funding and COVID-19 Essential Training (2019-22)

Final Report: Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2022, Skills for Care commissioned an independent evaluation of the Workforce Development Fund (WDF, also referred to as ‘the mainstream fund’), Individual Employer (IE) funding and the COVID-19 Essential Training programme. Covering the 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years, the evaluation was designed to provide an up-to-date assessment of the impact of the three funding streams.

The evaluation method involved the following:

- **Mainstream fund:**
 - online survey with 13 lead partners
 - online and telephone surveys with 163 employers
 - one-to-one qualitative consultations with four strategic stakeholders, five learning providers, 10 employers and four learners
 - estimating the economic impact of the fund using a Net Present Value approach
- **IE funding:**
 - survey with 20 individual employers¹
 - one-to-one qualitative consultations with 10 user-led organisations (ULOs), four individual employers and four Personal Assistants (PAs)
 - review of 112 learner comments from ULO funding reports
- **COVID-19 Essential Training:**
 - online survey with 116 employers
 - one-to-one qualitative consultations with eight learning providers.

The funding streams

The mainstream fund seeks to address market failures in workforce development in the adult social care sector by providing a contribution towards vocational learning. More than 170 qualifications were eligible for funding through the mainstream fund in 2021/22, as were several non-accredited programmes delivered by Skills for Care endorsed learning providers, and digital learning accessed via a virtual learning environment.

IE funding pays the full cost of training for individual employers and their personal assistants (PAs) (within certain criteria). Funding can be accessed directly by individual employers and by ULOs.

¹ People who employ their own care and support staff using either local authority Direct Payments, their own money, or a combination of the two.

COVID-19 Essential Training includes three funding packages introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: rapid induction for new staff, refresher training for existing staff, and a volunteer training programme.

The mainstream fund: fit-for-purpose and good quality delivery

As in previous evaluations, the partnership model received very positive feedback, with approximately 90% of lead partners and employers in partnerships agreeing it was fit for purpose. Views were similarly positive towards the range of qualifications and programmes eligible for funding, although some appetite exists for more non-accredited provision to be included.

The quality of training provided through the fund was praised by employers and lead partners. Views were more mixed on the funding cap per learner, particularly in the case of higher level (and therefore more expensive) qualifications.

The administrative aspects of the fund (e.g., applications and claims) were, for the most part, considered to be appropriate, although a minority of employers consider the processes to be overly bureaucratic and the one-year funding cycle is not well liked.

Training providers believe there is potential to raise awareness of the WDF still further within the sector. Some have been surprised by how few of their customers are aware of the fund and understand what it offers.

Impacts of the mainstream fund: improved workforce skills and quality of care

Those contributing to the evaluation praised the responsiveness and flexibility of the mainstream fund. Most agreed that it reflects the skills needs in the sector and has enabled innovative responses. As shown in the table overleaf, high proportions of employers cited impacts relating to workforce skills levels, quality of care, staff progression opportunities and staff retention.

Employers also spoke of positive impacts on staff productivity and efficiency. The majority had changed how they approach workforce development because of accessing the fund, for example by developing training plans, undertaking training needs analyses, or investing more in training.

Table ES1: Impacts of the mainstream fund

	% Employers (n=163)		Total
	Significantly	To some extent	
Skills outcomes			
Improved the skills/qualification levels of our staff team	49%	42%	91%
Addressed the most pressing skills gap(s) in the organisation	34%	47%	81%
Addressed other skills gaps in the organisation	29%	42%	71%
Outcomes for staff			
Increased opportunities for staff progression within the workplace	44%	36%	80%
Improved staff morale	29%	41%	70%
Quality of care			
Improved the quality of care that we provide	44%	43%	87%
We more effectively meet the specialist/personalised needs of people who access care and support	38%	45%	83%
Workforce development			
Become more interested in training	29%	40%	69%
Invested in different types of training than we had done pre-mainstream fund	31%	41%	72%
Taken a different approach to staff development	28%	42%	70%
Developed or refreshed training plans	33%	39%	72%
Undertaken new training needs analyses	30%	37%	67%
Business operations			
Improved staff productivity	25%	43%	68%
Improved staff retention	22%	41%	63%
Improved competitiveness within the sector	20%	37%	57%
Improved efficiency as a business	22%	43%	65%
Source: Employer survey (n=163).			

Most employers expect the impacts they have experienced to date to be sustained over time, suggesting that the benefits of the fund will persist well beyond the intervention period.

The estimated economic impact (Net Present Value) of the mainstream fund across the three years was £155.61m. The return on investment across the three years combined is therefore 6.92 : 1, i.e. for every £1 invested in the mainstream fund, an estimated £6.92 will be generated for the economy in England.

IE funding: offering additionality, meeting individual employer needs, and improving PA retention

Individual employers and ULOs were generally very satisfied with the funding model. Most had found it easy to access the fund and praised the communications with/from Skills for Care. ULOs felt the funding model aligns well with the needs of the clients they support, is flexible, and provides access to training for individual employers and PAs that would not otherwise have had the means to participate.

Individual employers and ULOs reported a wide range of positive impacts arising from the funding, including improved knowledge and skills, greater workplace confidence and improved morale of PAs, and – for individual employers – a better appreciation of their roles and responsibilities as employers. High proportions of individual employers stated that it had made their care and support more relevant to their needs, had made training more affordable and had helped them to retain their PA(s).

Impacts for individual employers

- Improved knowledge of responsibilities and rights as an employer, staff recruitment, direct payments, payroll, working relationships, performance appraisal and staff training.
- Greater confidence in addressing and resolving issues.
- Better able to set expectations and boundaries for working relationships.
- Better awareness of where to access information and resources on employment issues.

Outcomes for PAs

- Improvements in a range of job-specific skills.
- Improved self-confidence and self-belief in the quality of care they are providing.
- Better able to deal with challenging situations.
- More interest in training and development in the future.
- Broader professional networks and new friends.

ULO's were frustrated that there have been gaps in funding availability, which they see as compromising its responsiveness and they say it has made it harder for them to promote it. ULOs would also welcome some good practice examples of promotional materials that they could tailor for their own audiences.

COVID-19 Essential Training: enabling flexible access to training and improving continuity and quality of care

Employers and training providers agree that the three COVID-19 Essential Training packages are relevant, fit for purpose, enable access to important training at a time of considerable demand, and support new staff to move into work quickly.

They also provided positive feedback on the delivery model, the processes for accessing the training and the funding limits. The decision to allow unlimited access to the rapid induction programme was seen to be a good one.

It is an important finding for the evaluation that 90% of employers said the COVID-19 Essential Training had improved both their continuity and quality of care. Very high proportions also cited positive impacts on infection control, their ability to meet demand and the skills of their workforce. More than three-quarters said it had helped them with recruitment.

Table ES2: Impacts of the COVID-19 Essential Training programmes

	Significant or some impact (% of employers)
Continuity of care	90%
Quality of care	90%
Infection control	89%
Ability to meet demand/need	85%
Improved the skills of the workforce	85%
Addressed skills gaps in the workforce	82%
Source: COVID-19 Essential Training employer survey (n=116).	

Training providers often said that their profile in the sector had been enhanced because of delivering the COVID-19 essential training. They also spoke of having grown their business, developed new training programmes, and acquired new customers.