

Impact evaluation of the Workforce Development Fund (2015-17) and the Workforce Development Innovation Fund (2014-17)

Executive summary

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Introduction

In 2017, an independent evaluation was undertaken of the Workforce Development Fund (WDF), Individual Employer (IE) funding and the Workforce Development Innovation Fund (WDIF). The evaluation was designed to provide an up-to-date assessment of the impact of the three funding streams, including their impact on quality of care. The evaluation was commissioned by Skills for Care – the employer-led workforce development body responsible for distributing the funds.

The funding streams

WDF: seeks to address market failures in workforce development in the adult social care sector by providing a retrospective contribution of £15 per credit towards accredited qualification units. More than 400 units are eligible for WDF funding.

IE funding: pays the full cost of training for IEs¹ and their Personal Assistants (PAs) (within certain criteria). Funding can be accessed directly by IEs and by User Led Organisations (ULOs).

WDIF: funds innovative approaches to identify and address skills gaps/needs in adult social care. WDIF projects may develop new training resources, undertake research into innovative service provision or pilot new approaches to delivery.

WDF delivery model: well established and well regarded

The WDF delivery model differs by employer size and geographic location. Employer satisfaction with each part of the model is extremely high, including the amount of funding available per credit. The evaluation has found nothing to suggest that any significant changes to the model are needed and concludes that Skills for Care is widely trusted by employers to be an effective managing agent.

Skills for Care maintains an ongoing dialogue with employers which informs important updates to the list of units that the WDF will fund. This dialogue has enabled the fund to remain responsive to changing workforce needs and has contributed to the high levels of demand that exist for the funding year on year.

Driving up quality of care and exceeding expectation

Almost without exception, employers that took part in the evaluation said that the quality of care they provide has improved as a direct consequence of the WDF. This is an excellent result both for Skills for Care and the adult social care sector. Large proportions of employers also reported that they can more effectively meet the specialist/personalised needs of the people who receive their care and support, that

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

the WDF has helped them to address skills gaps and that staff morale has improved. Overall, the WDF has consistently over-achieved against employer expectation.

There is also evidence of the WDF having wider impacts. For example, many employers have refreshed their training plans/needs analyses and are investing in more and/or different types of training as a result of the funding. An estimated 1,125 employers supported by the WDF in 2016/17 have since engaged with another Skills for Care initiative (e.g. the information service and Learn from Others) as a result.

IE funding: reaching the right beneficiaries and generating impact

Skills for Care operates a simplified delivery model for IE funding and the evaluation has found that it remains fit for purpose. More than three quarters of the IEs in the evaluation attribute improvements in the quality of their care, and in the morale of their PAs, specifically to the funding. In the vast majority of cases, the IEs would not have been able to afford the training in the absence of the Skills for Care support. The additionality of the IE funding is therefore very high. IE funding is also prompting IEs to explore other Skills for Care initiatives and to consider more training and development activity in the future.

ULO's are similarly positive. The funding has helped ULO's to engage with more people who could benefit from their services and has deepened their knowledge of the issues faced by IEs and PAs. ULO's also report a range of positive impacts for the participants in their projects, including increased confidence and skills.

WDIF: the challenge of sustaining innovative activity

The WDIF has enabled well-recognised workforce issues to be approached in ways not previously tried within the geographic catchments of the funded projects. An array of positive impacts have been generated, benefiting members of the adult social care workforce, employers and people who receive care and support.

WDIF has been the catalyst for the upscaling and mainstreaming of some new and innovative activities. The evidence suggests that this would not have happened at all, or certainly not as quickly, had the funding not been available. However, many projects have struggled to maintain momentum beyond the funding period and have not achieved their stated ambitions for continuity of delivery or wider roll-out. There are various reasons for this, including the constraints imposed by a one-year funding horizon.

Looking ahead

The evaluation does not recommend any systemic changes to the WDF.

Operationally, Skills for Care should a) continue liaising with the sector to ensure the WDF remains responsive to workforce development needs; and b) seek to obtain robust estimates of the wage premia of qualifications in the sector. This would allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of the WDF.

The evaluation concludes that the IE funding model does not require any significant changes. Recognising that some IEs have concerns about accessing cover when their PAs are being trained, Skills for Care should consider signposting them (e.g. via locality managers) to temporary/replacement PA services. Training providers and ULOs could also be encouraged to arrange/deliver training in IEs' homes, where practicable.

A longer funding window (e.g. up to three years) should be considered for the WDIF as it is currently very difficult for projects to demonstrate impact and plan for sustainability. Without a longer funding window, Skills for Care may need to relax its expectations around the sustainability, scalability and transferability of WDIF projects.

A standardised and more detailed section on quality of care should be included in the WDIF self-evaluation template. This could be based on the shared view of quality set out in the *Adult Social Care: Quality Matters* policy document² and would help to provide greater depth and comparability across projects.

² Department of Health and Care Quality Commission; *Adult Social Care: Quality Matters*. July 2017
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