



Impact Evaluation of the Workforce Development Fund, Individual Employer Fund and Workforce Development Innovation Fund (2017-19)

Executive Summary

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Introduction

In 2019, Skills for Care commissioned an independent evaluation of the Workforce Development Fund (WDF, also referred to as 'the mainstream fund'), Individual Employer (IE) funding and the Workforce Development Innovation Fund (WDIF, also referred to as 'the Innovation Fund'). Covering the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years, the evaluation was designed to provide an up-to-date assessment of the impact of the three funding streams.

The evaluation method involved:

- **Mainstream fund:**
 - Telephone consultations with 29 lead partners and seven training provider representatives;
 - Telephone survey of 300 employers;
 - Estimating the economic impact of the fund using a Net Present Value approach.
- **IE funding:**
 - Survey and telephone consultations with 39 IEs¹;
 - Telephone consultations with 14 User-Led Organisations (ULOs).
- **Innovation Fund:**
 - Three project-level case studies.

The funding streams

The mainstream fund seeks to address market failures in workforce development in the adult social care sector by providing a contribution towards vocational learning. More than 200 qualifications were eligible for funding through the mainstream fund in 2018/19, as well as two non-accredited programmes².

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

The innovation fund supports innovative approaches to identify and address skills gaps/needs in adult social care. Innovation fund projects have developed new training resources, undertaken research into innovative service provision and piloted new approaches to delivering care and support services.

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.

² The Lead to Succeed programme was added to the list of eligible qualifications at the beginning of the 2017/18 financial year and the End of Life Care Programme was added in November 2018. Both are being delivered only by Skills for Care's endorsed providers.

The mainstream fund model and processes: fit-for-purpose and highly regarded

Lead partners and employers consistently agree that the current model is largely fit-for-purpose and works well for disbursing the mainstream fund. The majority view amongst lead partners and employers is that the fund supports an appropriate range of accredited qualifications and is responsive to changing workforce skills needs. The amount of funding available per learner is also felt to be appropriate by both lead partners and employers.

The inclusion of two non-accredited programmes within the mainstream fund's eligibility has been warmly welcomed. It seems likely that any expansion of the non-accredited offer within the fund (assuming it was targeted at genuine need) would be similarly well received.

The changes made to the mainstream fund in 2018/19 – most notably the shift to claiming/funding at qualification level – are noted to have reduced fund-related administration, but they are also thought to have caused a small reduction in the number of employers engaging with the fund in that year. Most lead partners predict that this will only be a short-term impact, although that is not the view universally.

Impacts of the mainstream fund: addressing the most pressing skills issues and improving quality of care

Employers report almost unanimously that they are providing better care, have a more skilled staff team and have observed improved staff morale as a direct consequence of the mainstream fund.

Significantly, in terms of added value and impact, a high proportion of employers report that the mainstream fund is not just improving staff skills *per se*, but is addressing the most pressing skills issues that they face. Large proportions also spoke of productivity and efficiency improvements, while lead partners are confident that accessing good quality training through the fund can have a positive impact on CQC ratings.

Employers have reviewed and refined their approaches to workforce development and CPD as a result of accessing the mainstream fund. High proportions have developed/refreshed training plans and/or undertaken new training needs analyses.

The estimated economic impact (Net Present Value) of the mainstream fund across the two years was £132.97m benefit to 'UK plc'. The return on investment across the two years combined is therefore 7.51 : 1, i.e. for every £1 invested in the mainstream fund across the two years, £7.51 will be generated to the England economy.

IE funding: easy to access and generating impacts

The Individual Employers in the evaluation sample spoke highly of the funding model. They consistently praised the amount of funding available, the timescales within which they receive it, the range of eligible training and communications from Skills for Care. They routinely stated that the funding was easy to access and that the paperwork was easy to complete.

Almost without exception, the IEs reported improvements in the skills and knowledge of their Personal Assistants and in the quality of their support. They attribute these improvements directly to the IE funding. The IE funding is also having a catalytic effect on IEs' networking/socialising and on their workforce development more broadly. This includes attending conferences and other events, applying for other sources of funding and accessing Skills for Care's online resources.

User-Led Organisations were similarly positive and regularly praised Skills for Care's management of the fund, the paperwork requirements and the amount of funding available. They said the funding had helped IEs to be more confident managers and employers and had also helped the ULOs to engage with IEs and PAs more effectively.

The only challenge from the IEs' perspective appears to be arranging cover for PAs when they attend training, although the findings do not pinpoint whether this is a financial issue or an issue about finding good quality short-term cover. ULOs also noted that the length of time between applying for funding and being notified can be unhelpful and that it can be difficult for them to find suitable partner organisations.

Innovation Fund: testing new methods of practice and building new and effective partnerships

Reports produced by Skills for Care, summarising the findings of project self-evaluations, note that projects funded through the Innovation Fund have resulted in notable successes in terms of testing new methods of practice, producing new resources, and building new and effective relationships. This is felt to have resulted in positive impacts for adult social care staff, organisations and those who access care and support. Improvements in the skills, knowledge and confidence of staff, and greater independence, improved wellbeing and higher levels of activity amongst those who access care and support were frequently reported by grant-holders.

A high proportion of Innovation Fund grant-holders indicated that they would not have been able to deliver their projects without the Skills for Care funding or they could not have delivered it to the same scale and timescale. This indicates a high additionality of the funding. Grant-holders also reported confidence about the scalability and transferability of their projects.

Although current monitoring and evaluation methods of Innovation Fund projects are felt to be comprehensive and sufficient for the evaluation of progress against

milestones and to highlight initial positive outcomes, there is currently little evidence available about the longer-term outcomes of projects.

The three Innovation Fund case studies provide good practice and learning for the sector. The importance of taking time to engage staff and gain their support and buy-in for new ways of working and ensuring that a clear plan is in place to train and support staff with this is evident.

Outcomes for staff involved in all three projects were very positive, particularly in terms of developing their skills, knowledge and confidence. There is also evidence of benefits to the wider staff team through the cascading of knowledge and staff being motivated to explore other opportunities for training and development.

There is a strong commitment from all three organisations to continue their project and all have plans in place to do so. This suggests that the new ways of working have the potential to be sustainable and transferable across organisations in the sector.

Looking ahead: recommendations

Recommendation 1: take regular feedback from lead partners in order to confirm that the short-term impacts of the 2018/19 changes on employers' participation in the mainstream fund are reducing over time.

Recommendation 2: if the next external evaluation of the fund is scheduled for two years' time, Skills for Care is advised to gather feedback from lead partners at an interim point to assess whether views towards the disbursement fee and administration have become positive.

Recommendation 3: this report contains a number of extremely positive messages that are based on primary research with a statistically significant sample of employers. They provide an excellent opportunity for renewed awareness raising and promotional activity on the fund, especially given the reduction in participation in 2018/19.

Recommendation 4: Skills for Care is advised to explore further the feedback from IEs that it can be difficult to arrange cover for their PAs while they attend training. This evaluation has not ascertained whether the issue is primarily a financial one (which would seem unlikely given that IEs can apply for funding specifically for this purpose) or one of being able to find cover of the appropriate quality and/or personalisation. Future evaluations of the IE funding stream should also have this within their scope.

Innovation Fund recommendations (as outlined in Skills for Care's project self-evaluation summaries):

- Ensure projects are provided with additional guidance on monitoring and evaluation in order that the quality of evidence provided through the self-evaluation process be improved.
- Modify the evaluation process to include new evaluations of the types of partnership working and new ways of engaging with digital technology and the relative effectiveness of these.
- Follow-up with grant-holders at a future point to assess the extent to which outcomes have been sustained, and approaches and products have been successfully transferred.
- Update internal guidance for Locality Managers to help them in their role in supporting Innovation Fund grant-holders.