





Performing Under Pressure: How Higher Performing Workplaces made a difference in challenging times

CONTENTS

partners





Executive summary		1	3.4 Efficient project management	
1.0	Introduction and context	4	3.4.1 Creating a collaborative delivery community	22
1.1	About West Yorkshire Consort of Colleges (WYCC)	ium 4	3.4.2 Effective support for delivery partners and suppliers	23
	About the Higher Performing Workplaces (HPW) project	4	3.4.3 Systems3.4.4 Impacts of ESF andDWP processes and requirement	24 24 nts
	Evaluation and project context	6	3.5 Marketing and engagement 3.5.1 Marketing	25 25
2.2	About the evaluation Evaluation methodology Delivery in a highly challenging context 2.3.1 Project timings 2.3.2 Procurement 2.3.3 Impacts of highly challen circumstances	8 8 9	3.5.2 Referrals 3.5.3 Barriers to engagement 3.6 Cross-cutting themes 3.6.1 Equal opportunities 3.6.2 Sustainable development 3.7 Return on investment	28 29 31 31 34
3.0	Findings	14	4.0 Conclusions	36
3.1	Positive impacts experienced by participants	14	5.0 Recommendations	38
3.2	Positive impacts experienced within businesses	17	6.0 Annex Logic Model Evaluation	39
3.3	Wider benefits 3.3.1 Benefits within the Leeds City Region 3.3.2 Benefits for training providers and delivery	18 18 21	Framework Participant survey	40
	providers and delivery			

Executive summary

About Higher Performing Workplaces

The aim of the Higher Performing Workplaces (HPW) project is to enhance the skills offer in the region, focusing on the following key objectives:

- improving staff motivation, leadership, communication and teamwork;
- increasing staff retention;
- supporting with longer-term skills planning to help realise business ambitions, diversification, new products, markets or expansion;
- enhancing employee involvement and commitment to the company;
- ensuring higher levels of financial performance;
- enhancing and enabling business strategy and operational planning to achieve growth; and
- promoting high levels of females in leadership positions¹.

HPW project objectives were designed to align closely with the priorities of the Leeds City Region's Strategic Economic Plan 2016-2036, which seeks to promote "good growth [which] delivers high levels of prosperity, jobs and quality of life for everyone." Business growth is the first major priority of the region's Strategic Plan, specifically aiming to "drive up productivity, growth and employment through an

environment that enables businesses to start-up, innovate, trade and invest."²

The HPW project is managed by WYCC with a total value of £3 million, made up of European Social Fund funding of £1.5million and match funding of £1.5million (employer cash contributions). It provided a training and coaching package to businesses in the Leeds City Region between 2019 and 2021.

The HPW offer spans four main categories:

Export and innovation: designed to increase in-house skills and knowledge to access new domestic and international markets to drive export

Innovative working: courses that helped individuals to drive working and employment practices that support operational and employee demands

Empowering leaders: programmes developed to nurture and progress leadership skills with specific activities to support female employees to narrow the gender gap in leadership positions

Effective human resources: training designed to help businesses use effective HR practices to support succession planning, encourage workplace diversity and improve workplace culture

Businesses in the Leeds City Region³ could access 40% ESF funding towards the cost of training. Eligible individuals could also access coaching and Business Performance Mentoring from a selection of coaches/mentors contracted by WYCC.

WYCC, Higher Performing Workplaces: https://www. westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk/contracted-projects/higher-performing-workplaces

^{2.} Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership, 2016, Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan, 2016-2036.

^{3.} See Table 1 for eligibility criteria

About the evaluation

The aim of this end-point evaluation of the HPW project is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact of the programme. The evaluation has been informed by desk-based research, an online survey of beneficiaries (97 responses, equating to a 10% response rate), a workshop and 21 depth interviews with a sample of individuals drawn from the WYCC project team, delivery partners, training providers and Leeds City Region stakeholders.

Key findings

It is important to note that the HPW project has been delivered in **unprecedented and highly challenging circumstances**. The project commenced in 2019 but was significantly affected by two key events outside of the control of the project team – the EU exit and knock-on effects of this, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many businesses in scope of receiving training via HPW faced significant challenges during the pandemic, notably pressures on cashflow and the need to furlough staff. The impact of the pandemic therefore had a detrimental impact on performance, limiting take up and delivery during 2020 in particular when multiple lockdowns were implemented. The WYCC requested an extension to the project because of the impacts of the pandemic; the impact on organisations cannot be underestimated; for most it was a time

to endure, and to focus on immediate protection of their business, rather than a time to consider investment in training. The requirement of a 60% cash contribution was difficult for many businesses at a time when their cashflow was under pressure. Although providers, with sustained support from WYCC, adapted their offer to an online course where possible to do so – this took time and was not suitable for all the provision on offer, notably the bespoke training.

Although the HPW project did not achieve its target numbers of people trained – in light of the challenging circumstances described above - the numbers that were achieved represent a significant achievement. Beneficiaries report highly positive impacts and outcomes as a result of receiving the training and mentoring. One business cited a Return on Investment (RoI) of £130,000 for just one cohort of eight people, while another says the support is expected to add at least 20% to their business income.

One individual beneficiary said:

"It's been transformational. It has made me more self-aware, built confidence and given me the opportunity to make positive changes in how I am in the workplace"

Interventions have been high quality, with very positive feedback from participants. Participants report an increase in both their level of knowledge and their level of confidence after the training. In addition, some participants report a positive, unexpected impact on their quality of life. Training also delivered positive impacts for communication skills, leadership skills

and levels of motivation, as well as improvement to participants' working practices.

The HPW project has supported businesses in the region to successfully navigate the impacts of the pandemic, equipping leaders with key skills.

Multiple rounds of procurement ensured a variety of offerings and that offerings were of high quality. Additional rounds of procurement targeted training providers with the ability to offer training, coaching or mentoring in specific areas where existing provision fell short: accredited training courses and, those covering export and sales. The offer aligned closely with priorities outlined in the Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan 2016-36.

Feedback relating to the HPW project team has been extremely positive, pointing to the ongoing support for providers during challenging circumstances. In addition to its core centralised activity, the WYCC marketing team went over and above contractual requirements to try and promote HPW in light of the challenges experienced during the pandemic.

HPW has brought wider benefits than just for beneficiaries, for example the impact on the Skills Brokerage role fulfilled by WYCC. Training providers also benefitted from internal capacity building as a result of delivering this project. Relationships with delivery partners and training providers were markedly strengthened, partly because of the regular contact via contract meetings and the Project Group meetings. This leaves a strong foundation for future delivery of training in the region.

33

"The success of this project lies in resilience, hard work, partnership working and collaboration on many levels - between the contract manager and the providers, internally between our team, and between our supply chain and employers. This collaboration was markedly strengthened by the project. HPW has connected our delivery partners and providers with businesses allowing strong long term reciprocal relationships to develop. Skills and training are identified as crucial areas in the levelling up 'white paper' - with over a 1000 people taking part in high quality training, HPW has offered exactly what is needed to deliver a skills boost to local people and businesses in the region.

West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges will continue to be dedicated to supporting businesses with the skills to grow, improve productivity and to be sustainable. The project has provided these foundations to help reduce the skills gaps and support economic recovery and growth."

Dr Joanne Harvatt, WYCC Project Manager

1.0 Introduction

1.1 About West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC)

The West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC) operates on behalf of seven Further Education Colleges in West Yorkshire:















WYCC⁴ provide a pathway for businesses to access training and support in the Leeds City Region⁵, bringing together businesses, organisations and training providers to deliver workforce training and skills support, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). These programmes contribute to the economic growth of the Leeds City Region, tackle social mobility and connect the education and business sectors. Projects under WYCC management offer funding opportunities for a variety of training providers to deliver training in the region.

1.2 About the Higher Performing Workplaces (HPW) project

The aim of the HPW project is to complement existing skills programmes in the region, focusing on the following key objectives:

- improving staff motivation, leadership, communication and teamwork;
- increasing staff retention;
- supporting with longer-term skills planning to help realise business ambitions, diversification, new products, markets or expansion;
- enhancing employee involvement and commitment to the company;
- ensuring higher levels of financial performance;
- enhancing and enabling business strategy and operational planning to achieve growth; and
- promoting high levels of females in leadership positions⁶.

^{4.} https://www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk/

^{5.} Comprising the local Authority areas of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Wakefield, Barnsley, Craven, Harrogate, Selby and York. However, for the purpose of ESF funding Barnsley is excluded from the Leeds City Region (sitting within the Sheffield City Region).

^{6.} WYCC, Higher Performing Workplaces: https://www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk/contracted-projects/higher-performing-workplaces

The HPW project objectives were designed to align closely with the priorities of the Leeds City Region's Strategic Economic Plan, which seeks to promote "good growth [which] delivers high levels of prosperity, jobs and quality of life for everyone." Business growth is the first major priority of the region's Strategic Plan, specifically aiming to "drive up productivity, growth and employment through an environment that enables businesses to start-up, innovate, trade and invest."

The HPW project is managed by WYCC with a total value of £3 million, made up of ESF funding of £1.5million and match funding of £1.5million (employer cash contributions). It provided a training and coaching package to businesses in the Leeds City Region between 2019 and 2021.

The HPW offer spans four main categories:

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Innovative working: courses that helped individuals to drive working and employment practices that support operational and employee demands

Empowering leaders: programmes developed to nurture and progress leadership skills with specific activities to support female employees to narrow the gender gap in leadership positions

Effective human resources: training designed to help businesses use effective HR practices to support succession planning, encourage workplace diversity and improve workplace culture.
Eligible⁸ businesses could access 40%
ESF funding towards the cost of training.
Eligible individuals could also access coaching and Business Performance
Mentoring from a selection of coaches/mentors contracted by WYCC.

Table 1: Eligibility Criteria

Employed or self-employed Aged 18+ Living or working in the Leeds City Region Based in one of the following districts: Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Leeds, Selby, Wakefield or York

^{8.} See Table 1 for eligibility criteria

2.0 Evaluation and project context

2.1 About the evaluation

The aim of this end-point evaluation of the HPW project is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact of the programme. A logic model framework was developed to support the evaluation, which can be found in the Annex.

This evaluation report:

- provides lessons learned about project design, implementation and delivery;
- provides an understanding of how HPW training and support has made a difference to the outcomes of those engaged in the projects;
- identifies and presents the main benefits witnessed or realised following the project interventions for businesses and individuals; and
- assesses the performance of HPW training and support in achieving the ESF's cross-cutting themes.
 Specifically, the effectiveness of the project in promoting gender equality and equal opportunities; and sustainable development (which incorporate environmental sustainability).

2.2 Evaluation methodology

The diagram below summarises the research methodology:



- *A copy of the survey questionnaire can be found in Section 6.
- ** Desk research continued throughout the evaluation, assessing the following
- sources: Manufacturing and dsitribution Project Change
- Request forms Recovery plan
- Appeal documents

documentation

- Contract review materials and Toolbox
- Project case studies and testimonials
- HPW marketing documents
- Project Group Terms of Reference and meeting summaries
- Project related documentation for delivery partners and suppliers
- Delivery partner and supplier End Point Evaluation Reports

The online survey was sent to 950 participants, and 97 responses were received, i.e. a 10% response rate. Figures 1 and 2 show the breakdown of respondents. These organisations were selected on the basis of achieving a cross-section by sector and business size. A total of 21 delivery partners, training providers and stakeholders participated in depth interviews. Providers and delivery partners were selected to provide a cross-section of different experiences of HPW e.g.

present from the first round of procurement/joined later, previous exposure/no previous exposure to ESF.

Figure 1: Survey respondents by sector

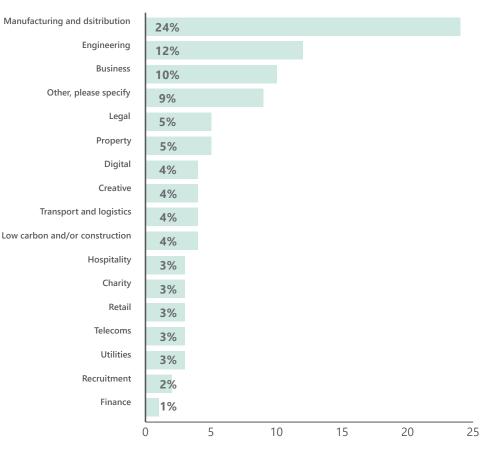
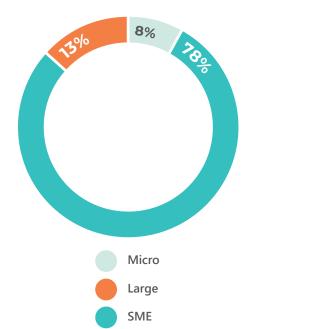


Figure 2: Survey respondents by organisation size



2.3 Delivery in a highly challenging context

The HPW project has been delivered in unprecedented circumstances. The project commenced in 2019 but was significantly affected by two key events outside of the control of the project team – the EU exit and knockon effects of this, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.3.1 Project timings

The timeline provides an overview of key events:

2019

UNTIL END

23 MARCH 2020

2020

29 JULY 2020

OCTOBER 2020

5 NOVEMBER 2020

10 NOVEMBER 2020

8 DECEMBER 2020

DECEMBER 2020

JANUARY 2020

22 FEBRUARY 2021

MARCH 2021

APRIL 2021

MAY 2021

AUGUST 2021

30 SEPTEMBER 2021

31 DECEMBER 2021 **HPW PROJECT COMMENCEMENT**

(inception meeting July 2019)

BREXIT TRANSITION PERIOD FOR BUSINESSES while the UK and EU negotiate arrangements

FIRST LOCKDOWN IN UK

CORONAVIRUS JOB RETENTION SCHEME (FURLOUGH)

BEGINS

FLEXIBLE FURLOUGH INTRODUCED

(furloughed employees could return to the workplace on a part-time basis and be furloughed for hours they didn't work)

RECOVERY PLAN V1 Impact of COVID 19 and EU Transition on delivery - requested re-profile of spend and deliverables

WYCC REQUEST TO SUPPORT LARGER EMPLOYERS

SECOND LOCKDOWN IN ENGLAND

RECOVERY PLAN V2 Impact of COVID 19 and EU Transition on delivery and re-profile of spend and deliverables

RECOVERY PLAN V3 Impact of COVID 19 and EU Transition on delivery and re-profile of spend and deliverables

WYCC PCR V1 Impact of COVID 19 and EU transition on delivery request to remove delivery partners

THIRD LOCKDOWN IN ENGLAND AND EU EXIT

RECOVERY PLAN V4 Impact of COVID 19 and EU Transition on delivery and re-profile of spend and deliverables

WYCC PCR V2 Impact of COVID 19 and EU transition on delivery and re-profile of spend and deliverables

WYCC PCR V3 Impact of COVID 19 and EU transition on delivery and re-profile of spend and deliverables

WYCC PCR V4 Impact of COVID 19 and EU transition on delivery and re-profile of spend and deliverables

REJECTION OF CHANGE TO PROJECT DATES (Activity, Financial and Practical), Change to Expenditure Profile,

Change to Outputs and Results.

APPROVAL of request to remove delivery partners.

CORONAVIRUS JOB RETENTION SCHEME (FURLOUGH) ENDS

TRAINING END DATE

FINANCIAL END DATE

2.3.2 Procurement

Multiple rounds of procurement ensured a variety of offerings and that offerings were of high quality. Additional rounds of procurement targeted training providers with the ability to offer training, coaching or mentoring in specific areas where existing provision fell short: accredited training courses and, those covering export and sales.

The initial plans during 2019 were underpinned by extensive strategic activity by the WYCC delivery partners (FE Colleges). This led to the development of partner plans, skills offer, and financial plans for four of the seven FE Colleges. FE Colleges commenced delivery to a small number of participants in November 2019.

The first round of procurement for HPW Skills was an Open and Competitive tendering procurement exercise (opened in October 2019 and closed in December 2019) to obtain training provision across the four themes in scope:

- Export and Innovation
- Innovative Working
- Empowering Leaders
- Effective Human Resources

Successful tenderers from this round were contracted in January 2020. The offer was regularly reviewed and assessed in light of the pandemic and employers' capacity to access relevant training during this challenging time. With the aim of providing the most comprehensive offer possible, WYCC undertook two further rounds of procurement.

Peer-to-peer support and mentoring services were procured to supplement the existing training offer, with a specific focus on supporting businesses to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and the resulting effects on their organisations.

A further Open and Competitive tendering exercise (opened in October 2020 and closed in November 2020) was undertaken for accredited provision – HPW Accredited Skills. The WYCC team had identified some gaps and as such, sought to ensure there was sufficient provision in place to help achieve the ESF indicator targets for R6 – Participants gaining level 2 or below or a unit of a level 2 of below qualification and R7 - Participants gaining a level 3 and above or a unit of a level 3 and above qualification. Successful tenderers were contracted during December 2020 and January 2021.

An additional tender was published in December 2020 which specifically targeted the development of businesses' in-house skills, capacity and knowledge to improve access to sales and international markets, and to prepare for the EU Transition. Successful providers were contracted in February 2021.

Reflecting on the procurement, the project team acknowledge that not all providers recruited actually delivered, and it may have been beneficial, in hindsight, to limit the total number of providers recruited. The first and main challenge was not all providers were able to engage on the project - those that did not have an established client base in the region or looking to promote a new area of delivery, it was impossible to engage with businesses, exacerbated by the pandemic.

This is what led to the additional rounds of procurement as the first round of providers did not have the capacity to fulfill the deliverables of the contract.

The transition to online delivery was to promote HPW making businesses aware of the support available and encourage delivery wherever possible within the constraints of Covid-19. However, not all providers were able to transition to an online offer, largely because this would not have been effective for the type of training they offered. The intent was to provide a comprehensive offer which was clearly achieved - with 304 different courses available offering highly relevant skills aligning to the needs in the Leeds City Region. A number of these courses were unique in the region, enabling businesses to access bespoke training directly relevant for them.

2.3.3 Impacts of highly challenging circumstances

The pandemic in particular had a major impact; project delivery was due to commence in early 2020 just as the first lockdown was imposed in the UK in March 2020. This meant that no face-to-face delivery could take place, effectively halting all delivery in the short-term as all delivery was designed as face to face. WYCC liaised with providers and supported them as much as possible to try and transition to an online offer, but this inevitably took some time to develop and set up. Furthermore, not all provision was suitable to be delivered online - for example one of the lean manufacturing courses included bespoke content, based on an organisation's specific

needs which necessitated face-toface delivery to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of the business.

Providers were able to ultimately benefit and build their own capacity because of the diversification of their model – having an online offer gave them an alternative channel through which to offer training., However, not all businesses were in a position to engage with an online offer. Many businesses in scope of receiving training via HPW faced significant challenges during the pandemic, notably pressures on cashflow and the need to furlough staff. The impact of the pandemic therefore had a detrimental impact on performance for the duration of the contract, limiting take up and delivery during 2020 in particular when multiple lockdowns were implemented.

The impact on organisations cannot be underestimated; for most it was a time to endure, and to focus on immediate protection of their business. The requirement of a 60% cash contribution was difficult for many businesses at a time when their cashflow was under pressure.

To ensure companies were aware of the training and funding available and, to generate interest, significant additional marketing activity was undertaken by the WYCC project team (see Section 3.5).

"Clients were not interested in talking to me about training. It definitely was not on their radar. Surviving was"

Training provider

"Work came to a standstill between March and September 2020. After September 2020, we were only at 30% capacity regarding our normal workflow, we had to put all of our provision online and managed to run 13 face-to-face events in the last 18 months compared to 45 normally. Delegate numbers have dropped due to customers organisations being devastated as a result of the pandemic (no cash for training)"

Training provider

WYCC submitted a request via a Recovery Plan to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)⁹ to reprofile the spend and deliverables in July 2020. WYCC made another request for a variation in October 2020 to support large employers, which was approved. A Project Change Request (PCR) was submitted in March 2021 seeking a 12-month contract extension following multiple Recovery Plans.

Evidence from WYCC highlighted that: "The spread of Covid-19 has had a large impact on businesses across the UK and the need to support businesses and individuals in the Leeds City Region is paramount. This business support will need to go beyond the scope of this project, but a 12-month extension would have allowed for businesses to start to consider training staff (beyond mandatory training). Following the end of the furlough scheme, when people returned to work businesses have skills requirements and are looking more and more for multi skilled staff."

A further barrier was the competing needs of the ESF targets and the needs of businesses in the Leeds City Region. Feedback from businesses reported back to WYCC via training providers indicated greater appetite for bespoke

provision to meet their specific needs. Furthermore, the ESF target relating to achievement of level 2 qualifications, conflicted with funding available via the Adult Education Budget. Level 2 qualifications are already fully funded through this route – therefore it was not logical or feasible to ask employers to make a cash contribution towards achieving them through HPW.

This would have displaced national Government policy and ESF rules which dictate: "ESF is funding used where no other funding can be obtained (the funder of last resort)". "ESF will not fund activity that duplicates or cuts across national policy on grants and loans for tuition for skills activities" (Investment priority: 2.1).

However, the DWP's response was that "the complete removal of gaining Basic Skills and substantial reduction in gaining Level 2 Result categories demonstrated a move away from the original call".

Ultimately the DWP rejected the request and subsequent appeals – in August 2021, and only approved the removal of some delivery partners from the contract. This left very little time for providers to delivery contracted volumes and values before the training end date of 30th September 2021.

There was significant disappointment for WYCC and among key stakeholders, delivery partners and training providers, when the request – despite multiple appeals – was rejected, particularly among the providers who had evidence of beneficiaries in the pipeline ready and waiting to engage with training after the height of the pandemic.

^{9.} The DWP is a Co-Financing Organisation for ESF in England and manages the programme at a national level.

"We've worked hard to (re)market the awareness of the funding since hospitality businesses have started to re-open...Training has not been an initial chief pressing matter, but many have recently started to widen their attention to include it. Many have intimated that they are now in a position to start to plan and prepare for the recovery phase and know that their staff are key...It's frustrating that when the funding has been available, the hospitality trade has not been 'open for business' nor in a position to utilise it. Now as they emerge from a very tough period, this much needed funding opportunity to provide them with critical financial support to help repair and prepare their businesses for success in the Leeds City Region won't be accessible due to a timing issue not of our or their making"

"We fell very short of the planned level of delivery, and this was all down to the situation with Covid-19. It seemed particularly unfair especially to us as we offer training to the hospitality sector which was forced to shut down. It was really disappointing the time wasn't extended – the sector is now even more desperate for this type of training but the timescales to deliver were just too short for so many of the businesses we spoke with. We had an added issue with switching to online delivery – it is never the same as face to face – but even more so when you are learning to taste etc., so again a bigger barrier for us than for other providers perhaps who's audiences were more capable of embracing online delivery"

Training provider feedback

"We had huge numbers in the pipeline.. our hard work paid off, we saw a significant increase in claims between Q1 and Q4...We are confident we would have achieved higher numbers had we been given more time"

WYCC Contract Manager

"Engagement with employers was the most difficult I have experienced in my career. We did the best we could in extremely challenging circumstances"

Delivery partner

It should also be emphasised that provider feedback indicates that the WYCC project team did everything they could to mitigate the risk and reduce the shortfall between delivery and target (described in more detail in section 3). Providers and the WYCC team felt frustrated that the scope could not be varied, thinking particularly about the requirement to deliver Level 2 skills which was not necessary in this context as outlined above.

"WYCC were great, I don't think they could have done more"

Delivery partner

"The scope is impacted by a lack of strategic foresight and lack of flexibility to fit with actual need (versus perceived need)"

Training provider

Table 2 shows the contract performance (numbers only – the remainder of the report describes the impact and benefits of training for participants in more detail). These results should be considered in the context described above, i.e. the substantial difficulties and challenges faced when delivering this contract – exacerbated in certain sectors which struggled more than others. The numbers achieved represent a significant achievement in these circumstances.

Table 2: HPW outputs: target vs actual¹⁰

	Target	Actual		
Outputs				
Total number of participants	2500	1038		
Participants over 50 years of age	500	192		
Participants who are ethnic minorities	400	53		
Participants with disabilities	200	10		
Participants who live in a single adult household	450	28		
Results				
Participants gaining basic skills	275	0		
Participants gaining L2 or below (or a unit of a level 2 or below) qualification (excluding basic skills)	625	34		
Participants gaining L3 or above (or a unit of a level 3 and above) qualification	200	69		

3.0 Findings

3.1 Positive impacts experienced by participants

The key enabler identified by delivery partners, suppliers and participants was funding:

"The funding made this course accessible for us as an SME, but it can be difficult to find - there is no central point for SMEs to go to find out if what they need is available and potentially funding available for it too"

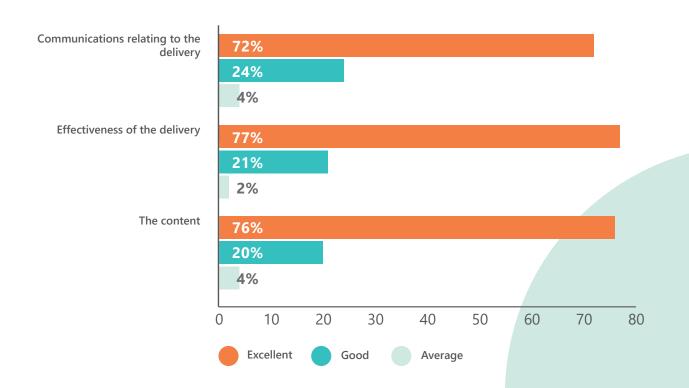
"The funding reduced the course cost to a level which made it accessible for us - without the match funding we wouldn't have done it"

"I [the participant] found the course and took it to the Directors who were delighted with my motivation to learn and progress and encouraged by the 40% funding. Funding made the decision quicker and easier for sure"

Participant feedback

Training provision content is deemed excellent by the majority of survey respondents. Feedback is similarly positive about delivery effectiveness and associated communications about the project (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Recipient ratings (base 97 respondents)



The majority of participants perceive an increase in both their level of knowledge and their level of confidence following the intervention (Figure 4 and Figure 5). In a minority of cases, respondents reported no tangible change; this was attributed to there being insufficient time for impact to be apparent at the time they completed the survey.

Figure 4: Knowledge levels pre- and post-intervention (base 97 respondents)

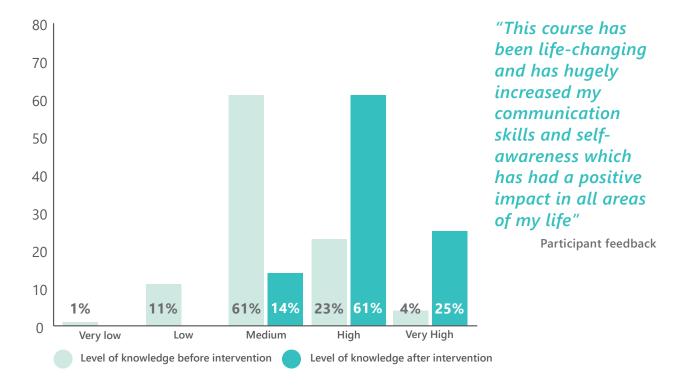
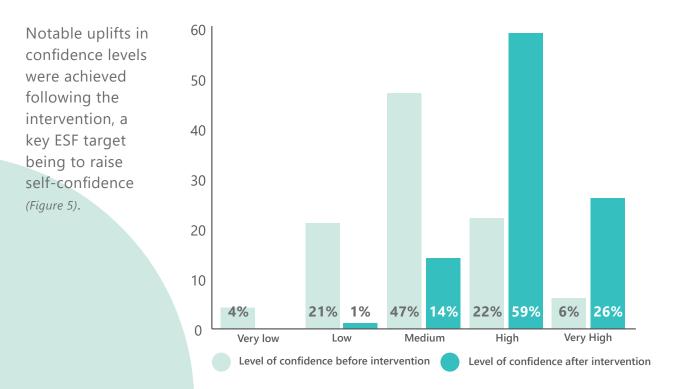


Figure 5: Confidence levels pre- and post-intervention (base 97 respondents)



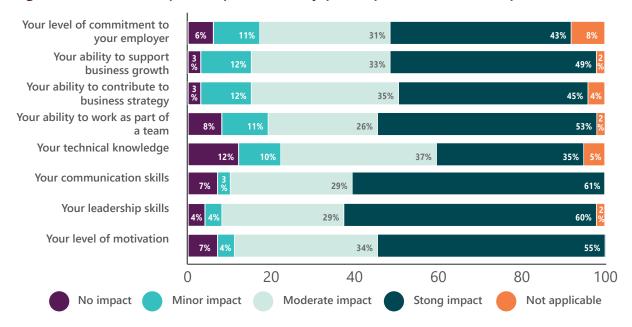
"The coaching I have received has given me considerable self-confidence and self-appreciation"

"It's been transformational. It has made me more self-aware, built confidence and given me the opportunity to make positive changes in how I am in the workplace"

Participant feedback

The intervention achieved strong impacts for participants in a variety of areas, most notably communication skills, leadership skills and levels of motivation (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Areas of impact experienced by participants (base 97 respondents)



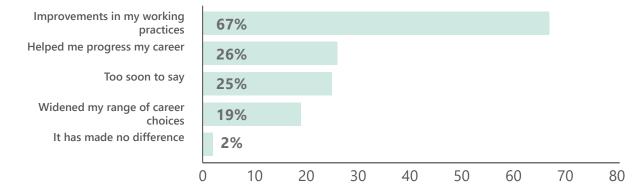
"[the training] made me feel more motivated and energised"

"I have been more productive and have helped others feel motivated – which leads to better output"

Participant feedback

Nearly three quarters of all survey respondents point to improvements in their working practices as a result of the intervention. Over a quarter say the training has helped them progress in their career (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Areas of key difference post intervention (base 97 respondents)



"The training was excellent, the content of the course and the way it was executed meant that my overall performance as a manager has improved"

"The standard of the training I received was excellent - whilst it hasn't necessarily improved my career progress, I would envisage that it will over a longer period of time. It has made a big difference to my working practices and beyond this"

"Progression within role definitely,
[the intervention] has given me
confidence to progress and know that
I am capable to progress"

Participant feedback

Some participants point to benefits they have experienced which went above and beyond what they were expecting as a result of taking part in the project, notably the impact on their quality of life:

"It has made me a better person"

"Impacted beyond my work life as much of the content/techniques can be applied to everyday life so it's been invaluable outside of work as well!"

"So powerful in the planned environment but using it in everyday life has been so beneficial"

"[The project has] increased my quality of life in unexpected ways - lots within the workplace but a lot beyond this too. It has created

a desire in me to improve. I've taken up meditation and yoga and made time for it. It's had a huge life impact – which will be maintained far beyond the course"

"The course gave us the framework and toolkit to be better leaders. This has benefited the business but, I would mention I am simply 'happier' than I was. I have made changes personally which have freed up my time to allow me to spend more time with family. I've also carved out thinking time in my day which is time well spent and I recognise this now"

Participant feedback

3.2 Positive impacts experienced within businesses

Participants point to a range of benefits experienced within businesses following the intervention, in particular strengthened working/team relationships, improved management styles and a more positive work environment. Training and support have helped business owners to drive business growth.

"Business growth was accelerated"

"There was a real impact on ability of learners to support and drive growth in their businesses"

"Business decision making was improved by the training"

Training provider feedback

"I've readdressed relationships with some key members of the team and had open and honest conversations with those people. This has led to a strengthening of those relationships, enabling us to become a higher performing team"

"Lots of positive impacts across my role – improvements to managing others, meeting new people, upward management and giving feedback"

"[The training] helped me to create a strong, positive, team ethos"

"[The training has] given me a generally more positive outlook on my relationships with my clients, and how I value my time and position as equal to theirs, instead of them being 'above me'"

"It has helped relationships I have in the team. It has helped my selfawareness. It has been excellent and really a catalyst for change"

Participant/business feedback

3.3 Wider benefits

3.3.1 Benefits within the Leeds City Region

The HPW offer has been designed and delivered not just in accordance with ESF and DWP requirements, but also in close alignment with the need in the Leeds City Region. In particular, the Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan 2016-36 and its priority 1: growing businesses and priority 2: skilled people, better jobs.

The training on offer aligned closely with aspirations to¹¹:

- Improve the City Region's export performance
- Boost business growth, productivity, exports and investment by linking businesses to support and funding
- Equip people with the skills needed to find and progress in work
- Support employers in widening and enhancing workforce training

The Leeds City Region Strategic Economic Plan 2016-36 emphasises the importance of developing and building skills in business at all levels, notably leadership and management skills to underpin growth. The majority (54%) of the HPW training taken up by businesses in the region was in leadership and management (Figure 8). HPW provision also strongly contributed towards the Levelling Up Agenda, by equipping businesses and individuals with bespoke skills that have helped to boost productivity and revenue.

Figure 8: Take up of HPW training provision across the four key themes (961 participants)

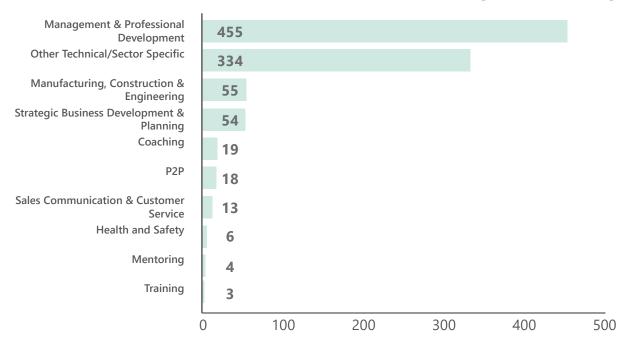


Figure 9: Take up of HPW training provision across course category (961 participants)

The pandemic inevitably presented some major challenges for employers in the region. The Leeds City Region Economic Recovery Plan devised an approach to recovery spanning three core themes:

- Respond: take immediate actions to support businesses, workers and the economy;
- Reset and Renew: understand the challenges and opportunities faced in recovery, and ensure a clear focus/direction on the projects and partnerships to address them; and
- **Build Resilience:** on-going aspiration to deliver inclusive growth, address the climate emergency and be the best city for health and wellbeing.

The HPW project has supported businesses in the region to successfully navigate the impacts of the pandemic, equipping leaders with key skills. The HPW project team introduced flexibility wherever possible (within the constraints of ESF and DWP funding rules), to adapt provision in line with changing business/leader needs in light of Covid-19. This included transitioning to online training



(where feasible and valuable to do so), echoing the response aspirations within the WYCC Recovery Plan to pivot existing business support.

Feedback from training providers and regional stakeholders strongly emphasised the positive role played by the HPW project in helping businesses, and notably SMEs, to survive and then thrive through the pandemic. This is clearly illustrated by the support expressed for HPW by multiple stakeholders when WYCC was seeking an extension to the delivery timetable:

The request to extend the time available for delivery of HPW made reference to significant support for this from regional sector-based bodies and organisations, including CKMA, Screen Yorkshire, Creative Calderdale and Local Chambers of Commerce. This demonstrates the value placed on HPW among key stakeholders.

Therefore, HPW has brought additional value, beyond that experienced by individual beneficiaries.

It has brought further value in the form of the impact on the Skills Brokerage role fulfilled by WYCC. Relationships with delivery partners and training providers were markedly strengthened, partly

because of the regular contact
via contract meetings and the
Project Group meetings.

Providers welcomed the additional support offered after the pandemic began; notably the group discussions to share ideas about a transition to online provision. Multiple rounds of procurement identified a wide range of providers, and over time this has resulted in a stronger supply chain in the region.



"Leeds Beckett University (LBU) supports the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC) application for an extension to the Higher Performing Workplaces (HPW) ESF programme... As a Business School we are dedicated to supporting our region's businesses to grow, improve productivity, innovate and be sustainable. Providing these foundations supports economic recovery and growth. The ability to connect with businesses through the Higher Performing Workplaces programme allows us to build strong relationships with the company offering access to a breadth of expertise and business support. We do not see Higher Performing Workplaces as a transactional opportunity but a chance to connect with businesses and engage in long term reciprocal relationships. The programme provides a gateway for businesses to access the university support which they otherwise may not"

> Prof George Lodorfos - Dean, Leeds Business School Leeds Beckett University

3.3.2 Benefits for training providers and delivery partners

Feedback from providers and delivery partners about the impact of the project has been positive; providers refer to wider benefits to their organisations including facilitating and revitalising relationships with former and new clients

"The ability to connect with businesses through the Higher Performing Workplaces programme allows us to build strong relationships"

Training provider

Capacity building has been an important benefit. Some providers also spoke of the benefit of building relationships with other providers and the increased awareness the project brought of their organisation and service offer.

"The programme brought us some great publicity, marketing and kudos which has really helped us to move forward. Effectively it has rubber stamped us as an organisation"

"We were able to adapt our working processes and delivery to continue to train those business who still had the capacity and the funds to do so during an exceedingly challenging time"

Delivery partner feedback

Over half of the 21 providers who completed project closure reports described themselves as completely satisfied or satisfied with their delivery performance. This has been attributed to positive feedback received from participants relating to their offering and its impact in the local region, support received from WYCC and adaptability in light of Covid-19 pandemic. This has contributed to capacity building within the provider network.

"There has been an unexpected benefit of building contacts with other training providers – we have always seen other training providers as opportunities to collaborate rather than competitors but the way this programme was run really encouraged this"

"Very happy with our performance, it has been instrumental to our recent growth"

"We delivered successfully against our targets and outputs and have had very positive feedback from all those we delivered for. Overall, we are very proud of the impact we have been able to have in our local region through this funding"

"We were able to adapt quickly mid contract and actually mid programme when we were hit with pandemic and continue to be able to offer our programme and deliver remotely"

Training provider feedback

3.4 Efficient project management

Feedback relating to the project team has been extremely positive. Provider and stakeholder feedback suggests that the project team went above and beyond in their role.

Joanne Harvatt was appointed Project Manager, at the time project roles were defined. Throughout the project, roles were multi-faceted according to individual strengths and weaknesses.

Throughout the project, responsibilities were clear, and actions allocated accordingly. The team were all aware of their own area of responsibility and also the roles and responsibilities of others.

"Well organised, slick project management"

Training provider

"Good team – experienced and knowledgeable"

Delivery partner

"The project team have been very positive, resourceful and helpful. Managing the project and its range of targets and the different needs within each aspect of HPW is very complex. We have valued the honest dialogue, proactive attitude to seeking solutions and the willingness to learn from the team"

Coaching and mentoring provider

3.4.1 Creating a collaborative delivery community

A dedicated Project Group was established early in the programme (pre-Covid-19 pandemic). All WYCC project staff delivery partners, providers, coaches and mentors were included and encouraged to attend. Providers did not view the Project Group as a competitive platform – despite some similarity in offerings.

The Project Group was a primary method of sharing key information, providing programme overview updates and contract information. It also provided a platform to share ideas and progress and was felt to be pivotal to the programme's smooth running and success, particularly during the lockdown period. At this time, to revitalise and add value to the Project Group, quest speakers were invited on an ad-hoc basis. The project team highlighted that the Project Group provided value to the network, generated ideas for the programme, provided a space to express feelings and share experiences and was an opportunity to learn.

"The Project Group was a supportive community for providers – which was established before Covid. It made people feel like a community delivering together – not threatened by each other. Strong relationships were established quickly. It [the group] became a place to express their needs, which generated ideas and led to other procurement. The group was pivotal during lockdown"

WYCC Project Team

"The Project Manager fostered the idea that we should all work together which worked well particularly in the circumstances"

"WYCC have communicated very efficiently throughout the term of the project and considering the current restrictions and faceto-face partner meetings being on hold, the consortium has held regular Zoom meetings, which have been particularly valuable for me where partners have been encouraged to share best practice around the barriers we have all been facing"

"Transparency has ensured that all partners always had a good understanding where the project stood against its profiled outputs; this has instilled a great deal of trust and collaboration between the management and the partners"

"Great governance has been conveyed from the beginning with the senior developers remaining heavily involved at the operation stage ensuring the team remained focused on the priorities, this has again created an environment where providers can deliver with confidence"

Training provider feedback

3.4.2 Effective support for delivery partners and suppliers

A range of support was made available to all delivery partners and providers:

Pre-Contracting Meeting Establishes the relationship, providing an overview of the project and it's requirements as well as understanding the provider, their delivery and capacity to fulfill the contract	Contract Performance Review Meetings A formal review of performance takes place as a minimum on a quarterly basis - provides a forum to discuss issues or challenges, scope for increased activity or reduction in contract, provide support and share best practice	
Ongoing Support Monthly meetings to maintain a regular, up to date view of delivery with an open dialogue to provide support and address issues in advance of a formal review. Additional support meetings arranged to guide with evidence requirements and completion of paperwork	Members Area Dedicated logins set up giving access to all guidance documents and forms included the Toolbox and Eligibility & Evidence Matrix	
Performance Tracker Used to forecast activity providing tool to open dialogue for the monthly meetings	Evidence Matrix A streamlined document created to provide delivery partners and providers with clear guidelines relating to eligibility	
Toolbox A reference document which provides essential information to support delivery partners and providers	Dedicated email inbox Established early in the project to ensure questions were answered and advice provided in a timely manner	

The support provided by the project team is deemed highly effective, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the additional challenges this brought.

A dedicated email inbox was established early in the project to ensure questions were answered and advice provided in a timely manner. With hindsight, the project team felt that an FAQ document could have been designed and made available to providers at the outset to avoid duplicate queries and potential delays.

Support provided by contract managers was felt to be highly effective and useful.

"We maintained our monthly management meetings. We have a good process to record our performance on GoogleDrive. We had a great contract manager who always thought out what worked for us to create a solution that was easy to manage"

Delivery partner

3.4.3 Systems

Multiple systems have been used throughout to manage the project; however, these operate independently leading to some task duplication and a lack of cross referencing. The project team feel a CRM would have been particularly beneficial, particularly one compatible with existing systems.

The E-Claims system, DWP's reporting mechanism, on the project was time

consuming. WYCC adopted as much of a flexible approach as possible directly with the supply chain however were bound by DWP's constraints on how activity was reported on the project. This included separately uploading individual pieces of evidence which was time consuming.

3.4.4 Impacts of ESF and DWP processes and requirements

Processes and paperwork required within the context of delivering an ESF contract constrained delivery and flexibility, which was relevant in the context of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. Requests for contract variations submitted to the DWP were subject to lengthy response times.

The requirement within the contract scope to include Level 2 courses was unachievable. Level 2 qualifications are available free of charge, funded via the Adult Education Budget - therefore delivery of basic skills in effect displaced national Government Policy. Despite this clarity, it took from March to August 2021 for DWP/ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds) to reject the PCR relating to the removal of basic skills and reduction in L2 qualifications. WYCC had alerted DWP of the proposed changes to the Outputs and Results back in December 2020 via a Recovery Plan.

"We do a lot at Level 2 as a college but there was no point putting this in it is available FOC – as it's free, people wouldn't pay. Those who showed interest, they were usually employees wanting it and getting permission from their employer to book it" Despite every effort from the WYCC team to inform providers and employers of the paperwork requirements specific to ESF prior to contracts being signed, some did not fully understand what was needed. This is not a process issue for WYCC and points instead to the need for providers to allocate the responsibility to a named individual. Not all providers seemed to understand that ESF paperwork requirements are fixed and outside the control or influence of the WYCC team. For example, some providers perceived insufficient challenge to DWP from the project team in relation to administrative requirements, particularly relating to the requirements for wet signatures and passport numbers.

"If anything, we feel that some of our suggestions in relation to the paperwork were not challenged enough with DWP fund managers, in particular we still believe that passport numbers should not be registered on the Participant Record Form due to data protection issues"

"Regarding delivery, the businesses we worked with did not like all the paperwork. For example, the rest of the world now accepts electronic signatures"

Training provider feedback

Other providers – notably those with prior knowledge and experience of ESF – acknowledged that administrative requirements are simply part of the course, with the WYCC team playing a useful role to help navigate wherever possible.

"The WYCC team is really good – committed, knowledgeable but tied by working within a process which is not fit for purpose. Paperwork/processes are so long winded and not necessarily joined up – some contradict each other"

"Administrative requirements specific to ESF funded projects are felt to be a barrier for many, however, these are thought to be particularly onerous for SMEs who invest in lower-level courses at a lower cost. The cost saving of higher value courses make the level of paperwork worthwhile"

"The process at times seemed very bureaucratic and time consuming – that is just the nature of how you are set up – and there was a lot of paperwork for clients to complete in order to access the training"

Training and coaching provider feedback

3.5 Marketing and engagement

3.5.1 Marketing

The overarching marketing strategy used within WYCC was applied to the HPW project. This comprised:

High-level (B2B) marketing: broad awareness raising activity, sharing of resources, processes and information with key stakeholders and relevant organisations

Branding support for delivery partners and training providers: support and guidance provided in respect of establishing the HPW sub-brand and ESF branding, with guidance materials available via the Members Area of the WYCC website

Employer marketing: the WYCC brand is marketing to employers as a gateway to the full offer, enabling general enquiries about skills and training to be signposted to the most relevant project(s)

In addition to this core activity, the WYCC marketing team went over and above contractual requirements in relation to the activity undertaken to promote HPW, particularly as a result of the challenges experienced during the pandemic. Figure 10 below provides an overview of the activity undertaken.

Figure 10: Marketing activity timeline

2
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2

Promoted at the Skills Café event Quarter Featured in WYCC February edition of the newsletter Seven (sent to 650 stakeholders and key contacts)

Public launch of the HPW offer

(inc. information on adapted delivery methods due to Covid-19 restrictions)

Grow Skills digital brochure produced and circulated

Publicity guidelines provided to contracted training providers

Member's area updated

Promotion in Seven Newsletter, WYCC website and social media

11 Taster Sessions held in May and June

Quarter

Quarter

3 Taster/Peer to Peer sessions held in July and September

Electronic flyer promoting all aspects of HPW produced and circulated at the Leeds City

Region Skills Conference

Live presentation on HPW at the Leeds City Region Skills Conference

(available afterwards on YouTube)

HPW double page advertorial in the Yorkshire Business Review

Peer to peer offer launched and promoted

PDF reference document produced and distributed listing current offering

Quarter

Training provider case studies launched and promoted

Meet the mentor videos launched and promoted

WYCC Instagram page launch

Website (branding and content) audit carried out

Promotion in Seven Newsletter, WYCC website and social media

Social media advertising campaign launched on Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram

4 Taster/Peer to Peer sessions held in October and December

Quarter •

Additional case studies launched and promoted attracting coverage in local press

Course offer information updated, and a new edition of the Grow Skills brochure produced

5 Taster/Peer to Peer sessions held in January and March

Twitter campaign launched

Quarter •

Course offer information updated, and a new edition of the Grow Skills brochure produced

New courses promoted on social media and in the newsletter Seven Coverage in local press and on local radio was gained through the ongoing marketing

activity and the promotion of case studies

Quarter •

HPW promoted at online West Yorkshire Partnership annual Skills Conference

Promotional Direct Mail sent to in-scope business contacts

Additional case studies launched and promoted

Microsite launched providing a searchable, one-stop-shop for finding courses

Social media promotion

One example of the way in which the team went over and above was in the organisation of taster sessions to market provision to a list of target businesses. These were organised and accessed via Eventbrite, with provider promotion via their own networks. Take up was high, with c.240 participants achieved which included a range of stakeholders. The project team felt the sessions gave the opportunity for providers to develop client relationships for the future and showcase the training provision.

These sessions helped to raised stakeholder awareness in the region and share relevant information with those supporting business growth, enabling them to share intelligence within their own networks. Furthermore, stakeholder attendees could be on the receiving end of upskilling themselves and be in a position to cascade that knowledge. The project team felt the time taken to set up and run the sessions was disproportionate to their impact, however, this is difficult to quantify in the absence of follow up data. Following up with attendees would provide more information of the outcome and impact of the sessions.

Delivery partner and training provider feedback of the marketing support received was generally positive with the majority of stakeholders having a clear understanding of the supportive nature of WYCC's remit. "We were supported with a range of both face to face and online support. The team was always on hand to support and offer advice and guidance when needed"

"We were always engaged throughout in both what was happening and our ideas for work that would support the project. The team remained open to suggestions on new ways of working and potential delivery ideas"

Training provider feedback

Views relating to the wider marketing of the project were varied. Most providers perceive that marketing was good with effective use of social media; they acknowledged they had responsibility for promotion of their offer. However, a smaller number of providers and stakeholders felt WYCC could have improved the approach to marketing to get the word out directly to eligible employers.

"It was not promoted as well as it could have been – more overt promotion of it would have been good. Word perhaps didn't get out there enough. Not sure if any research was done into the types of businesses which should have been targeted – not sure if the way the programme was promoted was the best way of getting to the target businesses"

Stakeholder feedback

Where views were less positive, this stemmed from a lack of clarity of WYCC's role relating to marketing. Some training providers held the assumption that

WYCC would promote their offerings directly to eligible businesses, however, direct marketing was the responsibility of the training providers themselves. Marketing was a standing agenda item at Project Group meetings, with regular updates provided as well as clarity on the division of responsibilities – i.e., WYCC's role of raising awareness at a high level, while providers were tasked with targeted marketing to their own customer base and recruitment. A collaborative approach between WYCC and providers worked well.

"It was a lot of work for us to put on the taster sessions. The most successful ones were those where providers pushed it in their own networks as well"

WYCC Marketing and Communications Manager

"The project would have been improved if there had been more centralised effective use of marketing and employer engagement to support the recruitment"

"I believe the WYCC marketing team tried hard to push the offerings"

Training provider feedback

The marketing related support, included a website audit and a branding and checking service which was carried out, was helpful from providers' perspectives, regardless of whether they had prior experience of delivering ESF contracts or not. This support was felt to contribute, at least in part, to the

high level of compliance from providers.

"Even with experience of ESF funded projects, we were still picked up on a couple of things on the website audit which we were able to address immediately so that was really helpful"

"The WYCC relationship team are skilful, responsive, engaged and very keen to support and assist. We found no issues"

Training provider feedback

3.5.2 Referrals

The referrals process and paperwork was comprehensive and underpinned by use of a centralised spreadsheet to log and track all enquiries. A separate sheet was added to enquiries which were to be referred. A Skills Associate would then be assigned to deal with the referral and log which delivery partner or training provider it was sent to, based on a 'best fit' decision thinking about location, available courses and any preferences expressed by the interested party. In most instances referrals were made to one provider, but could be referred to multiple providers if relevant/feasible.

Most stakeholders felt the referrals they had passed to the project team were dealt with effectively and efficiently. The project team noted some inconsistency with the way referrals were received and dealt with, particularly during the early stages of the project. This view was echoed by some providers:

"Bit hit and miss early doors – depended who sent the referral – might have been on a form or an email – sometimes sent to an individual."

Delivery partner

Some delivery partners struggled with referrals received for individuals as they were restricted by minimum enrolment numbers:

"We received a good number [of referrals] – but many wanted to do specialist training – the cost of putting these courses together and delivering on a small scale can outweigh the benefit – it's not always viable. WYCC pushed us to ensure all referrals were dealt with"

"The difficulty for us was that the referrals we received were for individuals and in most cases, we did not have sufficient enrolments to be able to run the courses cost effectively"

Delivery partner feedback

Referrals were discussed during contract meetings with their outcome recorded. Throughout the HPW programme, 332 enquiries were received by WYCC, of which approximately one-third (106) were referred to delivery partners/training providers. There is an opportunity to strengthen the tracking of the enquiries in terms of next steps and outcomes, to provide valuable data in respect of the conversion rate achieved.

Feedback about the referral process from key stakeholders is largely positive; the actual process of sharing enquiries worked well. The team echoed the reflection of the WYCC project team in that in hindsight, more visibility about the outcome of the enquiry would have been valuable data.

3.5.3 Barriers to engagement

The WYCC project team felt that the key barriers to reach were:

- The Covid-19 pandemic
 - Employer appetite (reduced due to context of the pandemic)
 - Pressures on cash flow at a time when there was the need to make a cash contribution towards the training
 - Employee responsibilities for home-schooling
 - Furloughing of employees (not allowed to access training)
 - Specific sector shutdown (e.g., hospitality industry)
- Targeted businesses already operating very much on the lean side
- Availability of other fully funded provision

Feedback from providers strongly echoed that the primary challenge was the pandemic. Significant time had to be invested to achieve even small numbers of participants, due to the reasons cited above. An increase in the pipeline of participants over time shows that efforts were starting to pay off, however the substantial time lost to deliver due to Covid-19 related restrictions have ultimately resulted in a failure to achieve target numbers and spend.

"If we'd have had a full two years, we'd have got much more from it. Huge amounts of time effort and energy went into it and there wasn't time to reap the rewards and have the intended impact"

"Employers simply didn't have any money and they had other priorities as a result of Covid. We found it incredibly hard to sign up people due to Covid – their focus was elsewhere, and they didn't have the cash"

"It has been so unfortunate that the project has been pulled at a time when we were picking up momentum and things were starting to build."

"My marketing was just about to start pre-covid and it just fell down as a result. Marketing to businesses which were shut is impossible and those who did re-open were not in the mood to speak about investing in training"

Training provider feedback

Availability of other funded provision created competition for the providers; cashflow was tighter than usual for many small businesses because of the pandemic.

"Whilst the offer of 40% funding was good, there were lots of other funded and free programmes out there which impacted take up"

Training provider

"Cashflow of some employers made the training out of reach for some – facility to fully fund where necessary would have helped"

"Businesses tended to go to regular/ specialist (often private) providers rather than colleges or they just weren't interested"

Delivery partner feedback

Not all participants/businesses were interested in an online offer during the height of the pandemic – when there was no other way for providers to deliver. Whilst attempts were made to keep potential participants engaged, it was not always possible to retain them.

"Some didn't want remote delivery so placed on hold – then business changed so much requirements and people changed as well"

Training provider

"We had to switch to online training which wasn't ideal for some of the programmes we were offering. In addition, employers were not always open to the idea of training at this time"

Delivery partner

Providers flagged that ESF paperwork can be a barrier to engagement – as employers can perceive this to be onerous and overly time-consuming, with a lot of detail and original documentation needing to be supplied.

"Paperwork requirements are very onerous and can be off putting – two companies walked away as a result of this"

"WYCC have made it as painless as possible – but the level of information on forms required has been a barrier – we lost 4 clients in this way because of their concern over the information required and data protection"

Training provider feedback

3.6 Cross-cutting themes

3.6.1 Equal opportunities

Gender equality and equal opportunities were actively promoted and encouraged by providers. Evidence of this can be seen through the consideration given to images and content used in social media promotion to ensure this reflected diversity. Several providers explained that gender equality was promoted throughout the training. Some talked of the setting of grounds rules to ensure opinions were equally valued and participants given equal time to speak, question and join discussions.

"Equality and diversity were considered as part of any marketing activity in terms of images used in social media, all posts were checked prior to release and part of the checking process was to ensure that images reflected both men and women and showed people from different ethnic backgrounds"

Delivery partner

Promotion of programmes was across all demographics in the region and several providers highlight the equality, diversity and respect procedures which they have in place. The format and content of all training and related documentation was non-discriminatory.

"We considered how any promotional activity could reach as wide a footprint as possible"

Delivery partner

Providers highlighted the accessible nature of online delivery and where

delivery was face-to-face, every effort was made to ensure it took place at accessible premises to accommodate any accessibility needs.

"During the booking procedure we ask employers to make us aware of any requirements of their employees so that we can prepare in advance any adaptations required to make the learning process meet their own individual needs"

Delivery partner

Some provider offerings were specifically targeted at female participants and as such delivered predominantly to an all women audience.

"Our offer was specifically targeted at female participants, and this is borne out by the fact that over 50% of participants were female"

Training provider

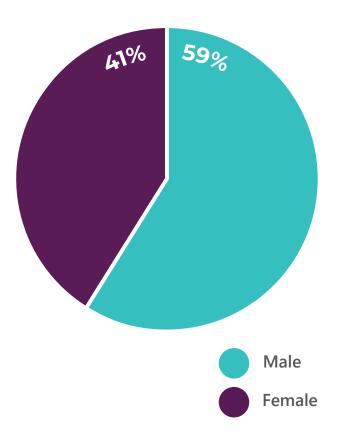
WYCC undertook extensive engagement and marketing activities to target females, including Women in Leadership Business Forums and Women in Leadership taster sessions (online). The split of beneficiaries of training shows a higher proportion of males (59%) compared with females (41% - Figure 11). Training providers acknowledged the difficulties in engaging with females during the lockdown when homeschooling had to be balanced with work and other commitments.

"In the majority of cases, women have been impacted by Covid as a result of home-schooling. Many of our programmes have had to

be delayed due to the inability for people to access training while their children were at home with them. We are still having some examples of this where schools or nurseries are closing due to self-isolation of covid cases"

Training provider

Figure 11: Beneficiaries of training, by gender



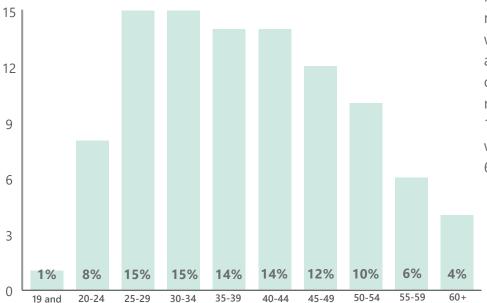
WYCC developed a comprehensive Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities Implementation Plan for HPW, which identified a range of core actions applicable to all WYCC projects, and additional actions relevant specifically to HPW. Progress was regularly reviewed, and the Plan kept updated.

Key actions and achievements included:

- Appointment of Equality and Diversity Champion for WYCC – providing guidance and training on equality issues within teams and business areas
- Ensuring access to buildings to enable delivery of HPW project
- Ensuring provision of HPW is tailored and flexible to meet individual participant needs – measures checked with partners to ensure provision is sufficiently flexible, thinking specifically about caring responsibilities
- HPW contract visits used to check delivery partner compliance and understanding of cross-cutting themes
- Due diligence process assesses equality and diversity plans to ensure they are robust, validation of policy and plan at initial contract review meeting

- Marketing and communications materials representative of project beneficiary cohorts, are jargon-free and accessible
- Review of commissioning and procurement processes to ensure equality and diversity are fully integrated into the HPW supply chain
- Embedding of equality and diversity targets and reporting requirements in partner contracts and for service level agreements
- Integration of equality analysis into decision-making, planning and strategic and service development processes
- Online portal maintained to host equality and diversity resources on WYCC website
- Co-ordination of delivery partner equality and diversity briefings
- Online equality and diversity training mandatory for all staff

Figure 12: Beneficiaries of training, by age



It should also be noted that delivery was achieved across a wide distribution of age bands, reaching those aged 19 and under, as well as people aged 60+ (Figure 12).

3.6.2 Sustainable development

Environmental training offered as part of HPW included:

- A wraparound course for participants of Leeds City College provision, supporting them to progress to ISO Environmental Standards.
- Carbon Literacy training.
- Accredited and bespoke courses that cover sustainability such as ILM Level 5 award in Leadership and Management.

Providers spoke of how sustainable development is embedded within their organisations and how environment and sustainability was considered throughout the project. Many providers highlighted the increased occurrence of online delivery which reduced travel time, costs and carbon emissions. Use of public transport was actively encouraged where possible for both facilitators and delegates.

"We have a sustainability policy in place, so consideration was given to this throughout the project. We travelled by public transport where we could and asked delegates to do the same"

Training provider

"We deliver the majority of HPW online or on client premises.
Therefore, any learners with accessibility issues were able to learn in a familiar environment at their usual place of work"

Training provider

Some providers spoke of their conscious efforts to ensure marketing was digital and that as far as possible, documentation was not printed, all material was sent electronically or distributed via email / file transfer thereby reducing printing and paper usage. Digital signatures were used on everything apart from the mandatory forms the employers and participants were required to fill out for WYCC.

"We moved to digital signatures and tried to minimise the amount of paperwork and printing involved, apart from the mandatory forms the employers and participants were required to fill out for WYCC"

Training provider

Some courses included relevant content such as the Environmental based ISO14001. Numerous providers highlight the specific policies which they have in place with regards the environment and sustainability (e.g., Carbon Management Plan; Environmental Policy; Green Travel Plan; Energy and Carbon Report).

The HPW Project Management team at WYCC were working on developing a Green Pledge amongst HPW providers. A sub-group investigated ways in which providers could support green and sustainability practices, with suggestions including:

- Plant a tree in the Yorkshire Moors/ Dales during an experiential walk three trees have been planted during the HPW project
- Water bottles Pro-Development stopped giving out bottles of waters and now have reusable Pro-Development water bottles that are

given out on WYCC programmes to reduce plastic

WYCC developed a detailed Sustainable Development Plan for HPW, with key actions and achievements including:

- Best practice promoted within WYCC, led by its I'm Green campaign (within the Luminate Education Group) to raise awareness
- WYCC appointed Sustainability
 Champion to provide support
 across projects to help embed
 sustainability. Also sits on Luminate
 Group's Climate Energy Committee
 which aims to reduce environmental
 impacts, raise awareness of
 sustainability and develop a
 curriculum for a zero-carbon
 economy
- Contractual requirement for partners to monitor and report waste minimisation (achieved through recycling and reusing)
- Sustainability included as a key element within WYCC's Procurement Code and Strategy
- All partners have Sustainability policies in place; policies and plans checked at contract review stage

3.7 Return on investment

Employers were required to make a cash contribution towards the cost of training (60%), with ESF funding used to pay for the remaining 40%. The Return on Investment (ROI) is therefore at least 2:1 given that employers match the ESF funding investment.

Employer contributions to HPW (£861,863.65) equated to 45% of the overall investment (£1,910,782.81).

Individual case study examples provide further evidence of the ROI:

Techbuyer

In July 2021, eight leaders within Techbuyer completed a bespoke three-day First Line Manager Team Development event. Following the training, the team was asked to identify areas of improvement and present back on their eight projects after three months. During this time, they received regular support via group coaching.

All the eight projects have effectively harnessed technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Based on results of just one cohort, a ROI of £130,000 has been estimated as a result of the HPW project.

ABL Business

ABL acknowledged they would have found it extremely difficult to access training having made other investments during the financial year, and in light of the impacts of the pandemic. The HPW project enabled them to make their budget go further and still access training as desired.

"I've calculated that Brook's support is going to add at least 20% to our income as a business, due to efficiencies, management and making sure we're on top of certain areas"

4.0 Conclusions

Highly challenging circumstances for the HPW project

- 1 The HPW project was delivered in a highly challenging context, with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic creating major challenges for the WYCC team and training providers. In spite of the issues, management of the project has been well organised and professional. Provider, supplier and stakeholder feedback suggests that the project team went above and beyond in their role.
- 2 Many businesses in scope of receiving training via HPW faced significant challenges during the pandemic, notably pressures on cashflow and the need to furlough staff. The impact of the pandemic therefore had a detrimental impact on performance for the duration of the contract, limiting take up and delivery.
- There was some misalignment between the scope of outputs required by ESF and DWP, and the needs of businesses within the Leeds City Region, which was a barrier to engagement and take up. The inclusion of basic skills and level 2 qualifications within scope was unnecessary as they are fully funded via the Adult Education Budget. Level 3 qualifications were also required by ESF, but businesses in the Leeds City Region were looking for more bespoke provision to meet

their specific needs.

4 Although ESF monies should not be used to duplicate existing provision, the request to remove the basic skills and reduce the level 2 qualifications from the contract was rejected.

Project design and delivery

- WYCC had a responsive and agile approach to procurement which ensured a variety of offerings (including over 300 different courses) and that offerings were of high quality, and furthermore were well aligned with business training needs within the Leeds City Region and priorities outlined in the Strategic Economic Plan 2016-36.
- A strong working relationship was established between WYCC and delivery partners and suppliers, underpinned by regular communications. Opportunities for on-going improvement were captured via a highly collaborative approach to project delivery and management. This was a key enabler to maximise delivery of the project.
- 7 The Project Group established a community of delivery providers and suppliers which provided an effective platform to share information, ideas and progress. This has resulted in some lasting relationships, referrals and collaborations, strengthening the supply chain to underpin the on-going Skills Brokerage role fulfilled by WYCC.
- 8 This collaboration came to the fore when the project was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and many delivery providers and suppliers where able to do so without compromising the value of the training offer transitioned to online delivery. Most providers tried to be as flexible as possible during multiple

- lockdowns but not all were able to deliver – notably if they could not transition to an online offer or if there was no appetite from the target market for remote learning.
- In addition to its core centralised activity, the WYCC marketing team went over and above contractual requirements to try and promote HPW in light of the challenges experienced during the pandemic.
- Gender equality and equal opportunities were actively promoted and encouraged by providers.

Impacts for beneficiaries

- Levels of effort required to engage participants were greater than usual because of the pandemic. However, the interventions which have been delivered have been high quality, with very positive feedback from participants. Participants perceive an increase in both their level of knowledge and their level of confidence after the intervention. In addition, some participants report a positive, unexpected impact on their quality of life.
- 12 Training achieved strong impact in a variety of areas, most notably communication skills, leadership skills and levels of motivation, as well as improvement to participants' working practices. Providers have also realised internal organisation benefits due to diversification of the offer because of the pandemic, contributing to capacity building.

Lessons learned

For the WYCC project team, the HPW project has been delivered in difficult circumstances; while this presented major challenges it has also provided the opportunity to reflect on lessons learned:

- A high number of providers were contracted to deliver provision; not all were able to deliver training, and some delivered no outputs during the project. A more streamlined approach could have reduced the volume of administrative and contract management work for the WYCC project team. However, this needs to be balanced against the need to offer a comprehensive and varied range of training and providers having the capacity to deliver on the project due to the challenges the pandemic brought in terms of engagement.
- 14 The team has already identified a need to have more robust data to support contract and project management. One member of the team has accordingly been appointed as Data and Performance Manager.
- While every effort was made to keep providers appraised of their responsibilities for marketing and engagement, and how this differed from the role undertaken by WYCC, there is clearly still some misunderstanding among a small number of providers who assumed that WYCC had greater ownership than was actually the case. This message is reiterated as part of the tender specification, their application to the tender, contracting, pre-contracting report, toolbox.
- The Project Group was a notable success of the HPW project and was well received and valued among delivery partners and training providers, underpinning a highly collaborative working environment despite the challenges faced.

 Maintaining a similar group for future projects would help to further strengthen the supply chain of providers within the Leeds City Region.

5.0

Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered in the context of management of similar contracts in the future.

- 1 Careful consideration should be given to the procurement of delivery partners and suppliers, ensuring numbers are kept to a minimum whilst not restricting quality and breadth of offering.
- 2 Maintain the existing agile approach to procurement, which effectively uses feedback from businesses, local skills plans and Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) to inform the offer. This worked well for the HPW project, but it is important to regularly refresh or identify up-to-date sources of information; the HPW project took place in challenging times which may not fully reflect business training needs under 'normal' circumstances.
- 3 Respond to the strong appetite for bespoke training provision and ensure this is reflected in the skills/training offer where feasible to do so.
- 4 Establish a centralised point for all referrals and a standardised process for their dissemination to ensure all referrals are dealt consistently. A follow-up process should also be established to gather data on their effectiveness.
- 5 Consider current use of systems and future requirements. The use of a CRM

- system, compatible with existing WYCC systems would enhance the referral process.
- Develop a data strategy specifically considering what types of baseline and monitoring data should be routinely collected for projects of this nature, for example region to supplement the other metadata, and levels of confidence/knowledge prior to the intervention.
- 7 Consider investment into a survey platform for this purpose, to conduct routine surveys of businesses receiving skills/training provision via WYCC, for example regular surveys to understand not just immediate, but also long-term impacts as a result of the training.
- 8 Establish a 'frequently asked questions' document at an early stage of future projects which can be added to and amended on an ongoing basis.
- 9 Maintain the successful Project Group platform/regular communications which was highly effective in fostering a collaborative delivery environment.

6.0 Annex

Logic Model Framework

Input	Activities/ Processes	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts				
ESF funding £1,500,000 Private match funding £1,500,000 (employer cash contributions) Delivery partners and suppliers	Staff Training in four strands: 1 Export and innovation 2 Empowering leaders 3 Effective human resources 4 Innovative working Coaching and business performance mentoring contributions Delivery partners and suppliers	2500 participants to include: 500 over 50 years of age 400 ethnic minorities 200 with disabilities 450 living in single adult 275 participants gaining basic skills 625 participants gaining L2 or below 200 participants gaining L3 or above 445 employed females gaining labour market status households with dependent(s)	Improved staff motivation, leadership, communication and teamwork Increased employee knowledge Enhancing employee involvement and commitment to the company Enhanced and enabled business strategy and operational planning Increased longer-term skills planning Stakeholder engagement and collaboration	Improved staff motivation, leadership, communication and teamwork Increased employee knowledge Enhancing employee involvement and commitment to the company Enhanced and enabled business strategy and operational planning Increased longer-term skills planning Stakeholder engagement and collaboration				
	Assumptions / External Factors							
 Interest from businesses located in eligible districts* Commitment and capacity from delivery partners and suppliers 								
Impact and restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic •								
	• Ava	 Impact of Brexit ailability of fully funded 						

^{*} Eligible districts: Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Leeds, Selby, Wakefield and York

Participant survey





West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC) has commissioned independent researchers Harlow Consulting to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the European Social Fund (ESF) funded **Higher Performing Workplaces** project which WYCC is managing and delivering.

As you received training, coaching or mentoring which was part-funded under this Higher Performing Workplaces project, you have been invited to participate in this survey.

We would very much appreciate your feedback and the survey will take no more than **10 minutes** to complete.

This evaluation will help us to understand the impact of the programme and how WYCC can help businesses in the future.

Data security

The information you provide will be treated confidentially, in line with the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The information provided will be aggregated into themes and reported to WYCC anonymously.

If you have any queries about this research, please contact Joanne McGillan, Harlow Consulting - **jmcgillan@harlowconsulting.co.uk** or Joanne Harvatt, West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges - **joanne.harvatt@westyorkshirecolleges.ac.uk**

About you and your employer

1. What sector does your employer work in? [drop-down menu, single response]

Creative	
Digital	
Finance	
Business	
Hospitality	
Tourism	
Low carbon and/or construction	
Manufacturing	
Engineering	
Medical Technology	
Transport and logistics	
Other, please specify	

If Other, please specify:

2. What size of company do you work for? [single response]

Micro (1-9 employees, with an annual turnover of less than €2m euro (£1.7m approx.)	
SME (10-249 employees, with an annual turnover of less than €50m euros (£34m approx.))	
Large (250+ employees, with an annual turnover of more than €50m euros (£34m approx.))	

About the coaching/training/mentoring you received

3.	As part of the Higher Performing Workplaces (HPW) project, please confirm if you
	received: Please select all that apply [multi response]

HPW Training	
HPW Coaching	
Business performance mentoring	
Back in Business - Peer to peer sessions	

For the following questions, if you completed more than one training/coaching/mentoring course, please focus on the most recent training/coaching/mentoring you received.

4. In which area of the Higher Performing Workplaces project was your training/coaching/mentoring? [single response]

Export and Innovation	
Innovative Working	
Empowering Leaders	
Effective Human Resource	
Other, please specify	
Don't know	

If Other, please specify:

5. How was the training/coaching/mentoring delivered? Please select all that apply [multi response]

Online	
Face-to-face at employer premises	
Face-to-face at training provider premises	

6. In total, how many working days was the training/coaching/mentoring? [single response]

Less than a day	
1-2 days	
3-5 days	
6-10 days	
11-15 days	
16-20 days	

If answered 'HPW Training' to Q3

Was the training you received accredited? (accredited training is training which is regulated by a government agency and/or recognised by industry)

Yes	
No	
Don't know	

If answered 'HPW Training' to Q3

7. What size of company do you work for? [single response]

Basic	
L1	
L2	
L3	
L4	
L5 or above	
Don't know	

Your views of the HPW programme

8. Thinking about the training/coaching/mentoring you received, how would you rate: [single response]

	Very Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	N/A
Communications relating to the delivery					
Effectiveness of the delivery					
The content					

The impact of the HPW programme

Please note: Questions 10 and 11 [mandatory] relate to the training/coaching/mentoring's area of focus.

9. **Before** the training/coaching/mentoring, how would you rate your: [single response]

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	PNTS
Level of knowledge						
Level of confidence						

10. **After** the training/coaching/mentoring, how would you rate your: [single response]

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	PNTS
Level of knowledge						
Level of confidence						

11.	Has the training/coaching/mentoring you received had an impact on any of the
	following? [single response]

	No impact	Minor impact	Moderate impact	Strong impact	Not applicable	PNTS
Your level of motivation						
Your leadership skills						
Your communication skills						
Your technical knowledge						
Your ability to work as part of a team						
Your ability to contribute to business strategy						
Your ability to support business growth						
Your level of commitment to your employer						

12. Has the training/coaching/mentoring had an impact in any other a above? If yes, please specify.	area(s) not specified

13. Has the training/coaching/mentoring made a difference to you in any of the following ways? Please select all that apply. [multi response]

Helped me progress my career	
Widened my range of career choices	
Improvements in my working practices	
Too soon to say	
It has made no difference	
Other, please specify	

lf	Other,	please	specify:

14. Do you have any further comments about the training and support you've received under the Higher Performing Workplaces programme?	

Finally

15. Thank you for taking the time to respond. We will also be holding a number of follow up conversations (by telephone, Teams or Zoom) to explore views in more detail. If you would consider taking part, please indicate below:

Yes, I'd be willing to have a follow-up	Go to Q16
No, I would not like to provide	FINISH AND SUBMIT

16. Thank you for taking the time to respond. We will also be holding a number of follow up conversations (by telephone, Teams or Zoom) to explore views in more detail. If you would consider taking part, please indicate below:

Name	
Email	
Telephone number	







Harlow Consulting is a full service research agency, undertaking qualitative and quantitative methodologies across a wide range of industry sectors, specialising in evaluation and qualifications and standards design. Born from a desire to make in depth research engaging and accessible for all, Harlow Consulting aims to deliver research that will have an immediate and lasting impact.