

Evaluation of ESF In-Work Progression Programme

Final Report

Connor Stevens
Hazel Klenk
Oliver Crunden
Hannah Murphy

Published by National Learning and Work Institute

4th Floor, Arnhem House, 31 Waterloo Way, Leicester, LE1 6LP

Company registration no. 2603322 | Charity registration no. 1002775

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

www.learningandwork.org.uk

@LearnWorkUK

@LearnWorkCymru (Wales)

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without the written permission of the publishers, save in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Contents

Executive summary	5
Specification design and development	5
Design and implementation	7
Participant characteristics, barriers and needs	9
Participant experiences of support	11
Employer experience of support	11
Programme outcomes	12
Participant experience of outcomes	14
Employer experience of outcomes	14
Conclusions and recommendations	15
1. Introduction	18
GLA In-Work Progression Programme	18
The Evaluation	18
Qualitative research	19
Structure of the report	21
2. ESF In-Work Progression programme specification design and development	22
Development of the programme specification	24
Payment model	26
3. Design and implementation of the in-work progression programme	31
Provider views on programme design features	31
Design of the support model	33
Engagement	34
Recruitment via employers (employer-led)	34
Recruitment via outreach and other channels (individual-led)	37
Registration and assessment process	38
Skills and training provision	40
Adviser contact	42
Additional support	43
Funding model	43
Supply chain management	44
4. Participant characteristics, barriers and needs	46
Demographic characteristics	46

	Experience of employment, low pay and insecure employment	49
	Participant priorities	53
	Barriers to progression	54
5.	Participant experience of support	57
	Awareness and engagement.....	57
	Views of support	60
	Support gaps and suggestions for improvement.....	67
6.	Employer experience of support.....	69
	Types of employers	69
	Awareness and engagement.....	71
	Engagement	72
	Introduction and need assessment.....	73
	Provision of training	77
	Support gaps and suggestions for improvement.....	79
7.	Programme outcomes.....	81
	Programme enrolments to October 2018	81
	Training.....	82
	Progression outcomes.....	84
	Earnings outcomes.....	84
	Impact assessment.....	87
8.	Participant experience of outcomes.....	88
	Progression outcomes.....	88
	Intermediate and soft outcomes	90
	No outcomes.....	92
	Support to sustain progression outcomes	93
	Plans for the future	93
9.	Employer experience of outcomes	96
	Changes to business through involvement with programme.....	96
	Changes to employees	98
10.	Conclusions and recommendations.....	100

Executive summary

This report from Learning and Work Institute (L&W) presents findings from the evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) In-Work Progression programme.

The ESF In-Work Progression programme started in January 2017 and initially intended to run up to March 2018, though has since been extended to run to March 2019. The programme was delivered by two prime providers – Prospects and InterLearn (formerly Manley Summers) – across four sub-regions in London.

The programme was developed with the aim of supporting low paid workers to progress into better paid, more stable work through the provision of a tailored package of support including personalised advice, coaching and skills support. A mix of referral pathways onto the programme were planned, including person-led pathways through outreach, self-referrals and partnerships with other support services and organisations. Employers were also intended to play a major role in the recruitment of low paid workers onto the programme.

Specification design and development

The In-Work Progression Programme was developed in response to rising in-work poverty in London and recognition of the need to support low paid workers to progress into better paid and more stable work. At the time of programme design, there was a relatively limited evidence base around what works in supporting individuals to progress. As such, the programme was viewed as a significant opportunity to invest more resources and build on the limited evidence base around this area. In particular, the use of a payment by results model (PbR) and roll-out of support across all London boroughs were regarded as significant opportunities to explore new techniques and test at a larger scale.

The programme specification was designed to include three main ‘good practice’ service requirements for providers: establishing skills needs to meet the needs of the business and help individuals to progress; conducting an initial assessment for participants; and providing a tailored support package to each participant. The service offer was designed to provide a degree of direction without being prescriptive, giving providers the freedom to develop models they felt would be effective and suited to their local context.

The programme design included regulated and non-regulated learning activities as key deliverables. Regulated learning is the provision of learning activities that lead to a qualification or recognised certificate. Non-regulated learning is development activity that does not lead to a formal qualification. This combination was chosen to ensure participants had access to wider range of support types to meet their individual needs and more effectively support them to achieve progression.

Engagement with employers was also included in the service design requirements as a suggested approach in response to existing evidence which highlighted the importance of employer buy-in. The specification recommended working with both the employers and the individual to support progression. For example, by using techniques such as Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) to identify training opportunities which meet employer aims, whilst also supporting employees to progress in their role. There was recognition that working with employers could limited participants' opportunities to internal progression routes, which may not match their preference and could limit the potential of the programme. As such, individual-led approaches were also encouraged, whereby providers would work directly with participants outside of the employer setting, to support their progression.

The specification advised that providers should build and utilise good partnership links with a range of specialist and local organisations, including the National Careers Service (NCS), Jobcentre Plus (JCP), local authorities, children's centres, social landlords and community centres,

A PBR model was used to incentivise providers to focus on achieving outcomes through the delivery of high quality support. Providers had to evidence weighted minimum service deliverables which formed the basis of the payment model, including: learner assessments and plans, regulated learning and non-regulated learning. Two main outcomes were measured: 1) improvement from zero hours or temporary contract to a permanent contract and 2) a wage increase that lasted two consecutive months. The latter was not defined or set at a minimum level and so could mean any increase from a participant's prior earnings. The timeframe for outcomes to be achieved was up to 12 months of joining the programme. However, an additional ESFA requirements which stipulated that outcomes had to be achieved and evidenced within 28 days of the completion of a learning activity, meant this timeframe was limited upon the completion of the learning activity.

In addition to improving support for those in low paid, insecure work and influencing employer behaviour, the programme aimed to expand the evidence base around in-work progression support. This included furthering knowledge and understanding of innovative delivery models targeted at helping individuals to progress.

Stakeholders mentioned several contextual factors which influenced programme development and could have influence over delivery. These included policy changes during the three years between programme design and delivery, such as changing ministerial priorities and the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). The prolonged period of wage stagnation underway at the time of programme development and delivery, and individual priorities and circumstances were also felt to have significant influence on the success of the programme.

Design and implementation

Target groups and eligibility criteria

Parents, and lone parents, were targeted through the programme as a group who are disproportionately affected by low pay. The programme also had set targets for those aged over 50, ethnic minorities, female participants, participants without basic skills and participants with a disability or health condition. Providers agreed that the target groups were appropriate, however some noted that reaching certain groups was challenging. For example, lone parents and those with a disability and health condition were particularly hard groups to reach as employers were unlikely to know the parental or health status of their staff.

The programme specification defined eligible low-paid workers as individuals earning 10 per cent below the weekly earnings' equivalent of 35 hours at the latest London Living Wage who had been in such employment for at least four consecutive months. Some providers felt that eligibility criteria worked well in identifying suitable participants. However, many experienced difficulties collecting the necessary evidence to provide eligibility. Providers were also concerned that eligibility criteria sometimes meant they were not able to offer support to those in precarious work who would have benefited from support; namely individuals earning a low hourly wage but working a high number of hours and individuals whose weekly earnings fluctuated widely, because of insecure, volatile work.

Referral Routes

Providers used a mix of referral pathways to recruit participants onto the programme. The main route used by providers was employer-led approaches. Working with employers gave providers access to a large volume of participants, helping them to meet registration targets efficiently. Providers cited a range of approaches that they found to work effectively in engaging employers, for example using existing networks, working with large employers and approaching employers they felt were likely to find the support offer effective. In general, providers found it challenging to get employers to commit to increasing the wages of staff who completed training, thus placing clear limitations on participants' ability to achieve outcomes. Employers were unlikely to engage if they could not see how training their staff would improve their business.

Person-led pathways, such as outreach, self-referrals and partnerships with other support services and organisations, were also intended to drive recruitment – however played a substantially smaller role. This method was found to be less efficient and introduced added obstacles for providers. For example, programme requirements meant that providers had to gain employer's written acknowledgement of participant's receipt of support. Participants were unwilling to source such acknowledgement where they intended to use the support to

move into a new job. Providers also found it more challenging to source the required documentation to evidence eligibility when not working directly with the employer.

Assessment process

The needs assessment was intended to be conducted with individuals in a private one-to-one setting with an adviser or tutor. Providers explained that the assessment followed a conversational format as well as specific skills assessments, helping to identify barriers and areas for development.

The assessment process was seen as a valuable method to introduce individuals to the programme and to help them think about their current position and opportunities to progress. In conducting the initial assessment, providers spoke of the importance of providing a clear explanation of the assessment and conducting assessments outside of their immediate work setting.

Skills and training provision

Training offered by providers included a mix of regulated and non-regulated provision. For example, sector-specific qualifications, such as health and social care and security qualifications, basic qualifications and non-regulated learning such as job-specific training, employability workshops and confidence building. Some providers felt that non-regulated training was more appropriate for the purposes of the programme, as it is most flexible and could be delivered in a group format.

Some providers experienced difficulties with participants being able to commit to training schedules. This was particularly the case with individuals on flexible contracts with wide-ranging hours who often had limited warning of their availability, for example people working within care.

Adviser contact

Participants were expected to have regular meetings with advisers through a variety of means, including face-to-face, phone or skype appointments, according to the preference and availability of the participant. Whilst some providers said this was offered to all participants regardless of their referral pathway (individual-led or employer-led), there was evidence that contact was more limited for those accessing support through their employer.

Additional support

In addition to the core offer of training, providers listed additional support options, including welfare, housing and legal advice; access to hardship funds; employability and careers support; and referral to external advice and support services.

Funding model

Providers agreed that the PbR model incentivised them to engage participants, provide training and support the achievement of outcomes. Providers had mixed views about the level of resource provided through the payment model and whether payments were enough for them to provide the right level and type of support. There were also concerns over the impact of some of the requirements attached to the funding. Collecting and submitting evidence of training and progression outcomes was viewed as an administrative burden, often taking up resource at the expense of adviser and training resource for participants. Further, the registration targets were felt to encourage providers to focus on employer-led recruitment, limiting the potential for individual-led support pathways.

Programme management

Some providers reported challenges resulting from the management structure of the programme. Sub-contracted providers which were led by prime providers felt that there was little opportunity to collaborate or share learning, unclear advice and instructions from the lead organisations and problems caused by changes in supply chain management.

Participant characteristics, barriers and needs

Overall 11,421 participants had registered to join the programme up to October 2018. 57 per cent of programme participants were female and 43 per cent were male. More than half of programme participants were aged between 25 and 49, and there was a mix of ethnicities represented reflecting the diversity of London. Only 3 per cent of participants declared a disability, health condition or learning difficulty.

More than half of participants had no prior qualifications (55 per cent) and just 3 per cent of participants were qualified at Level 4 or above. Available data indicated that participants were most likely to have been with their employer between four and six months (43 per cent). The average starting hourly wage of participants from the Prospects supply chain to achieve an earnings progression was £7.50, with 82 per cent originally earning a between £6.51 and £7.50 per hour.^{1 2} In comparison, a representative sample taken of InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression showed that, on average, InterLearn

¹ Weekly earnings data was not available, limiting the evaluation's capacity to gauge the weekly earnings of participants upon joining the programme.

² Programme-wide hourly wage data was only available for participants from the Prospects supply chain to achieve an earnings-related progression outcome. This does not include the hourly wage of participants to either experience a decline in hourly wage or not change at all.

participants earned an hourly wage of £7.83 at the start of the programme.³ ⁴ The majority of participants (67 per cent) were projected to be earning an hourly wage between £7.51 and £8.50.

The effects of low pay were reported to be wide ranging, from the impact on an individual's sense of independence and ability to afford non-essentials, to a more severe inability to meet their personal or household needs, for example rent, utilities and groceries. Insecure, volatile work was also a common issue, with some individuals 'underemployed' and working less hours than required to meet household needs. Challenges with earnings and employment security were reported as contributing towards high levels of stress and emotional distress. Interviewees also spoke of the toll of long hours, extensive travel and feeling dissatisfied with being unable to take part in hobbies or spend time with their friends and family.

Some participants were not wholly negative about their employment situation at the point of joining the programme and felt positive about the fulfilment they got from work, despite low pay and poor security. Others that were positive about their work related this to job security, the availability of progression opportunities and supportive management practices.

Participants main priorities prior to receiving support were to increase their income and job security; improve their hours worked and work-life balance; gain new knowledge and skills; and better their job satisfaction.

A wide range of barriers were perceived as preventing individuals from being able to progress, including limiting health conditions; impact on welfare eligibility; limited knowledge of the employment market and suitable opportunities; qualifications, skills and experience; challenges with their current employer; and factors that constrained the take up of further learning, for example availability, financial barriers

³ Hourly wage data for participants from the InterLearn supply chain was not electronically captured. In order to compare with Prospects supply chain, a sample of 273 participants from the InterLearn supply chain to achieve an earnings progression was randomly selected – this represented 30 per cent of all InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression up to October 2018. This is the number of individuals deemed necessary to create a representative sample at 95% confidence level. Hourly wage estimates were then weighted to take account of the differences between the sample and total salary progressions in terms of age, gender, ethnic background and prior qualification levels.

⁴ Weekly earnings data was not available, limiting the evaluation's capacity to gauge the weekly earnings of participants upon joining the programme.

Participant experiences of support

Most participants interviewed accessed the programme through their employer or agency. Others joined through referrals from other services and word of mouth recommendations.

Effective referral strategies included personal recommendations from social or professional networks, and clearly highlighting the time limited offer of free training and potential benefits.

Participants who accessed support independently from their employer described full needs assessments which reviewed their strengths, weaknesses, interests and goals. In comparison, participants to access support through their employer described simpler registration processes, made up of information gathering and basic skill tests. This sometimes included a wider review of circumstances and barriers but did not lead to any additional support.

All participants were aware of the access to free training through the programme. A range of factors influenced participants views and experiences of the training provided, including its perceived usefulness and relation to their current role or future career plans; the quality of training delivery; the knowledge and helpfulness of trainers; the learning environment and the availability and flexibility of provision.

There was limited awareness of the wider package of support designed to support progression. Almost all participants to access the programme through their employer only received the training offer. Participants who accessed the programme independently from their employer accessed a wider support offer including one-to-one support with job search, careers and qualification advice and CV assistance. They valued support which was tailored to their availability and focussed on their individual strengths, needs and aims.

The main suggestions for improvement amongst participants was for a wider package of support tailored to their individual circumstances and specific barriers limiting their progression. This included the provision of employability support, specialist skills and careers advice and referrals to further support for complex needs, such as housing, health and financial assistance. Preference was also given for an improved support pathways, designed to support participants take the necessary steps to achieve their progression goals.

Employer experience of support

Whilst not all programme participants joined the programme through their employer, employer-led referrals and support represented a significant portion of the programme model.

Employers found out about the programme through provider outreach, existing relationships or recommendations from their networks. At the point of engagement, employers were provided with varying information about the programme.

The main purpose for employers to join the programme was to access free training provision and develop the skillset of their employees. Some employers were not clear about the programme requirements and aims and explained they were generally unclear about the details of the programme from the start. This meant several employers were not aware the programme was targeted at supporting employees in 'low pay' to progress.

Overall, employers' experience varied considerably. Perceptions of the programme were influenced by specific factors, including whether and how an ONA was conducted; the training courses on offer; the location of the training course, the tutor's approach during the delivery of the training course; the usefulness and quality of the training; and whether follow up support was provided.

Employers identified a range of gaps in the support and gave several suggestions on how their experience of the programme could have been improved, including maintaining a clear, consistent support offer for both employers and employees; improved channels of communication; better organisation; more robust, standardised needs assessment process and support and training offer that encourages meaningful progression opportunities.

Programme outcomes

The programme's management information has been used to examine enrolments onto the programme, the types of training and progression outcomes achieved up to October 2018.

Registrations

The cumulative total of programme registrations between January 2017 and October 2018 was 11,421 participants. 6,150 of these participants had joined via the Prospects provider supply chain, whilst 5,271 had joined via the InterLearn provider supply chain. These do not represent final programme totals as the programme was still running at the time of writing.

Regulated and non-regulated learning

All participants registered onto the programme were registered as having participated in some form of regulated or non-regulated learning⁵.

Overall, different variations of the non-regulated 'Foundation for Learning and Life' courses accounted for 74 per cent of all Prospects supply chain course places. Length of courses differed. The most common regulated learning course was 'NVQ Certificate in Spectator

⁵ The definitions of learning activities differed across the Prospects and InterLearn supply chain of providers, so analysis is presented separately.

Safety', which was the third most common overall. The majority of Prospects supply chain participants completed one training course over the duration of their engagement (79 per cent). Eighteen per cent completed two courses, whilst 3 per cent did three or more courses.

Data for completion status, hours spent, and average length of time was not available for InterLearn supply chain of providers' data set. Variations of the non-regulated 'Preparation for Work' courses accounted for 89 per cent of all InterLearn supply chain of providers' course places. The most common regulated learning course was 'Safeguarding the welfare of children and young people', which was the seventh most common course. The vast majority of participants (82 per cent) only did one training course. The remaining 18 per cent did two or more.

Progression outcomes

Between January 2017 and October 2018, 3,323 participants had recorded a progression, meaning that 29 per cent of all participants achieved a progression-related outcome. 2,138 of the recorded progressions were an earnings progression (19 per cent), whilst 1,185 of recorded progressions were an improvement in contract (10 per cent).⁶

Earnings outcomes

Supply-chain wide information related to hourly wage was only available for participants from the Prospects supply chain.⁷ ⁸ Of those to achieve an earnings progression and have hourly wage recorded, the average change in hourly wage was £1.25, from an average initial hourly wage of £7.50 to an average hourly wage at outcome of £8.75. The average percentage change in hourly wage was 16.7%.

A representative sample of InterLearn Supply-chain participants to achieve an earnings progression was taken to estimate change in hourly wage.⁹ Of those to achieve an earnings

⁶ Whilst it was possible for participants to achieve an earnings progression and an improvement in contract at concurrently, it was only possible for providers to register one of the progression outcomes for each participant.

⁷ Weekly earnings data was not available, limiting the evaluation's capacity to measure the change in weekly earnings and gauge the true impact of the support.

⁸ Programme-wide hourly wage data was only available for participants from the Prospects supply chain to achieve an earnings-related progression outcome. This does not include the hourly wage of participants to either experience a decline in hourly wage or not change at all.

⁹ Hourly wage data for participants from the InterLearn supply chain was not electronically captured. In order to compare with Prospects supply chain, a sample of 273 participants from the InterLearn supply chain to achieve an earnings progression was randomly selected – this represented 30 per cent of all InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression up to October 2018. This is the number of individuals deemed

progression, the average change in hourly wage was projected to be £0.18, from an average initial wage of £7.83 to an average hourly wage at outcome of £8.01. The average percentage change in hourly wage was projected to be 1.3%.

Participant experience of outcomes

Participants reported improved employment contracts and increased earnings since taking part in the programme. This was achieved through a mix of moving to a new employer and progressing within their current role.

Whilst many of those interviewed felt that the programme had played some part in their progression, some did not feel their progression could be attributed to the support received. Those that did attribute their progression to the programme tended to have completed an accredited training course or had received individually tailored employment support.

Most participants to achieve an increase in pay were very satisfied with their pay increase. Benefits reported included being able to meet living costs more easily; living independently; being able to think about future career plans; and enjoying a better work-life balance. Those who were less satisfied had secured a marginal pay increase that had little to no impact on their wider life circumstances.

Participants also reported that they had gained soft outcomes such as improved skills; techniques and knowledge; improved ability to perform in their role; and increased confidence. These outcomes were attributed to training being relevant or useful to their current or desired role and additional support such as careers advice.

Most of those who did not secure outcomes perceived the training and support to be irrelevant to their role, interests and future ambitions, and as such served no purpose in terms of supporting them to progress. Other reasons for not achieving a progression outcome included not receiving certification, personal factors such as caring responsibilities or their employer's willingness to pay a higher wage.

Employer experience of outcomes

Most employers interviewed felt that their engagement with the programme had some type of positive impact on their staff or business. Primarily this was that training had supported their staff to gain skills and knowledge relevant to their business. Employers felt that these primary outcomes had secondary impacts on their business such as higher productivity, improved employee performance and customer satisfaction. Additionally, some employers felt that engagement in the programme had prompted an attitudinal shift; employers felt

necessary to create a representative sample at 95% confidence level. Hourly wage estimates were then weighted to take account of the differences between the sample and total salary progressions in terms of age, gender, ethnic background and prior qualification levels.

more motivated to deliver future training to employees; and employees had an improved understanding the role that training could play in their development. Employers were particularly positive about the impact of courses that were accredited, relevant to employees' roles or represented longer term opportunities.

Conversely, other employers felt there had been no pivotal impact on the business. Non-regulated, short-term courses - for example refresher courses or mandatory requirements - and training that was not considered relevant to employees' roles or the business model were perceived to have little or no impact.

Employers reported that no earnings-related progression outcomes were achieved as a result of engagement with the programme. Employers explained that they were unable to provide pay increases based on the training and support provided, as they felt it had not led to substantial enough improvements. For those that did report pay increases, none attributed individuals' progression to their involvement in the programme. Instead these were attributed to statutory minimum wage increases or organisational increases that would have happened with or without the programme.

Overall, employers recognised soft and intermediate outcomes that had been achieved by their staff, as a result of engagement with the programme. This included sector-specific knowledge and skills; transferable 'life skills'; improved confidence; and improvements in attitudes towards learning and development. In general, employers felt that important factors working to support employees to achieve soft outcomes were the formal and professional nature of the course and the course having clear relevance to employees' roles which boosted employee engagement and interest in the training.

Conclusions and recommendations

The ESF In-Work Progression programme recognised the issue of rising in-work poverty in London and took seriously evidence that those in low pay are often unable to sustainably progress into better paid work. As such, the basis for the programme is rooted in sound rationale.

The evaluation has found the programme resulted in the development of an expansive employer-facing model, in which participants received training in relation to their current role. Some providers also followed an individual-led approach. The individual-led model supported participants away from their employer, providing a wider range of support tailored to their needs and aspirations and focused on both internal and external progression opportunities.

Participant outcomes

Just under one-third of all participants to date (29 per cent) recorded a progression outcome. 19 per cent of participants increased their pay, whilst 10 per cent achieved an

improvement in contract. Some increases were negligible and had no significant impact on the individual.

Recommendation 1: If using outcome-based payment models for future in-work progression programmes, commissioners should consider using earnings targets to incentivise provision that leads meaningful increases in earnings for programme participants.

Engagement

Several recruitment targets focused on specific demographic characteristics have been met but it has been more challenging to recruit single parents and people with disabilities.

Recommendation 2: Clear recruitment channels for ‘hard-to-reach groups’ should be established from the start of the programme.

Programme eligibility criteria worked well to identify individuals on low pay but there were concerns that some individuals with support needs were excluded. For example, those earning a low hourly wage but working a high number of hours, and individuals whose earnings regularly fluctuated because of insecure, sporadic work.

Recommendation 3: Eligibility criteria should be responsive to the nature of modern work and ensure that all to experience hardship because of low paid, precarious employment or whose working situations are considered ‘unsustainable’ are able to access support.

The employer-led model appeared to be a more effective way to engage potential participants at scale compared to the individual-led model. Alternative engagement routes were practised. Yet, these were less efficient at meeting registration targets, and as such were less utilised.

Recommendation 4: Where aligned with the intended model of support, future programmes should utilise individual-led pathways as a key source of referrals.

Programme structure

Programme registration targets and the ‘28-day progression rule’ also incentivised the use of the employer-facing model.

Recommendation 5: Programme commissioners should monitor to check for any unintentional impacts of programme requirements and revise where necessary.

Support Model

The referral method had a significant bearing on the scope and type of support delivered on the programme, with a wider range of personalised support made available to those following the individual-led model.

Those engaged through the employer-led model tended to have limited awareness of the overall purpose of the programme and the full package of support available.

Recommendation 6: It is important that programmes maintain a consistent introduction to their service, with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the programme and the support offer.

Recommendation 7: Future programmes should ensure to complete a robust needs assessment with participants at the point of engagement.

Participants favoured one-to-one advice, coaching and links to a wider package of support tailored to their needs and aims.

Skills provision was beneficial when clearly aligned to participants needs, provided in a supportive, engaging manner and closely matched with their current role or aspirations.

Employers interviewed felt that training had not delivered a large enough impact to progress staff.

Recommendation 8: The employer-led model should serve the interests of both the employer and the employee and include a range of support options including specialist training, business advice and one-to-one adviser support. Support must contribute towards the genuine progression of staff. Specialist approaches to employer engagement may be utilised.

Recommendation 9: Support delivered through the individual-led model should be tailored to a standardised needs assessment process. A wide range of support options should be available, according to individual need. Central to the individual model is the role of the adviser. Support must be flexible and provided in a format that is engaging and accessible. Employer brokerage should be utilised as a valuable tool to supporting participants enter new employment opportunities, with the support of their adviser.

1. Introduction

This report from Learning and Work Institute (L&W) presents findings from the evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) In-Work Progression programme.

The Greater London Authority (GLA) commissioned L&W to conduct the evaluation. The findings are based on an analysis of the programme's management information, combined with analysis of data from qualitative interviews and workshops conducted with programme participants, employers and key stakeholders, and staff involved in the management and delivery of the programme.

This chapter describes the programme, the evaluation approach, methods and the structure of the report.

GLA In-Work Progression Programme

The European Social Fund (ESF) In-Work Progression programme started in January 2017 and initially intended to run up to March 2018, though has since been extended to run to March 2019.

The programme was designed by the London Economic Action Partnership (LEAP) and procured by the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) as a Co-Financing Organisation for ESF and is delivered by two prime providers – Prospects and InterLearn – across four sub-regions in London. Both providers have employer-focussed delivery models and use a mix of sub-contractors to deliver support across their respective areas.

The programme was developed with the aim of supporting low paid workers to progress into better paid, more stable work through the provision of a tailored package of support including personalised advice, coaching and skills support. A mix of referral pathways onto the programme were planned, including person-led pathways through outreach, self-referrals and partnerships with other support services and organisations. Employers were also intended to play a major role in the recruitment of low paid workers onto the programme.

The Evaluation

The evaluation used a combination of methods to provide an assessment of the programme model and its effectiveness. These include:

- **Scoping stage** which featured interviews with senior leads and other strategic stakeholders to gain insight into its aims and objectives, and how policy intent was translated into practice. This stage also included workshops with staff from each prime delivery organisation and their respective supply chain, and a review of available documents and resources related to design and delivery of the programme;

- **Qualitative interviews** with programme managers and delivery staff, participants and employers to explore their experiences and views of the programme's progress, commissioning and service design, partnership working and achievements to date.
- **Quantitative analysis of programme management information** to provide a description of participant characteristics, the activities completed by participants and the outcomes achieved by the programme, and how these varied by participant characteristics.

Qualitative research

The qualitative analysis in the report draws on two waves of fieldwork:

- **Wave One** fieldwork was undertaken in May 2018 and comprised in-depth interviews with 5 key senior leads and strategic stakeholders. Two workshops were also held with staff from each prime delivery organisation and their supply chain.
- **Wave Two** fieldwork was undertaken between June and October 2018. This included in-depth interviews with 10 programme managers and delivery staff, spread across providers involved in the delivery. 20 interviews were conducted with programme participants. The characteristics of participant interviewees are shown in table 1.1 below. 12 interviews were conducted with employers that participated in the programme. The qualitative sample of service users and employers is not statistically representative, so it is not possible to report on how common particular views and experiences are among participants and employers. Rather, the intention is to provide insight into a range of experiences and views.

Table 1.1: Characteristics of participant interviews

	Participant type	Wave 2 interviews
Programme supply chain	Prospects	10
	InterLearn	10
Gender	Male	13
	Female	7
Age	18-24	9
	25-49	8
	50+	3
Health condition / disability	Health condition / disability	3
	None	17
Prior highest level of qualification	No qualification	3
	Entry level	1
	Level 1	1
	Level 2	5
	Level 3	6
	Level 4	1
	Level 5+	2
Employment contract at engagement	Overseas qualification	1
	Zero-hours temporary	10
	Fixed-hours temporary	1
Achievement of outcomes	Permanent contract	9
	Progression outcome	11
	No outcome	9

Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter two describes the aims and rationale of the programme, and the design and development of the programme specification;
- Chapter three defines the support model of the programme and explores staff and stakeholder views of its implementation;
- Chapter four presents data on programme participants, exploring their characteristics and barriers to progression;
- Chapter five examines the support provided through the programme and participant views of this;
- Chapter six presents an overview of employers' perception of the support and training provided through the employer-led component of the programme;
- Chapter seven presents programme achievements and progressions;
- Chapter eight presents participants' views of outcomes via the programme;
- Chapter nine present employers' views of outcomes achieved through the employer-led component of the programme;
- Chapter ten presents the conclusions and lessons for delivery of in-work progression support going forward.

2.ESF In-Work Progression programme specification design and development

Chapter two draws on findings from a document review and scoping interviews conducted with key representatives from GLA, ESFA and London Councils involved with the development of the programme. This chapter provides an outline of the design and development of the specification, including the main features of the model, changes made prior to commissioning and key representatives reflections on the design and development of the programme.

The In-Work Progression Programme is one of the ESF-funded programmes delivered in London through the 2014-2020 funding programme. The European Programmes Management Unit at GLA is responsible for the award, management and administration of the ESF in London under delegated powers granted by the ESF Managing Authority at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The strategic direction and priorities for the programme were set by the LEAP (the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for London formerly known as the London Enterprise Panel). The LEAP brought together stakeholders to consult on the design of ESF programmes, including London Councils, ESF Co-Financing Organisations (CFOs), the London Voluntary Service Council (now London Plus) and Jobcentre Plus (JCP).

The ESFA, one of the national CFOs, provided match funding and were responsible for the design of the programme specification, procurement of contracts and programme management.

Policy context and rationale for development

The programme was developed in response to rising in-work poverty in London. At the time of programme development, there were more people living in poverty in working households than there were in workless households. There was also evidence that many people in low paid work were 'stuck' in low pay and unable to sustainably progress into better paid work.

Supporting low paid workers to progress into better paid and more stable work was identified as a priority through the LEAP stakeholder group and workshops with London boroughs organised by London Councils. In-work poverty was identified as a key issue for both inner and outer London boroughs with a clear gap in support for this group. This was confirmed by analysis completed by GLA Economics, which demonstrated that in-work poverty was a large and growing issue and was particularly acute in London.

At the time of programme design, there was a relatively limited evidence base. Whilst a small number of pilots¹⁰ were being developed to address the issue, these had not yet produced conclusive findings about how to effectively support low paid workers to progress into better paid and more stable employment.

Representatives explained that the new programme represented a significant opportunity to invest more resources and expand efforts in tackling low pay and encourage progression, while building on the limited evidence base. The main differences between this programme and previous programmes were identified as:

- The **scale of the programme**: the programme would operate across all London boroughs, whereas previous pilots were limited to smaller areas.
- The **proposed payment model**: this programme was designed to test a payment by results (PbR) model within an in-work progression programme.

Overview of process

The design phase for the programme began in 2014 and involved wide consultation and research, including the coordination of a LEAP Skills and Employment Working Group made up of key stakeholders and experts, including researchers, policy experts, charities and providers. There were several stages of activity prior to the commissioning of the final specification, including:

- The LEAP consulted with stakeholders to produce the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) strategy which set out the key issues for future ESF employment and skills programmes. One of the main issues identified was in-work poverty.
- GLA consulted with wider stakeholders and GLA Economics to develop an initial Programme Concept Template (PCT) for an in-work progression programme. This comprised a review of existing evidence and interventions, analysis of LFS datasets and proposed approaches with feedback from sector experts. The specification was chosen by the LEAP's stakeholder group as a programme to develop further.
- GLA and London Councils conducted research into appropriate eligibility criteria and payment models. The development of the payment model consisted of different stages, including the analysis of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and Labour Force Survey (LFS) to determine counterfactual outcome levels, benchmarking against existing data from the limited number of existing in-work progression programmes.

¹⁰ Representatives referred to Step Up, Skills Escalator, the ESF Skills Support for the Workforce programme and DWP's Universal Credit Pilots.

- Further input, scrutiny and feedback was provided by the LEAP Skills and Employment Working Group throughout the design and development process.

The model was translated into ESFA's commissioning templates to ensure the final specification matched their existing systems. This led to several key changes which were implemented prior to the publication of the final specification. This final specification was then published, and providers were invited to bid to deliver the programme.

Development of the programme specification

Service Requirements

The composition of the service offer was developed based on a review of existing literature, consultations with stakeholders and the Skills and Employment Working Group. It was designed to provide a degree of direction without being prescriptive, giving providers the freedom to develop models they felt would be effective and suited to their local context. Commissioners wanted to avoid a narrow set of requirements to support an approach that encouraged innovation and meaningful, tailored provision. It was hoped that this 'black box' approach would produce a range of delivery models which could be tested at scale to provide robust evidence of distinct approaches.

The programme specification included general and specific service requirements for providers, including:

- **All participants to complete a needs assessment**

All participants were required to undergo an initial assessment, exploring their situation at the start of their engagement with the programme, including barriers to progression, work history, housing status and a better off calculation. This assessment would then be used to produce an individual progression plan, including progression targets.

- **Provision of flexible, tailored support**

A tailored support package had to be designed for each participant, including mentoring or coaching with a personal adviser to address the barriers identified during the personalised needs assessment. The specification provided examples of support such as: increasing skills levels, working with employers to determine different progression opportunities, or providing personal adviser support to build confidence and motivation. The specification also stipulated that providers operate flexible delivery outside of working hours as needed.

- **Regulated and non-regulated learning**

To align with ESFA systems, learning was included as a minimum service deliverable of the programme and incorporated into the provider payment model. This meant that the programme became more skills-orientated than had been initially envisaged. Learning activity was divided into two categories:

1. **Regulated learning activity** - the provision of learning activities that include a formal outcome assessment and validation process and lead to a qualification or certificate.
2. **Non-regulated learning activity** - the provision of learning and development activity that does not lead to a formal qualification, for example the development of basic skills, employability skills, work shadowing or mentoring.

A mix of regulated and non-regulated activity was included to ensure participants were able to access different types of support. Representatives reported that stakeholders involved in the design of the programme had mixed opinions about the role of training at the point of specification development. Some stakeholders felt that a compulsory training requirement could place a large burden on providers. There was also concern that learning activity might be delivered as 'one-size-fits-all', which would not necessarily meet individual needs. These stakeholders felt that, whilst learning should be a component of the support provided, it should not be a mandatory requirement, citing that skills deficiencies were not always the main barriers to progression faced by individuals. Instead, they felt a wider offer of support should have been required to aid progression.

- **Employer engagement**

The specification set engagement with employers as an important element of the programme. Where participants were identified through their employer, the specification recommended that providers work with both the employer and individual to support progression. For example, by using techniques such as Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) to identify training opportunities which meet employer aims whilst simultaneously supporting the participant to progress in their role.

Representatives recognised the potential benefits of working with employers, both for the recruitment of potential participants and for sourcing employment opportunities for participants to progress into. The ONA was viewed as a key way to inform employers about the benefits of supporting staff to progress internally and create a cultural shift within businesses.

However, representatives highlighted that they were keen for providers to use a variety of approaches to identify, support and progress low paid workers. There was recognition at the design stage that working with employers to identify low paid workers could limit participant opportunities to internal progression routes, which may not match their preferences and limit the potential of the programme.

- **Partnership working**

The specification advised that providers should build and utilise good partnership links with a range of specialist and local organisations, including the National Careers Service (NCS),

JCP, local authorities, children's centres, social landlords and community centres, in order to enhance the support offer.

Payment model

A PbR model was chosen as the payment model as it was felt that it would encourage providers to focus on achieving outcomes and deliver high quality support, driving up performance.

PbR models had not been used in past in-work progression programmes, hence there was considerable work put into the development of an appropriate model. Representatives wanted to positively influence provider behaviour, whilst ensuring that the key deliverables and outcomes were not overly burdensome.

The final targets for volumes and unit costs were calculated based on, and benchmarked against, the previous experience of ESF programmes. Unit costs were calculated based on the number of participants expected across the whole In-Work Progression programme, and then split by projected numbers for each sub-region; Central London, North & East London, South London and West London.

Funding and deliverables

The specification included minimum service deliverables, values and volumes for providers, which formed the basis of the payment model. The minimum service deliverables which providers had to evidence were:

- **Learner Assessment and Plan**, which comprised 43 per cent of the overall contract value
- **Regulated Learning**, which comprised 8 per cent of the overall contract value
- **Non-Regulated Activity**, which comprised 18 per cent of the overall contract value

There were also two main outcomes, which comprised approximately 30 per cent of the overall contract value:

- **Outcome 1:** participant's employment contract improved, which comprised 8 per cent of the overall contract value
- **Outcome 2:** participant's earnings increased for two consecutive months¹¹, which comprised 22 per cent of the overall contract value

Representatives felt the model would provide reasonably substantial payments at each stage of the programme to ensure providers had enough income. This was to ensure the

¹¹ Representatives explained that total earnings were measured as opposed to hourly wage, as earnings are more closely linked to poverty levels.

bidding process was commercially attractive, reducing the risk to providers and enabling them to deliver the tailored support required to achieve outcomes.

Definitions of progression

Improvement in earnings

The final programme funding model did set a minimum level of earnings increase required to achieve an earnings-related progression outcome, meaning *any* increase in earnings from a participant's prior earnings could satisfy an earnings-related outcome. The specification limited the working hours that could be counted towards an earnings progression to 40 hours per week, to prevent progression outcomes being primarily driven by participants increasing their hours or working additional jobs.

In order to qualify, an earnings progression had to be sustained over two consecutive months and be achieved within 12 months of starting the programme. The introduction of ESFA funding requirements added a further requirement, meaning where an outcome was achieved, this also had to take place and be recorded within 28 days of the completion of the funded learning activity.¹² Whilst this meant funded outcomes could still technically be achieved within 12 months of starting the programme, this timeframe would be limited to just 28 days upon the completion of a funded learning activity.

During the design of the specification, commissioners envisaged that different levels of outcome payments would be used, based on participants attaining different earnings thresholds. This was based on extensive modelling of prior and expected average annual increases for low paid workers in London. These thresholds were expected to be “more ambitious” than the Universal Credit in-work conditionality thresholds. However, this feature was not included in the final specification, with commissioners opting for a simpler outcomes measure. During programme development, stakeholders felt that the absence of an earnings requirement risked impeding delivery, with less incentive for providers to support participants to achieve meaningful pay rises. The comparison to Universal Credit in-work conditionality thresholds and relevance of programme learning to DWP and other agencies was also felt to be restricted by the removal of earning thresholds.

During programme development, commissioners also considered a range of progression types that could be used as deliverable outcome targets, including qualification increases

¹² Education & Skills Funding Agency - Funding Rules 2014 to 2020 ESF Programme ESF Specifications Deliverables Evidence Requirements (Version 4), claiming and evidencing a progression outcome (p.27): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/763564/Spec_Deliverables_V4.pdf

and promotions, but selected an increase in earnings as the most direct measure of poverty reduction.

Improvement in employment contract

The final specification also included a smaller outcome payment for an improvement in employment contract as a secondary measure of progression. An improvement in contract was defined as:

- Changing from a **zero hours contract to a permanent contract** (or a temporary contract of at least six months duration)
- Changing from a **temporary contract of less than six months duration to a permanent contract** (or a temporary contract of at least six months duration)

Stakeholders felt it was important to include a payment for contract change in the payment model to recognise the importance to individuals of improved employment conditions and stability of employment.

Claiming and evidencing a progression outcome

Providers had to evidence participants' weekly earnings prior to the intervention and provide the equivalent of two months' worth of wage slips (up to 8 wage slips if paid weekly) or other documentary evidence of a change in employment contract to demonstrate a progression. According to ESFA evidence requirements, progression outcomes had to be achieved within 28 days of the completion of the regulated or non-regulated learning activity.^{13 14} This meant participants had 28 days following the end of learning activity to achieve a progression outcome. Stakeholders felt this could have a substantial impact on programme outcomes as progression outcomes achieved after 28 days would be excluded, limiting the time in which it was possible for participants to progress. Some stakeholders also recognised the risk that providers may face difficulties in acquiring payslips, or other evidence of hours worked, and contract type required for ESF purposes, from the participants or their employer.

In order to register participants, and claim an outcome, ESFA requirements also meant providers had to obtain a state aid de minimis declaration from the employers of participants registered to the programme, acknowledging the provision of support. This was required for all participants, regardless of whether their employer was involved with the programme.

¹³ Education & Skills Funding Agency - Funding Rules 2014 to 2020 ESF Programme ESF Specifications Deliverables Evidence Requirements (Version 4):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/763564/Spec_Deliverables_V4.pdf

Programme procurement and commissioning

The bid scoring process was conducted in accordance with Government procurement regulations. Stakeholders commented that all bidders had applied the minimum service levels as specified in the tender rather than increasing these. There was also a relatively standard delivery model across all the bids.

While the providers had similar delivery models, stakeholders involved in the procurement felt that both of the successful providers demonstrated a good knowledge of their local labour markets and strong partnerships.

Expectations for programme

At the time of programme development, there were relatively few existing in-work progression programmes and therefore limited outcomes for the programme to benchmark against. Therefore, the programme's aims were to measure outcomes and to increase knowledge and understanding of this type of support.

Some stakeholders were keen for the programme to adopt innovative delivery models, for example, addressing participant needs through personally tailored support. However, it was reported that funding and procurement rules limited the scope for innovation around delivery.

All stakeholders hoped that providers would focus on changing employer behaviour and champion the development of meaningful progression routes within organisations. It was also hoped that learning from the programme would generate good practice to share with relevant policymakers and decision makers such as DWP, and that the findings from the programme would feed into the plans for the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB).

Contextual factors

Stakeholders mentioned several contextual factors which influenced programme development and could have influence over delivery, including:

- Despite bringing a welcome focus on in-work conditionality for low paid workers earning below the equivalent of 35 hours at National Minimum Wage¹⁵, **the launch of Universal Credit (UC)** was felt to limit the involvement of both DWP and JCP. During development, some stakeholders also felt that the introduction of UC was likely to affect programme delivery due to the varied rollout timetable across the London boroughs.

¹⁵ Some claimant groups, for example claimants with young children, caring responsibilities and work-limiting health problems, have different earnings thresholds in relation to their claimant commitment.

- The wider economy and employment levels were also viewed as vital contextual factors. While the economy was relatively stable, stakeholders highlighted that there had been a **prolonged period of wage stagnation**. In this context, it was considered that it may have been more difficult for employees to achieve wage progression, particularly if providers focused on up-skilling and progressing employees within an organisation, rather than supporting individuals to progress externally.
- **Individual priorities and circumstances** were also regarded as a key contextual factor. For example, their capacity and propensity to engage with support, wider impacts of progression outcomes on household income and wellbeing, and differing definitions of 'progression' in the context of an individual's life.

3. Design and implementation of the in-work progression programme

This chapter describes the implementation of the In-Work Progression programme, including provider views of key features of the programme design and funding model, and the participant journey through the support.

Provider views on programme design features

Target groups

The programme requirements for the demographics of participants included:

- a minimum of 45% of all participants should be parents; and
- a minimum of 30% of all participants who are parents should be lone parents.

There were also core-ESF targets for the following groups:

Participants who are over 50	20%
Participants from ethnic minorities	56%
Female participants	45%
Participants without basic skills	21%
Participants with a disability or health problem	25%

ESF programmes typically target groups with poorer labour market outcomes to ensure that they can access suitable support. This rationale, and research into the characteristics of low paid workers, informed the development of the programme's target groups.

Parents, and lone parents in particular, were identified in the research as a group who are disproportionately affected by low pay and face additional barriers to progressing their income. Stakeholders involved in the programme design emphasised evidence identifying the long-term negative effects experienced by children growing up in poverty. Stakeholders expected that supporting low paid parents and lone parents to move out of poverty would also reduce child poverty.

Sub-contracted providers shared the same level of targets as the main provider they worked with. Most providers agreed that the target groups were appropriate, as they were groups that would most benefit from support.

Some providers noted that reaching certain groups could be challenging, particularly when recruiting participants through employers who may not have a knowledge of certain characteristics of their employees. This included:

- **Lone parents**, who are often inflexible and time poor given their childcare responsibilities, making them harder to reach. Providers also felt that lone parents were a particularly hard group to reach because employers, which represented the main referral source of participants, were unlikely to know the parental status of their staff.
- Similarly, providers reported that **individuals with health conditions or learning disabilities or difficulties (LDD)** were difficult to target. Again, providers felt that this was because employers were unlikely to have a full understanding of their employees' health status, particularly because employees often keep their health conditions 'hidden' from their employer.

Other providers reported that they did not experience any challenges reaching their target groups. They attributed this to having a clear and robust marketing plan. Some providers targeted specific sectors with a preponderance of one target group, leading to some providers exceeding their targets. For example, some providers engaging with businesses in the care sector exceeded their target for female participants.

Eligibility criteria

The programme specification defined eligibility as earning **10% below the weekly earnings' equivalent of 35 hours at the latest London Living Wage and having been in such employment for at least four consecutive months.**^{16 17} These criteria were designed to identify individuals in low paid work who would benefit from support to progress, without being unnecessarily complex to implement in practice.

"We wanted to make sure that it was people who were actually struggling to get out of low paid work rather than it just being a blip... the challenge with that, particularly around ESF, is being able to provide the evidence for that."

Although some providers felt that the eligibility criteria worked well, many of those interviewed felt the criteria introduced key limitations and restricted support from individuals who may have benefited from it, including:

¹⁶ Low pay was defined in relation to the London Living Wage (LLW), as this is endorsed by the Mayor of London and is closely linked to the GLA's objectives.

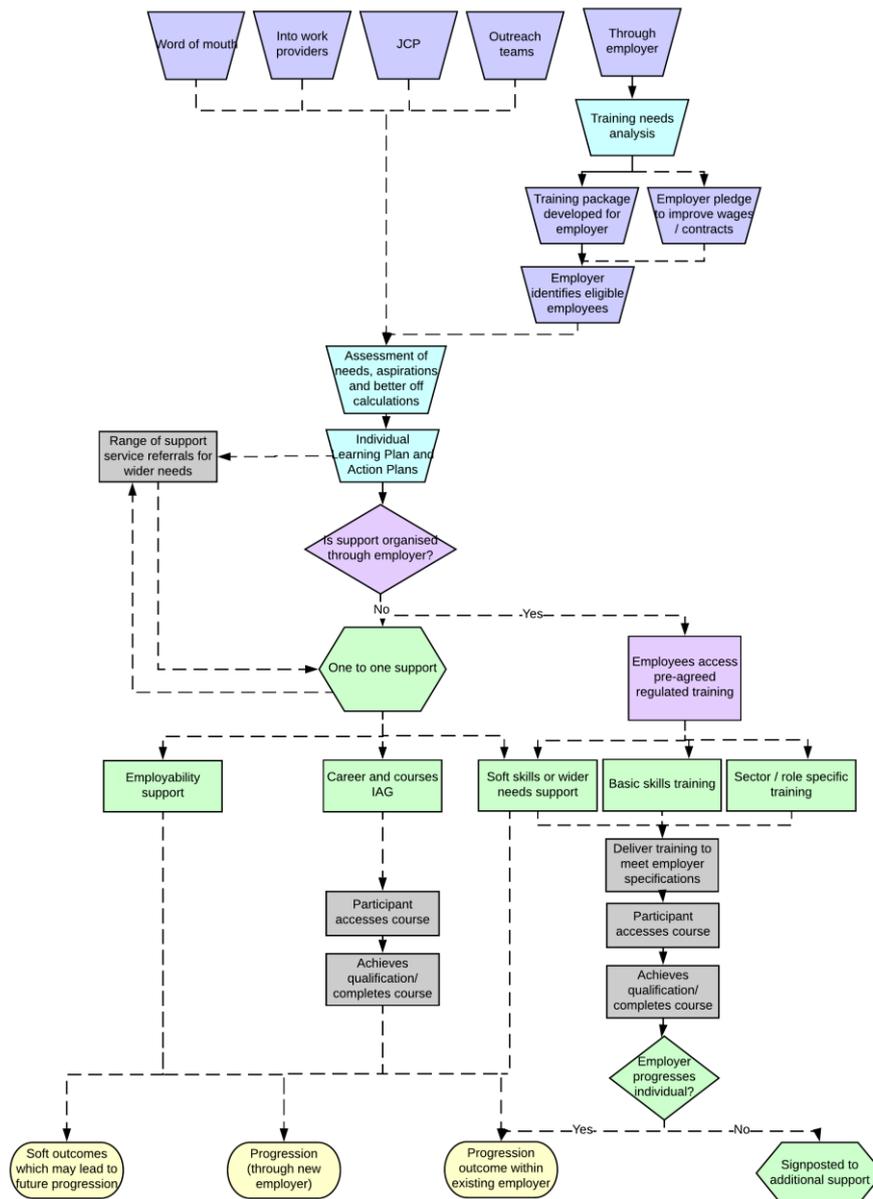
¹⁷ It was decided that the programme should target individuals who had been in low pay for an extended amount of time. However, due to perceived difficulties of securing evidence to prove eligibility, it was decided to set the time-frame at four months rather than a longer period.

- **Individuals earning a low hourly wage but working a high number of hours per week**
- **Individuals whose weekly hours and earnings fluctuated each week, for example those on flexible or zero-hour contracts**

Design of the support model

The In-Work Progression programme aimed to deliver an innovative package of support, through a mix of tailored advice and skills provision, to help low paid workers achieve an earnings progression or improvement in contract. The diagram below depicts an amalgam of the support provided – elements of which varied across individual providers.

In Work Progression Programme - Participant Journey



Engagement

Providers used a mix of referral methods to recruit participants onto the programme.

Recruitment via employers (employer-led)

The main method reported by providers was employer-led recruitment, whereby providers directly engage employers to enlist their employees. Once employers were engaged with the programme, providers would work with them to identify participants eligible to participate

and explore suitable support options. In order to register participants to the programme, providers had to obtain the employer's written acknowledgement of receipt of support.

Working with employers gave providers access to a large volume of participants, helping to meet registration targets efficiently. Providers used a variety of means to engage employers:

- **Using existing networks and partnerships;** for example, working through existing contacts from previous delivery was seen as an easier approach to approaching new employers 'cold'.
- **Approaching employers who were likely to have employees who met the eligibility criteria;** for example, approaching specific 'low-paid' sectors, such as health and social care employers, whose employees were likely to meet the eligibility criteria
- **Approaching employers who were likely to achieve impact through the programme;** providers targeted employers that they were confident would benefit from training and additional support, and as a result would be more likely to progress their staff. Some providers targeted specific employers based on their understanding of their sector's training requirements and methods to encourage staff progression. For example, one provider worked with stewarding companies as they knew that providing a Level 2 qualification to staff would support their promotion and lead to an increase in their wages.
- **Approaching large employers;** bigger employers were viewed favourably as they allowed providers to engage a larger number of employees.

Approaches to employer engagement

A range of approaches were found to work effectively, including:

- **Pitching training and support with a clear benefit to the employer**
Providers explained that offering free training with a clear benefit for the employer was an effective approach to engaging employers, for example training that was tailor-made to meet specific skills gaps could improve productivity or save employer costs. Some providers used ONAs to provide an assessment of the business model, skills gaps and/or current training provision and identify beneficial options. Providers also emphasised other potential benefits to businesses including improved employee motivation, satisfaction and wellbeing, reduced staff turnover and increased corporate social responsibility. Providers explained that this was a big draw to employers that were too busy, had little interest or lacked the funding to upskill their workforce.

- **Being clear about the programme offer**

Providers felt that it was advantageous to be clear about what was expected or required from the employer from the outset. For example, discussing earnings targets and programme eligibility during the initial meeting. Not being clear about the purpose of the programme risked employers' later commitment to progressing staff. Providers found that an effective approach to securing employers' commitment was to highlight the subsidised funding in conjunction with the expectation that progression outcomes will be secured. Some also introduced an 'employer pledge', which specified the purpose of the training in supporting individuals to progress, to secure employers' commitment.

- **Using wider teams' expertise**

Some providers had access to an employer engagement team, with expertise in marketing services. Drawing on this expertise was found to be beneficial in securing employer buy-in. Providers without this resource (mainly smaller providers) felt that their recruitment could have been improved with a member of their team dedicated to employer engagement.

Challenges to employer engagement

Providers experienced several challenges which they felt deterred employers' engagement with the programme. This included:

- **Inability or reluctance to improve staff pay and/or contracts;** some employers felt that their business could not feasibly progress staff due to limited opportunities for progression or the likely impact on their costs. Providers stated that the use of the employer pledge deterred the engagement of employers that felt the progression of staff was not an option.
- **Aversion to training and staff progression;** in some instances, employers felt training or staff progression would not deliver any benefits or improve their business. Some were concerned that training would only result in a higher staff turnover.
- **Put off by programme requirements;** requiring employers to gather and share paperwork relating to participant pay, contract and worker characteristics to prove eligibility was found to be too "time consuming" for some employers.
- **Concerns about the nature of the programme;** providers explained that some employers were suspicious of the programme, as they thought it was unlikely that free training and support would be available without any additional conditions or adverse requirements.

- **Difficulties reaching management and key decision makers;** not having management present during the initial discussion was felt to limit the efficacy of the sales pitch, as this relied on the staff member present accurately relaying information internally.
- **Existing in-house training;** some employers did not see the value in participating with their programme as they were satisfied with their current training arrangements.

Recruitment via outreach and other channels (individual-led)

Whilst all providers interviewed stated that employer-led recruitment was their main referral source, some recruited participants independent of their employer through an ‘individual-led’ approach.

Approaches to individual-led engagement

When engaging potential participants, providers emphasised the offer of funded training opportunities and additional support options such as careers advice and CV, job search and interview advice, and the potential for participants to progress in work. Providers found that an individual-led approach gave a greater scope to provide person-centred support, away from the restrictions of their current employer, which could help participants focus on progressing with a new employer. Providers stated the programme was particularly appealing to individuals wanting to upskill and gain qualifications but had previously faced barriers to doing so. Several individual-led recruitment methods were tested by providers, including:

- **Outreach with low paid workers** – Some providers used outreach activity, such as mail-outs, social media and targeted invitations and information sessions to inform potential participants about the programme and support available to them. For example, one FE college promoted the programme to learners partaking in courses that typically engaged learners in low paid work, for example, health and social care, nursery care and ESOL classes.
- **Partnership with Jobcentre Plus** – Providers worked with JCP to establish referrals of Universal Credit (UC) customers. This was expected to be an effective approach to engaging low paid workers as a result of the growing focus on in-work claimants, however providers experienced several challenges. First, the scale of change brought on through the introduction of UC was felt to limit JCP and work coach’s capacity to engage with providers. Providers also felt that work coaches were mainly focused on support to move claimants in to employment, as opposed to supporting employed claimants to progress. The voluntary nature of the programme, a lack of incentives, limited awareness of progression support and concerns around how welfare entitlement may be affected was also thought to limit JCP customers

willingness to engage. In general, it was felt that improved planning to develop an effective referral pathway with JCP could have led to a more successful arrangement.

- **Signposting from other relevant services** – Providers sought to develop engagement pathways with relevant support services and other organisations which could identify and signpost eligible participants, for example housing associations and local authority bodies. However, providers reported this was not particularly effective, with few participants recruited via these channels.
- **Word of mouth** – Encouraging existing participants to share information about the programme with their social networks and local communities, through word of mouth, was found to be an effective approach at increasing self-referrals.

Challenges to individual-led engagement

Providers reported several issues that arose through individual-led recruitment, including:

- **Unable to source necessary participant documentation to evidence eligibility;** meaning providers were unable to register participants to the programme as participants were unwilling or unable to share payslips and other documentation necessary to evidence their eligibility.
- **Requirement to gain employer's written acknowledgement of participant's receipt of support;** participants looking to progress into a new role were discouraged by this requirement as it risked informing their employer they were receiving support to look for a new job. Providers were also averse to this time-intensive process as it meant they had to contact each employer and obtain written acknowledgment.

Overall, providers found individual-led approaches were more resource-intensive than the employer-led approach yet secured an insufficient number of referrals. This meant providers were confident they could not efficiently reach the number of participants required by programme registration targets. As a result, some providers restricted their referral pathways to solely focus on employer-led participants.

Registration and assessment process

Upon engaging with the programme, participants must register and complete a needs assessment.¹⁸ To encourage efficiency providers often combine the two processes, completing learner plans alongside the assessment of needs. This is typically conducted in

¹⁸ Learner plans were used to register participants and collect necessary information, for example participant details, demographic and employment details

a private one-to-one setting with an adviser or tutor during a participant's initial appointment. The process follows an informal, conversational format and includes a review of participant barriers, goals and areas for development. The process can also include specific skills assessments, including literacy, numeracy and workplace skills, and better off calculations. Results of the assessment process include the identification of specific barriers to progress and next steps.

Key considerations for registrations and assessment process

- **Combining needs assessment with action planning** – Some providers used the process to develop a personalised action plan which prioritised steps to be taken. Needs assessment and action plan development was considered a valuable means to introduce individuals to the programme and help them consider their current situation, their priorities and opportunities to achieve progression. Providers spoke of the importance of providing a clear explanation of the assessment process.
- **Non-workplace setting** – Providers felt that participants were more comfortable if the assessment was conducted outside of their immediate work setting, as this encouraged them to be open about their needs, personal details and objectives, supporting the assessment process.
- **Signposting where appropriate** – Some providers feared that the programme could not cater to all the needs identified in the needs assessment, particularly those requiring longer-term support. Providers attributed this to the limited scope and length of the programme. As a result, some providers signposted participants to external provision to additional support such as mental health, financial and further skills support.
- **Different support options according to participants' referral route** - Providers reported a clash between completing needs assessments and developing action plans with participants that engaged with the programme through their employer, as support options and recommendations would have to align with the needs of the employer. This restricted the type of support available and advice made to participants.
- **Burdensome evidence requirements at registration** - There was some concern amongst providers about the level of information that was required, particularly demographic, earnings and benefits information. This was difficult to source, because participants were either unwilling or unable to share the requested information.

Skills and training provision

Skills and training provision make up the core offer of support provided through the programme. This includes a mix of regulated¹⁹ and non-regulated training²⁰. Programme requirements stipulate that regulated training can only be provided up to Level 2 full qualifications or individual units of Level 3. Providers reported that the majority of training provided to participants was non-regulated.

Types of training

Overall, providers preferred to deliver in-house training from their existing catalogue of provision. This was considered more cost-effective as it utilised existing staff, resources and provider expertise. Those with a wide range of in-house provision, such as FE colleges, were confident they had a large enough scope to cater for a wide range of needs. Some providers spoke of the additional option of using small “training pots” to fund training consultants or other providers to fill gaps in provision. Other providers restricted their offer of support to focus on specific areas of expertise. For example, one provider which specialised in the delivery of health and social care related training only worked with employers and employees operating within the care sector.

Examples of the types of training offered by providers includes:

- **Regulated sector-specific training**; such as Health and Social Care, Spectator Safety and Food & Hygiene.
- **Non-regulated sector-specific training**; such as Principles of Manual Handling, Safeguarding, Principles of Control of Substances Hazardous for Health (COSHH)
- **Regulated basic skills qualifications**; such as Adult Literacy, Adult Numeracy and ICT.
- **Non-regulated training**; such as Confidence Building, Team Building and Conflict Management

Providers explained that ESFA requirements meant there were some restrictions on the types of training provided, for example providers said they were not able to provide ESOL provision and Health and Safety qualifications.

¹⁹ Regulated learning activity - the provision of learning activities that include a formal outcome assessment and validation process and lead to a qualification or certificate.

²⁰ Non-regulated learning activity - the provision of learning and development activity that does not lead to a formal qualification, for example the development of basic skills, employability skills, work shadowing or mentoring.

Selection of training

The referral route of participants has a significant bearing on the training delivered:

- **Providers typically work with employers to select the type of training suitable for them and their workers.** This is made in consideration of business needs and advice from provider staff. Providers explained that this included taking employers through their catalogue of training options and identifying provision which best suited them. Some providers conducted an ONA, which provided a more in-depth review of business needs in order to match employers with training. As a result, the type of training offered to 'employer-led' participants typically aligned with their current role, restricting participants options, such as upskilling in a new area.
- **Participants who join the programme independently of their current employer have more freedom in which to select suitable training options.** This means participants who follow the 'individual-led' approach have greater capacity to identify and select training options relevant to them. This means participants can select training that links with their needs and ambitions, as opposed to the needs of their employer.

Provision of training

Some providers experienced difficulties with participants being able to commit to training schedules. This is particularly the case for individuals with caring responsibilities and those on flexible contracts, who often work wide-ranging hours with limited advance knowledge of their availability. In some cases, this prevented participants from being able to commit to training or meant they were more likely to miss training sessions and appointments.

Providers stated that having a close working relationship with the employer was helpful for facilitating their participation, for example planning the employees' rota hours around adviser appointments or hosting training sessions on site. One provider offered employers funding to pay for cover staff for employees attending training and support sessions, however these employers did not make use of the resource.

Impact of training

Providers explained that they preferred non-regulated provision in comparison to regulated training as it offered:

- **Greater flexibility;** non-regulated provision can be delivered in-house at a time and place that is most convenient for the employer and participants. In comparison, regulated provision has more rigid course structures and availability, making it comparatively more challenging to organise around the limited availability of participants and the timeframe of the programme.

- **More efficient;** non-regulated provision can be delivered in a group format, allowing providers to reach a larger cohort of participants using the same resources. In comparison, some regulated provision required 1:1 tuition, which was felt to be too resource-intensive for providers. Non-regulated provision was often less time-intensive than regulated training and was less likely to require external specialist training expertise.

Despite this preference, some providers acknowledged that the content of non-regulated learning was sometimes too light-touch and generic to support sustained progression, with limited potential to impact on participants in a meaningful way. Some providers were also concerned that the type of non-specialist training they delivered may have duplicated what employers already provided.

To deliver provision which was best placed to support meaningful progression, providers recommended:

- Training which leads to the development of specialist, job-specific skills or recognised qualifications;
- Matching provision with the participants interests and/or employer's needs;
- Working with employers to ensure provision is not repetitive and delivers added value;
- Providing learning opportunities which fit around the needs and availability of the learners – including accessible times and locations; and
- Recognising that training may only play a small part in the support necessary to help individuals progress.

Adviser contact

Contact with an adviser is another central component of the model. Participants are intended to have regular meetings with programme advisers through a mixture of contact types including face-to-face, phone and video call appointments, according to the preference and availability of the participant. Providers explained that regular contact between advisers and participants helped to build advisers' understanding of participants' needs and priorities, improving their capacity to give advice and support. Regular appointments also helped staff to maintain participants' engagement with the programme.

However, whilst providers stated regular contact was offered to all participants, there was evidence that contact was largely limited; particularly for those accessing support through their employer. Several providers explained that contact with participants was mainly restricted to the registration process and the provision of training, with little opportunity for

additional contact. This sometimes meant that participants involvement with the programme only span across one single appointment.

Additional support

In addition to the core offer of training, providers listed a range of other support options. This included:

- Welfare, housing and legal advice
- Access to hardship funds
- Employability and careers support e.g. CV, job search and interview techniques
- Referrals to external services e.g. advice services and additional training providers

Additional support that focused on helping participants to progress into new jobs was mainly provided to participants that accessed the programme through the individual-led approach. Participants explained this was because of the potential conflict of interests caused by supporting employees that had accessed support through their employer to move into a new job.

Funding model

As detailed in chapter two, the programme adopted a PbR model with payments made to prime providers for the completion of registrations, regulated and non-regulated training, and progression outcomes. Prime providers followed a similar model with sub-contracted providers, paying for the same outcomes, whilst taking a proportional management fee.

Providers agreed that the PbR model incentivised them to engage with individuals, to provide training and to achieve progression outcomes. There were mixed views about the amount of resources provided through the payment model. Some stated that payments were for them to provide what they deemed to be the right level and type of support. However, one sub-contracted provider stated that the payments did not provide enough funding in comparison to other employment-related programmes, especially considering the amount of resource spent completing paperwork and providing support.

In addition to the amount of resources available, providers identified several other limitations related to the funding model, including:

- **ESFA requirement stipulating progression outcomes must be achieved within 28 days of the completion of learning activity limited the potential for external progressions**

This requirement meant providers had to focus on the achievement of short-run outcomes to meet targets and receive funding. As providers considered it unlikely for participants to move into a new job within such a short timeframe, this reduced their focus on external

progressions, with providers instead concentrating on employer-led support which they felt was more likely to lead to a quicker achievement of outcomes.

- **Registration targets encouraged providers to focus on employer-led recruitment**

Similarly, providers felt that registration targets and the payments attached to them encouraged providers to concentrate on employer-led recruitment, as this was a more efficient method to reach the required number of participants. This limited the potential for individual-led support pathways.

- **Evidence requirement processes placed an administrative burden on providers**

Providers were also concerned about the amount of resource and time spent evidencing payment claims. They explained that gathering participant information at the start of the programme, alongside evidencing training and progression outcomes took up a lot of administrative resources, often at the expense of adviser and training resource for participants.

Supply chain management

The programme was led by two prime providers, and their respective networks of sub-contracted providers. Sub-contracted providers reported several challenges resulting from the management structure of the supply chain, including:

- **Little opportunity to collaborate and share learning between providers;** providers stated this prevented the exchange of ideas and ways of working, which they felt would have benefitted programme delivery, particularly due to providers' relative unfamiliarity with progression-focused support.
- **Unclear advice and instructions;** some providers explained that they were not fully informed about programme requirements when starting delivery. This led to providers providing support that was not eligible for funding, whilst others did not collect the correct evidence. Providers explained this caused significant issues with cash flow and business sustainability, given they had provided support but could not claim funding.
- **Changes in supply-chain management;** over the course of the programme, one of the prime providers changed ownership. Providers explained that this had considerable impact on their operations as they were unable to contact any management staff in relation to their strand of the programme. One provider reported that they had experienced late and missing payments from the prime provider. This

had caused significant disruption, and as a result the provider was no longer participating with the programme.



4. Participant characteristics, barriers and needs

This chapter describes the programme's participants; their circumstances, priorities, and barriers to progression. It draws on programme management information collected between January 2017 to October 2018 to look at how the cohort is distributed across a range of key socio-demographic indicators. The chapter also uses qualitative interviews with participants to explore their aspirations and the range of barriers faced to progressing in work. Interviews were not conducted with a representative sample, hence do not offer insight into the incidence of specific issues. Rather, their purpose is to add depth and nuance to the analysis.

Demographic characteristics

Overall, 11,421 participants had registered to join the programme up to October 2018²¹.

Gender

Across the programme, 57 per cent of participants were female whilst 43 per cent were male. At the time of writing, the programme was surpassing the female registration target of 45 per cent. Comparison with the London Poverty Profile 2017 shows a similar gender split; 55 per cent of all low paid London workers were female, whilst 45 per cent were male.²²

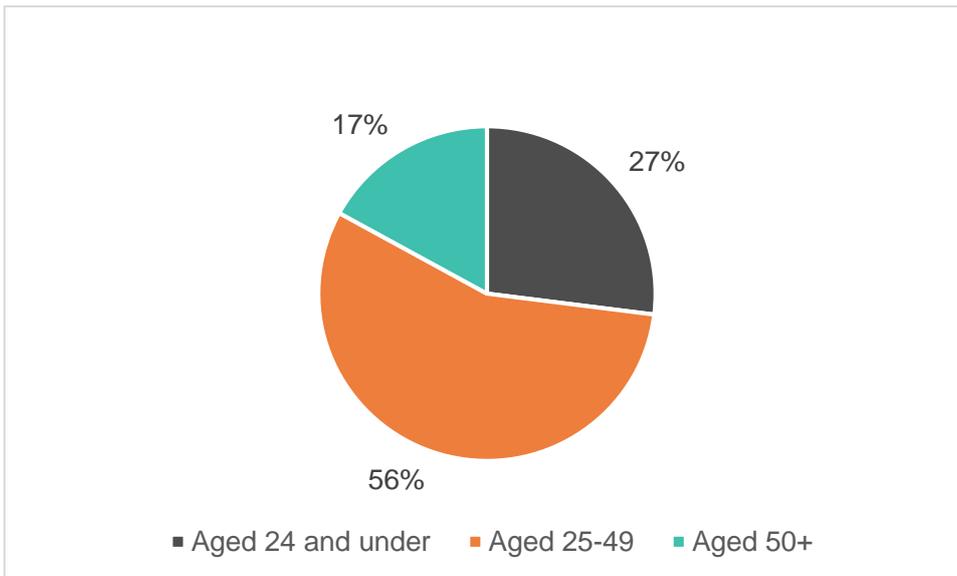
Age

Participants aged 25 and 49 years of age made up the greatest proportion of participants (56 per cent). Those aged 50 and above made up just over a quarter of participants (27 per cent), whilst those aged 24 and below made up just 17 per cent of all participants. At the time of writing, the programme was surpassing the 'over 50' registration target of 20 per cent.

²¹ This does not represent the final number of participants to join as the programme is due to continue to run until March 2019, with further registrations expected

²² Tinson, A., Ayrton, C., Barker, K., Born, T. and Long, O. (2017) London's Poverty Profile Trust for London <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/londons-poverty-profile-2017>

Figure 4.1: Programme participants to date by age

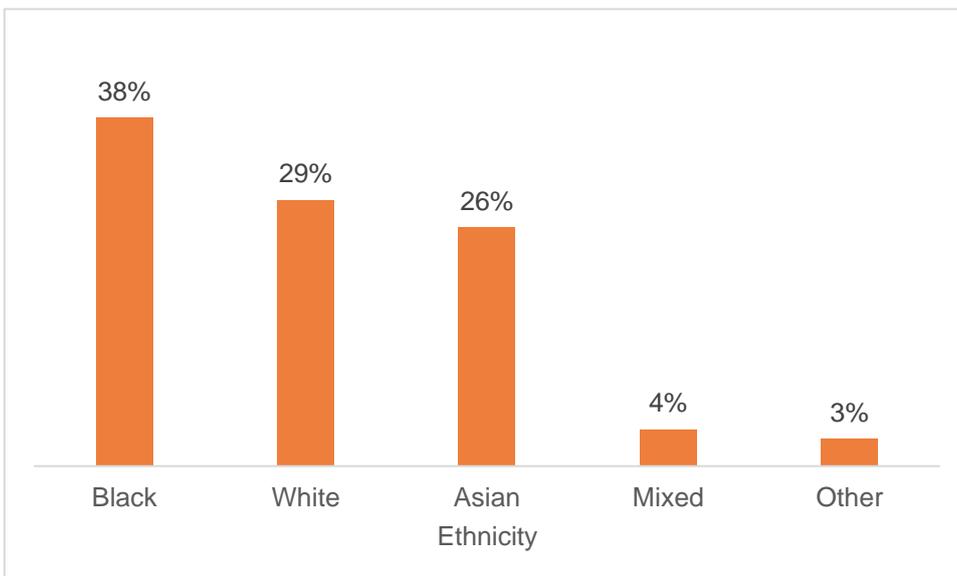


Base: all programme participants = 11,421

Ethnicity

Across the programme, the largest ethnic group were those who identified as being Black (38 per cent). There were also high proportions of participants who identified as being White (29 per cent) and Asian (26 per cent). At the time of reporting, the programme was surpassing the ethnic minority registration target of 56 per cent.

Figure 4.2: Programme participants to date by ethnicity



Base: all programme participants = 11,421

Disability

Most participants had no declared disability, health condition or learning difficulty (97 per cent). The most common disabilities or health condition amongst participants captured by management information were dyslexia, visual impairments and mental health conditions. At the time of reporting, there was a substantial gap between disability registrations and the disability registration target of 25 per cent.

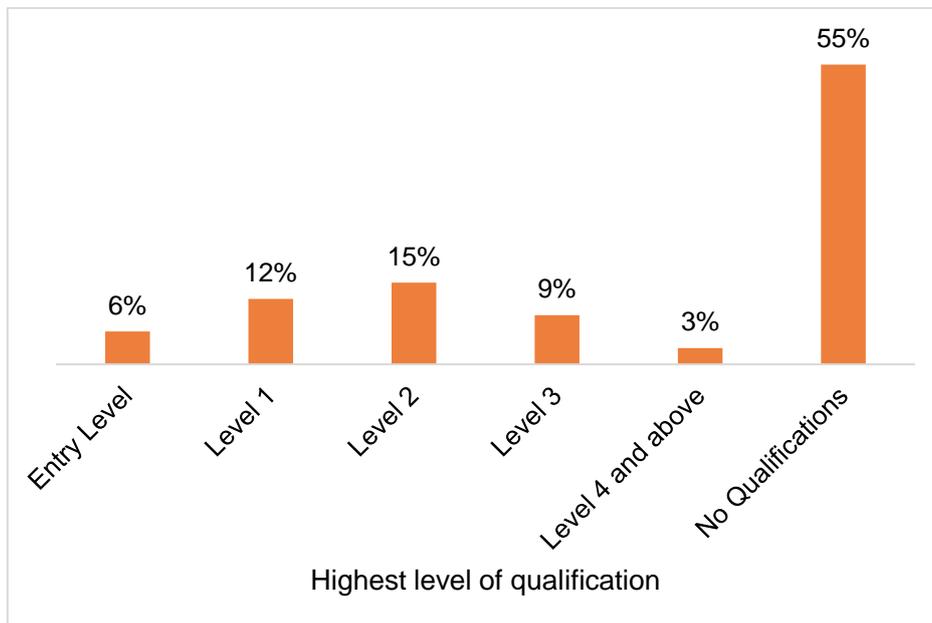
Single parent household

Data for family status was only available for participants from the Prospects supply chain (6,150 participants). 11 per cent of participants from this supply chain lived in a single adult household with dependent children.

Highest level of qualification

The prior level of qualification varied between programme participants. Six per cent of participants' highest level of qualification was Entry Level, whilst 12 per cent of participants' highest level of qualification was Level 1. Amongst those with qualifications, Level 2 was the most common level of qualification (15 per cent). Nine per cent of participants were qualified at Level 3. Just 3 per cent of participants were qualified at Level 4 or above. Most participants had no prior qualifications (55 per cent).

Figure 4.3: Programme participants to date highest level of qualification



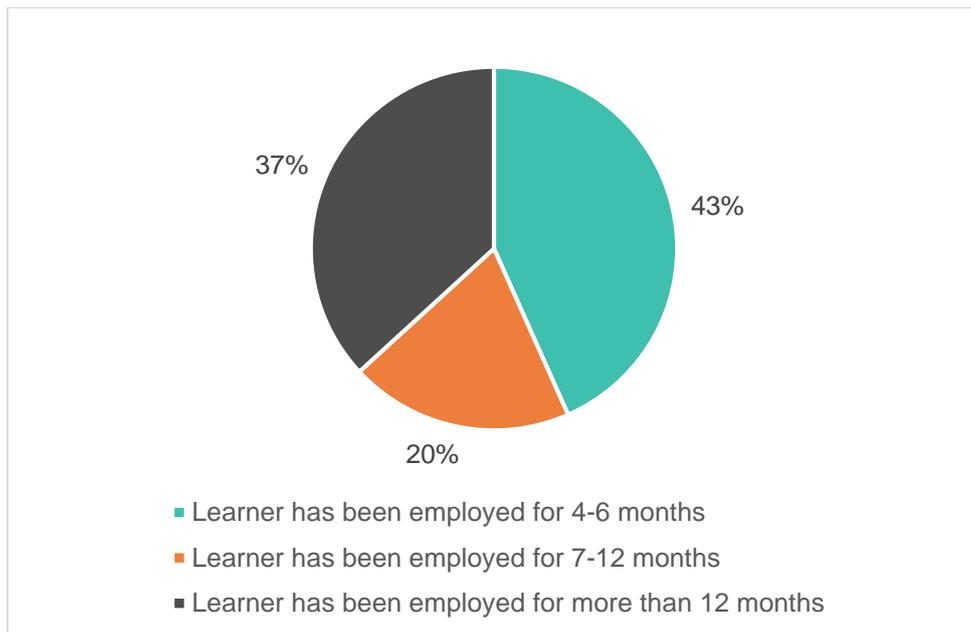
Base: all programme participants = 11,421

Experience of employment, low pay and insecure employment

Length in employment with current employer

Data on length in employment with current employer was only available for participants from the Prospects supply chain (6,150). 43 per cent of these participants had been employed by their current employer for 4-6 months. 20 per cent had been employed by their current employer for 7-12 months, whilst the remaining 37 per cent had been employed by their current employer for over a year.

Figure 4.4: Programme participants to date by length in employment with current employer



Base: programme participants from Prospects supply chain = 6,150

Pay, hours and security

It was not possible to provide a programme level analysis of earnings, hours or contract types as providers did not collate this information.

Prospects supply chain hourly wage

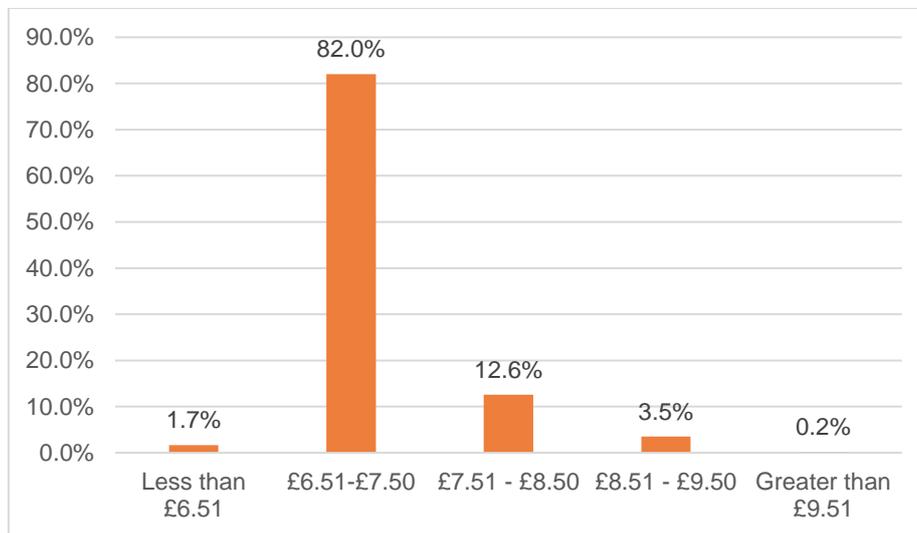
Supply chain wide data reflecting hourly wage at the point of recruitment was only available for participants that had achieved an earnings progression through the Prospects supply chain.²³ The main findings from this data show that most Prospects supply chain

²³ This does not include the hourly wage of participants to either experience a decline in hourly wage or not change at all.

participants to go on to achieve an earnings progression, earned around the minimum wage at the start of the programme, which is significantly below the London Living Wage.

The average starting hourly wage for all participants who achieved an earnings progression, from Prospects supply chain, was £7.50. Just 1.7 per cent of participants who achieved an earnings progression earned less than £6.51 per hour at the start of the programme. Most participants were originally earning an hourly wage between £6.51 and £7.50 per hour (82 per cent), 12.6 per cent earned between £7.51 and £8.50 per hour, 3.5 per cent earned between £8.51 and £9.50 per hour. Three participants (0.2 per cent) were earning an hourly wage higher than £9.51.

Figure 4.5: Prospects supply chain participants to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured to date by hourly wage at the start of programme



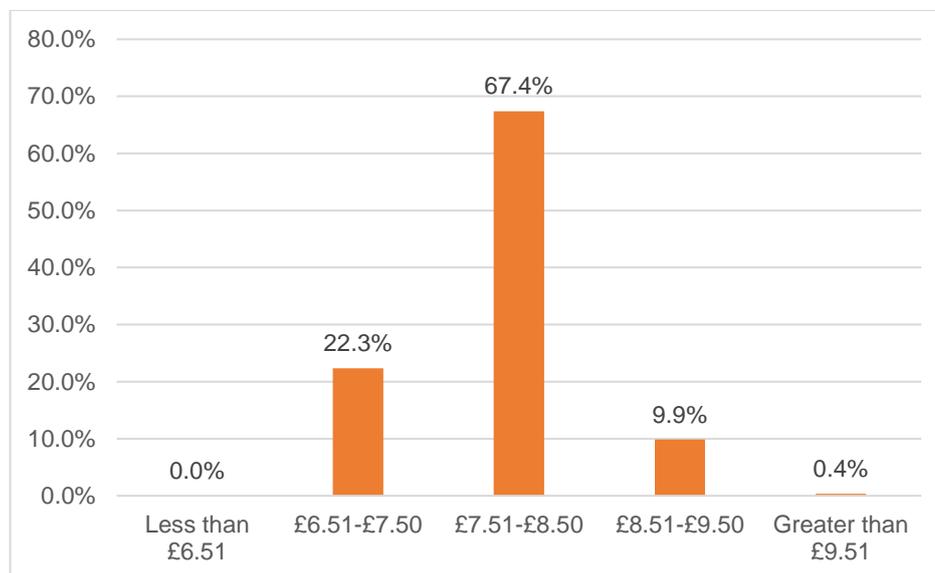
Base: programme participants from Prospects supply chain to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured = 1,374

InterLearn supply chain hourly wage

Supply chain wide data was not available for InterLearn participants. To estimate the hourly wage at the point of outcome a random sample of paper records detailing participants hourly wage data at the start of the programme was selected.^{24 25}

The estimated average starting hourly wage for all participants who achieved an earnings progression, from InterLearn supply chain, was £7.83. 22.3 per cent of participants were originally earning an hourly wage between £6.51 and £7.50 per hour, 67.4 per cent earned between £7.51 and £8.50 per hour, 9.9 per cent earned between £8.51 and £9.50 per hour. Just 0.4 per cent were earning an hourly wage higher than £9.51.

Figure 4.6: Representative sample of InterLearn supply chain participants to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured to date by hourly wage at the start of programme



Base: representative sample of programme participants from InterLearn supply chain to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured = 273

²⁴ To allow for a comparison with the data available for Prospects supply chain, a representative sample of those to achieve an earnings progression was taken, meaning this data is only representative of InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression.

²⁵ A sample of 273 participants was randomly selected, representing 30 per cent of all InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression. This is the number of individuals deemed necessary to create a representative sample at 95% confidence level. Hourly wage estimates were then weighted to take account of the differences between the sample and total salary progressions in terms of age, gender, ethnic background and prior qualification levels.

Experience of employment and impact of low pay and insecure employment

Qualitative interviews conducted with participants provided insight into their experience of employment and the impact of low pay and insecure work. Interviewees spoke of a broad range of circumstances prior to receiving support.

Participants were employed in a range of occupations and sectors, for example as carers, stewards, security guards, healthcare assistants and door to door fundraisers. All interviewees were initially 'low paid' as defined by the programme.^{26 27} The effects of low pay on participants varied. The effect was relatively less severe for participants with reduced outgoings, for example those living rent free with family members, or those in receipt of familial support. These participants tended to be younger. Whilst the impacts of low pay were less severe, this group was still affected, primarily impacting on their sense of independence and their wellbeing.

"Obviously I want to be finding appropriate work and, you know, not having to rely on them at all because I'm 25 and I shouldn't be relying on a parent, so, you know." **Programme participant**

Those with dependent children and no familial support networks often felt the effects of low pay much more sharply. Participants explained that low pay sometimes meant they were unable to meet their household needs, such as paying for rent, utilities or food. This often resulted in a significant amount of stress and emotional distress for participants.

"At the end of the month my landlord was cooking for me and hopefully she was cooking for me because I didn't have enough for paying food." **Programme participant**

Several interviewees were employed on zero-hour and/or temporary contracts. These individuals spoke of the difficulty they had in planning their lives around the flexibility that their employment contract demanded. Some interviewees also explained that 'flexible'

²⁶ Low pay was defined as earning 10% below the weekly earnings' equivalent of 35 hours at the latest London Living Wage and having been in such employment for at least four consecutive months

²⁷ During the research, several of the participants contacted for interview indicated that they were earning in excess of the earning requirements at the start of the programme. Participants were unaware that their earnings meant they were ineligible for the support, as they were unaware of the eligibility criteria. This suggests that some providers recruited participants that were technically ineligible for support. All participants that were not in "low pay" as defined by the programme, and technically ineligible for support, were screened out of the interview process.

working practices sometimes meant they were underemployed at short notice, working less hours than they desired and needed to meet their household needs.

"I was on a zero hours contract, so it was basically as and when they needed me ... I've got two children to provide for so I kind of needed a bit more of an income, yes." **Programme participant**

In addition to negatively impacting on participants' material living standards, employment in low pay meant that individuals were forced to make difficult choices between spending time with their family and working a high number of hours to increase their income.

"I would try to make as much time with my family, but it was not always available because of my work and the family there was a compromise of being with my family life or my work so I had to choose one." **Programme participant**

Where participants did work long shifts, the combination of long hours and extensive travel times from work often left participants feeling fatigued and excluded from participating in leisure activities. Participants reported dissatisfaction at being unable to take part in their hobbies or meet and socialise with their friends and family as frequently as they would like.

"...you go to work, you take time to travel to work and you come back, you're tired from work and, you know, your social life is very minimal... It's not a great amount of social interaction. You fall behind on things a lot. You can't keep up with your hobbies, etc." **Programme participant**

Participants were not wholly negative about their employment situation at the point of joining the programme, with some speaking positively about the fulfilment they received from their work. Despite this, participants often felt they were remunerated poorly for their work.

"I like caring, I like working with people. The sector, I love that, helping people ... it brings me a lot of satisfaction, particularly the vulnerable... The thing is the pay... it's why I don't like it." **Programme participant**

Some participants with positive employment satisfaction attributed this to job security and the perceived availability of progression opportunities, noting the opportunities available to them and supportive management practices as positive factors related to their roles.

"I get to communicate a lot with my colleagues and they were very happy about this place and they did tell me that there were promotions available and you can always improve, and you can always get better." **Programme participant**

Participant priorities

Participants were asked about the main priorities in their life prior to receiving support from the programme. A range of priorities were identified, including:

- **Increased income** – This was viewed as vital to improve their living standards and remove the stress, anxiety, and constraints imposed on them by living in low pay. Participants referenced different ways in which they hoped to improve their pay, including increasing working hours, gaining a promotion or moving into a new role.
- **Improved job security** – Job security and guaranteed hours were sought by participants in order to provide stability to their situation, avoid short-notice changes in hours and guarantee a regular set level of income. Participants mainly hoped to achieve this through moving into a new job or improving their employment contract with their current employer.
- **Improved hours and work-life balance** – Working family-friendly hours and earning a higher wage in order to reduce the total number of hours worked was also viewed favourably by participants. Participants explained that this would have a substantial impact on their ability to spend time with friends and family, manage caring responsibilities and enjoying their time off work.
- **Improved job satisfaction** – Participants wanted to move into jobs which better matched their interests and offered a more positive working experience. Examples included becoming a self-employed electrician, midwife and beginning a career in digital marketing.
- **Gaining new knowledge and skills** – participants linked the achievement of new skills and qualifications to the benefits that it would give them in work. For example, participants explained that additional skills and knowledge would help them to gain a promotion, increase their income or move into a more suitable job.

Barriers to progression

Participants identified a range of factors they felt impeded their ability to progress in work. The nature and extent of barriers referenced varied between participants, with some reporting few or no barriers whilst others faced multiple, intersecting barriers that created challenging circumstances for participants to overcome.

Impact on welfare eligibility

Some participants expressed concern that progressing in work and increasing their income could result in a reduction to their benefits. Participants explained that this risk made them anxious about seeking to improve their income.

Health

Participants disclosed health conditions that limited the number of hours they were able to work or prevented them from working in specific roles. For example, one participant explained that the severe physical pain they experienced in their feet, limited the number of

hours and types of roles they were able to work in. Another respondent experienced seizures which meant they were unable to obtain a driving license, preventing them from working in their desired driving role.

"Unfortunately, I've had a seizure every year and, basically, the time has reset every single time, so I haven't been able to get my UK, my full UK license since I moved over, which is unfortunate." **Programme participant**

Limited knowledge of the employment market and suitable opportunities

Many of the participants interviewed felt that they lacked key employment-related knowledge, for example what types of jobs were available in the local area, whether opportunities were suitable, and how to search effectively and apply for vacancies. Further, participants felt certain sectors were particularly tough to enter without an existing network of contacts, or another 'way in'. One participant who had recently moved to the UK discussed the difficulty in breaking into the creative industry without pre-existing contacts.

"It's very hard to get to know people and even harder still for those people to get you onto a set doing anything" **Programme participant**

Qualifications, skills and experience

Participants noted a low level of skills or a lack of relevant qualifications that prevented them from progressing in work. Some attributed this to factors outside their control that meant they had to leave school, or college, prematurely. Others noted that they lacked occupational specific skills that prevented them moving into higher skilled roles.

"Well, I think it was just the fact I didn't have much experience and my communication skills weren't that good and the customer service, because you need to know how to approach a customer..." **Programme participant**

Several participants had previously worked in highly skilled roles abroad and had high level overseas qualifications or undertaken extensive training abroad. However, these qualifications were often not recognised or perceived to be of lesser value to UK employers.

Factors constraining the take up of further training

Time

Participants were often 'time-poor' as a result of long hours worked, combined with travel to work and caring responsibilities. As a result, lack of spare time acted as a major barrier to participating in training or other activities to encourage progression.

"I literally had just no life whatsoever because I was doing only with them Monday to Friday, and the weekend I was so tired that I spent my whole weekend sleeping." **Programme Participant**

Financial barriers

The high cost of training was also identified as a major barrier to low skilled participants improving their skillset in order to progress in work. Participants explained that a lack of resources to fund training and knowledge of how to access funding was a major issue. This was a particular barrier for individuals working, or hoping to work, in sectors that required specific licenses or qualifications. For example, in order to progress in security, participants must possess a Security Industry Authority (SIA) license which costs around £400. This was cited as a significant barrier for some participants working or hoping to move into security.

"In order to get that promotion, you have to pay to get there. Not as in like bribes or anything but you have to pay to get special licenses and stuff, so you can become a supervisor and that." **Programme participant**

Challenges with current employer

Several participants spoke of their previous attempts to increase their income or improve their employment situation with their current employer. Participants explained that they had been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. Some had been denied pay rises by their employers for reasons of affordability. Others had been told that they did not possess the required qualifications to warrant a progression, while some had been promised a pay rise but never received it. In another instance, whereby a participant wanted to move to a permanent contract, their employer stated their preference was to retain a flexible workforce.

"I mean there was times where I did discuss with the manager about a contract and they just basically kept declining it and saying no that they didn't want a contract because they wanted it to be more flexible." **Programme participant**

5. Participant experience of support

This chapter draws on qualitative interviews with participants to outline their experience of the programme and support received. This includes how participants found out about the programme, their reasons and motivations for engaging, and their experience of training and the programme offer. This includes reviewing how well the support helped to address barriers to progress, as well as identifying gaps in provision that may have hindered success. Interviews were not conducted with a representative sample, hence do not offer insight into the incidence of specific issues. Rather, their purpose is to add depth and nuance to the analysis.²⁸

Awareness and engagement

Participant awareness

Most of the participants interviewed accessed the programme through employer-led approaches (through their current employer and employment agency) whilst a smaller proportion enlisted through the individual-led route (word of mouth and referrals from other services):

- **Current employer** - This was done via a one-to-one conversation with their line manager, team meetings with management and other colleagues or through group emails sent out to multiple members of staff.
- **Employment agencies** – Employment agencies sometimes sought out employees and employers eligible for the support. Some of those recruited through their employment agency had recently been hired in a new role and were told that the programme was compulsory training needed to start in their new role.
- **Word of mouth** – referrals from friends, family members and co-workers, linking participants with the training provider.
- **Referrals from JCP and other services** – a small number of participants were referred to the programme to receive employability support by related services. For example, one participant was signposted by their JCP work coach.

Whether a participant engaged with the programme through the employer-led or individual-led approach had a large impact on how the programme was introduced to participants and the types of support offered.

²⁸ L&W also conducted an online survey of programme participants to examine participant experiences and outcomes from the In-Work Progression programme. However, a low response rate of less than 0.5 per cent of those contacted meant meaningful analysis of the survey results was not possible.

Information provided

Most participants were informed about the offer of free training but were not made aware of a wider programme of support or the programme's wider aim to improve progression prospects for low-paid workers.

"To be honest, it was just a case of this is a training opportunity that we have, would you like to do it? Really, and that was it." **Programme participant**

Most had limited choice over the training on offer. The initial information provided was mostly about the practicalities of a pre-decided training course. For example, participants were informed about the level, structure of training, whether it would take place during work hours, content of the course and the qualification.

Participants who were offered a restricted version of the support, focussed on pre-determined training, had typically accessed the programme through their employer. Participants who had joined independently from their employer were more likely to be provided with further information about wider support offers available such as needs assessments, soft skills support, careers advice and employability support with job search, interviews and CV development alongside training options.

How programme was sold to participants

Those who chose to access support from the programme were influenced by how the programme was sold to them and who informed them about it:

- **Recommendations from social networks, such as friends, family and colleagues;** played an important role in encouraging participants to take part in training, particularly if those networks had personal experience of the training or provider. These personal recommendations were important in dispelling initial scepticism or fear of training.

"I didn't quite know about this until the girls [at work] introduced me to it... and I found out you can actually do these courses... they said that the trainers are very helpful which was great for me because I was a little bit scared." **Programme participant**

- **Personal recommendations from managers;** also encouraged participants to engage in the training, particularly when managers had confidence that the training benefitted the participant in their development. Participants felt more able to take part when managers paid for training or arranged the training to take place at a convenient time and place.

"It was free. My manager obviously agreed to pay for the time that I was away. He also advised there was potential to increase responsibility, increase the hours of work and obviously ultimately increase salary." **Programme participant**

- **Highlighting the time limited offer of free training and potential benefits;** this encouraged some participants to access training to take advantage of the opportunity, even when the range of courses offered were not particularly relevant to their role or aspirations.

"It is never really something that I thought about or something I have really been interested by. At the time I only accepted it just simply because it was something I didn't have and it wasn't going to cost me any money or too much time." **Programme participant**

However, others reported being told that the training was compulsory. In some cases, participants were told they would not be able to continue working with their employer until they had completed the training. This included participants who had recently been hired by their employer and those who had already been working in their role prior to the training. These participants had varying levels of enthusiasm for the training and tended to view it as an aspect of their existing role, rather than support to improve their progression prospects.

"The manager just said we've got training that we have to do, and you're booked on it...I thought it wasn't optional to do the training. We all had to take part in it. The wages increase wasn't mentioned and that was it. So I would have taken part in it either way anyway."

Programme participant

Both those who voluntarily engage with the support and those placed onto the programme by their employer shared similar aspirations if they felt the training would be genuinely useful for their role and development. However, those who were told they must attend the training were less enthusiastic if they felt the training held no benefit to their development. In some cases, the main priority of the training was to be able to work and earn again, rather than to achieve genuine skills development.

"It's not I like I went home and thought, I'm going to gain x, y or z from it. It's something I thought we had to do and there were no questions about it." **Programme participant**

Some participants were told they would experience an increase in pay by the training provider, agency, or their employer. Others reported that their managers alluded to a potential pay progression following an improvement of skills and performance after the training. The prospect of improving their income, gaining increased responsibility or better hours was a key driving factor for these participants, particularly where managers appeared to support their individual training and development.

“Well, they did go on about how this training will help me to improve my skills and be more qualified and my manager did tell me at one point that I could get promoted if I go on this course.” **Programme participant**

The exceptions to this were participants who were actively seeking learning opportunities and found out about the programme through their own inquiries. Some were certain that they would have accessed training as a matter of course through their employer, although participants had different views as to whether their employers would make training available.

Views of support

Initial appointment

Participants reported a variety of experiences of their initial appointments. The initial appointments typically took place at the participant’s place of work, or at a college or training provider’s premises. In one case, an adviser attended the participant’s home on a weekend to conduct the individual needs assessment where they felt comfortable. Initial appointments were usually held in groups, whilst others had one-to-one appointments.

Many of the participants interviewed recalled their initial appointment as an introduction to the training and structure of the course, provision of materials and an opportunity to ask questions, rather than an introduction to a wider programme of support. Several remembered taking an English and maths test to assess their ability to undertake the course. Some struggled to recall the initial appointment as being significantly different from the remainder of the training, as training was delivered at that very first appointment or was delivered entirely in that one session.

The initial appointment was an important time for participants to get to know the trainers. Participants who were less certain about what the training would entail valued having the opportunity to ask questions and receive contact details from the training provider. Participants had a positive impression of trainers who were flexible, effectively clarified the course and provided reassurance of support to meet their needs.

Needs assessment

Several participants did not remember an individual needs assessment prior to their training, or only remembered basic skills tests. This was particularly evident for those with shorter courses which took place over one day, independent study courses, and those who participated in training in larger groups. These participants had typically accessed support through their employer.

“In the beginning they made us do these tests. It was like a written test. It was numeracy, maths and simple English. They said it was equivalent to G grade stuff at GCSE.”

Programme participant

Some participants in smaller group training recalled completing a form about their role, history and aspirations. Others remembered an individual needs assessment in their initial appointment, where trainers sat with them individually to discuss their career history and aspirations. Participants who were not aware of the progression aim of the programme were surprised about the types of questions asked, such as career history and aspirations. These participants felt they would have benefitted from a clearer understanding of the programme from trainers, and prior notice that this type of information would be required:

"Giving information sometimes isn't easy to do, and sometimes you don't know why they're asking that information" **Programme participant**

Individuals who accessed the programme independently of their employer had a clearer recollection of an individual needs assessment where an adviser sat with them and provided tests to assess their capabilities, offered careers advice and feedback on their goals and reviewed their CV. These needs assessments were generally viewed positively and often fed directly into the support provided. For example, one participant discussed their career goals and were encouraged to take a higher-level qualification to achieve these.

Types of support accessed

Most participants interviewed accessed training and were not aware of other support offers, or a wider programme. This was particularly the case for participants who had joined the programme through their employer. These participants reported having minimal decision-making influence about the support they received. As a result, many participants were not able to tailor the support offer; except for some choosing the level of qualification they felt confident to complete.

Conversely, participants who joined the programme independently from their employer tended to have accessed a range of personalised one-to-one support including job search support, careers advice and assistance with their CV. These were delivered by an adviser, who supported them with training and employment needs.

However, participants accessing support independently of their employer often had to attend this support outside of their work hours, unless they independently secured their employer's approval to undertake training. As a result, 'individual-led' participants described finding it very difficult to find time to participate in support offer. Longer term training provision was particularly difficult for these participants to access and sustain, especially for those with irregular work schedules or caring responsibilities.

Adviser support

Many participants interviewed who only accessed training did not feel they had received one-to-one adviser support. There were mixed views of trainer usefulness and the amount of individual attention received. Some participants mentioned light touch coaching support,

including informal advice about how to use their new qualification, or future training courses to consider progressing their career in the future. Others had an assigned adviser they were able to contact for advice during the training, which provided reassurance.

Participants who joined the programme independently from their employer often accessed more intensive adviser support. This included careers and training advice, a full skills evaluation and goal setting, coaching and encouragement, job search support and one-to-one training. Participants highly valued advice about career options and appropriate training or qualifications to help them to achieve their goals.

"I was supported by knowing what I'm doing and after I finish where I'm going to land and what the prospects are after finishing this course. There was career guidance, there was one-to-one teaching, there was one-to-one assistance... I learnt a lot from them, what I like, what I don't like and what I should do in a situation that I don't know." **Programme participant**

Advisers helped participants to address their areas of weakness and delivered support to improve their CVs or job search ability. This support was delivered to help participants change jobs, as well as progress internally.

"I was looking for different jobs. Jobs that I wasn't even thinking about...that was really helpful because it helped me to see a bigger picture." **Programme participant**

"After the class sometimes, I was staying a little bit extra to understand more and I met with the trainer as well... which was great because I needed somebody to help me to do a really good CV." **Programme participant**

Coaching support which focused on individual's strengths and goals was particularly beneficial for participants who wanted to change their circumstances.

"It really helped me to focus on the positive things and I think mentally he was a great support to have this person so you know that you can do it...you have enough to find something better or something different. I really, I really needed it at that time." **Programme participant**

These participants met with their coaches at varying frequencies, from weekly calls to roughly fortnightly meetings depending on their schedules and priorities. Participants valued tailored adviser support which was flexible to their availability and need. However, some participants felt that the support delivered was too generalist to meet the specific progression goals identified in their needs assessment. For instance, one participant wanted to work in the creative sector but was not supported to access vacancies in these sectors and did not find any relevant training options through their provider.

Training courses

Participants accessed a wide range of training courses, ranging from a two-hour training session about safeguarding, to training undertaken over a period of six months and one participant completing four courses over the year.

These courses were delivered in a variety of formats. Some participants accessed these during consecutive work days, others were designed to be mainly self-taught, or done entirely in participant's own time; some had practical or supervised assessment elements; others had written assessments units, coursework and exams. Teaching led by a trainer was often conducted in small groups of between five to ten people. However, there were also examples of one-to-one teaching, smaller groups of two or three and larger groups of up to 50 people.

Despite the wide variation in training accessed, there were key areas which influenced the participant's views and experience of the training provided:

- **Perceived usefulness of training**

The main factor which influenced participant views of training was the perceived relevance to their current role and future goals. Training was viewed favourably when the course provided clear practical support that could be directly utilised in their job role, as an additional skillset for future roles, provided a clear line of sight to higher paid roles or taught transferable skills. These varied depending on participant roles and the training accessed, some examples included care sector qualifications, leadership training, training in Microsoft Office programmes and the SIA badge.

Conversely, participants held a negative view of training which was not sufficiently challenging to be useful in their role, particularly if they felt it covered topics they were already familiar with. Participants were particularly dissatisfied if training covered familiar elements but did not address areas they were keen to improve their skillset in. For example, supporting people with dementia, completing specific paperwork or dealing with difficult customers.

"I think they should have included some more of the things that we use when we are out on the field because a bunch of the stuff wasn't really useful ... just a more in depth and more modules would have really helped. It was very basic" **Programme participant**

"I wish it had shown me how to speak to a customer, but it was telling me stuff that I already knew like don't be rude, be polite, or some people might not understand you so make sure you use clear hand gestures, stuff like that." **Programme participant**

- **Training delivery**

Views about the delivery varied according to personal preference, course content and structure. Some participants preferred to learn independently through self-study, whereas others thrived in a lively group environment.

It was important for the training delivery style to suit the learner's time and abilities. While some participants preferred studying in their own time, other participants who undertook longer term courses with a large element of self-study found it difficult to fit in the amount of learning and assessment required in their own time. It was particularly challenging for participants with long, irregular working hours and childcare responsibilities. Some participants found completing this type of training without sufficient support an exhausting and negative experience.

"If you are not working it's a different thing. But when you have to work from seven or from eight till eight, by the time you come out of work and get the bus... get home... some people have children... You have to make time, you don't have time." **Programme participant**

"I don't want to get into no more writing and studying. I'm done with that now, I just want to work and get my money. It's too much. To the hours that I work. Because they said to you, you will get help and when the time come you get no help for you..." **Programme participant**

There was a general preference for interactive and engaging learning with practical, problem-based scenarios which related to their work. Learning through these scenarios enabled participants to consolidate their good practice and apply their new skills. Opportunities to discuss their answers, learn from others and gain feedback from tutors were also viewed positively.

Participants generally had a negative view of training which did not include time for discussion or questions and involved mostly monotonous activity such as copying from a board or completing a worksheet. The main suggestions for improvement from participants were making the training sessions more interactive to ensure that everyone could engage with the information provided.

"I guess it was a bit boring. I felt like I was in school really. It was more just like slap the booklet in front of you and then you have to just complete it and that was your training." **Programme participant**

The quality and provision of learning materials was also important, as these enabled participants to learn in their own time and retain information from the course. Participants were positive about good quality learning aids, study books and links to free websites and resources to support their training. Participants that were not provided with additional

information regarded this as a key weakness of the training and were keen for trainers to develop or signpost them to free materials online to access after the training.

"There wasn't anything that we could really take away, we just had to take notes and, obviously, if you're not a confident person or a good listener or someone who lacks confidence to ask questions then some of the information could definitely bypass you."

Programme participant

- **Trainer helpfulness and knowledge**

The trainer's level of knowledge and approachability were amongst the most important factors. Participants spoke highly of trainers who were likeable, supportive and created a welcoming learning environment.

"The teachers were really kind ...they were just fun. They was nice. Like they were friendly, they were cool...Everyone liked each other, so everyone used to turn up to classes."

Programme participant

Participants had a positive view of trainers who delivered learning at the right level and tailored their delivery to the abilities and interests of learners on the course. Participants also felt more confident with trainers who offered one-to-one support where needed. This provided reassurance to participants who found the training challenging.

"It was difficult but at the end of the day my trainer was going to help me figure it out."

Programme participant

Participants were less satisfied with their trainers when they felt that they were not able to access one to one support. Some participants had initially been told they would be in receipt of one-to-one support but did not receive this. This was particularly damaging for participants who accessed longer-term training. Some participants struggled to complete the training without trainer guidance and support and had negative experiences of participation as a result.

"It would help her showing her face a little bit more and helping, even getting everybody together as a team and then go through certain units with us, but no she didn't do none of that." **Programme participant**

Regular feedback from trainers was also a valued aspect of trainers' support. Expert feedback was regarded as an important part of learning and improving their skills, knowledge and quality of work. Participants often cited this as a suggestion for improvement where it was not provided.

- **Group learning**

Participants who accessed training in groups had mixed experiences of their learning environment. Learners were more positive about group-based training when there was a welcoming learning environment, useful discussion and the training was sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of different abilities within the group. Group based learning was also viewed positively when the trainer-maintained control and there were limited distractions:

"It was laid back but it was quite good because I picked up everything that I needed to pick up and it was good because there was also a quiet group, so there wasn't as much distractions" **Programme participant**

However, some participants reported a negative experience of learning in a group when the other learners did not know one another, there were disruptive individuals, or there was an overly wide range of learning levels and needs. These factors made it difficult to have a productive or interactive environment and resulted in unpleasant experiences of training.

"The way that it was taught could have been improved much more, we were in a hall which is fine but it was difficult to get everyone together in groups, like, some people didn't want to sit by each other, we had a few disturbing people...who didn't want to comply with certain things." **Programme participant**

- **Organisation of training**

Participants were positive where training was organised to fit around their existing employment responsibilities. Here, the flexibility and support of managers was a key factor. Some participants reported that managers paid for their time during training or arranged suitable places and times for them to access the training. Other employees were able to schedule their shifts accordingly because of prior knowledge and effective organisation of training, which was very helpful for participants with irregular working hours.

"It was scheduled so everybody had time to stay with their employers and schedule the days that they were going to have the course on and it was easy because we knew beforehand when we were going to have the courses and the trainers were very helpful." **Programme participant**

Sustaining engagement with training was more challenging if there was no co-ordination between training and work obligations. Some participants reported difficulties trying to find someone to cover their shift while they attended training sessions. Participants who were enrolled on longer term courses were particularly likely to struggle to balance the demands of the courses with work and existing commitments if these were not effectively organised between themselves, their training provider and their employer. This was a particular problem for those that had accessed support independently of their employer.

Participants explained that training providers that were unorganised negatively impacted on their views of the support and willingness to engage. Examples of this included administration mishaps which resulted in participants not receiving their qualifications, not receiving enough notice of exams to adequately prepare and not considering offering reimbursement for significant travel to provider premises.

- **Ongoing support**

Some training organisations also offered participants an option to contact their trainers after the completion of their course. A small number of participants received additional contact from their training providers to offer further courses and training. Two participants remained in frequent contact with their trainer, who continue to offer support with workplace concerns and job search.

"If I'm in a challenging situation or if something goes wrong I do call my trainer and I try to discuss with her and I try to find a solution for everything and she does help me a lot, you know, after all this time she helps me a lot." **Programme participant**

Participants felt dissatisfied if they had additional questions and support needs they were keen to address but were unable to contact their trainer to resolve their problem. For example, one participant had missed a key supervision element of their training and had failed the course but did not have the training provider's contact details to reschedule this. Others had not received their certificate and were keen to evidence their skills development on their CV, and several more participants were eager to access careers advice and information of further training opportunities but had not heard from their trainer since their course.

Support gaps and suggestions for improvement

Participants expressed a range of support gaps relating to the delivery of training, trainer helpfulness, learning environment and training organisation as identified above. These varied depending on the individual experience of training rather than universal gaps in programme delivery. When asked what support would help to progress earnings and careers, participants had a range of suggestions:

- **Employability support:** some participants who accessed the programme remained unconfident in their CV, interview skills and ability to job search.
- **Course advice:** several participants wanted guidance in choosing their course and one to one post course guidance to understand how their training course could lead on to more advanced training, and what career opportunities were available to them as a result.

- **Career advice:** Several participants felt they would benefit from careers advice to aid their longer-term progression. There was a desire for this to be ambitious, tailored and focus on an individual's strengths to support them to truly fulfil their long term career aspirations and potential:

"Just having someone to sit down and talk to you about what I want to do and how I should be able to follow my dreams, my goals." **Programme participant**

"A lot of people are very educated and very qualified but didn't seek any different opportunities... people are engineers and have a variety of backgrounds...I guess they didn't have the right support to push for employment in different fields... which are more suitable for them." **Programme participant**

- **Support with wider needs:** these included English language classes; referrals to specialists who could support their individual progression aims; and advice which was tailored to the issues they perceived as their biggest barriers to progression, for example housing, health and financial support.
- **Financial assistance:** although training provision was free, some experienced financial difficulties when having to undertake training unpaid and in their own time. Some participants felt that assistance with the cost of travel and training materials would have been helpful to sustain learning.

Some participants expressed frustration when training was delivered to a large group of their colleagues because they had all become equally qualified in their role, limiting the impact on any one individual's progression prospects. Others felt their progression prospects were constrained by their employer's decision or inability to provide progression routes. These participants felt that the largest determinant of a pay progression was the progression routes available, rather than their individual efforts to improve their skills. These participants expressed a desire for improved performance review processes, target setting and development support at work. They wanted their trainers to provide more independent advice, including employability support to apply for new roles, guidance about alternative careers and signposting to different employers and agencies.

The suggestions from participants demonstrated demand for support which reflected individual circumstances and needs. This support would need to be underpinned by an individual needs assessment to identify participant barriers and goals, which training would be most beneficial, the level of support needed to complete the course and where support could address wider needs.

6. Employer experience of support

Whilst not all programme participants joined the programme through their employer, employer-led referrals and support represented a significant portion of the programme model. This chapter describes the types of employers engaged and their experience of the programme, including how they found out about the programme, what information they were given, their reasons and motivations for engaging with the programme and their experience of the training and programme offer.

Types of employers

A wide range of employers were interviewed, these varied across:

Sector

Employers operated in a range of sectors including the charity sector, security, health and social care, recruitment, warehouse, early years and adult education, and food and hospitality.

Size

Employers varied in size. For example, one employer in the charity sector had only three paid employees, while another – a security company - had 700 employees on their database.

Pay

Some employers paid minimum wage (£7.93 at the time of interview) and others were paying slightly higher hourly wages up to £9 per hour. Some of the employers interviewed paid staff higher than the London Living Wage (£10.20 at the time of interview). Employers typically paid a range of wages across their businesses. This was largely due to differences in roles and responsibilities, with management and highly-skilled staff typically paid higher wages. One interviewee explained that labouring staff earned the minimum wage whilst drivers and management earned more than £12 per hour. This variation also included changes according to the day worked. For example, a care agency paid their employees £9 an hour on weekdays, increasing to £9.50 on weekends. An employer in the security sector explained that wages were determined by the event or venue that their employees worked at.

Employers that did not pay LLW explained that this was often not possible because of financial constraints on the business. Some interviewees were not aware of the London Living Wage and were positive about the fact they paid all staff at least minimum wage, indicating a potential misconception amongst employers about what wage rates constitute low pay.

Contract types

Employers interviewed use a range of contracts: permanent, temporary and zero-hours contracts. Employers also used a mix of part-time and full-time contracts.

Skills development and progression

Most of the employers interviewed reported offering some form of training opportunities to their employees. The purpose of this training differed across those interviewed, with some providing learning opportunities as a route to clear progression pathways and others delivering training solely to meet regulations and requirements.

Some employers reported a variety of training and development opportunities that employees could access, ranging in formality and approach. One nursery employer explained that those in educator roles had quite formal and holistic support including a clear focus on career progression, access to training and regular appraisals to identify their strengths and weakness to support their progression into higher paid roles. However, the same employer noted that the same progression opportunities were not available for employees in catering roles.

Others explained that they had previously supported their employees to secure specific qualifications needed to access higher paying roles. For instance, carers were supported to secure their Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) giving them the opportunity to apply for higher paying roles such as assistant manager positions, supervisors and care co-ordinators. Similarly, those working in a nursery were offered role-specific training and qualifications such as Level 3 and 4 early years childcare to support their progression.

One education provider took a more informal and holistic approach; through in-house guidance, support and shadowing, trainees can progress to secure tutor and senior tutor roles by developing and demonstrating their improved skillset.

Some employers reported that there was little opportunity for progression within their business. In some cases, the company size limited opportunities, in others, the role or career path itself placed a barrier for some employees, with progression opportunities restricted due to a lack of higher skilled, better paid roles.

Many employers reported that they only provided training that was mandatory for employees working in their particular sector rather than training that could play a role in supporting their progression. For instance, those working in food and hospitality had accessed food hygiene and health and safety training, while an employer in security provided in-house training to ensure all employees secured an NVQ level 2 in Spectator Safety – a legal requirement for safety stewards:

Some employers reported providing little or no training. Generally, they explained that this was due to costs. For example, one employer explained that for employees to progress, a specific qualification was required. However, they did not provide this training, meaning that employees who were interested had to cover the course fees themselves.

Most employers reported that existing training (prior to engagement with the programme) had been delivered at a cost to the business, although one nursery had been able to access a range of free training courses delivered by their local authority.

Some employers reported little opportunity for progression or increases in pay, stating that the only pay increases they gave were in line with increases in the minimum wage.

Awareness and engagement

Awareness

Employers found out about the programme through a variety of ways:

- **Provider outreach** - Most employers became aware of the programme as the training provider was based or operating in the local area and had approached them via a phone call or drop-in to inform them about the training offer.
- **Existing relationship** - Some had an existing working relationship with the training provider who was therefore a 'trusted source'.
- **Recommendation** - One employer was provided with the training provider's details through a contact in their sector who recommended their services.

Information provided

Employers were provided with varying information about the programme, its aims and the requirements of becoming involved in the programme.

Some employers were informed that the programme offered free training as part of a larger scheme to improve employee skills, with the ultimate aim to improve pay or the employment contract of staff. Several employers reported an 'employer requirement' to increase pay for staff that underwent training. This was presented as a conditional offer (i.e. the training would be provided on the condition that the employer committed to offering employees a pay increase upon successful completion of the training). Other employers understood this was merely an aim, and not a prerequisite for training. A number reported being unaware of any intention to improve pay or support staff progression. For example, one employer reported that they would not have been able to make this commitment as their employees secure an incremental pay increase every year as standard procedure.

Others were unable to recall specific details about the programme requirements or aims, explaining that they were generally unclear about the details of the programme from the start.

Some employers were not aware of many of the details regarding requirements and eligibility. For example, a number of employers did not realise the programme was targeted at employees in 'low pay' and as a result had staff enrolled who were earning above the earnings criteria.

Engagement

Reasons for engaging

Employers gave a range of reasons for engaging with the programme, although none of them related to the programme aims of supporting those in low pay to progress in their careers and achieve pay increases or contract changes. The two main reasons for engagement were:

- 1. To access free training provision** – an opportunity to upskill staff or provide training at no extra cost to their business:

"They said that there is a training and that they can deliver some training that we need, do our staff need to access some training? I said, "Yes, our staff need to access a lot of training but we haven't got money to pay for the training." They said oh this is short-term training and they're short courses but they are funded. I said, "Well, we'll welcome that." So they came in and delivered it to all the staff." Employer

Some employers reported that they were already planning to deliver staff training in an area that the training provider offered, either because it was a legal requirement or because they had identified a skills gap. Although they would have delivered this anyway, employers perceived the training as a good opportunity to deliver mandatory or desired training for free, and so prompted their decision to engage.

One employer explained that the opportunity of free provision enabled them to provide the training to a greater number of staff, thus maximizing their reach.

- 2. To access provision that would improve the skills of employees** - for some this was a generic benefit, while others saw an explicit benefit, for example, developing a certain skillset or securing a sector-specific qualification:

"some of the courses were really interesting especially for a lot of my stewards that work in this industry having some of those qualifications around health and safety and safeguarding, working in this industry they're really good qualifications to have." Employer

For others, this was about meeting a legal requirement or specific skills gap that the employer had already identified:

"I chose to sign up to the programme because...we've already identified that the staff needed the training and we've been sorting out, we've been trying to phone around to see where we can get them done for free or at a very low cost...So it was an opportunity we have been waiting for." **Employer**

Others were keen to engage as they felt it would develop business opportunities or give them 'market edge' over competitors in the sector as their staff would be more highly skilled and able to provide a higher quality service:

"Some of my staff are more trained than other companies' staff...that's what really interested me, I wanted to get my staff trained up more than just having their NVQ Level 2 certificates"
Employer

Perceptions of engagement process

Employers had mixed perceptions of the engagement process. Aspects of the engagement process that employers highlighted as effective included providing clear information in a professional manner and being clear about the service offer and benefit to the business. Those that were most satisfied with the initial engagement had an existing professional relationship with the training provider prior to engagement.

Conversely, those employers who were less satisfied at this stage highlighted weaknesses around professionalism, communication and efficiency. For example, one felt that the preparation of paperwork could have been completed prior to meetings with the provider so as to improve efficiency. Another explained that the reliability and consistency of communication between them and the provider was an issue:

"Just when I was trying to get hold of someone, give them answers, get a reply, sending email, following up, leaving a message, no-one would get back to you or two or three days...It's annoying when you're doing it, when you're phoning up again the next day and still that person is in a meeting or lunch break, call you back, never does." **Employer**

Introduction and need assessment

Employers typically selected the type of training to access prior to identifying workers to take part.

Organisational needs analysis

Several employers reported the completion of organisational needs analysis. This usually involved the employer describing the daily activities and remit of employees and the business, followed by a short discussion of suitable training options. Training options were usually set out in a training brochure, provided by the training provider. Conversations were

held face to face and over the phone. Some employers found the process useful, stating that it helped them to identify skills gaps and decide which area to seek training. However, others reported being largely disappointed by this process, explaining that the discussion lacked depth and left them feeling unclear of the content and suitability of the recommended courses.

"There were lots of courses were put forward for us but there were only a certain amount of courses that I thought would help my staff especially in what we do...[I] based my selection on what I thought would help my staff in working for us." **Employer**

Training selection

From this, most selected courses they thought would be most valuable for staff and relevant to their roles. Employers largely selected a range of standalone or a series of non-regulated training courses, including Health and Safety, Food Hygiene, Safeguarding, Fire Marshal, Administering medication, Infection control, Data protection, and Customer service. Two employers accessed longer-term accredited training, including a QCF Level 2 in care and an NVQ Level 2 in Spectator Safety.

Some employers selected the training type based on a previously identified need or a legal duty, for example, employers operating in the hospitality sector selected a Health and Safety and a Food Hygiene course because it is a legal requirement that all staff working with food obtain this certificate. Others selected courses they felt would develop their employees' skills in a certain area or would provide a benefit to the business.

Some of the employers interviewed reported that staff had already completed the relevant courses available to them. Despite this, employers chose to re-run the courses as it posed no additional cost to their business and would provide the opportunity for staff to refresh their skills awareness of certain procedures.

While most employers were satisfied with the training course options presented to them and saw their added value, others reported that the offer of non-regulated courses was too generic and not tailored to their sector or the roles of their employees.

Employee selection

All employers reported being involved in the selection of employees, although the approach taken varied. Overall, the selection of employees tended to be based on a mixture of the parameters set by the programme and employer's own criteria.

Those employers who reported that they were aware of the eligibility criteria set by the programme reported that this governed their selection. They reported that any staff who met the eligibility criteria (having been employed on a low wage for 4 or more months), often a large proportion of the total workforce, were offered training. Employers who took this selection approach emailed or sent a text to all staff asking them to reply if interested.

Employers (both those reporting that they were aware of eligibility criteria and those that were not) also reported using their own approach to selection. For example, some employers said that they selected employees who they believed would benefit most from the training. Others prioritized those who were due to receive training anyway, while one made a selection based on hours worked:

"We selected the main employees, they are the full time really, not the part-time ones really."

Employer

One employer, a recruitment agency, reported that employees were selected based on their clients' commitment to giving a pay increase. In other words, the employer put forward those employees who would be guaranteed to secure a progression outcome, as their clients had agreed to increase pay or provide a change in contract for staff they would take on. This approach worked best when providing role specific training, as they were more likely to gain client buy-in:

"We chose the people with jobs that they needed certain skills for, i.e. they need airport security clearance, they needed aviation security understanding... Let's put it this way, the priority was who we believed we could give something more to, i.e. show the progression. "

Employer

While one employer with high staff turnover reported that the requirements meant that many employees were ineligible as they had not worked for the employer for four or more months, another employer who employed a large proportion of temporary staff interpreted this requirement as meaning that the four months could have been with any employer rather than their current employer, allowing them to select employees who they had only employed for a few weeks.

Some employers reported that they were not aware of the criteria around employee selection and therefore offered training to all employees, regardless of their wage. This meant that some employees who accessed the training were earning over the threshold.²⁹

Employee reaction

Some employers stated that staff reacted positively to the opportunity of accessing training. Employers felt their staff saw it as a good opportunity to increase their knowledge and upskill:

"They were really enthusiastic, really looking forward to it...like I said, it makes their CVs look better, it increases their knowledge especially what we do, it helps them out, makes

²⁹ Due to gaps in the programme management information, it is not possible to assess the starting hourly wage of all programme participants and identify the scale of this problem.

their life a bit easier when they're working if they get into certain situations like a missing child or a health and safety issue." **Employer**

Conversely, some employers reported that staff were initially dubious about the training, potentially because they had had negative experiences of training previously. In order to overcome this, one employer emphasized to employees that upon completion, the certification would belong to them and that there was no obligation to stay with the company having done the training:

"I'm going to be honest, they thought there was a catch to it so the hardest task we have as a business was persuading them, confirming to them that, "No, this is for you guys," ...the key thing that we always used was, "When you pass this, the certification belongs to you guys. It doesn't belong to us, so if you decide that you don't want to work for us tomorrow, you can take that certification with you and go and work at another employment." That seemed to make them understand." **Employer**

Registration and individual needs analysis

Prior to completing training, providers conducted a registration process with participating employees. This included checking through employees' records and gathering evidence.

"They looked at all their documents, they looked at their employment requirements and how they were employed and how their contracts that they have, and they looked at their passports. They looked at the NI and all those things, yes." **Employer**

Whilst employers appeared to find this standard practice, employers felt that providing proof of eligibility was a barrier to engagement. Some employees who chose not to access the training as they felt overwhelmed about the quantity of paperwork.

Most employers were unaware of individual needs analysis being offered to participants. However, some did recall the completion of numeracy and literacy assessments prior to training being delivered. Employers were positive about the role of these individual assessments. Firstly, it helped determine eligibility for the training. Secondly, it unearthed skills gaps that they were unaware of. This prompted one employer to request the training provider to deliver English and maths training in the workplace.

"Both of us benefited from it, because it was after that initial assessment with the staff... they requested for that English and maths in the workplace. So that was how we requested for that, to improve their fluency in English...they've not delivered that. The staff requested that. So, they said they will look into it, but they've not come back to us with the confirmation. We hope that they would." **Employer**

However, another employer who experienced the same process explained that they were not interested in this training offer as they felt that this area of skills development was not related to the role and therefore something that staff could work on in their own time.

Provision of training

Training and support delivery

Location and format

Employers reported that the training provider typically delivered the courses within the workplace. In most cases, this was felt to be the most suitable location for employees, given their familiarity with the location and facilities available, for example rooms for training.

"Our office was in Stratford at the time it was easy to get to so I thought that it would be easy for my staff, so I tried to make my staff, make it easier for them, and I thought holding it in my office would be better because we had training rooms and meeting rooms in there."

Employer

Only one of the employers interviewed reported that training took place at a training centre 30 minutes from the workplace. This had a detrimental impact on engagement as employees were not willing to travel this distance, particularly as the course took place across multiple sessions.

All the employers interviewed accessed training that was delivered in groups, with no examples of one-to-one training. Where training was provided to large numbers of employees at the same company, training was delivered to separate groups in waves to minimise disruption to the employer, and ensure different times were available to staff.

In some cases, the employer attended the training sessions. Some commented that this was useful as they, as a 'trusted source', could liaise between the provider and employees should any issues arise:

"I was always going between... my staff would always come to me because they know me, they trust me so they always come to me first and then I would say, can you contact this person or can you tell me what needs to be done on this one that seems to be stuck and, yes, it was fine." **Employer**

Some employers also reported having discussions with the training provider following each session to discuss the usefulness of the session, and for longer courses, progress made.

One employer included the training course in a larger training day that was taking place in their workplace on the same day. This meant it blended in to other training given that day which may have reduced the focus of the purpose of the programme of supporting those to progress in work.

Duration

Most employers reported that training was delivered in a day or less. Short courses were typically non-regulated training, whilst accredited training tended to take place over a longer

course of time. For example, one employer accessed training that lasted 18 months (a QCF Level 2 care course) and another (an NVQ Level 2 in Spectator Safety) that ran two days a week for seven weeks.

Usefulness

Employers identified key success factors that influence the usefulness of the support:

- **Tutor approach;** employers were particularly satisfied by tutors who struck a good balance between professionalism and approachability. This was felt to facilitate a good relationship between provider and learners, helping to motivate workers engagement.
- **Regular communication;** for example, one employer whose employees were on an accredited 7-week course, was very impressed when the provider made it clear that they were contactable between training sessions. The employer felt this was indicative of a supportive approach.
- **Learner support;** employers were positive about providers that went the extra mile to engage and support learners. For example, one employer explained that the provider supported participants with an ESOL need by providing elements of the training in their first language which they found very useful.

However, some employers were not satisfied with the training delivered, in particular the non-regulated training. Employers felt that one off sessions, lasting up to one day or less, placed limitations on the ability for the tutor and participants to develop a good relationship. Another issue with non-regulated training was that employers found it too generic and thought it lacked relevance to their business and participants' job roles.

One employer faced significant challenges with the training provider when one of the tutors delivering a level 2 qualification stopped attending without explanation, having only delivered a fifth of the course. Despite notifying the training provider, the situation was not resolved. This not only prevented the group from completing the qualification with this training provider, but also negatively impacted on their willingness to participate in future learning opportunities.

"one of them she stopped coming whilst the... our carers were still doing the training and when we tried to follow-up with Manley Summers they said, "She has now left Manley Summers," she didn't give us notice so... which means that particular group didn't manage to achieve their level, their...diploma... at the end it wasn't good in the sense that some of the carers now they didn't finish. So now we want to go to another company for the carers to register to complete the, the NVQ. They became reluctant because they think half the time the trainers don't turn up." **Employer**

Additional support

Most employers reported that beyond the training course, no additional support was offered to them or their employees. Those that were offered additional support had mixed experiences.

Two employers were offered business advice that they found beneficial. The first, a care agency, was given advice on managing and standardising employee performance. For example, they were advised to ensure that all staff completed care plans in a certain way and that they all wore the correct uniform. Overall, the employer found this advice useful as they found it had improved customer satisfaction. The second, a recruitment agency, was given strategic advice on how to develop an in-house training programme for staff, for example information on available funding streams. They emphasised how supportive the provider continued to be:

"Even now, even though the contract has finished, they're there for advice if I need further advice on anything else..." **Employer**

Other employers were offered additional training but chose not to engage as they felt practical barriers such as time and cost meant it was unsuitable. For example, one employer explained that employees chose not to engage in future training because it was only available outside of work hours.

Another was encouraged by the training provider to engage staff in a Level 3 qualification. This employer was keen to engage and carried out the necessary initial steps such as paperwork, but then did not hear from the training provider regarding this additional training:

"They were encouraging us, once the staff finished the Level 2, if they could go to another higher grade level, the Level 3...we completed the forms and they said someone would...contact us. We did quite a follow-up for some time, but no one ever contacted us."
Employer

Support gaps and suggestions for improvement

Employers identified a range of support gaps relating to their experience of the programme. Based on these gaps, employers gave several suggestions about how their experience of the programme could have been improved:

- **Clear, consistent support offer for both employers and employees;** a clear and consistent support offer would encourage better understanding of the programme and its purpose - for both employers and employees. This would ensure that employers understand the programme's purpose is to progress low paid workers (rather than receive free training) and make sure employees have a better idea of the support they could expect.

- **Improved channels of communication:** fostering improved communication between providers, employers and employees could improve service delivery. For example, direct communication between the provider and employees would ensure employees were fully up to date on the training and additional support, whilst better contact between providers and employers could facilitate better planning, avoid disruption and missed sessions.
- **Better organisation:** better preparation and organisation from training providers would improve the quality of provision as well as perception of the training and support amongst both employers and employees.
- **More robust, standardised needs assessment process:** a robust and holistic needs assessment for both employees and the business would help to identify areas for development and ensure that support and training is tailored to the needs of both. A standardised method would also ensure consistency, and that support provision is aligned with the programme aims.
- **Support and training offer to encourage meaningful progression opportunities:** findings suggest that much of the training provided to employers was in the form of non-regulated, short-term learning opportunities with little additional provision. The programme should ensure that a wide range of support, suitable to both business and employee needs, is provided in order to facilitate meaningful progression for staff and the employer. The impact of support could be improved through the development of career progression pathways as well as the use of sector and role-specific training.

7. Programme outcomes

This chapter investigates the outcomes from the programme to date. The programme's management information was used to examine enrolments onto the programme, the types of training accessed, and progression outcomes achieved.

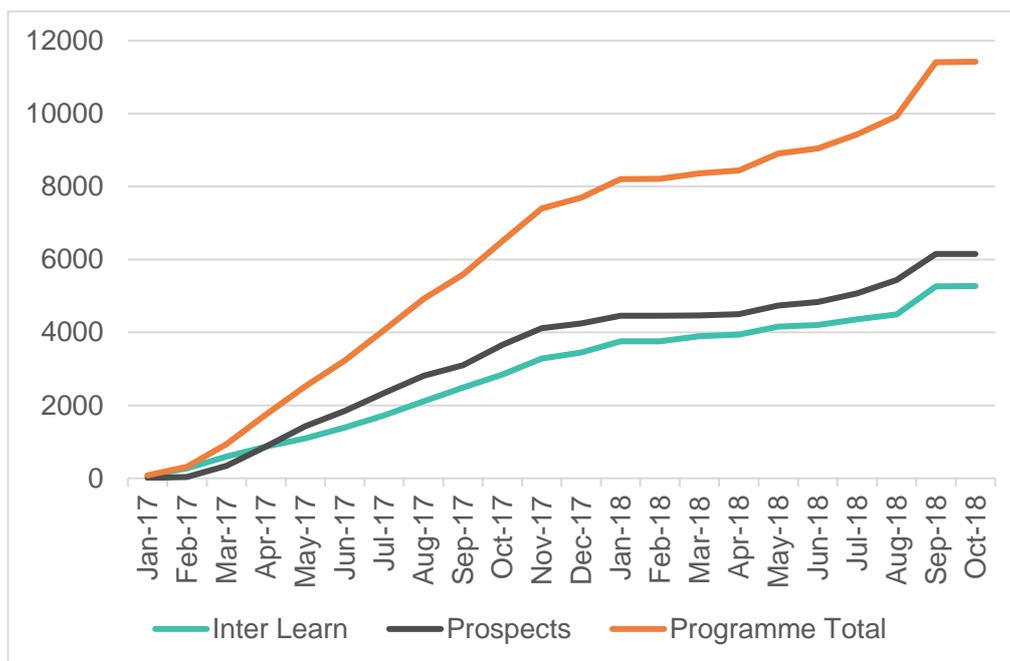
Programme enrolments to October 2018

Figure 7.1 below shows cumulative participant registrations for both prime provider supply chains, and the cumulative programme total between January 2017 and October 2018. By October 2018, a total of 11,421 participants had registered onto the programme. 6,150 of the participants had joined via the Prospects provider supply chain, whilst 5,271 had joined the programme via the InterLearn provider supply chain. These do not represent final programme totals as the programme was still running at the time of writing.

Participant registrations per month were consistent up to December 2017. However, there were periodic sharp fluctuations in participant recruitment between January 2018 and October 2018. September 2018 saw the largest number of participants registered in a single month with 1,487 new registrations.

Registrations between the Prospects and InterLearn supply chain followed a similar pattern, with Prospects registering a higher proportion of programme participants over most of the time period referenced. At the time of writing the Prospects supply-chain accounted for 54 per cent of total registrations, whilst the InterLearn supply chain accounted for 46 per cent.

Figure 7.1: Cumulative number of programme participants to date



Base: all programme participants = 11,421

Training

All participants registered onto the programme participated in some form of regulated or non-regulated learning. The definitions of different learning activities differed across the Prospects and InterLearn supply chains, so analysis is presented separately.

Table 7.1 presents the main training courses attended by participants from the Prospects supply chain of providers. These eight courses accounted for 91 per cent of all course places, and 92 per cent of completed courses.

The most common course provided was the 7 to 12 hours non-regulated Foundations for Learning and Life course, which on average lasted less than a week. This course was provided 2,239 and completed 2,051 times, a completion rate of 92 per cent. The second most common course provided was the non-regulated 21 to 44 hours Foundations for Learning and Life course, which on average lasted 5.7 weeks. This course was provided 1,823 and completed 901 times, a completion rate of 49 per cent. The third most common course was the regulated NVQ Certificate in Spectator Safety, which on average lasted 8.3 weeks. The course was provided 798 and completed 569 times, a completion rate of 71 per cent. Overall, the non-regulated “Foundation for Learning and Life” courses accounted for 74 per cent of all course places.

The majority of participants only completed one training course over the duration of their engagement with the programme (79 per cent). Eighteen per cent completed two courses, whilst 3 per cent did three or more courses.

Table 7.1: Main training courses by participation, completed and average length of course in weeks, Prospects supply chain of providers

Course	Total	Completed	Completion Rate	Average course length (weeks)
Non regulated SFA formula funded provision, No defined level, Foundations for Learning and Life, 7 to 12 hrs, PW A	2239	2051	92%	0.7
Non regulated SFA formula funded provision, No defined level, Foundations for Learning and Life, 21 to 44 hrs, PW A	1823	901	49%	5.7
NVQ Certificate in Spectator Safety (QCF)	798	569	71%	8.3
Non regulated SFA formula funded provision, No defined level, Foundations for Learning and Life, 45 to 68 hrs, PW A	737	526	71%	8.9
Non regulated SFA formula funded provision, No defined level, Foundations for Learning and Life, 13 to 20 hrs, PW A	478	135	28%	7.6
Understanding and using inclusive teaching and learning approaches in education and training	313	300	96%	8.6

Understanding assessment in education and training	303	291	96%	7.8
Non regulated SFA formula funded provision, No defined level, Foundations for Learning and Life, 3 to 4 hrs, PW A	293	254	87%	0.3

Table 7.2 shows the main training courses attended by participants from the InterLearn supply chain. Data for completion status, hours spent, and average length of time was not available for InterLearn. Non-regulated “Preparation for Work” courses accounted for 89 per cent of all course places.

Most participants (82 per cent) only undertook one training course. The remaining eight per cent did two courses or more.

Table 7.2: Main training courses by participation, completed and average length of course in weeks, InterLearn supply chain of providers

Course	Total
Non-regulated Adult skills formula funded provision, No defined level, Preparation for Work, 45 to 6	1,912
Non-regulated Adult skills formula funded provision, No defined level, Preparation for Work, 7 to 12	1,452
Non-regulated Adult skills formula funded provision, No defined level, Preparation for Work, 21 to 4	840
Non-regulated Adult skills formula funded provision, No defined level, Preparation for Work, 13 to 20	292
Non-regulated Adult skills formula funded provision, No defined level, Preparation for Work, 69 to 9	150
Non-regulated Adult skills formula funded provision, Level 2, Preparation for Work, 21 to 44 hrs, PW	81
Safeguarding the welfare of children and young people	81
Certificate in Preparing to Work in Adult Social Care	79
Contribute to the Support of Positive Environments for Children and Young People	55

Progression outcomes

Between January 2017 and October 2018, 3,323 participants (29 per cent) had recorded a progression-related outcome across the programme. A progression could be defined as any increase in weekly earnings or an improvement in employment contract.^{30 31}

Of the 3,233 participants to achieve an employment progression:

- 2,138 were an earnings progression, meaning 19 per cent of participants were registered as increasing their earnings.
- 1,185 of recorded progressions were an improvement in contract, meaning 10 per cent of all participants achieved an improvement in employment contract.

Earnings outcomes

Programme wide data related to weekly earnings progressions was not available, limiting the evaluation's capacity to measure the change in weekly earnings and gauge a true impact of the support³².

Prospects supply chain

Pre and post-progression hourly wage for participants from the Prospects supply chain was available, allowing for a comparison in the change in hourly wage experienced by those to achieve an earnings progression.

As demonstrated by Table 7.3, analysis of pre and post-progression hourly wages shows that of 1,375 Prospects participants to achieve an earnings progression, the average change in hourly wage was £1.25, from an average initial hourly wage of £7.50 to an average hourly wage at outcome of £8.75.³³ The average percentage change in hourly wage was 16.7%.

³⁰ An improvement in contract was defined as changing from a zero hours contract to a permanent contract (or a temporary contract of at least six months duration) or changing from a temporary contract of less than six months duration to a permanent contract (or a temporary contract of at least six months duration)

³¹ Whilst it was possible for participants to achieve an earnings progression and an improvement in contract concurrently, it was only possible for providers to register one of the progression outcomes for each participant.

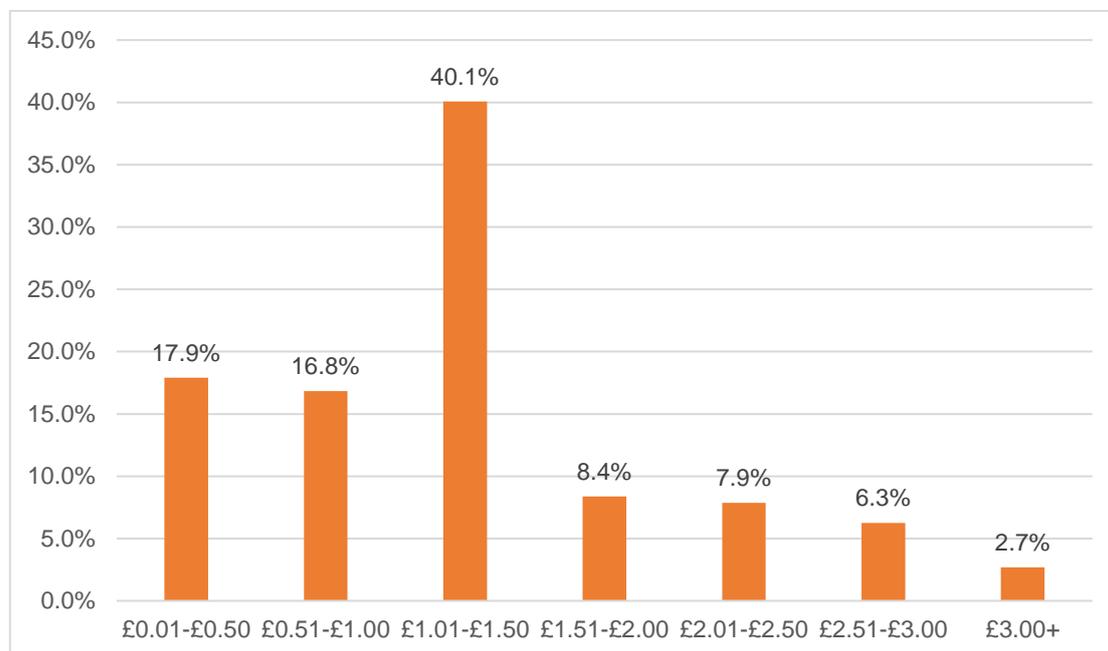
³³ This analysis does not include the inclusion of participants who either experienced a decline in hourly wage or no change at all.

Table 7.3: Average salary rates of participants to achieve an earnings progression from Prospects supply chain

Average...	Hourly Wage
Average Initial Pay Rate	£7.50
Average Updated Pay Rate	£8.75
Average Progression	£1.25
Average Percentage Change	16.7%

As referenced in Table 7.3, the average change in hourly wage for Prospects participants to achieve an earnings progression and have earnings data captured to date was £1.25 per hour. Overall, 17.9 per cent of Prospects participants to achieve an earnings progression increased their hourly wage between £0.01 and £0.50, whilst 16.8 per cent increased their hourly wage between £0.51 and £1.00. Most Prospects participants to achieve an earnings progression increased their hourly wage between £1.01 and £1.50 (40.1 per cent). 8.4 per cent of Prospects participants to achieve an earnings progression increased their hourly wage between £1.51 and £2.00, 7.9 per cent increased their hourly wage between £2.01 and £2.50, 6.3 per cent increased their hourly wage between £2.51 and £3.00 and 2.7 per cent increased their hourly wage by £3.00 and higher.

Figure 7.2: Change in hourly wage for Prospects supply chain participants to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured to date



Base: programme participants from Prospects supply chain to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured = 1,374

InterLearn supply chain

Supply-chain wide data was not available for InterLearn participants. To estimate the change in hourly wage experienced by InterLearn participants and allow for a comparison with the data available for Prospects supply chain, a random sample of paper records detailing participants hourly wage data at the start of the programme and at the point of an earnings progression was selected.³⁴

As demonstrated by Table 7.4, analysis of pre and post-progression hourly wages shows that of 920 InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression, the projected average change in hourly wage was £0.18, from an average initial hourly wage of £7.83 to an average hourly wage at outcome of £8.01³⁵. The average percentage change in hourly wage was 1.3%.

Table 7.4: Average salary rates of representative sample of participants to achieve an earnings progression from InterLearn supply chain

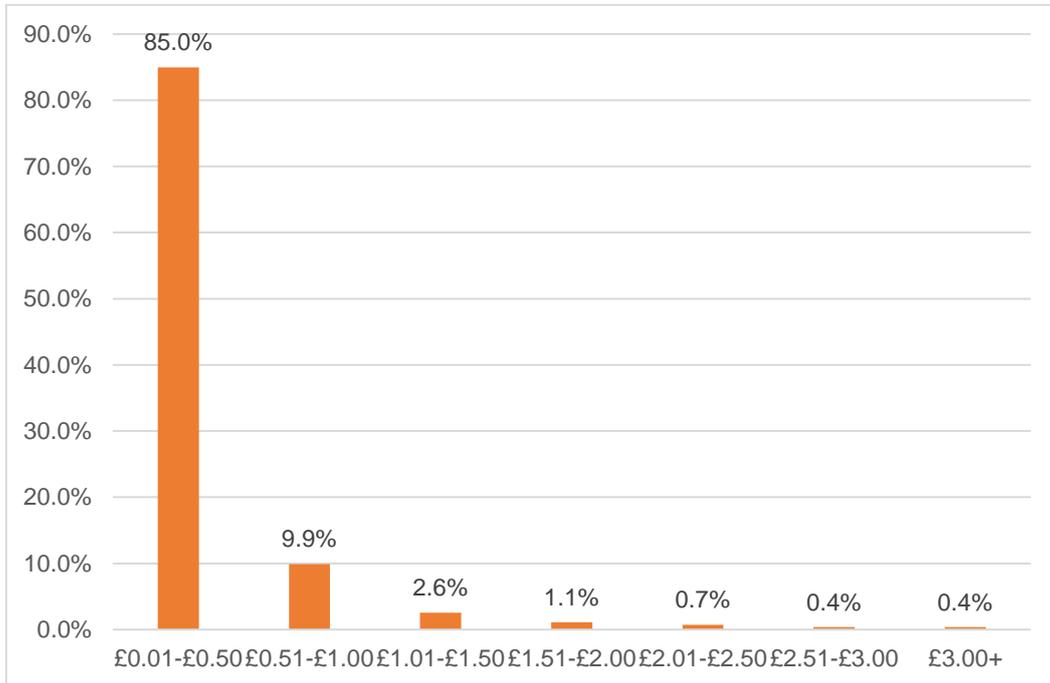
Average...	Hourly Wage
Average Initial Pay Rate	£7.83
Average Updated Pay Rate	£8.01r
Average Progression	£0.18
Average Percentage Change	1.3%

As referenced in Table 7.4, the projected average change in hourly wage for InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression and have earnings data captured to date was £0.18 per hour. The majority of InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression were projected to have increased their hourly wage between £0.01 and £0.50 (85 per cent). 9.9 per cent were projected to increase their hourly wage between £0.51 and £1.00, 2.6 per cent were projected to increase their hourly wage between £1.01 and £1.50, 1.1 per cent were projected to increase their hourly wage between £1.51 and £2.00, 0.7 per cent were projected to increase their hourly wage between £2.01 and £2.50 whilst a further 0.4 per cent were projected to increase their hourly wage between £2.51 and £3.00 and £3.01+ respectively.

³⁴ A sample of 273 participants was randomly selected – this represents 30 per cent of all InterLearn participants to achieve an earnings progression up to October 2018. This is the number of individuals deemed necessary to create a representative sample at 95% confidence level. Hourly wage estimates were then weighted to take account of the differences between the sample and total salary progressions in terms of age, gender, ethnic background and prior qualification levels.

³⁵ This analysis does not include the inclusion of participants who either experienced a decline in hourly wage or no change at all.

Figure 7.3: Projected change in hourly wage for InterLearn supply chain participants to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured to date



Base: representative sample of programme participants from InterLearn supply chain to achieve earnings progression and have earnings data captured = 273

Impact assessment

L&W intended to conduct a full impact assessment of the In-Work Progression programme to gauge the impact of the programme on participant earnings, over and above what they would have experienced if the programme had not been delivered. This was not possible as the data necessary to conduct a robust impact assessment was not collated by providers and not available for transfer.

8. Participant experience of outcomes

The chapter draws on qualitative interviews with participants to provide insight into participant views of what was achieved through their participation with the programme, including soft outcomes, skills and qualifications development and career progression.

Progression outcomes

Contract change

Several participants interviewed obtained a contract change. In all instances, this was secured by participants who had moved into new roles with a different employer following their engagement in the programme. These individuals had received individual-led support, as opposed to the employer-led model.

Pay increase

Many of the participants interviewed reported that they had secured a pay increase since completing the programme. Some of those who secured pay increases attributed their outcome to the support received. While most participants reported being very satisfied with their pay increase, some noted that the level of increase had been marginal, with little positive effect on their day to day life. Of those to secure a pay increase, there was a mix of participants who had either accessed support through their employment and those that had accessed support independently.

There were two main routes to receive an increase in pay:

(i) Through existing employer

A number of those to secure a pay increase did so with their existing employer. Participants explained this was either related to an increase in responsibilities or promotion to a new role, following the receipt of training. For example, one participant who completed a 2-month Customer Service NVQ Level 2 secured a promotion and pay rise. Another secured a pay rise having completed Spectator Safety training. This cohort tended to attribute their progression to the training accessed:

"Yes, definitely. I think that [NOT] having this training I was never going to improve myself, I was never going to get a wage increase and I was never going to get to be an assistant manager." **Programme participant**

However, some did not ascertain their pay increase to the role of the programme. One participant who had a small increase in pay was unclear as to why this has increased, noting they had received no communication about the increase or any connection this had with the training.

"Well, since the training I do believe I've had an increase in my income. It's only by a few pounds a month so, yes, that happened... there was no follow-up. I don't know if there was a pass or fail. Do you understand? If I passed or failed, I don't know. I have got no idea. There was no certificate to say that I've taken part in it. Nothing was said to me... [and] it wasn't a big enough amount for me to question it." **Programme participant**

Some of those interviewed explained that the increase was due to a rise in the minimum wage or organisational award related to the cost of living and therefore should not be attributed to the programme.

"Even when we did get a pay increase that was because the government was increasing the minimum wage." **Programme participant**

(ii) Moving into a new role

Many of those who secured a pay increase did so as a result of moving into a new job or a new sector. Benefits to moving roles included:

- Increased hourly wage and weekly earnings;
- Working in a role/sector more closely aligned to their interests and aspirations;
- Improved job security; and
- Better conditions, including more training and progression opportunities.

For example, one participant who had started a new job at a hospital explained that their employer had offered to support them through midwifery training, enabling them to fulfil a long-standing career goal.

Some of those interviewed attributed this progression directly to the programme and the support received. One participant explained that the provision of personalised advice and employability support from their adviser had helped them to move into a better paid role, with significant impact on their earnings and standard of living. Those that directly related their move to a new job with the programme tended to have accessed support independent of their existing employer.

"I showed them the advert, said, "Okay I need advices for my cover letter or for the interview," and they really helped, really, really. I think I had that job because of them, honestly, because of their advices because of their, their support, their... Well, because they, they showed me that I could apply for this kind of job." **Programme participant**

Another participant who had gained a level 3 qualification through the programme, told how this new qualification and associated improvement in skills had supported them to move into a new, higher paying role relevant to their skill-set. This was particularly the case for those who completed an accredited training course or who received individually tailored employment support.

Others took a more nuanced view; whilst they did not fully attribute their change in circumstances to their involvement in the programme, they acknowledged the role it had played in helping them secure their new position. For example, one participant who completed a Level 2 Health and Social Care qualification through their employer, went on to secure a higher paying role in healthcare which they attributed in part due to their qualification.

Others did not to attribute their change in employment situation to the programme. For example, one participant who secured a higher paying role in administration explained that the care course they completed was not relevant to their new role and hence did not contribute to her progression.

Wider benefits of pay increase

Some of those who secured a pay increase reflected on how it had positively impacted on their wider circumstances:

- Being able to meet living costs;
- Less reliance on familial support and able to live independently;
- Able to work less hours, meaning improved work-life balance; and
- Being able to think about future career plans.

"I'm getting hours that I want, I'm getting a steady income every month, so I'm able to provide and do a lot more, you know, so I'm not falling behind or asking anybody else for help" **Programme participant**

"It's very positive because I make sufficient money, I have a top quality of job, better quality in life so more time with my family..." **Programme participant**

"I mean I've got a good amount of savings as well. I plan to continue saving, possibly saving up to get my own place, you know, get a flat or deposit on a flat or something. I'm not too sure but, yes, I'd love to get married in a few years." **Programme participant**

"I've got a life. I've got my own flat. I don't live in someone's home so that is a huge difference as well." **Programme participant**

"In a very good way because, you know, you can't really do a lot on minimum wage and then doing these courses and improving so much has been really, really helpful for me." **Programme participant**

Intermediate and soft outcomes

Many of those interviewed reported that they had gained intermediate and soft outcomes through participating with the programme, including:

Improved knowledge, skill-set and qualifications

Some participants improved their knowledge and skill-set by participating in the training. This was commonly attributed to accredited training, which also led to qualifications for participants. Improvements in knowledge and skill-set were particularly useful when relevant to the participant's current role, aspirations or where they had gained transferable skills. For example, one participant described how the completion of a level 2 Diploma in Team Building had supported them to gain additional skills which enabled them to broaden their remit at work.

"I could do other things within the organisation or in different roles and, yes, so it helped me within the role and so it opened up, you know, a few different things within this department."
(Programme participant)

One participant had completed a Level 2 care qualification explained that they had learned a lot from the course, boosting their skill level and ability to perform well in their role. Similarly, another explained their new skills had supported them to better carry out their role, including being able to better manage risk, make decisions and support clients:

"After this training, I felt that I'm a good carer, I'm skilled. I had a qualification, I learnt something. There's a lot of information I got from the trainer...It just gave me a lot of satisfaction." **Programme participant**

However, in some cases, improvement in knowledge and skill-set were felt to contribute little to participants' current roles and future goals. Participants found it difficult to see how specific knowledge could be applied within their current role or used to support their progression. For example, one participant who had participated in a 4-hour training course in Customer Service and Safety, explained they had been unable to put their learning into practise and as a result had now forgotten most of their training.

Employability skills

Participants reported improvements in employability skills through the provision of employability support. For example, some participants said the provider had furthered their understanding of the job search and application process by helping them to look for jobs, complete a CV or job application. Participants also explained that their adviser had supported them to secure voluntary work experience opportunities in their desired sector which they felt had boosted their experience and CV, helping them to take necessary steps towards their career goals. All participants made reference to improvements in employability skills as a result of employability support, they had accessed, independent of their employer.

Participants that were not offered this type of wraparound support suggested that it would have been useful to support their progression. Suggested improvements included careers advice and support with job search, applications and the interview process.

Confidence and motivation

Several participants felt that their confidence and motivation had increased as a result of their participation with the programme. This was often perceived as occurring in conjunction with securing other soft outcomes such as improved skills; for example, increased confidence was typically reported by those who had accessed training relevant to their role.

"It's very difficult for me explain but it's just skills make you more confident and overall I think it made me a more work ready person." **Programme participant**

"...it just helped to give me a bit more confidence. When I saw that equipment out in the field, I was, like, right, I know how to use it. So, it did give me confidence during work as well and, like, procedures and stuff." **Programme participant**

Others reported that despite not achieving a progression, the programme had given them the increased motivation to change their circumstances. For example, one participant was now looking for a new role to move into, whilst another had recently registered for an accountancy course in the hope of a career change. Another participant had sought information about degree level apprenticeships from a different provider – a route they were considering pursuing to help them achieve their desired progression into a management role

No outcomes

Some participants reported that they had not benefited from the programme. They gave a range of reasons for this, including:

- **Poor quality, irrelevant training;** participants explained that training irrelevant to their job role/interests, or training that was poor quality, served no purpose in terms of their progression – either within their current role or into a new job. Typically, these participants had accessed non-regulated learning courses which lasted for less than a day.
- **Incomplete training;** others reported they had not completed their training or did not receive certification to prove their successful completion. This acted as a barrier to achieving a pay increase or contract change. For example, one participant completed a security course but did not receive his SIA badge, preventing him from progressing.
- **Employer's unwillingness to progress staff;** some participants that had been placed onto the programme by their employers were told that, upon completion, their

employer had been unwilling to increase their hourly wage or support their progression.

The experience negatively influenced some participants' motivation to progress and willingness to engage in support and training in the future. For example, one participant explained that they were not interested in accessing any more training as what they had experienced had not been useful.

Support to sustain progression outcomes

Many of the participants interviewed reported that they were not receiving support to sustain their progression. Participants explained they were not offered follow-up support or were told they were no longer able to access provision. One participant reported that they were told they were no longer eligible to access support from the provider given their wage increase. Participants stated that an absence of post-outcome support acted as a barrier to further progression and risked the sustainment of their initial outcomes.

However, others said that they were still accessing some forms of support in relation to the programme. For example, one participant who accessed one to one employment support independently of their employer, reported that they continued to access help from the training provider as they looked for new roles in their desired sector. Another participant was working closely with their training provide to access further progression opportunities. This additional form of support was secured through the active request of participants, as opposed to constituting a core component of the support model.

"I'm actually communicating with my trainer about that and she does help me improve more and more and more and I think with her help I will get to improve and get where I want to."

Programme participant

Plans for the future

Numerous factors influenced participants' future plans and the extent to which they perceived them as achievable. This included:

- how participants saw their current role vis-à-vis their career goals;
- experience of the programme and whether outcomes were achieved;
- access to information and advice about progression pathways;
- employer support; and
- personal factors which impacted on participants' desire to progress, for example proximity to retirement and caring responsibilities.

Participants that had a positive experience of the programme that were in desired roles or sectors, or had secured a progression outcome, were more motivated and confident about their future opportunities for progression.

Many of those interviewed explained that they had plans to move into work in different sectors to the ones they were currently in. This was particularly prevalent for those who were in roles that 'paid the bills' rather than 'career roles', regardless of their outcomes from the programme. For example, one participant working in security reported that they wanted to build a career as a fiction writer. Others explained that they wanted to start their own business. Another expressed that they wanted to move away from short-term roles and move into a role that was sustainable and that they were passionate about.

"I'm trying to find something that's going to be sustainable for a long period of time, ideally in something that I want to do and, you know, whether that be on set, sort of thing, with films or whether that be in an office doing post-production work " **Programme participant**

Some felt confident in their ability to access the support and/or training needed to get to this point. For example, some had already enrolled on relevant courses, independently of their employer or the programme.

Other participants had plans to progress within their current organisation. For example, some felt ready to discuss a contract change or apply for higher paying internal roles. Overall, these participants were in desired sectors, had a very positive experience of the programme, had secured a hard outcome and felt that the support had met their needs.

One participant's plans centred around improved employment circumstances, regardless of the job type or sector. They explained that their future priority was securing a fixed hours contract and higher pay in whichever sector that would enable them to achieve this. They perceived training to be the best approach to achieving this goal.

"Yes, I just... with me because a zero-hour contract there's not a lot of work so in any ways I can improve myself with different types of qualifications and learn about different jobs then that's something that I'll be interested in." **Programme participant**

Others had no intentions to progress their employment situation and saw no value in accessing further training. External factors such as lack of motivation and perceived proximity to retirement influenced these decisions:

"I'm old now. I'm nearly 50. I'm not looking to do any form of training. If something comes my way and if I think it's going to benefit me then maybe yes. So I'm not looking to trying to progress or anything. Like I said, I'm nearly 50 so it's just not about... I just need to earn a little bit of money, pay rent and live. I'm just living." **Programme participant**

Some participants recognised that there were challenges to achieving their goals. This was common among those who wanted to move sector and were not accessing any support at the time of interview. Identified challenges included lacking:

- Information and knowledge about alternative jobs and courses;

- Employer support and opportunities for progression within their current role; and
- Time and resources to access further support and training.



9. Employer experience of outcomes

The chapter draws on qualitative interviews with employers to provide an insight into employer views of what was achieved through their participation with the programme.

Changes to business through involvement with programme

Most employers interviewed felt their engagement with the programme had some form of positive impact on their staff or business. This was particularly the case among employers that had accessed accredited, longer-term training or non-accredited training that was relevant to their employees' roles.

The main outcome identified by employers was improved skills and knowledge. Employers explained that this led to a wider range of improvements across their business, including:

- **Increased output;** employers to select accredited training courses reported that it had positively impacted on the daily operation of business, improving employees' efficiency and productivity:

"It has an impact in improving efficiency of the running of the centre" **Employer**

"It did a lot of good, you know, we, we, we ended up getting so much really because the staff had been trained and they were actually selling the business in a very good way and we ended up being overwhelmed with a lot of work" **Employer**

- **Improved client satisfaction;** for example, one employer who accessed non-regulated health and safety as well as safeguarding short courses, had received positive feedback from clients about their employees' performance. They attributed this improvement directly to the training:

"A lot of clients have been impressed by the stewards I've sent them, a lot of stewards have done the courses, some of my senior regular staff and, yes, it helps when the client is happy with your staff." **Employer**

- **Competitive edge;** another employer felt that the training had enabled staff to upskill in areas relevant to their business, which in turn gave them the 'market edge' over their competitors:

"Our skill base increased dramatically and that was in... I'm going to say that was mainly in food and aviation, because we were able to offer the specific skills and specific training for the specific industry, it gave us that market edge...most businesses or recruitment businesses especially wouldn't be offering this level of training, wouldn't be offering this level of support to grow their employees and support their clients" **Employer**

- **Improved communication and team working;** employers referenced more effective communication across the company. For example, one employer thought

the training had acted as a team building exercise, facilitating more effective employee interaction.

- **Skills development practices;** some employers reported the programme had had positively influenced managers' and consultants' perception of the value of training, including the business benefits it can accrue. One employer explained that their engagement with the programme had encouraged them to provide more staff training, including the development of apprenticeship schemes.

"it's given our internal managers and consultants a stronger tool and a better understanding of the work force that we need to employ...They were never aware of what we could offer, what training was about for workers. They treated workers as arms and legs, they now treat them as a full time employee... the more we do at the front end makes it easier at the long end and that's the way that I drummed into our internal teams." **Employer**

However, other employers noted that while training had improved employees' skills, there was not a pivotal shift or change to their business as a result. This was common where training was:

- A mandatory requirement for the business that had to be provided to all employees;
- Was considered less relevant to employees' roles and the business model; and
- Delivered as a refresher course to employees.

Training of this type tended to be non-accredited, standalone training courses.

"It wasn't a major training. It was literally just manual handling because we hadn't ticked that off, so that's what we did" **Employer**

"Individual skill has been improved in some of the people because some people don't have idea about all these things, but after that, you know, they are more aware of all these things...but this is all minor really." **Employer**

Only one employer – a children's day nursery – felt that there had been no positive impact on the business as a result of the training. This employer explained that despite earlier assurances of the training's relevance to the business, the training that was then provided was found to be wholly irrelevant to the business and its employees' roles.

Changes to employees

Progression outcomes

None of the employers interviewed stated that the support had led to an increase in employee pay that would not have otherwise occurred without the presence of the programme. There was just one example of an employer referencing a change in employment contract as a result of the programme.

Increase in pay

Most of the employers interviewed reported that none of their employees to participate in the programme had obtained an increase in pay. Where participants had experienced an increase in pay, employers were clear this was not related to the programme. Instead, increases in pay were the result of organisational increases which increased employee pay company-wide. This was often in line with statutory increases or cost of living awards. Employers explained that this would have occurred regardless of their engagement with the programme.

"It wasn't just the staff that had done the training, all our staff who work for us pay rates went up... We did it for everyone, we put the pay rates up for all of our staff... a lot of it was related to the training but then we were going to put our pay rates up anyway, it was our plan to start putting pay rates up." **Employer**

In another example, an employer told how employees who achieved pay increases had done so in relation to staff development unrelated to the purpose and outputs of the programme.

Change in contract

One employer reported that all staff who accessed the training had moved from temporary to permanent contracts. In this case, the employer was an employment agency that was not able to increase the pay of staff, as the agency's clients would not be willing to absorb the extra cost. Instead the agency worked with the client to secure improved contracts for employees. The employment agency explained that receipt of training and additional support was the main motivating factor for the client when deciding whether to progress staff.

Some employers attributed the absence of progression outcomes a result of the receipt of training that was not substantial or relevant enough to lead to such changes. Others explained it was beyond their business's capability to afford to give pay increases or change employment contracts. Other employers stated they were not aware of the expectation to increase pay or improve participants' employment contracts.

"One little afternoon course isn't going to make a difference to anybody's career, is it?"
Employer

Soft outcomes

Employers reported a range of soft outcomes that they believed employees gained having completed the training, including:

- Sector-specific knowledge and skills;
- Transferable 'life skills';
- Increased confidence and motivation; and
- Improvements in attitudes towards training.

Employers who accessed training that they would have provided anyway, or un-regulated standalone/generic training stated that the programme did not have a significant impact on employees' skills or knowledge.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

This final chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations based on the evaluation of ESF In-Work Progression programme and the reported outcomes achieved by the programme.

The ESF In-Work Progression programme recognised the issue of rising in-work poverty in London and took seriously evidence that those in low pay are often unable to sustainably progress into better paid work. As such, the basis for the programme is rooted in sound rationale.

The evaluation has found that the programme resulted in the development of an expansive employer-facing model, in which participants received training in relation to their current role. Some providers also followed an individual-led approach. The individual-led model supported participants away from their employer, providing a wider range of support which was tailored to individual needs and aspirations and focused on supporting access to both internal and external progression opportunities.

Participant Outcomes

Just under one-third of all participants (29 per cent) recorded a progression outcome. 19 per cent of these participants increased their pay, whilst 10 per cent achieved an improvement in contract. Increases in pay led to a wide range of benefits for some participants. However, some increases were negligible and had no significant impact on the individual. Some progressions were not attributed to the programme and would have otherwise occurred. Alongside progression outcomes, participants also referenced the achievement of wider employment-related and softer outcomes.

Recommendation 1: If using outcome-based contracts for future in-work progression programmes, commissioners should consider the use of earnings targets to incentivise provision that leads to meaningful increases in earnings for programme participants.

Engagement

Several recruitment targets that focused on specific demographic characteristics were met but it was more challenging to recruit single parents and people with disabilities. Recruitment targets for women, over 50's and ethnic minorities were met. However, it was a challenge to meet recruitment targets for single parents and people with disabilities. This is likely to have resulted in part from the extensive use of the employer-led model, as employers were less likely to have this type of information about their employees.

Recommendation 2: Clear recruitment channels for 'hard-to-reach groups' should be established from the start of the programme. Where characteristics remain 'hidden', programmes should utilise local stakeholders' knowledge of potential participants

characteristics. This could include local authorities, health services or community organisations.

Programme eligibility criteria worked well to identify individuals on low pay but there were concerns that some individuals with support needs were excluded. There were concerns that the earnings threshold restricted support for individuals earning a low hourly wage but working a high number of hours, and individuals whose earnings regularly fluctuated because of insecure, sporadic work.

Recommendation 3: Eligibility criteria should be responsive to the nature of modern work and ensure that all who experience hardship because of low paid, precarious employment or whose working situations are considered ‘unsustainable’ are able to access support. Future in-work progression programmes should test alternate eligibility criteria which ensure support is not restricted from individuals in need.

The employer-led model appeared to be a more effective way to engage potential participants at scale compared to the individual-led model. By utilising existing partnerships and targeting outreach at larger employers and those in sectors with traditionally low levels of pay, employer-led recruitment provided access to a large volume of participants.

Alternative engagement routes were initially employed by providers. Yet, these were less efficient at meeting registration targets, and as such were less utilised.

Individual-led recruitment approaches, through outreach and referrals, were more arduous and inefficient, requiring engagement with potential participants. However, the individual-led model has demonstrated its effectiveness at providing a wider package of support that is tailored according to individual needs and aspirations.

Recommendation 4: Where aligned with the intended model of support, future programmes should utilise individual-led pathways as a key source of referrals, including signposting from relevant services and stakeholders, expanded partnership with JCP and wider promotion, for example via outreach and participant networks.

Programme structure

Programme registration targets and the ‘28-day progression rule’ incentivised the use of the employer-facing model. The need to meet registration targets and relative efficiency of employer-led recruitment meant that the programme was largely employer-facing, limiting the role of individual-led support. This was encouraged by the requirement for participants to achieve a progression within 28 days of the completion of a learning activity to be counted as an outcome.

Recommendation 5: Programme commissioners should monitor and check for any unintentional impacts of programme requirements and revise where necessary. This will help to minimise any adverse impacts on programme structure and delivery.

Support Model

The referral method had a significant bearing on the scope and type of support delivered on the programme, with a wider range of personalised support made available to those following the individual-led model. This included an in-depth needs assessment and the provision of one-to-one support, employability and careers advice and training. Participants supported through the individual-led model progressed via two routes; either through moving into a job with a new employer or progressing through their existing employer.

Those engaged through the employer-led model tended to have limited awareness of the overall purpose of the programme and the full package of support available.

Participants had minimal influence over the type of training accessed through the employer-led model, with little evidence to suggest participants received an in-depth needs assessment, sustained contact with an adviser or any additional support. Participants who accessed the employer-led model typically progressed via a promotion or increased responsibilities with their existing employer rather than by moving to new employer.

Recommendation 6: It is important that programmes maintain a consistent introduction to their service, with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the programme and the support offer. This will ensure that any programme beneficiaries, including employers and participants, are fully informed of the service that is available to them, and how to access it.

Recommendation 7: Future programmes should ensure that a robust needs assessment is completed with participants at the point of engagement. A standardised assessment can help to encourage participants to consider their barriers and aspirations and develop a tailored support plan. The needs assessment should operate within the confines of the programme, linking to suitable support options and wider provision where necessary, to avoid the risk of unmet expectations.

Participants favoured one-to-one advice, coaching and links to a wider package of support tailored to their needs and aims. This type of support was typically accessed by participants supported through the individual-led approach.

Skills provision was beneficial when clearly aligned to participants needs, provided in a supportive, engaging manner and closely matched with their current role or aspirations. Skills provision formed an important element for both the employer and individual-led models. Training that led to an improvement in relevant skills or qualifications was most valuable. This was typically regulated, but also included non-regulated provision.

Employers interviewed felt that training had not delivered a large enough impact to progress staff. For some, training was not relevant to their business and provided no added value. This was typically stand-alone, non-regulated provision. Others did experience an improvement in employee skills, with resulting benefits for business. However, these were not substantial enough to lead to progression.

Recommendation 8: The employer-led model should serve the interests of both the employer and the employee. Employer-led programmes should provide a robust needs assessment at the point of engagement. This should include a review of the business model, current challenges and workforce needs, and should be conducted alongside business support, using outputs of the assessment to identify and map viable progression pathways. A range of support options may be utilised in order to address challenges and support business development, with the main aim of progressing low paid employees. This may include specialist training and business advice. Participating employees should also be provided with one-to-one adviser support, to help guide their participation with the programme and identify any further barriers to progression. Support must contribute towards the genuine progression of staff, with a wide range of support types, formats and durations available, which is selected based on the needs of the employee and employer. Specialist approaches to employer engagement may be recommended, for example focusing on sector-specific pathways or targeting employers that are the focus of local economic development strategy.

Recommendation 9: Support delivered through the individual-led model should be tailored to the barriers faced by those in low paid work, either through internal provision or partner services. A standardised needs assessment process should conduct a full review of participant needs and aspirations, identifying relevant support options. Central to the individual model is the role of the adviser - ongoing one-to-one support will encourage participants to tackle underlying barriers in the medium to long-run, increasing the likelihood of progression. Support must be flexible and provided in a format that is engaging and accessible to in-work participants. Employer brokerage should be utilised as a valuable tool to supporting participants entering new employment opportunities, with the support of their adviser.

Overall, the programme has represented a valuable opportunity to expand the limited evidence base for models of interventions which support progression and presents several key lessons. Future programmes should seek to build on these, testing new approaches to individual and employer-led models of support. In order to produce conclusive statements about the relative effectiveness of progression support, it is essential that future programmes collect and collate necessary evidence to monitor and measure impact. This will help aid understanding of which approaches work best and can provide value for money.