

European Social Fund

Support for In-Work Training research

by Peter Dickinson and Richard Lloyd



Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 666

European Social Fund

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Peter Dickinson and Richard Lloyd

A report of research carried out by GHK Consulting Ltd on behalf of the
Department for Work and Pensions

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The Authors

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Each member of the study team also contributed to the production of the final report, namely **Ali Zaidi, Andy White, Heather Rose, Michael Lawrie, Naomi Williamson, Ross Neilson** and **Steph Charalambous**.

Abbreviations

BDC	Business Development Coordinators
CAD	Computer Aided Design
CFO	Co-financing Organisation
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GO	Government Office
HE	Higher Education
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IES	Integrated Employment and Skills
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LAD	Local Authority District
LCC	Liverpool Chamber of Commerce

LDA	London Development Agency
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
ONA	Organisation Needs Analysis
OP	Operational Programme
QCF	Qualification and Credit Framework
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RES	Regional Economic Strategy
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SME	Small to Medium Sized Enterprise
SSC	Sector Skills Council
TNA	Training Needs Analysis
TUC	Trades Union Congress
ULR	Union Learning Representative
VQ	Vocational Qualification

Summary

Introduction

GHK Consulting Ltd was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to examine the nature and effectiveness of European Social Fund (ESF) funded in-work training within Priority 2 (Competitiveness) and Priority 5 (Convergence) of the 2007-2013 England and Gibraltar ESF programme. This is the summary of the final report bringing together the main findings from each stage of the study.

Background and context

The ESF is a key component of the European Union's (EU) Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. The aim of the programme is to reduce differences in prosperity across the EU, and therefore funding is weighted towards those areas of greatest need.

The programme has two broad objectives:

- To increase employment by providing training and support to unemployed and disadvantaged groups.
- To provide targeted support to build a better and more competitive workforce.

It also has two cross-cutting themes: gender equality and equal opportunities; and sustainable development.

The current England ESF programme was launched in 2007, and will invest £2.5 billion (€3.1 billion) of European funding to 2013. The ESF programme is investing £823 million (€992 million) in Priority 2 activities and £98.2 million (€117.9 million) in Priority 5 activities.

The ESF programme is managed through a number of regional Co-financing Organisations (CFOs), which for Priorities 2 and 5 include Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and local authorities but principally the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Research methodology

The main aims of the study are to explore:

- how effectively ESF funding has been targeted at priority sectors;
- how well provision has been used to engage learners facing barriers to entering and progressing within the labour market;
- the impact of ESF provision on individual companies, employees and others; and
- the added value of the programme.

Interviews were undertaken with national partners identified by DWP, and all of the regional CFOs with a role in Priority 2 and Priority 5 provision. Much of the evaluation was based on qualitative interviews with project managers, delivery staff, partners, employers and learners of 31 Priority 2 and ten Priority 5 projects.

Most Priority 2 projects were led by private providers or further education colleges (including college consortia); the largest number of projects were focused on particular sectors (including the third sector, environmental and bioscience, construction and aerospace), or occupations (including information, advice and guidance advisers, managers and sports coaches), and people at risk of/already been made redundant. The amount of ESF funding received by the case study projects varied significantly, ranging from just over £26,000 to more than £16 million.

Of the ten Cornwall-based Priority 5 projects receiving Convergence funding, four were intended to support the Cornwall Higher Education and Skills Strategy and six the wider skills needs of the Cornish workforce.

Across the 41 Priority 2 and Priority 5 projects, 166 project staff were interviewed, an average of five people per project (ranging from two to eight depending on project size and complexity). Interviews were also undertaken with 65 employers and 133 learners.

Overview of Priority 2 and Priority 5 projects

The breadth of activities and foci across the case study projects indicates the wide array of interventions that ESF funds.

The projects can be grouped into those which added value to mainstream provision (i.e. Train to Gain, Skills for Life, Integrated Employment and Skills and higher-level skills); those enhancing the supply side, and; those raising and meeting demand for learning.

There was close strategic alignment, which is to be expected as this was an inherent part of the development of regional ESF Frameworks and CFO plans, and which involved the key partners, principally the LSC, RDAs and Jobcentre Plus. This also explains the absence of strategic partnerships at a project level. The exception was in Cornwall where strategic partnerships at the project level were a key feature.

Within Priority 2 projects, there was much partnership working, but this tended to exist at the operational level and supported project delivery.

Targeting of employers and employees/learners tended to be focused on sectors/occupations; geographical areas; business start-ups; people made redundant/at risk of redundancy; and those with low/no skills. There was little targeting of specific population groups.

Delivery models

Most employer engagement was with existing employers, although business/sector organisations, partner providers and direct marketing techniques were also used. Employer engagement was largely based on providers' existing approaches and mostly undertaken by themselves, except when expanding into new sectors or areas.

Most providers were not directly targeting hard to reach employers, although they expected to engage with them as a result of their delivery activities. Most employees/learners were engaged by their employer. Line managers usually selected staff on their eligibility, the costs of the training, and which employees would benefit most.

Providers delivering Response to Redundancy, Skills for Life and Higher Education Priority 5 projects were most likely to engage directly with learners themselves, tending to use other referral agencies, especially Jobcentre Plus.

The main barriers to engagement were employee time off; perceptions of the relevance and quality of existing provision; and engaging in rural areas (particularly in Cornwall and the South West).

Most employer and employee/learner respondents said that they had heard about the provision after direct contact from the provider. Most employers were positive about the value of training and became engaged in order to address specific skills needs. Employers were attracted by the offer of financial support; the relevance and responsiveness of the training; and their experience of the provider.

The assessment stage was short and straightforward, but a vital one in making the provision responsive and relevant. It tended to be based on existing, formal processes.

There were a number of examples of innovative and exemplary provision. However, services relating to mainstream provision – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Skills for Life, higher level skills, and Response to Redundancy – were relatively straightforward because it was based on existing delivery models and employers.

The main barriers to delivery were employee time-off and rurality, which providers tried to address by being flexible.

Providers valued the flexibility, relevance and quality of their provision, links to other provision (e.g. Train to Gain), and partnerships. Employers also found the provision to be relevant, responsive to their needs and of high quality – resulting in high levels of satisfaction. Similarly, learners found the provision tailored to their needs and were also highly satisfied.

The progression and aftercare element of the participant journey appears to be the least developed. Many providers did not highlight it, and when they did it tended to be ad hoc and informal. Most employers had not discussed their future training needs with their provider, however, they did expect this discussion to take place. Most learners had not had this discussion either, although more worryingly some had asked but not received it.

Delivering the ESF Programme

Monitoring by CFOs was relatively light touch, with them tending to only get involved in projects which were not meeting their profiles. Most monitoring was against targets and profiles, but some providers felt that this misses important achievements such as value added and confidence building. There was a particular issue over measuring job outcomes for Response to Redundancy projects, especially the definition of a job and getting evidence.

Most projects were on track to meet their targets, albeit revised targets in some cases. The largest obstacle to meeting targets was late project starts.

In interviews with CFOs and GOs, the cross-cutting themes were seen as the most vulnerable aspects of the programme. To some extent this has been realised, with a significant minority of providers being unaware of the sustainability theme. More were aware of the equal opportunities theme, but few providers mentioned CFO support for the cross-cutting themes.

Providers believed that the main impacts of their projects were on skill needs, learner job performance, and an increased approbation of learning. This largely tallied with the view of learners and employers who mentioned addressing skill needs, confidence and productivity as the main benefits to them. A large number of employers said that their views of training had been positively influenced by their experiences.

Both employers and learners had very high satisfaction ratings of the provision. For providers, the main success factors had been the responsiveness and relevance of their provision; developing effective partnerships; and the quality of their staff.

The main challenges were engaging with hard to reach employers; getting time off for staff; and quality assuring partner providers.

The main benefits of delivering under ESF were its ability to enhance existing provision; support hard to reach employers and learners; develop innovative provision; and increase the flexibility of provision. The main drawback was the paperwork.

Conclusions

The projects complemented a range of sub-regional, regional and national agendas, with the fit appearing closest amongst the Convergence Priority 5 projects in Cornwall, where explicit reference was made to a range of local strategic drivers and priority activities. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including existing familiarities between the actors involved, the focus on a smaller number of providers available within the county, and previous experienced and strategic awareness resulting from the previous Objective 1 programme.

The Priority 2 projects had a more implicit strategic fit, which is likely to be due to the influence of co-financing (where the 'contracting' model addresses many of the wider strategic parameters in advance), and may also explain why fewer examples of strategic partnerships were identified. However, operational partnerships were plentiful, and served to broaden the range of provision (sectorally and geographically), enhance progression routes, and provide expertise.

In both cases, it was too early (and sample sizes did not allow) for clear conclusions to be drawn regarding the influence of strategic alignment with project performance and impact. However, in many cases the projects were positioned, and able to articulate their expectations, in terms of making real contributions to local, regional and national priority areas.

In terms of the targeting of project activities, most employers were targeted on the basis of their sector or location. Whilst the projects were working with a broad range of learner groups, the targeting of individuals by specific characteristics was limited. Here Priorities 2 and 5 projects appear to differ from those under Priority 1 – not least as the engagement is with the employer rather than the individual.

Whilst there were examples of innovative projects, including the Innovation and Transnationality project studied, most provision was conventional. This is likely to be due to the more prescriptive nature of contracts under co-financing, and because activities tended to be delivered by experienced providers, to existing customers, and complementing mainstream provision. Most provision therefore operated within certain parameters defined by CFO plans and tenders, qualification structures (e.g. NVQs), and years of experience as to what worked.

Most engagement, assessment and provision tended to be undertaken by the providers themselves, only bringing in partners to recruit and work with employers and learners in new sectors or areas.

High levels of satisfaction were expressed by both the employers and learners interviewed (although it should be noted that the contact details of employers and learners were supplied by the providers in question). Providers believe they have developed flexible, relevant and high quality provision, and this was reflected in the views of the employers and learners, who valued the responsiveness, pertinence and calibre of the training offered.

However, the progression and aftercare stage of the participant journey seems the least developed. Most providers, employers and learners had little to say about this stage. For some this was because they had only just embarked on the training, and most employers expected this discussion to happen. However, some learners had been disappointed by the lack of further information, advice and guidance offered, even when they had asked for it.

The monitoring of ESF projects appears to be light touch, however, this does not seem to have impacted on performance as indicated by the high satisfaction levels of employers and learners who could find little wrong with the provision.

Providers, employers and learners all identified the same range of 'soft' and 'hard' impacts, i.e. addressing skills needs, improving confidence and increasing productivity. Some providers believed that this was due to ESF funding as it helped them to develop or enhance existing provision, support harder to reach learners and employers, and develop innovative and flexible provision. However, providers believed that ESF paperwork was still too excessive, and there was an issue over the definition of, and collecting evidence for, job outcomes for Response to Redundancy providers.

The research was tasked with addressing four key aims (see Section 1.3). Our conclusions against these aims are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Conclusions against study aims

Main aim/key questions	Conclusion
How effectively has funding been targeted at priority sectors identified in regional ESF frameworks, particularly among sectors with identified skills gaps and shortages, and those traditionally weak in training?	The process of co-financing under ESF has led to a close strategic alignment between project activities and regional and sub-regional priorities in terms of mainstream provision and priority sectors. However, there was little evidence of providers targeting hard to reach sectors, although they expected to 'pick up' on these groups as a result of the normal activities.
How well has provision been used to engage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="240 1621 783 1787">• learners facing barriers to accessing and progressing within the labour market, e.g. lone parents, offenders/ex-offenders, young parents, disabled workers, older workers and ethnic minorities? <li data-bbox="240 1794 783 1919">• those least likely to access training, e.g. low-paid and part-time workers, women and those in sectors/businesses traditionally investing less in training? 	<p data-bbox="799 1583 1343 1742">Most providers were working with employers they already delivered to, and who had positive attitudes to training (although this may also have been developed through the projects).</p> <p data-bbox="799 1749 1343 1823">Employers tended to identify which employees undertook the training.</p> <p data-bbox="799 1830 1343 1998">There were a number of projects working with hard to reach employers and learner groups, but little overt targeting of them, particularly where ESF provision supplemented mainstream provision.</p>

Continued

Table 1 Continued

Main aim/key questions	Conclusion
<p>What is the impact of ESF provision on individual companies, employees and others (particularly in addressing skills needs to support productivity and growth), 'soft' outcomes gained by participants (e.g. improved motivation and confidence, and a greater value of training), and whether the programme has empowered individuals to progress in their occupation?</p>	<p>There was extensive evidence of impacts on both 'hard' and 'soft' measures. Providers, employers and learners all felt that the greatest impacts had been on addressing skill needs, confidence and motivation, and productivity.</p> <p>In addition, there were positive impacts on employers' in terms of their future training behaviour, although less impact was seen on learners' progress in their occupations.</p>
<p>What is the added value of the programme, particularly in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complementing companies' own investment in skills; and • supporting mainstream programmes (e.g. Train to Gain) and strategies (e.g. recommendations of the Leitch Review, the LSC statement of priorities, and regional economic strategies)? 	<p>A key aim of ESF Priority 2 and Priority 5 provision was to support mainstream programmes and agendas. This study has demonstrated progress and success in this respect.</p> <p>In particular ESF has supported the development and delivery of responsive, relevant and high-quality provision, which both employers and learners found appropriate and beneficial.</p>

Recommendations

A series of recommendations were produced, which included in summary:

- taking steps to ensure that the positive impacts of co-financing around strategic alignment are not at the cost of innovation within the current programme, and that this valued element of the programme is maintained;
- placing an increased emphasis on maximising the benefits of positive employer and learner experiences through more active approaches to progression and aftercare. This could include, for example:
 - requiring progression stages and/or strategies to be explicitly described in project applications/delivery plans, and their implementation monitored; and
 - providing additional support to enhance progression mechanisms, for example by stimulating cross-referrals between projects and provision for mutual gain;
- facilitating much valued flexibility and responsiveness by making the parameters for delivery under ESF as flexible as possible, and ensuring that the Managing Authority and CFOs accurately communicate the parameters of the current programme to potential providers;

- ensuring projects are able to start promptly post contract finalisation – through communicating the importance of this to new projects, as well as the importance of the prompt contract finalisation to CFOs. In addition, consideration should be given to including initial pre-delivery 'set-up' periods into project timetables;
- taking steps to raise awareness of, and engagement with, the cross-cutting themes, with further effort being directed towards supporting implementation, particularly of the sustainability theme.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

GHK Consulting Ltd was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to examine the nature and effectiveness of European Social Fund (ESF) funded in-work training within Priority 2 (Competitiveness) and Priority 5 (Convergence) of the 2007-2013 England and Gibraltar ESF programme. This is the final report bringing together the main findings from each stage of the study.

1.2 Background and context

The ESF is a key component of the European Union's (EU) Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. The aim of the programme is to reduce differences in prosperity across the EU, and therefore funding is weighted towards those areas of greatest need.

The programme has two broad objectives:

- To increase employment by providing training and support to unemployed and disadvantaged groups.
- To provide targeted support to build a better and more competitive workforce.

It also has two cross-cutting themes: gender equality and equal opportunities; and sustainable development.

The current England ESF programme was launched in 2007, and will invest £2.5 billion (€3.1 billion) of European funding to 2013. The ESF programme is investing £823 million (€992 million) in Priority 2 activities and £98.2 million (€117.9 million) in Priority 5 activities.

The current programme provides greater flexibility than the previous 2000-2006 programme, with broad priorities replacing the five priority fields and measures of the previous round. In addition, the three previous objectives were reduced to two:

- **The regional competitiveness and employment objective** – covering all areas of the country other than those eligible for Convergence funding, with funding allocations being based on those out of work and those with no or low qualifications.

- **Convergence objective** – targeted at areas where Gross Domestic Product is less than 75 per cent of the EU average, and applying only to Cornwall within England and Gibraltar.

This research project is focusing on two of the priorities within the current programme:

- **Competitiveness Priority 2:** Developing a skilled and adaptable workforce.
- **Convergence Priority 5:** Improving the skills of the local workforce.

Priority 2 and Priority 5 address the skills needs of workers without basic skills or with low or no qualifications. The majority of activities under these priorities have been commissioned by the Regional Learning and Skills Councils (LSC), which received about 80 per cent of Priority 2 funding¹, and also by Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and local authority district (LAD) Co-financing Organisations (CFOs) to address regional priorities, with ESF funding being used to support more flexible and responsive provision which complements and adds value to mainstream programmes, and with particular relevance to Train to Gain. In addition, Priority 5 activities within the Cornwall Convergence area also include activities to support the implementation of the area's Higher Education (HE) development strategy.

One third (34 per cent) of ESF funding is available in Priority Two with a focus on up-skilling the employed. The LSC planned to focus the resources in the following ways:

- 36 per cent for basic/entry level skills;
- 36 per cent at Level 2 activities;
- 23 per cent at Level 3; and
- a maximum of five per cent at level 4 and above.

The LSC planned to use ESF to support two main programmes:

- **Train to Gain** – which is a national programme that utilises brokers to facilitate access to training to support the needs of employers. ESF was to be used to provide:
 - additionality – more first Level 2s where budgets are spent; more Level 3s where small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) needs exceeds budget (but not to displace Train to Gain Level 3 pilot areas²); and additional entry-level skills;
 - enhancements – second Level 2s; additional Train to Gain pilot Level 3s; and Train to Gain pilot Level 4s to SMEs only;

¹ The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) took over the LSC's ESF CFO responsibilities from 1 April 2010.

² The LSC/SFA is running a series of pilots testing support for Level 3 and Level 4 qualifications.

- gap filling – to extend the Train to Gain offer to include ESF-funded Level 1 provision.
- **Apprenticeships** – covers a range of programmes to both adults and young people focusing on National Vocational Qualification delivery with supporting key skills and technical certificates at Levels 2 and 3. ESF was to be used to provide:
 - additionality – more adult provision where this better meets the needs of employers at Level 4, only to SMEs, ensuring that the offer aligns with professional apprenticeship pilots³ (limited to a maximum of five per cent of Priority 2 funding);
 - enhancements – activities that support a higher success rate in delivery of mainstream programmes, or activities that promote progression, or enhancements that generate and support additional entry onto these programmes;
 - gaps – for example, Level 1 as a transition between Entry to Employment and an apprenticeship.

The LSC contracted on an output and deliverables basis, giving flexibility to providers as to how they achieved those outcomes.

RDAs and LADs similarly utilised Priority 2 funding to support their strategic priorities. For example, some RDAs used ESF funding to enhance provision to priority and high-tech sectors, whilst some LADs used the funding to support their Skills for Life provision.

1.3 Research methodology

The main aims of the study are to explore:

- how effectively ESF funding has been targeted at priority sectors identified in regional ESF frameworks, particularly among sectors with identified skills gaps and shortages, and those that are traditionally weak in training;
- how well provision has been used to engage learners facing barriers to accessing and progressing within the labour market (such as lone parents, offenders/ex-offenders, disabled workers, older workers and ethnic minorities), and those least likely to access training (such as low paid and part-time workers, women and those in sectors/businesses that traditionally invest less in training);
- the impact of ESF provision on individual companies, employees and others, particularly in addressing skills needs to support productivity and growth, the soft outcomes gained by participants (such as improved motivation and confidence, and a greater value of training), and whether the programme has empowered individuals to progress in their occupation; and

³ There are limited pilots for adults at Level 4 called professional apprenticeships.

- The added value of the programme, particularly in complementing companies' own investment in skills and supporting mainstream programmes (such as Train to Gain) and strategies (such as recommendations from the Leitch Review, the LSC statement of priorities and regional economic strategies).

Table 1.1 provides a summary of our methodology, which starts from a national perspective and drills down into case studies of 41 individual projects. The sample of projects was based on consultations with regional CFOs.

There is no national list describing the nature of all of the individual Priority 2 projects and so no sample could be truly representative. Regional CFOs were asked to provide us with a long list of eight-ten projects which provided a good coverage of ESF Priority 2 projects in their region from the list of criteria (see below), and from this the final shortlist was selected. Of the 31 selected ESF Priority 2 shortlisted projects, 13 projects had to be replaced with similar projects from the long list. This was for two main reasons: some projects were not yet delivering whilst other projects were too busy to get involved in the evaluation (for example, they were undergoing an inspection or had been involved in other evaluation projects). Attempts were made by GHK to ensure that projects involved in other evaluation activities were removed from the short and long lists. Where GHK was aware of other evaluation activities we contacted the evaluators and shared our list of selected projects with them.

Table 1.1 Summary of the methodology

Stage one: Project inception		
Task 1.1: Inception meeting	Initial meeting with the Steering Group.	July 2009
Task 1.2: Policy briefing, document and data review	Review of data and documents to develop a comprehensive understanding of Priority 2 and Priority 5 aims, objectives, activities and expected outcomes and impacts.	Aug-Sept 2009
Task 1.3: National stakeholder interviews	Interviews with national ESF stakeholders, including DWP ESF Division, LSC National Office, Regional Skills Partnership and regional Trades Union Council.	Aug-Sept 2009
Task 1.4: Interviews with regional partners	Interviews with the regional ESF Government Office (GO) and CFO leads in each area, including Cornwall.	Sept-Nov 2009
Task 1.5: Scoping report	Short report on progress and findings to date, and further detail of proposed next stages.	Nov 2009
Task 1.6: Steering meeting	To discuss the scoping report and next stages.	Nov 2009

Continued

Table 1.1 Continued

Stage two: Case study fieldwork		
Task 2.1: Piloting, team briefing and preparation	Piloting the case study visits with two Priority 2 projects and one Priority 5 project. Internal study team briefing.	Dec 2009
Task 2.2: Competitiveness Priority 2 project case studies	Thirty-one Priority 2 in-depth project case studies. Interviews with project leads, partners, delivery staff and participants (individuals and employers).	Jan-Feb 2010
Task 2.3: Convergence Priority 5 project case studies	Ten Priority 5 in-depth project case studies. Interviews with project leads, partners, delivery staff and participants (individuals and employers).	Jan-Feb 2010
Task 2.4: Team debrief	Internal study team debriefing.	Mar 2010
Task 2.5: Steering meeting	To discuss the case studies, emerging findings and final report structure.	Mar 2010
Stage three: Final reporting and dissemination		
Task 3.1: Analysis of study information	Detailed analysis of all of the information collected during the study to date.	Mar 2010
Task 3.2: Draft final report	Produce a draft report to the agreed structure.	Mar 2010
Task 3.3: Steering meeting	To discuss the draft final report.	Mar 2010
Task 3.4: Final report	Incorporation of comments into an agreed final report.	April 2010

The majority of the study resources are directed towards the 41 case studies. At the inception meeting it was decided that the case studies would cover the following criteria:

- Different levels of provision – from basic skills, Level 2, through to intermediate and higher-level skills, especially in SMEs.
- Different delivery models – such as single, consortium, partnership and managing agent approaches.
- Good or promising practice, or approaches that were less effective – in order to provide lessons for future development and the second half of the programme.
- Different client groups – from redundant workers to managers; people in non-traditional occupations; migrant workers, and people with basic skill needs.
- The impact of ESF – i.e. how ESF adds value to existing provision, participants (individuals and companies) and local economies.

The project sample comprised a combination of Competitiveness Priority 2 and Convergence Priority 5 projects in Cornwall. The Priority 2 sample included one project from the Innovation and Transnationality strand, which is a suite of strategic, regional projects aiming to develop and deliver new ways of extending employment opportunities and raising workforce skills across six themes, including employer engagement. Although in their early stages of implementation at the time of study, one project was selected as a case study.

Table 1.2 provides a profile of the 31 Priority 2 projects. Most providers were private providers or further education (FE) colleges (including college consortia). Six providers were 'Other' which included Chambers, HE institutions, business support organisations and Learning Partnerships. A number of projects addressed the skills needs of employers and learners at a variety of levels. Where a level of learning was specified, most provision was to address basic skills needs, either Skills for Life or English for Speakers of Other Languages provision, with a wider range of support for provision ranging from Level 1 to Level 4.

Table 1.2 Profile of Priority 2 projects

	Number of projects
Target groups	
50+	3
All employees	2
At risk of/made redundant	5
Ethnic minority	2
Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3
Migrant workers	3
Non-unionised workplaces	1
Specific occupations	6
Specific sectors	10
Under/post graduates	1
Unionised workplaces	1
Women	3
Type of provider	
Careers service	2
FE college	8
Private provider	13
Trade union	2
Other	6
Level of provision	
Basic skills needs	5
Level 1	1
Level 2	2
2nd Level 2 and 3	3
Level 3	3
Level 4	4
Level of ESF funding	
<£100,000	4
£100,000-£499,000	9
£500,000-£999'000	9
£1 million+	9

In terms of target groups, the largest number of projects were focused on particular sectors (including the third sector, environmental and bioscience, construction and aerospace), or occupations (including information advice and guidance advisers, managers and sports coaches), and people at risk of/already been made redundant.

The amount of funding varied significantly from just over £26,000 to more than £16 million. Table 1.2 shows that four projects received under £100,000's worth of funding, and there was an even split of the remaining projects of between £100,000-£499,000, £500,000-£999,000 and over £1 million.

Of the ten Cornwall-based projects receiving Convergence funding, four were intended to support the Cornwall Higher Education and Skills Strategy and six the wider skills needs of the Cornish workforce. The four Priority 5 HE case study projects were at different stages of development at the time of the visits, although all shared the underpinning strategic objective of improving the provision of, and access to, Higher Level Skills for the workforce in Cornwall. The projects comprised:

- a project aiming to promote access to and take-up of HE provision, with five strands of activity including the development and delivery of modular 'bite-sized' provision, leadership and management training, and enterprise and employability provision; and activities to promote the uptake of Level 4 provision within colleges;
- a project providing a graduate placement service for employers within Cornwall, which built on an existing service enhanced with subsidies for employers and support, mentoring and business skills training for participants;
- a project aiming to promote enterprising behaviour amongst teachers and other educators through a creative problem solving approach, and engaging students to ensure the 'soft skills' demanded by employers are available in the county;
- a project aiming to increase the range of Level 4 and 5 programmes within Cornwall, including taught Masters, PhD studentships and post-doctoral research posts, and featuring bursaries to enable students to participate.

The Priority 5 HE projects consequently followed different approaches to working with their individual target groups, which differed to the remaining Priority 2 and 5 projects. While in many cases the intended participants were individuals (including under-graduate, graduate and post-graduate students), employers were also intended to engage to access higher-level training for their staff, receiving student placements and benefiting from improved links with the HE community. However, at the time of visit, just two of the projects were engaging with individuals and employers, with two being in preparatory stages. This report therefore includes the findings from the analysis of all ten Convergence case studies, with the 'non-HE' Convergence projects being reported as part of the main Competitiveness Priority 2 projects and the HE projects being referred to specifically, as appropriate.

Interviews were undertaken with a range of people involved in managing and delivering the provision, including managers, contract managers, delivery and support staff, and representatives of partner organisations. Across the 41 Priority 2 and Priority 5 projects, 166 people were interviewed, an average of five people per project. The number of interviewees ranged from two to eight per project depending on its size and complexity.

Across all the case studies, interviews were sought with employers and learners benefiting from the projects. Projects were asked to provide us with a long list of employers and participants from which the interviewees were selected and so were not a random sample. Table 1.3 shows the number of employer and learner interviews per region, and that in some cases projects did not have any employers or learners to interview.

Table 1.3 Employer and learner participant interviews

	Number of projects	Learner interviews	Number of projects with no learner interviews	Employer interviews	Number of projects with no employer interviews
Priority 2					
East Midlands	3	15	0	6	0
East of England	3	11	0	6	1
London	4	13	0	8	0
North East	3	13	0	2	2
North West	3	7	1	2	2
South East	3	10	0	6	0
South West	4	10	0	8	0
West Midlands	5	21	0	6	2
Yorkshire and the Humber	3	10	0	4	1
Priority 5					
Cornwall	10	23	5	17	4
Total	41	133	6	65	12

Source: GHK.

This could be for a variety of reasons: the project had not engaged with any employers or learners to date because it was not yet delivering; the project did not plan to support employers or learners (for example, Response to Redundancy projects did not deliver to employers); employers were interviewed as learners (this mostly happened with projects delivering leadership and management courses where the learners were the owners), or we were unable to contact employers/learners either because the contact details were late in coming through or the participants did not want to be interviewed. On average, four learners and two employers were interviewed per project.

1.4 Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of Priority 2 and Priority 5 projects, including their rationale and strategic fit.
- Section 3 analyses the project delivery models from engagement to progression, and looks at what has worked well and barriers to delivery.
- Section 4 looks at the advantages of delivering ESF programmes, the main benefits and impacts, and what needs to be developed.
- Section 5 includes the main conclusions and recommendations.

2 Overview of Priority 2 and Priority 5 projects

2.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the 41 case study projects, the background and rationale of the projects, and the strategic and operational fit within regional and sub-regional priorities, partnerships, and target groups.

The main findings are:

- There was a wide range of projects selected which indicates the array of interventions European Social Fund (ESF) funds.
- The projects can be grouped into those which added value to mainstream provision (i.e. Train to Gain, Skills for Life, Integrated Employment and Skills (IES)⁴, and higher-level skills); those enhancing the supply side; and those raising and meeting demand for learning.
- There was close strategic alignment which is to be expected as this was an inherent part of the development of regional ESF Frameworks and Co-funding Organisation (CFO) plans which involved the key partners, principally the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Jobcentre Plus.

⁴ The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended that a more integrated system of employment and skills support be developed. The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) and Department for Innovation Universities and Skills' joint paper *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work* set out the Government's ambition to achieve an IES service which would provide all Jobcentre Plus customers with the opportunity to be referred to the new adult advancement and careers service for a Skills Health Check, from 2010/11 onwards. The development of IES is part of a broader shift towards a more active welfare state in which, when 'people sign up for benefits, they sign up for skills as well'.

- This also explains the absence of strategic partnerships at a project level. The exception was in Cornwall where strategic partnerships at the project level were a key feature.
- Within Priority 2 projects, there was much partnership working but this tended to exist at the operational level and supported project delivery.
- Targeting of employers and employees/learners tended to be focused on sectors/occupations; geographical areas; business start-ups; people made redundant/at risk of redundancy, and; those with low/no skills. There was little targeting of specific population groups.

2.2 Overview of the projects

2.2.1 Priority 2 projects

A complete list and summary of the 31 Priority 2 case study projects is listed Section A.1. The projects covered each English region plus one Innovation and Transnationality project. Funding ranged from £25,000 to over £16 million. Providers included trade unions, private training providers, information, advice and guidance (IAG) organisations, as well as further education (FE) colleges and higher education (HE) institutions.

2.2.2 Priority 5 projects

A complete list and summary of the ten Priority 5 case study projects is listed in Section A.2. These fall into two distinct groups. Four HE projects which support the Cornwall Higher Education Strategy, and six non-HE projects which cover a similar range of provision to the Priority 2 projects.

2.3 Project background and rationale

The main aims and objectives of the projects varied considerably, showing the diverse range of provision of ESF funds. Even where there were similar programmes, often the mode of delivery or focus differed.

The projects could be characterised by their activity focus, with five main areas emerging:

- Enhancing Train to Gain. There were three main types of projects in this category:
 - those delivering pre-Level 2 provision as a stepping stone into Train to Gain;
 - those offering second Level 2s or enhancements to Level 2s. These projects were affected by the changes to Train to Gain in 2008 which enabled the mainstream programme to fund some second Level 2s; and
 - those providing higher-level qualifications that Train to Gain did not fund, sometimes as a progression route from Train to Gain funded Level 2s.

- Response to Redundancy. This was the only category where there was a great deal of similarity between projects although there were key differences, for example some were trade union led. These projects were aiming to up-skill and find jobs for people recently made redundant or at risk of redundancy.
- Skills for Life. A number of projects focused on Skills for Life, or Skills for Life as an adjunct to other provision e.g. Response to Redundancy or NVQs. In some cases this supported individuals in their return to work, helped their progression into Train to Gain and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), or had a focus on specific sectors or population groups, such as migrant workers.
- Enhancing the supply side. Several projects were focusing on enhancing the supply of provision, including:
 - capacity building, for example, partnership development to facilitate new provision;
 - supporting and developing trainers, including those delivering numeracy skills, IAG advisers, and Union Learning Representatives;
 - developing new provision. This included non-accredited provision as well as new provision in specific skill areas (e.g. environmental technologies).
- Raising and meeting demand. This involved:
 - developing sector provision either in sectors where there was low demand; in growth and regional priority sectors; or enhancing provision to deliver in rural areas. The main rationale was that existing ‘off-the-shelf’ provision did not exist or was not appropriate for certain types of employer. In addition, meeting demand, particularly amongst hard to reach⁵ employers, where employers did not have the resources to fund training, such as in very small businesses; and
 - raising or meeting demand from specific population groups, with projects targeting a range of groups including migrants, people with skills but no qualifications, and those in low-skilled sectors.
- Higher-level skills. A number of projects were delivering higher-level skills, in both the Priority 2 and Priority 5 samples. Some projects were developing provision as a progression route from Train to Gain (see above) but a number were offering Level 4+ programmes, especially in management or entrepreneurship. In the Cornwall Convergence area, some projects were supporting the development of HE provision within the county, through a range of approaches including developing new higher-level provision and providing placement and employment opportunities for graduates in Cornwall.

⁵ There is no one definition of hard to reach employers or participants used in the study. Whilst there were target groups defined by the ESF Framework (people aged 50+, people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ethnic minority people etc.), when discussing hard to reach employers or participants we tended to base the definition on the groups providers themselves thought were hard to reach.

In most projects these categories overlapped so there were a variety of rationales underpinning the project development.

Projects could also be grouped into those supporting mainstream programmes and those testing out new approaches. The former tended to support Train to Gain, Skills for Life and worklessness agendas, whilst the latter tended to be more (though not exclusively) innovative within the enhancing supply side, and raising and meeting demand categories.

About a quarter of the projects were based on new provision that the provider had not delivered before or did not exist in the market prior to the funding. In some cases this involved providers developing and delivering new vocational qualifications, provision new in the sector, area or for the target group, or in response to the economic downturn (some Response to Redundancy projects). Around one third of projects were based on existing provision – this included previous ESF-funded projects, pilot activities which had been successful and developed to serve a large market or other provision previously developed and delivered under a range of funding.

However, most projects, about 40 per cent, were a mixture of the two, their elements based on existing provision but certain aspects had been developed. This included: developing and delivering new units; building on existing partnerships but providing new provision; enhancing progression either into training or beyond it; delivering to a different target group, such as hard to reach employers; or other enhancements, such as developing the recruitment side of Response to Redundancy provision.

2.4 Strategic and operational fit

A recent review of national and regional ESF frameworks reported that there was close strategic alignment between Priority 2 and Priority 5 activities and the programme's strategic and operational direction. This analysis of Regional ESF Frameworks found that:

*'The connections between the operational programme and regional priorities are explicitly outlined in the Regional ESF Framework...All of the documents have adopted a structure which makes reference to the Operational Plan and key elements of the programme such as the priorities, target groups, activities and cross cutting themes...'*⁶

The national stakeholders interviewed during the first stage of this evaluation also noted the 'high level of coherence' between the national and regional frameworks, a view supported by our review of national and regional documentation.

⁶ See *Regional ESF Frameworks: A Case Study Evaluation*, Policy Research Institute for DWP ESF Evaluation Team, June 2009.

National stakeholders also felt that ESF was complementing mainstream provision. Respondents noted that the ESF infrastructure has had to quickly respond to policy changes, primarily increased Train to Gain flexibilities which encroached on a typical area of ESF additionality, as well as the effects of the current recession. Others noted that joint LSC and Jobcentre Plus joint working over Priorities 1 and 2 complemented the developing IES agenda.

Interviews with regional CFO leads also found a close alignment between the development of Regional Frameworks and CFO plans with regional priorities. There are a number of well-developed regional strategies – in particular the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Skills Priorities and other strategic documents – which are based on intelligence, research, and partnership consultations. So the transmission of regional economic, and learning and skills priorities into The Regional Frameworks and CFO plans was also relatively straightforward. Also the way priorities were identified and specified in the National Framework allowed for regional interpretations, for example ‘people at a disadvantage’ were identified rather than specific groups allowing regional flexibilities based on regional and sub-regional documents.

In identifying the focus for activities, and priority sectors and clients, some CFOs used a targeted approach whilst others offered more flexibility. Some CFOs used the processes of developing the Frameworks and CFO plans to identify priorities; others undertook specific research and consultations. But generally there were less prescriptive approaches because these had tended to generate problems in previous programmes. For example, previous programmes had stipulated certain types of unemployed people, but given the economic expansion of the late 1990s and the first half of the noughties meant that there were few people in these groups who were out of work, which made it difficult for projects to meet their targets. In some areas, the CFO plans were less specific about priority clients and sectors, leaving it to the demand-led approaches to do this.

The regions were in the process of reviewing their frameworks and it is likely that the same mechanisms will be repeated.

CFOs believed there was close alignment with the priorities set out in the national Operational Programme (OP) and identified regional priorities. This was because this alignment was an inherent part of the development of Regional Frameworks and CFO plans. It was also because there was sufficient flexibility in the priorities of the national OP. Some regions had commissioned activities that used flexibilities within the OP, for example non-accredited qualifications, because that is what employers wanted – however, these tended to be specific projects.

Generally, GO respondents also felt that Priority 2 and Priority 5 activities had been developed to complement the national OP and regional skills priorities. The main issues were:

- addressing higher-level skills as the focus on much ESF-funded activities were basic skills and Level 2 qualifications, whereas some important regional skills priorities were at higher levels;

- Train to Gain flexibilities meant that some priorities and foci had to be revised to align with changes in the national Train to Gain programme;
- whilst there was satisfaction with the identification of priorities, GO respondents were unsure as to progress to date;
- one GO representative felt that whilst activities met priorities, the projects lacked coherence on the ground in terms of their combined contribution to regional objectives – and were encouraging such contributions to be more explicitly described in the ongoing review of the regional ESF framework.

The review of regional ESF documents and strategies found a strong and consistent thread from the regions (and in some areas, sub-regions) up to the national OP. However, this was due to national priorities being widely defined and regional skills priorities and programmes have been extensively debated. In addition, some regions left priorities deliberately broad in order to respond to local need and responses.

As far as projects were concerned, all but four projects were able to identify other local, regional or national programmes and priorities their provision fitted in with. There seemed to be the greatest strategic and operational alignment amongst the Cornwall non-HE projects.

Again, the eclectic nature of ESF-funded provision was demonstrated. There was a wide assortment of strategies and initiatives which projects were complementing:

- Train to Gain was the most frequently mentioned as a programme which served as a progression route into or from ESF-funded provision, or provided second Level 2 qualifications.
- Regional economic and skills priorities, identified through the Regional Economic Strategies, Regional Skills priorities and, more recently, the Regional Economic Taskforce, were also cited as framing the level, sectors, client groups and approaches projects took. In addition, several of the Convergence Priority 5 projects in Cornwall were specifically supporting the Cornwall Higher Education and Skills strategy for the county.
- Skills for Life, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), was also a key strategic driver.
- The IES agenda was also mentioned, especially by Response to Redundancy projects.
- Sector skills priorities identified through sector skills strategies developed by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other sectoral organisations.

But projects also mentioned a number of other programmes and agendas including (in order of times mentioned):

- Leitch Review (in terms of delivering employer and client-centred provision);
- infrastructure development and capacity building (e.g. for changes to delivery agencies);

- apprenticeships;
- other ESF programmes;
- other LSC priorities not identified in regional documents;
- Lifelong Learning;
- rural development; and
- a range of other agendas including local business and enterprise development; environmental agendas; higher-level skills; New Deal; Foundation Learning Tier; and the Future Jobs Fund. The Sports Coaching Workforce Development project in the South East fits in with the Sport England strategy, the health and wellbeing agenda, and the Olympic Legacy agenda, and it is also a priority sector.

In some cases these programmes and strategies provided more implicit parameters to project activities, providers were aware of them and they helped provide the context to provision, but they did not regularly or directly impinge on provision. For other projects there were close links with, for example Train to Gain and Skills for Life provision, or delivering to priority sectors.

The main exception was in Cornwall where many of the projects identified a number of county- and region-wide strategies and programmes that their activities related to.

Case study: Key Sectors project – Cornwall

The project has clear links to economic strategies at the regional and county level by supporting the priority sectors in Cornwall and the South West and also the large number of strategies and plans associated with each of the individual sectors. This is achieved not only by providing training and developing the skills of the existing workforce but also through using ambassadors (recruited by the sector organisations) to go out and sell their respective sector to students.

The project also supports the findings of the Leitch Review, supports the Government's Skills for Life strategy and has close links with Train to Gain. The Train to Gain Skills Brokerage Service is represented on the project steering group. There is also strong coordination and collaboration with mainstream Train to Gain brokers, while several partners are also Train to Gain providers. The partnership also includes representation from FE and work-based learning providers.

However, despite the best efforts of the provider, there have been issues engaging with certain potential referral partners, creating issues in terms of partners' ability to direct employers to the Key Sectors project if they are not aware of it.

The lack of overt strategic fit and partnerships (see below) may be because co-financing fulfils this function. Strategic priorities, partners and agendas are identified beforehand and underpin the CFO regional plans which projects then bid against. Set against this regional strategic framework there is less need to demonstrate this higher-level integration.

2.5 Partnership structure

Most projects involved other organisations either in strategic management or delivery – however, about one in five did not.

There were very few formal steering groups or strategic partnerships. Where they existed, they were for the larger projects and served to provide:

- strategic guidance on the role and position of the project in the wider regional or sub-regional agenda;
- representation of the different elements of provision, such as referral, employer engagement and delivery; and
- representation of specific target groups, such as employers, sectors and specific population groups.

Most partners were involved in a delivery capacity and served as:

- delivery partners either because they had particular specialisms (e.g. Skills for Life or delivered in a technical area), delivered in a certain geographical or sectoral area, or added capacity to delivery in the larger projects;
- providers of specific elements within the participant's journey, such as providing IAG, client referrals or employer engagement;
- complementary providers delivering provision which was concurrent, such as, Train to Gain organisations who could provide progression routes into or out of ESF-funded provision, or programmes which dealt with a different aspect of the provision, e.g. the Future Jobs Fund;
- expert advisers providing knowledge to delivery to certain sectors, employers or population groups.

The most frequently mentioned partner organisations were:

- other providers – all but four projects with partnership arrangements had other providers as their main partners, usually in a delivery capacity, and covering private, FE and HE providers;
- sector organisations, especially SSCs as sector representatives or organisations with particular sector expertise;
- Jobcentre Plus, mostly as a referral organisation in Response to Redundancy projects but sometimes as a strategic partner;

- IAG organisations, such as Nextstep and Connexions, mostly to provide client referrals but also because of their IAG specialisms;
- third sector organisations, because they represented specific population groups or were specialist delivery organisations.

There were a plethora of other organisations, such as (in order of number of times they were mentioned): local authorities; trade unions; business organisations (e.g. Chambers of Commerce); Learning Partnerships; Enterprise Agencies; employers; Business Link; LSC; RDAs; Education and Business Partnerships; and training provider representative organisations.

Of the 28 projects that had partnership arrangements with other organisations, three of them were new. The large majority were based on existing partnership arrangements through: previous ESF-funded projects; partnerships delivering other programmes (such as Train to Gain and Skills for Life); and pilot projects which ESF monies had helped to develop further. A small number were based on existing partnerships but had developed to include additional partners, for example to deliver in new sectors, with new client groups or in expanded geographical areas.

The Market for Learning project in the South West developed its delivery partnership from scratch.

Case study: Market for Learning project – South West

The main aim of the project is to improve the skills of people working in rural communities by: identifying the needs of local employers in specific communities; addressing additional difficulties learners in rural areas may experience; and providing learning opportunities in the local areas.

The rationale for the project is to up-skill individuals in rural areas, in order to enable them to find higher-paid work and higher skills to feed into the rural economy. In addition, it serves to improve the competitiveness of small to medium-sized enterprises in rural areas.

Gloucestershire First (part of Gloucestershire County Council) and Wiltshire County Council led on the project and the delivery partnership was developed during the planning and tender writing process. Gloucestershire First had delivered in Gloucestershire under a previous ESF contract but in Wiltshire a partnership structure had to be developed from scratch.

Project managers required a number of providers to deliver flexible and responsive provision, in a number of locations and within certain cost parameters. They also wanted providers which knew their localities and the businesses there. The local development agency leads on the project and contracts with three providers to deliver provision in the two counties.

2.6 Target groups

There was a wide range of individual and employer target groups on which projects were focusing their provision, which again demonstrates the diverse array of provision which ESF funds. There were three types of foci for employers:

- The main focus was sectoral. The most frequently mentioned sectors were the third sector and leisure (each mentioned by three projects) but there were also a number of other sectors: environmental and bioscience; transport and logistics; travel and tourism; land based; hospitality; food and drink; marine and aerospace; care; cleaning; construction; retail; education; and the public sector. Some providers were targeting regionally or sub-regionally identified priority sectors, and a limited number were covering all sectors.
- Those with a geographic focus, usually a local authority area.
- Those working with business start-ups (usually for management development) and the self-employed (because they predominated in the sectors the provider was targeting). The self-employed included taxi drivers and construction workers, as well as those located in specific geographical areas (e.g. the Scilly Isles) and particular sectors (e.g. land based).

As far as individual participants were concerned, the main groups of learners were:

- those who had been made redundant or were at risk of redundancy;
- those without particular skills or qualifications, including basic skills and ESOL, second Level 2s, low skilled, higher skilled (Level 3 and Level 4);
- particular population groups, such as people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ethnic minority people, older people, women in non-traditional roles, lone parents, and migrant workers;
- specific occupation groups, mostly managers, but also those in craft and skilled occupations, and teachers;
- others, including those in trade unions and graduates.

However, there was little targeting of particular population groups. Certain groups of learners predominated because they fell into particular categories, for example older workers are more likely to have low or no qualifications.

The lack of targeting of specific population groups may have been because of the flexibilities afforded by the CFOs around what constitutes a target population group (see page 23). Some CFOs deliberately omitted the definition of target group profiles because they would not be able to identify such groups within the precise focus of a particular project. Providers were aware of the equality and equal opportunities cross-cutting theme (see Section 4.2.4) and most were actively monitoring it, even if they were not directly targeting priority population groups.

There is no data available from the projects about the type of businesses and learners they supported. However, a profile of the employers and people we interviewed provides an indication of the types and range of businesses and individuals projects were working with.

Figure 2.1 shows the sector of employers we interviewed, which provides an indication of the main sectors the projects were working with. Around one in five employers interviewed were third sector organisations (which includes not-for-profit organisations such as sports governing bodies). Manufacturing was the second largest sector, followed by hotels and catering, and health and social care.

Figure 2.1 Employer sectors

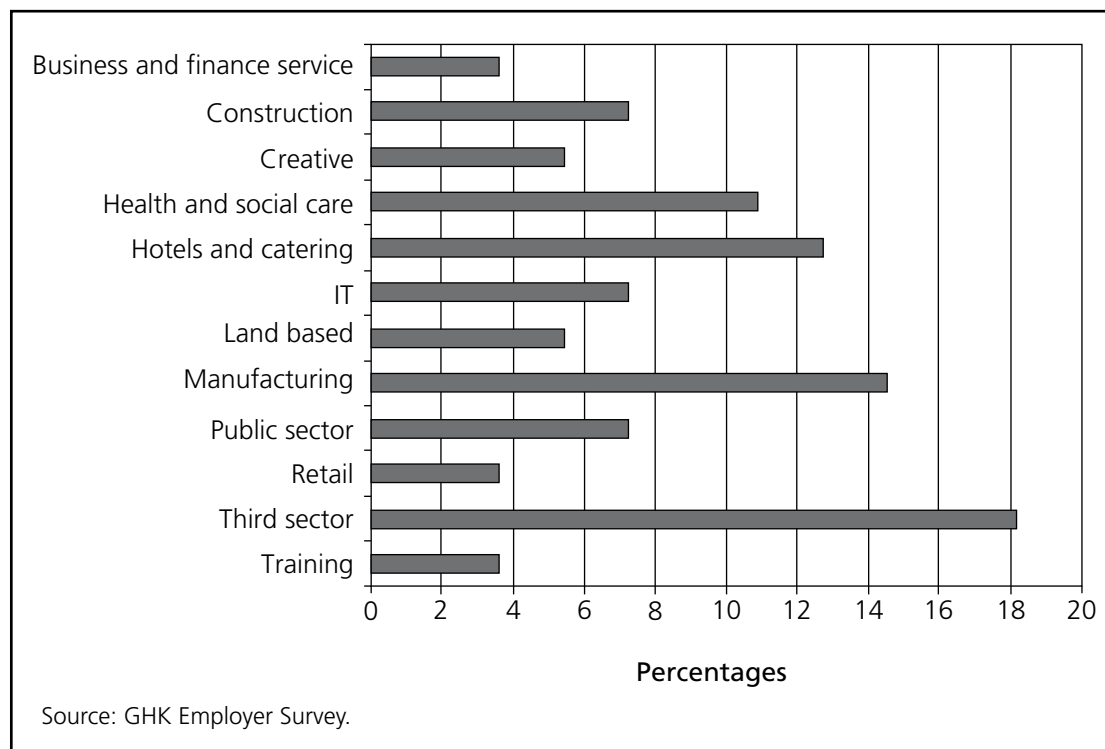


Figure 2.2 shows almost half of employer respondents were micro businesses employing ten or fewer people, including self-employed people. One in five employed between 11 and 50 people, and 15 per cent employed more than 250 people. This is similar to the findings of the ESF cohort survey, except that more respondents in this study employed less than 11 people.⁷

⁷ The comparative data comes from the ESF Cohort Study: Wave 1 due to be published in July 2010.

Figure 2.2 Employer size

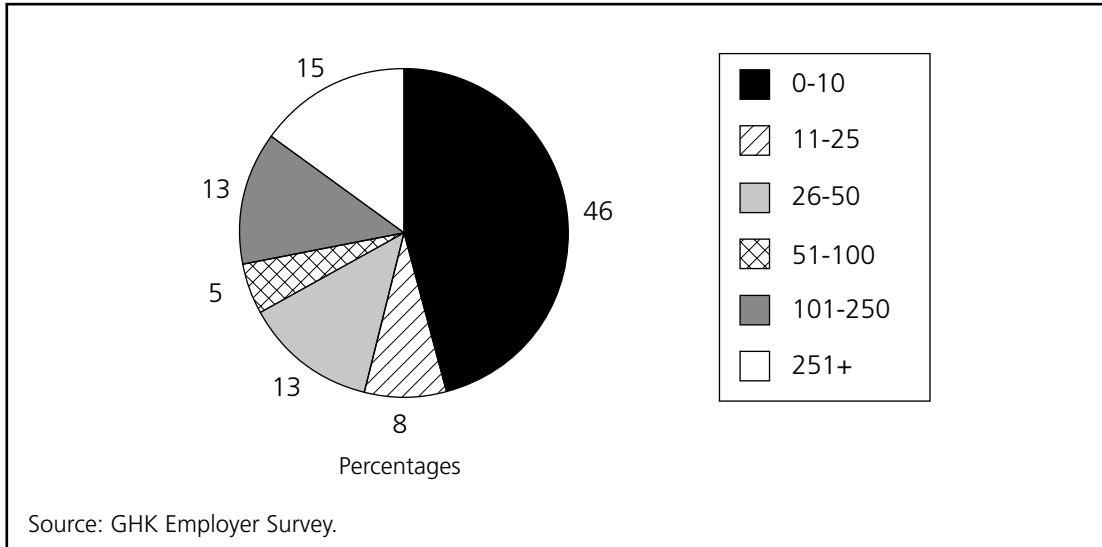


Figure 2.3 Learner occupations

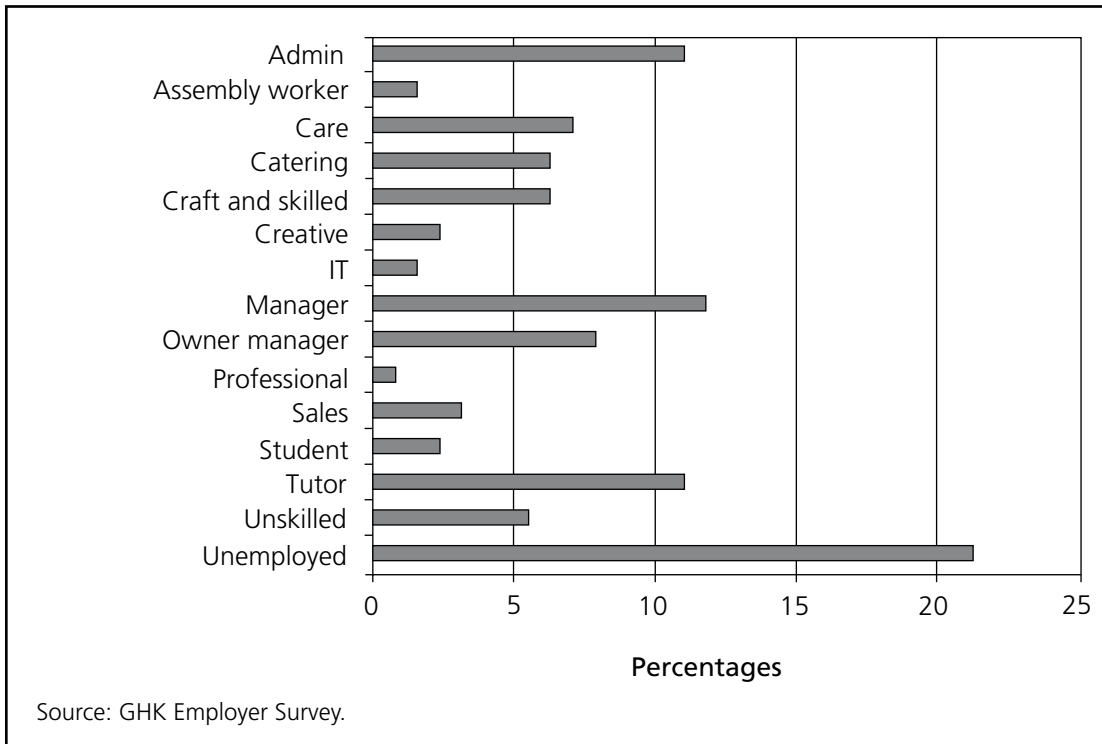
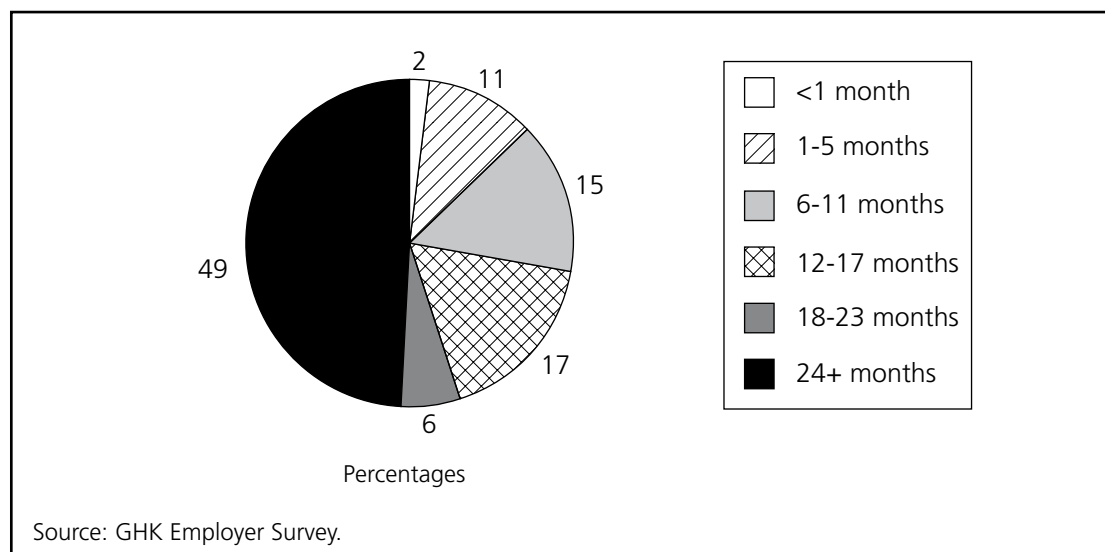


Figure 2.3 shows that the largest category of learner respondents were unemployed, most of whom were participants of Response to Redundancy programmes. The next largest occupation categories were managers, administration workers and tutors. Again these findings are consistent with the ESF cohort survey where 22 per cent of Priority 2 participants were unemployed.

Figure 2.4 shows that almost half of learners had been at their current workplace for more than two years. Less than one third of learners had been working for the employer for less than one year, with around one in ten having been there for less than six months. The ESF cohort survey found that one third of respondents had been at their employer for less than one year, 44 per cent for one-five years and 21 per cent for more than five years, so there is again a similarity with this study's respondents.

Figure 2.4 Length of time at current employers



The demographic profile of learner respondents were:

- half of learner respondents were female;
- 55 per cent worked full time, 22 per cent part time and 15 per cent were unemployed⁸;
- 32 per cent were aged under 30, 48 per cent 30-50 years old, and 20 per cent were aged over 50;
- seven per cent had a disability; and
- 13 per cent were of ethnic minority origin.

This profile of respondents is similar to that of the cohort survey except that there were more ethnic minority respondents than in the cohort survey.

⁸ All but one unemployed person was on a Response to Redundancy programme.

3 Delivery models

3.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of provision for each stage of the participant journey for employers, employees and other participants, from initial engagement to progression and aftercare.

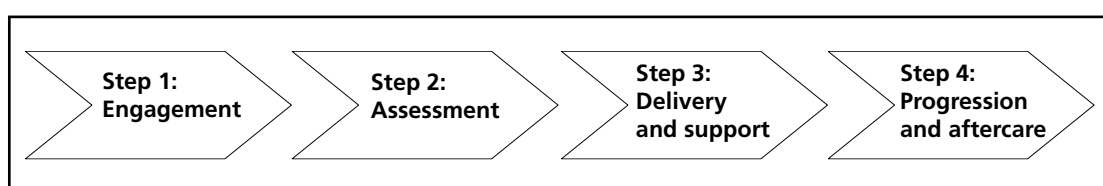
The main findings are:

- Most employer engagement was with existing employers, although business/sector organisations, partner providers and direct marketing techniques were also used.
- Employer engagement was largely based on providers' existing approaches and mostly undertaken by themselves except when expanding into new sectors or areas.
- Most providers were not directly targeting hard to reach employers, although they expected to engage with them as a result of their normal activities.
- Most employees/learners were engaged by their employer. Line managers usually selected staff on their eligibility, the costs of the training, and which employees would benefit most.
- Providers delivering Response to Redundancy, Skills for Life and higher education (HE) Priority 5 projects were most likely to engage directly with learners themselves, tending to use other referral agencies, especially Jobcentre Plus.
- The main barriers to engagement were employee time off; perceptions of the relevance and quality of existing provision; and engaging in rural areas (particularly in Cornwall and the South West).
- Most employer and employee/learner respondents said that they had heard about the provision after direct contact from the provider.

- Most employers were positive about the value of training and became engaged in order to address specific skills needs.
- Employers were attracted by the offer of financial support; the relevance and responsiveness of the training; and the experience of the provider.
- The assessment stage was short and straightforward, but a vital stage in making the provision responsive and relevant. It tended to be based on existing, formal processes.
- There were a number of examples of innovative and exemplary provision. However, provision relating to mainstream provision – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Skills for Life, higher-level skills, and Response to Redundancy – was relatively straightforward because it was based on existing delivery models and employers.
- The main barriers to delivery were employee time-off and rurality which providers tried to address by being flexible.
- Providers valued the flexibility, relevance and quality of their provision, links to other provision (e.g. Train to Gain), and partnerships.
- Employers also found the provision to be relevant and responsive to their needs and of high quality resulting in high levels of satisfaction.
- Similarly, learners found the provision tailored to their needs and were also highly satisfied.
- The progression and aftercare element of the participant journey appears to be the least developed. Many providers did not highlight it, and when they did it tended to be ad hoc and informal.
- Most employers had not discussed their future training needs with the provider, but they did expect this discussion to take place.
- Most learners had not had this discussion either, although more worryingly, some had asked for this but not received it.

The case studies allowed each project's delivery approaches to be examined in detail, following a model of the participant journey summarised as Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Stages in the participant journey



The participant journey comprises four distinct steps, namely:

- **Step 1: Engagement** – covering promotional, awareness raising and initial engagement activities with employers and individuals.
- **Step 2: Assessment** – the process followed to assess the specific skills development needs of employers and individuals that have engaged with the projects.
- **Step 3: Delivery and support** – including the delivery of a range of project provision, and the support offered to participants during delivery.
- **Step 4: Progression and aftercare** – covering participants' completion and disengagement from the projects, aftercare services and support available for progression.

Each step was explored with the case study projects, including whether they were following pre-existing or specially developed approaches, and what had been the barriers to, and facilitators of, the different steps.

In parallel with this, both employers and employees, as appropriate for each case study project, were asked about their experiences of the journey, which aspects they found particularly useful, and which elements could be further developed.

3.2 Employer and employee/learner engagement

The first step in the employer and individual participant journey includes the projects' recruitment and engagement activities, which were most commonly found to follow providers' existing procedures and processes.

3.2.1 Employer engagement activities

Virtually all providers are mature organisations with well developed employer engagement functions. The main employer engagement activities were:

- **Recruiting employers with existing relationships with the provider** – for example, through other training and services that the providers had delivered. Most providers (about one quarter) engaged employers through this method. Where employers had worked with the provider before they often wanted their employees to progress into other provision, such as higher-level management training at Level 3 and 4, or to use European Social Fund (ESF) provision to deliver to employees who are not eligible for other funding (e.g. second level 2s).
- **Sector organisations** – around one in five providers used sector organisations to recruit employers. The sector organisations were mostly Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), but other sector representative organisations were also used.
- **Marketing through business organisations** – including Business Link, Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses.

- **Cold calling** – again about one in five providers described directly telephoning or sending marketing materials through to employers.
- **Utilising partner training providers** – either providers who were formally involved in the delivery partnership or wider, formal and informal provider links (for example, between the Priority 5 HE projects in Cornwall).
- **Attending networking events** – there are a number of provider, sector and employer events which providers attend.
- **Using generic employer engagement functions** – with some, mainly larger, providers having a business liaison unit which promoted the provider and their offer. This approach often included identifying the learning and skills needs of the client organisation, and offering solutions from a wide portfolio including Train to Gain, apprenticeships, as well as full cost provision. This approach was also followed by the Priority 5 HE projects, one of which featured college Business Development Managers undertaking business health checks to target provision and assess fitness to participate.
- **Marketing through various media, including newspapers, radio and the internet** – primarily to promote their projects, although one Priority 5 project described identifying graduate placement opportunities by reviewing job adverts in the local press to identify employers they had not engaged with before.
- **Word of mouth.**

Some providers actively researched their market before contacting employers:

'The lead partner's employer engagement activities have a number of levels. They begin with a marketing team that researches the particular campaign they are running. In this case, they will speak to the SSCs of the sectors the tender specifies so as to gain an understanding of the businesses they will be approaching and what their business needs are. The lead partner has a call centre facility and they take over at this point, ringing up and setting up appointments for the brokerage service that [the provider] also manages. This brokerage service consists of five skills brokers, working across the region. They go into the companies that the call centre has 'warmed up' and assess the skills needs of the company. The brokers then pass the information they gather on to the providers.'

Usually providers use a variety of techniques, especially when seeking to recruit employers with specific characteristics (from a particular sector or area).

Case study: Rural land based project – Cornwall

The project aims to provide training and business support to employers in a historically 'hard to reach' sector in Cornwall and an effective and appropriate engagement strategy has been critical to the success of the project.

One of the main project partners, an SSC, has recruited a specialist skills broker for the sector as part of the project. This approach effectively provides the project with an enhanced brokerage service delivered by a specialist skills broker familiar with the needs of the sector and with close links to Train to Gain. This partner leads on engagement activities for the project and ensures a coordinated approach to marketing and engagement across the partnership. The other partners are also involved in marketing the project and engaging with employers, although their involvement is more focused on the delivery of training.

The project has its own website and has also been marketed heavily using publications, events and organisations related to the sector in Cornwall. However, it is the close contact between the broker and the employers that is of paramount importance to engagement in this 'hard to reach' sector. The broker meets 'face to face' with employers to explain and sell the benefits of training in detail and in a way that highlights the benefits for the employer and the learner. This can only really be achieved by a specialist broker that fully understands the industry, its employers and their training needs.

Most of the case study providers were mature organisations, and so were basing their employer engagement activities on existing approaches. Only three providers reported that their employer engagement activities were new:

- One provider took an entirely new approach and started with a 'blank canvass'.
- Two providers changed their engagement approach as their project provision included working in a new sector/market area.

An additional six providers reported that their previous employer engagement approach had been developed further for their project. In one example, a provider stated that their current programme involved new partners; while in others, tasters or additional promotional activities had been introduced specifically for their projects. One provider had had their employer engagement activities audited, and had developed them further to reduce the time between initial contact to signing clients up.

In most cases the providers describe engaging with employers on their own rather than with the assistance of other organisations. This is due to a combination of factors: most projects are not based on partnerships, providers already having well established employer engagement functions, and many employers engaging solely with providers they have worked with in the past. Where other organisations are involved they tended to be other providers in the partnership, chosen because

they cover a particular geographic area or specialism. A few providers mentioned sector organisations (which tended to be part of the partnership) and Union Learning Representatives (ULRs).

Most projects had a sectoral focus and so were targeting employers within certain sectors. Most of these providers were targeting employers within specific sectors, such as care, construction, leisure, marine and aerospace, environmental technology and bioscience, learning providers and the third sector. These sectors were targeted because there was a particular demand for the types of provision (for example, customer care in the retail or hospitality sectors), a lack of demand due to identified barriers (such as the third sector) or because of a generic lack of demand (e.g. for apprenticeship provision).

Most other projects were targeting a number of priority sectors. These were identified as priorities through strategy documents, especially the Regional Economic Strategies or identified as important sectors within a defined geographical area, for example they were large local employers.

Three providers were working with a range of sizes and sectors of employers in their areas, whilst some providers were working with mainly larger employers, smaller small to medium-sized enterprises and start-ups, and unionised and non-unionised businesses depending on the foci of their programme.

Most providers linked with other employer engagement activities outside the specific ESF programme, but one quarter who engaged with employers did not. The main links were with Train to Gain provision either delivered by the provider or with other providers (within the partnership but also outside it).

As discussed above, much ESF provision serves as a progression route into or out of Train to Gain or complements Level 2 provision by funding those ineligible for Train to Gain (i.e. for a second Level 2). One quarter of providers also mentioned the Train to Gain brokerage and a similar proportion Business Link (where the Train to Gain brokerage now sits). One provider said that it was a contractual requirement to develop such links:

'The contract requires the lead partner to inform engaged employers of the contact details of the Regional Train to Gain brokerage service if they have not already accessed the service. The providers we use often have a wider offer than the second Level 2. As a result, they will often build packages of training for employers of which the second Level 2 offer is only one (albeit, normally the main) element. So, for example, alongside NVQ Level 2 courses, companies may purchase IT or health and safety training.'

The other main linkages were with other providers, on an informal partnership basis (such as through providing information, advice and guidance (IAG)).

Very few providers mentioned Jobcentre Plus (outside of those delivering Response to Redundancy projects), sector organisations (including SSCs), and apprenticeships.

Only a minority of the Response to Redundancy programmes were engaging with employers in order to identify vacancies for people who had been made redundant. Where Response to Redundancy providers did engage with employers it tended to be through their broader employer engagement functions, although one provider had developed this aspect of provision through ESF funding. It is a general weakness of programmes supporting people made redundant/at risk of redundancy, that employer links are weak. Where employer engagement is a stated aspect of the project, job outcomes tend to be greater.⁹

Most projects had managed to engage and deliver to the numbers of employers they predicted, so demand has been in line with expectations. Five projects had experienced levels of demand lower than they expected, two of which were Skills for Life projects. Mostly, providers felt that this was due to capacity issues, i.e. getting themselves organised to deliver. However, one provider said that they had identified that demand for their services just wasn't there, and another felt their targets were too challenging. Five projects said that demand was higher than expected, two of these delivered leadership and management training, and two were Train to Gain.

3.2.2 Engaging with hard to reach employers¹⁰

Around 40 per cent of the projects engaging with employers said this included working with hard to reach employers. However, about half of these were not deliberately targeting such employers but were engaging with them as a result of their normal employer engagement activities. Where hard to reach employers were being targeted they accounted for between 75 per cent and 100 per cent of the providers' workload, with the remaining providers estimating that such employers accounted for half or less of their client base. However, a significant minority of the projects were unable to comment as they did not monitor engagement with hard to reach employers – and a small number stated that their delivery targets meant that they were less able to work with hard to reach employers whilst delivering to budget.

There was no single, universal definition of how the providers defined employers as being hard to reach. The most common definitions included employer size (namely micro businesses and business start-ups), their location in rural areas, or their previous lack of/limited investment in training. Other definitions included employers in specific sectors (e.g. land based, care and the third sector), without Investors in People accreditation, or with fewer than half their staff holding recognised qualifications.

⁹ See *An Evaluation of the Employment and Skills Routeway Model in the North West*, GHK for Learning and Skills Council (LSC) North West, forthcoming; *An evaluation of the Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Strategy*, GHK for LSC West Midlands, September 2009.

¹⁰ There was no definition of hard to reach employers employed by the study, instead providers were asked how they defined the term.

Where providers were directly targeting hard to reach employers, most did not take a different approach to their engagement. Where they were treated differently, close contact emerged as the preferred approach:

'The project partners already have close links with the sector and have been able to identify target employers through existing knowledge and business directories. Close contact is then paramount in the engagement of employers, ideally face to face, in order to explain and "sell" the benefits of training to this "hard to reach" sector. Employers in these sectors are typically very traditional and "set in their ways" and are unlikely to have undertaken much training previously. It is therefore vital to explain in detail the benefits to the employer of training. For example, the [one partner] has devised a model to be used with businesses to show how training and IT can assist them in making business decisions, run "what if" scenarios, and help business planning whether the future lies in the core business or diversification, which would raise even more significant training needs.'

3.2.3 Employee/learner engagement activities

As most of the provision explored was in-work training, the majority of providers did not target individual employees and instead accessed them via their employer. Individuals tended to be recruited directly for Response to Redundancy and Skills for Life provision under Priorities 2 and 5, and for the Priority 5 HE projects in Cornwall.

A wide variety of recruitment mechanisms were used to target individual employees, including: local media (newspapers and radio); Jobcentre Plus; word of mouth; partner training providers; networks; other ESF projects; previous contacts; third sector organisations; self referral; learning directories; posters in the workplace; Business Link; and learndirect.

Case study: Ladders for Learning Project – London

Ladder for Learning is using ESF funding from the LDA and its Train to Gain contract to offer a complete package to learners in the construction industry in London. They have found that many construction workers are keen to work towards and achieve a qualification (NVQ) in construction but are often let down by their English language skills. Through ESF the project can provide construction-specific English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Once the learners achieve an ESOL qualification they then seamlessly progress to the NVQ. This 'package' is a key selling point for Eastern European workers, the main target group, for whom a qualification is very important. They are less likely to go on to stand-alone ESOL which does not lead to a vocational qualification.

The project team has established connections with a major contractor and trade unions on site. The major site is the new Westfield shopping mall in Stratford, within the Olympic site, but they also have a presence in other major construction sites across London. Once on site, the team sets up a specific offer for the site and then promotes the project through posters, flyers and eventually through word of mouth. Construction workers are self-employed (they are sub-contractors to major suppliers) and refer themselves on the project. This is why word of mouth is so important for recruiting on a construction site. All assessors are former construction workers so they understand and speak the language of the trade. This has helped the project to establish a good reputation on the site for offering something that is free and on site but also relevant to their day-to-day job.

In addition to delivery on construction sites, the project has partners with Kasa Polish Centre to offer the package to construction workers over the weekend at their location in West London. Kasa promotes the offer through Polish community contacts such as the East European shops in the area. This allows workers not attached to a particular construction site to access the learning. Following the success of working with the Polish community, a new site is currently being set up to provide training to Asian tradesmen on Saturdays in a community hall in Southall, West London. The new offer will also be promoted through community contacts and word of mouth and also established links in the construction and building industries.

As with employer engagement, most of the providers had well established employee engagement activities, with just one describing developing these processes afresh. Three providers described how their employee engagement approach was a combination of new and existing methods, such as engaging with new initiatives (for example the Future Jobs Fund) or developing pilot activities into a full-blown programme.

For the most part providers engaging with employees did so themselves, and where other organisations were involved this tended to be either as part of delivery partnerships or due to the nature of the project – for example Response to Redundancy programmes often involved Jobcentre Plus and Nextstep, while those engaging with specific types of clients worked with the appropriate sector-specific organisations or with third sector organisations.

Given that employees were engaged for the most part through their employer, the way in which staff were selected for training was explored. Based on the experience of the providers, decision making lay with individual line managers, who employed a variety of criteria including eligibility, cost (in terms of funding cover), who would benefit most, employee experience and skill levels, and the employee job role. Where providers were working with smaller employers, all staff (or at least all of those who were eligible) commonly took part in the training – with, for example, projects offering a second Level 2 using ESF to fund part of the intake and Train to Gain funding for those who were eligible.

Elsewhere alternative methods were used to identify employees for participation. Four providers stated that employee selection was done through the Training Needs Analysis/Organisation Needs Analysis (TNA/ONA) discussions between them and the employer, to ensure that the right people were selected. Other providers also described how often the learner is the employer (e.g. those delivering leadership and management training, or working with the self-employed). In addition, one Skills for Life project reported the experience of other projects that while staff were usually engaged through their employer, there were occasions where staff did not want their employer (or their colleagues) to know they had basic skills issues and would contact the project directly.

In some cases providers were targeting specific target groups, or expanding their provision to encompass hard to reach learners. In the East Midlands a Train to Gain project was targeting taxi drivers, and had used local authority registration details to contact this cohort.

The projects most commonly engaging directly with employees were the Response to Redundancy projects (who tended to work with a wide range of individuals) and the Priority 5 HE projects (who engaged with graduates and undergraduates as well as employees). Other projects where individual engagement was more direct included those addressing Skills for Life needs (including ESOL), those targeting migrant workers, and projects focused on graduates. These project types also tended to include employee engagement links outside the ESF programme – with Jobcentre Plus tending to be the main linkage for both Response to Redundancy and Skills for Life, although other training providers, Business Link, learndirect, Nextstep, Connexions, third sector organisations and Sure Start were also cited as providing referrals.

3.2.4 Barriers to, and facilitators of, effective employer and employee engagement

The case study providers identified a range of barriers to engaging with employers and employees, the main ones being:

- **Giving employees time off for training** – this covered a range of provision, and is an issue arising commonly in training-based projects. This also applied to Response to Redundancy programmes, as even though employers are making people redundant they still have orders to fill. The recession was considered to be having a wider effect here, as employers are devoting as many resources as possible to producing their goods and services and time off for training is currently seen as a luxury.

Providers were seeking to address this barrier by delivering flexibly (on site, in the evenings, at weekends etc.), and delivering in as efficient a way as possible. For example, one provider delivering management training to micro businesses based the project on a real business problem identified by the Managing Director so learners were working at addressing a real business need.

- **Existing perceptions of provision** – here seven providers considered that overcoming employer's perceptions of provision was a key issue, either resulting from a previous negative experience or as more of a general perception. For example, providers mentioned:
 - the poor reputation of NVQs – *'Employers just see NVQs as a badge with no actual training'*;
 - apprenticeships being perceived as a programme for young people; and
 - perceptions over the quality of free training – following the argument that 'you can't get something for nothing'.

Providers were seeking to address this barrier by: selling the positive benefits of the training, taking people through an NVQ unit by unit and showing a completed portfolio, and using other training (e.g. food hygiene and other training to meet legislative requirements) as a carrot for the training.

- **Partnership referrals** – a number of providers stated that the number of referrals from their main referral agencies (Jobcentre Plus, Train to Gain brokers, the LSC (for apprenticeships) and others), or their partner providers, were not forthcoming at the levels initially expected. This meant they had to turn to other partners or increase their existing activities to generate the number of starts. Some providers believe that there is an issue over the capacity of Jobcentre Plus advisers and other referral agents to keep abreast of the range of initiatives within the Integrated Employment and Skills agenda, which provider is delivering which programme, and which provider has which specialism within a particular programme.
- **Engaging with other training providers** – for example where changes took place in partnership arrangements between bid development and the award of contract, which could be further compounded by contracting delays. As we have seen, partner providers were often used to broaden the spread of provision into wider geographic areas, sectors or types of employers. A number of instances were identified where providers had to withdraw from partnerships, for example having been awarded other contracts and not having the capacity to deliver both.
- **Language barriers** – for both employers and employees. Some projects were deliberately focusing on particular groups of learners with English language needs, or engaging with such employers and employees due to the sectors or geographic areas they were working in. Again flexibility was a key to addressing this barrier (for example having translators or bilingual staff) and developing relationships with both employers and employees. Some providers would link-in ESOL provision to try and sell their main provision.
- **Engaging with employers in rural areas** – identified as an issue in Cornwall and the South West, and relating to the relatively high unit costs of delivering to employers in isolated areas and the breadth of provision available. For example:

'Some courses are difficult to deliver other than NVQs. It has been difficult to provide non-NVQ training which, for example, is delivered over a term in sessions as it is costly to bring in staff, due to the economy of scale/cost effectiveness required to deliver courses in a remote area. It is also difficult to provide courses in a intensive week as employers are unable to allow staff to have the time off.'

Providers attempted to address this by having group training to increase the economies of scale, although this could run counter to the delivery of tailored provision.

- **Paperwork** – some providers mentioned paperwork as a barrier. This was a combination of ESF requirements, their interpretation by Co-funding Organisations (CFOs) and the systems CFOs had developed to collect information. It covered a range of issues including getting the right person to complete/sign documents (e.g. someone at Head Office), some employers refusing to sign ESF de minimis forms¹¹, and conflicts with training aid rules. Other providers mentioned other bureaucratic barriers, such as eligibility requirements, and the complexities of delivering specific types of provision.

A number of other barriers were mentioned by a couple of providers each: the stigma attached to Skills for Life; employers struggling to pay their 40 per cent contribution (a particular issue for third sector organisations); and employers not seeing the benefits of training.

In some cases providers had to overcome several barriers – as illustrated below:

'Some of the allocations we were given by the LSC did not help, we felt the control was taken off us. For example, we were unable to work with some of our providers as they were delivering under other contracts. We also were not able to provide Level 1 provision, which was often an entry point for many people into the sector. We were also given allocations by specific sector, but some of these were small organisations and difficult to engage with.'

Some larger [engagement] organisations did not want to be involved as they had to fill out forms like the de minimis exception for all of the employers they covered because they found it very time consuming for a £200 bursary (the value of the course ranges from £480 to £1,800).

[However] the LSC have been very supportive and we have worked with them to overcome many of the barriers

We have also worked with larger organisations to support the sign up of learners, we have even offered to pay the salary of a person there to record the paperwork.'

¹¹ The de minimis ruling excludes enterprises from receiving €100,000 or more aid (any public resources including ESF) over a three-year rolling period.

Surprisingly only two providers mentioned the recession as a barrier to employer engagement.

The Priority 5 HE projects actively engaging with employers and individuals also described a series of challenges, many of which were common with the Priority 2 projects. Additional challenges reported included:

- **College resource constraints** – including having the right staff to deliver to a business audience, and ensuring appropriate staff can fit more flexible ‘employer driven’ provision into existing timetables.
- **Higher-level skills training can be a difficult sell** – for a variety of reasons, including the current economic climate which makes employers and individuals more introspective, optimistic initial assessments of demand, and the challenges of selling ‘higher-level skills’ to individuals and organisations with limited experience of the benefits of training at any level.
- **Employer demands** – with comments being made that employers are a particularly challenging group to satisfy, whose requirements are for highly flexible provision at minimum costs. However, several consultees also considered that this was part of the ‘cultural change’ process that colleges had to go through to work effectively with employers.

Steps taken to negotiate these challenges included:

- Working with employers where relationships already exist – which, while more efficient than generating new contacts and demand, rather limits the options for adding value and changing perceptions amongst harder to reach groups.
- Engaging and recruiting on a cross-referral basis between similar Priority 5 projects and colleges in the county – this was considered to be a key strength across the Priority 5 projects.
- Offering increasingly flexible and personalised delivery options – in terms of the timing and frequency of delivery, location of provision on employer or college sites, etc. Similarly, the provision of bite-sized provision was also helpful – although care must be taken that such provision is not seen as purely a shortened version of a longer course, with limited value as a standalone item.
- Offering employers the opportunity to participate in employee training – offered by one project and proving to be successful.

There were a number of elements of providers’ engagement activities which were working well, and considered to be **facilitators of effective engagement**, namely:

- Most providers identified developing **personal relationships** with employers as a key factor. As many delivered to employers who they already knew and had worked with before, they had an existing relationship and so were preferred suppliers. Other providers had, or used organisations which had, well developed sector links or community-based provision (for engaging with employees) – which meant that providers were either well known and/or had a better understanding of the needs of employers or employees.

Where providers had no specific track record, they most commonly worked through other organisations with good reputations (e.g. sector representatives and organisations, employing sector specialists, use of subcontracted providers or Business Link), built on other provision delivered, and developed different employer engagement activities for different markets. For example, one provider used two 'engagement' teams – one with a business development focus who worked with 'warm' contacts, and another with more of a sales focus who undertook 'cold calling'.

The development of **personalised approaches** allowed the providers to better understand the needs of the business or employee clients, and so offer the most appropriate response tailored to the specific business or individual:

'Having a specialist broker for the sector has worked very well. The face-to-face approach from a specialist, locally-based resource has been key to helping employers understand the project and the various processes. The broker suggested that once face to face with employers, virtually all will engage with the project because it is so flexible and can adapt to different needs. Employers have also reported being confused by the different programmes and sources of funding and have really valued having a friendly face and a dedicated resource to explain what is appropriate for their needs.'

- **Flexibility** – several providers spoke about the flexibility of their engagement activities (for example, different approaches for different markets), particularly when engaging with employees where the employer can be a barrier to engagement. One described, for example, using learndirect centres to target a different group of individuals in addition to working through employers. However, most providers spoke about the flexibility of their whole approach, especially delivery – with employer engagement being a means to an end, and that if provision wasn't flexible then the employer would be less likely to be interested. Consequently providers were developing offers which was delivered at the right time, on site and shaped around working commitments. One provider said that ESF increases their flexibility as it can enhance other provision, especially Train to Gain, by removing the constraints around Train to Gain eligibility and allowing employees within the same shift to benefit from the training. ESF also enables providers to develop and deliver a whole package of provision – with one describing being able to offer a portfolio of provision where ESF filled the gaps to allow them to offer a whole package of provision to employers.
- **Offering responsive and relevant provision** – again, while not directly related to employer engagement, this stage was critical in identifying need and developing responsive provision. Central to this was the ability to demonstrate the business benefits for the employer, with many projects using case studies of previous employer benefits. Other providers wrapped provision around business problems or work practices, with a number developing sector-specific and relevant provision, whilst others used sector specialists, as they understood business needs. One provider ensured that their sales team was trained in the aims and objectives of the different programmes, whilst another felt it is also about *'being honest about what you can't provide'*. But selling the business benefits was the main element:

'The best employer engagement is where employers are satisfied with the training being offered and delivered, and where training is free or heavily subsidised. In the transport and logistics sector the cost of releasing an employee for training is very high. Therefore we ensure that the offer is very flexible and take a "24/7" approach to training. We do training on the job and ensure that training complements employees' duties. This really helps improve links with employers and makes them tell others about the positive benefits of training. Moreover, what really helps engage employers is when they are told how training can improve their bottom line. For example, by training employees on how to drive a truck more efficiently this can help companies save over 30 per cent in the cost of fuel.'

- **Developing and enhancing relationships with referral agencies** – although most providers engaged with employers solely by themselves, developing links with referral agencies was also an important element of their work. Providers mentioned ULRs, Business Link, Train to Gain brokers, Jobcentre Plus, external verifiers and other providers. In one case a Priority 5 HE project described how they had moved away from promoting their service to individual employers to engaging with organisations representing businesses and business networks, which had provided a richer source of referrals. An important element is ensuring the referral agencies know which providers offer which programmes and, if possible, any specialisms providers offer. However, this can work both ways and some providers highlighted the fact that ESF is a good source of referral on to other provision and providers as well.

A small number of providers also identified the importance of:

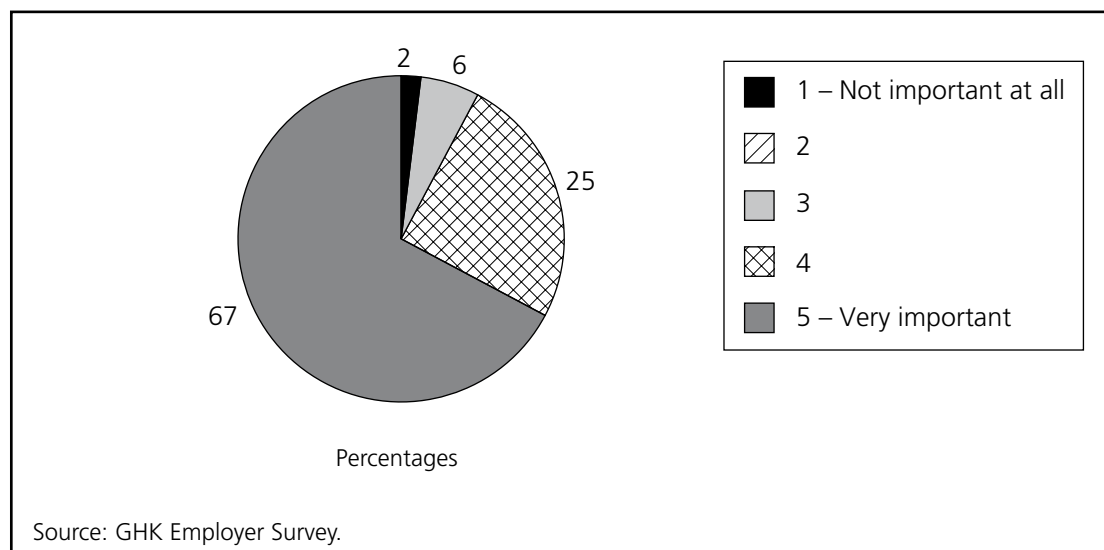
- developing holistic packages of provision, for example embedding Skills for Life in other provision;
- offering a 'hook' and progression routes into and out of ESF-funded provision, with one provider offering bite-sized courses which were quick-fire ways of demonstrating the benefits of the training;
- monitoring their activities to show what was working and what wasn't;
- ensuring a speedy response from initial to first meaningful contact;
- showing an appreciation of the business environment – as one Priority 5 project described, *'We talk the language of business and endeavour to speak back to academia – the success of our business engagement is we understand where they are coming from as we all have a significant business background.'*

3.2.5 Employer and employee/learner experience of the engagement process

The employers interviewed most commonly became aware of their projects following direct contact from the provider (44 per cent), with 38 per cent describing working with the same provider previously. Six employers heard about the provision through word of mouth, with a similar number finding their project via the internet. Other sources mentioned by the employers included individual learners bringing it to their attention, trade bodies (including SSCs), ULRs and skills brokers.

The majority of the employers had a positive view of training, either before or following their project experience. Figure 3.2 shows that when asked to rank the importance of training to their company, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was not very important and 5 was important, more than 90 per cent gave a rank of 4 or 5, with two thirds saying that training was very important. Only two per cent of employers gave a rank below 3.

Figure 3.2 The importance of training to employers



Just under half (45 per cent) had individual training and development plans for their employees, which in most cases covered between 76 per cent and 100 per cent of their staff.

For the most part they engaged with their project to address a particular skills need, although this ranged from general (e.g. apprenticeship training) to the specific (such as CAD training) requirements. Skills for Life, ESOL training and management skills were the most common foci of activity amongst the case study employers – although others were motivated by a broader desire to use training to improve employee, and so business, performance. About one in five of the employers had no specific requirements at the outset, although they and others

appreciated the business benefits of training and wanted to take the opportunity to up-skill their staff. In two cases the employers reported how, contrary to experiences elsewhere, the recession had given them the opportunity to up-skill their staff during quiet periods.

Employers chose their projects, and the particular provider, for four main reasons:

- Financial assistance with the costs of training – most (33 per cent) employers chose the particular provision because it was either free or subsidised.
- Relevance – about one in five employers stated that what the projects/providers offered would directly meet their needs.
- Flexibility – one in five employers also mentioned the flexibility of the provision offered, especially regarding delivering on site and at times convenient for them and the learners.
- Previous experience of the provider – again one in five described how positive previous experiences of the provider meant that they were happy to use them again.

Finally one in ten employers described choosing their provision because it was the only option available to them, while just under one in ten had used the provision following a recommendation.

The **employees** interviewed most commonly heard about the training from their employer (about one third), and where selected by their employer to participate, about one in five said that the training was compulsory. For the most part the employees had either already been identified as being likely to benefit most from any training, or participated following discussions with the provider.

Just under one third of employees interviewed reported hearing about the training directly from the provider, either through direct contact (such as an email), as they had received/were still receiving training from the provider, or from an event organised by the provider (such as open days, outreach activity, etc). Just over one in ten employees had heard about the training through word of mouth, usually from a work colleague or a friend, while others also mentioned finding out about the training themselves – from the internet or requesting prospectuses; or through Business Link (for management training), the local paper and from a ULR or trade union.

The nature of the project activity and their specific target groups also influenced the ways in which employees and other individual participants engaged with them. For example, individuals involved in Response to Redundancy programmes mentioned Jobcentre Plus, and other IAG organisations such as Nextstep as awareness raising and referral routes. Similarly the Convergence Priority 5 case studies, when engaging individuals, also followed different recruitment routes, with reference being made to awareness raising through business and other network contacts, as well as through media promotion and cold calling.

3.3 Assessment of need

Whilst the assessment step of the employer and employee journey is usually a short one, it is essential to the whole delivery process as it involves understanding clients' needs and how the provider can best respond to them.

3.3.1 Employer assessment

All providers who engaged with employers had a formal TNA\ONA process. For the most part assessments were undertaken by the provider or the lead partner in the project, although other approaches were followed including contracting the assessment process out. In some cases assessment was undertaken by an independent skills broker, the tutor or the business engagement function of the provider – in others it was a two-stage process with, say, a skills broker undertaking a more general needs analysis (e.g. to determine eligibility and appropriateness) followed by a tutor undertaking a more specific assessment:

'The needs assessment process is delivered by matrix-accredited advisers within whichever partner organisation was responsible for the initial engagement. In the majority of cases, the skills broker is the first person the employer meets and they will discuss the background to the business and how the project could help provide training and/or business support. A training needs analysis is undertaken as part of this discussion before potential learners are identified, although the employer will sometimes be referred to other provision at this stage.'

Providers were keen to stress that the assessment process was not a sterile exercise but involved close discussions with employers to ensure they would get the best from the provision, and was often seen as part of developing or further enhancing their relationship with the employer.

For the large majority of providers the assessment process was based on tried and trusted procedures, with discussions with employers ensuring that it was flexible and tailored to their needs:

'The process is a mixture of existing and new elements. We use the standard college enrolment form, and the ILP [Individual Learning Plan]/IAG documentation is based on existing college documents for NVQ provision, although it has been shortened and adopted for use with the short courses that the project delivers. With larger framework training (e.g. NVQs) the assessment process will be more formal, e.g. looking at learner writing skills. However, in the case of shorter courses we do not use the full literacy assessment. The close working relationship that is established with employers through this project means that the tutors can apply a more flexible approach depending on the nature of the course and the learner. Hence, if a more formal assessment is required this will be performed, otherwise not as it could be seen as inappropriate and too time consuming and turn people off. In addition to these documents the ESF eligibility check list is used, which wouldn't normally apply to college provision.'

Providers tend to follow the same processes for all employers, although in some cases the approach could vary depending on the size of the employer (with a more general assessment covering a broader area) or their degree of specialism.

Case study: The Caleb Project – Yorkshire and the Humber

The Caleb Project works with small, third sector organisations to develop individuals within the organisation, and help organisations to promote themselves in their own markets.

The provider works closely with the organisation, often at director level as the organisations involved tend to be micro businesses. An assessment process, which begins with a formal TNA, is followed to allow individual need to be identified.

Following the assessment a 'statement of expectations' is prepared, which sets out what the client organisation expects to gain as a result of the provision. The provider offers non-accredited provision, and so it is important to create realistic expectations and outputs that are transparent and measurable for the client. Each stage in the 'client journey' is reviewed in terms of progress and against the expectations set. Each stage of provision is linked to a real business problem identified in the TNA, which is work through with the client.

One Priority 5 HE project in Cornwall also described undertaking business health checks with the employers offering graduate placements, as summarised below.

Case study: The Graduate Placement Programme – Cornwall

As part of the process of developing placement opportunities, this project features the assessment of employers to assess their ability to grow, and where a placement can best meet their development ambitions. The assessments take a holistic view of the business, and are delivered by college business development managers.

This process ensures that the projects developed for graduates to undertake during their placements fit with employer needs. However, if a business is felt to be struggling a placement is not offered, and they are instead referred to relevant business support provision.

The results of the assessment are then put to a panel, which decides which projects go ahead and sets the level of subsidy offered (if any).

3.3.2 Employee/learner assessment

The employee assessment process was very similar to employer assessment, being based on existing and formal processes undertaken by experienced providers used to delivering NVQs, work-based learning and Skills for Life provision. Again, providers, or the lead partner provider, most commonly undertook the assessments themselves, although Train to Gain skills brokers were also used. In two cases ULRs provided the assessment, and in one case the assessment was subcontracted to a specialist Skills for Life agency.

The large majority of providers used formal diagnostic tools, mostly to identify Skills for Life needs but also employability skills and the suitability of particular programmes:

'Assessment of learners' needs is carried out by providers hired by us to deliver the learning. As such, there are a number of different approaches. Generally, initial assessment begins with a phone call to the learner which aims to understand their learning needs and current job role. Courses begin with an initial assessment day which ensures that learners are up to the required level for the course. If not we offer a refresher course to get them up to the right level.'

Providers stressed the need for sensitivity, especially in working with learners who may not have been involved in learning since school or were suspected of having basic skills deficiencies. This sometimes meant that formal tools were completed 'informally' through face-to-face discussions with learners.

Some assessments could last for a few days if they involved induction, health and safety, the use of diagnostic tools and developing ILPs – with a large number of providers mentioning the development of ILPs as an integral part of the assessment process. Other assessments were part of a two-stage process, with a general suitability and eligibility assessment followed by a more specific and detailed assessment.

3.3.3 Barriers to, and facilitators of, employer and employee assessment

Most providers had not experienced any difficulties with the assessment of employers or employees as this was a well established and practised activity. A small number identified barriers in assessing **employers**, although these largely revolved around paperwork and eligibility criteria and did not appear to be major issues.

Of greater concern were the barriers facing **employees**. Five providers felt that the paperwork was a potentially significant barrier to involving individuals in provision (see above), especially those with Skills for Life needs:

'This project is about finding the best ways of delivering Skills for Life to overcome barriers to learning and generally make it more attractive to learners, but the significant amount of paperwork can be the most overwhelming and off-putting aspect, particularly for those with a literacy skills need. The registration paperwork is the greatest barrier to Skills for Life learning we've ever seen!'

Providers were addressing this barrier through hand holding learners through the process, spreading out the assessments, and explaining why learners need to complete the forms.

Another barrier was language, especially for projects working with migrant workers. Whilst providers used translators and bilingual advisers, sometimes the range of languages is so wide that this is not a viable option.

The majority of providers considered that their **employer and employee assessment** approaches were working well overall, with a minority identifying a series of specific strengths including the quality of the diagnostic tools used, the flexibility of the assessment process and the clarity of links into the training programme. Three providers mentioned the importance of partnership working, mostly through links with Train to Gain and skills brokers. Another three providers mentioned developing relationships with employers as key to both understanding their needs and helping them understand the assessment process and the importance of information gathering.

As far as specific elements to assessing **employees** were concerned, five providers mentioned the links between the assessment stage and the learning programme, most commonly manifested in the ILP. One provider emphasised the importance of establishing the individual's learning style and motivation for attending the course at an early stage, so the provision could be shaped accordingly. Other specific elements which worked well (mentioned by three providers) were: partnership working (e.g. quality assuring the assessment processes and links to and from Train to Gain and Business Link); working sensitively with learners and hand holding them through the process; and tailoring the assessment processes to different learners. One project was trialling two different approaches to assess which was most effective:

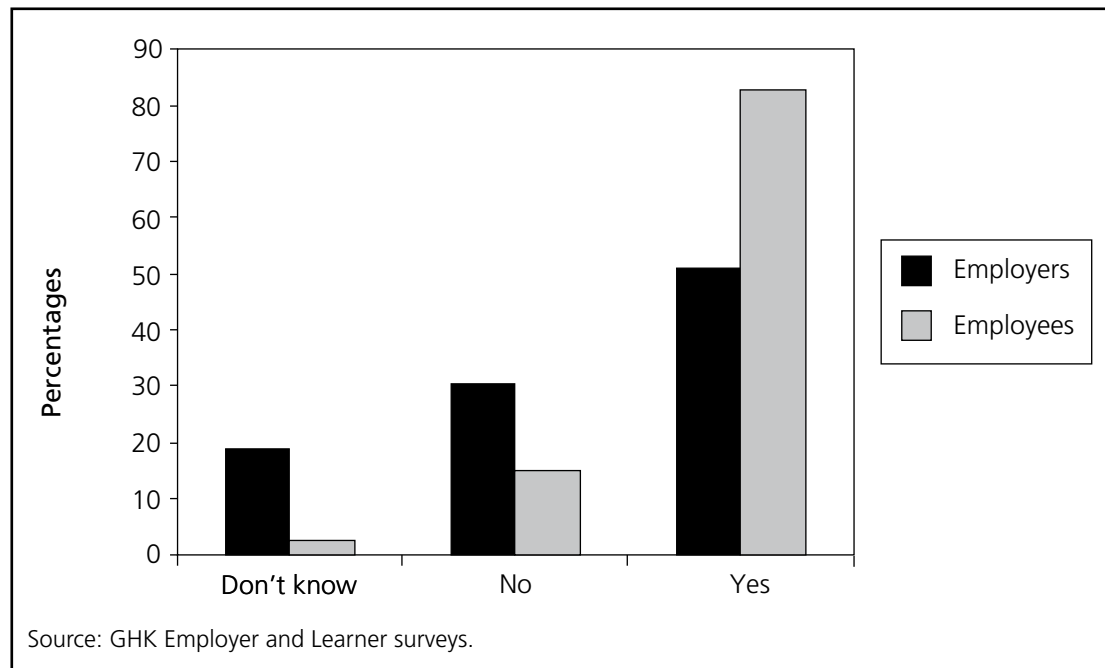
'Both approaches complete the assessment [of skills level and establish what sector participants are interested in training] and relevant paperwork. One group complete the assessment one week before and the other on the day. We are trying to understand which approach is more effective – for example is doing the assessment on the same day as starting the programme too overwhelming, or does this get them into provision straight away that will enable them to complete the programme and get a job?'

3.3.4 Employer and employee/learner experiences of the assessment process

Just over half of the employers interviewed (51 per cent) reported that the provider (or an agent acting on their behalf) identified their business or training needs before the training took place (see Figure 3.3). However 30 per cent stated that no assessment took place, with the remainder not recalling an assessment process. However, business or training needs assessments may not have taken place because their needs may have already been articulated. For example, one employer stated: *'This was not required as we have an active training and learning function, and had already assessed the training needs of the organisation, although this was*

discussed with the provider too. In addition, as described previously, 38 per cent of the case study employers had used their training provider before, so it is also likely that the providers had already assessed their needs in the past.

Figure 3.3 Whether employers and learners received an assessment



Where an assessment had taken place, and the employer could recall the process, the majority (two thirds) were satisfied with both the process and the outcome and could not think of anything that could have done differently as part of the assessment stage. While one quarter of employers suggested slight changes to the assessment process, a minority (two employers who were not happy with the provider's understanding of their needs) would have preferred the process to have been more rigorous. Less than a third (32 per cent) of employers said that an action plan was agreed with them, with 36 per cent saying 'no' and the remainder being unsure.

Finally, a handful of employers made reference to what they perceived as excessive paperwork associated with signing up for the training, and specific issues such as changes in the personnel they were dealing with during the process.

Eight out of ten of the **employees and other learners** interviewed described being questioned on what they wanted to get out of the training or what they wanted to do (see Figure 3.3). Just 15 per cent described not being consulted – split equally with one third being told this is what they will be doing, one third considering the provision inappropriate, and one third claiming that they told the provider what they wanted to do!

Overall, more than nine out of ten learners (92 per cent) described being satisfied with the overall assessment process, with three quarters stating there was nothing about the process they would change. Where changes were suggested they included making more detailed information about the course available at the outset (with some learners describing that the course level was too low for them) and shortening application forms and collecting only information that was needed.

While 32 per cent of employers described having an action plan agreed with them, this was higher for learners with just over two thirds (69 per cent) stating that their provider agreed a plan or goals with them. For some learners the short duration of the course meant that an action plan was not completed, while others felt that heavily structured courses did not need accompanying action planning.

3.4 Programme delivery and support

This step includes the delivery of project provision and services to participants, the support available to them during delivery and the ways in which delivery is monitored.

3.4.1 Delivery activities

Six types of provision were identified across the case study projects:

- **NVQs** – 12 providers were delivering NVQs, half to participants who were not eligible to be Train to Gain candidates (e.g. second Level 2s, or Levels 1, 3 and 4). Most providers were delivering in specific sectors or occupations – such as leadership and management, care, customer care, third sector, leisure, marine and aerospace. However, a number were delivering across a broad range of sectors and occupations. Delivery was typical NVQ, provided on a one-to-one basis, with the assessor supporting the learner in the workplace, and assessment by discussion, observation and portfolio building. Those delivering leadership and management often made the provision more relevant by basing project work on a specific problem identified with the employer. However, as provision tended to be one to one (with occasional group sessions) and delivered in the workplace, it tended to be highly tailored to the employers' and learners' needs. All of the provision was delivered by the providers themselves. Support for progression was mentioned by a minority of providers, and tended to occur where the provider offered the next Level qualification. Only one provider mentioned offering learner support, and this was a bursary to help with the costs of the training.

One provider offered a 'hook' programme (two, two-day programmes) which served two purposes: first to help engage with sceptical learners, and second to help them to progress to the most appropriate NVQ.

- **Response to Redundancy** – eight case study projects delivered provision to redundant people or people at risk of redundancy, two of which were led by Trades Unions. This provision tended to be delivered at the provider's learning centre(s) and on a group basis (although there was potential for one-to-one work within a group setting). The number of venues depended on the geographical coverage of the provider and levels of demand, so where demand was high providers could often develop and deliver additional provision in that area. Provision tended to be structured around the four elements of: induction/initial assessment; employability skills; Skills for Life; and vocational provision. The vocational element varied from offering work placements; license to operate qualifications or 'cards' (such as the Construction Skills Certification Scheme for construction and Security Industry Authority (SIA) for security), and accredited and non-accredited units to full NVQs. One provider noted that an advantage of ESF funding is that you can offer a wider choice of qualifications than with mainstream funding.

Most providers delivered the provision themselves, although some used subcontractors to broaden their geographic coverage. One provider worked as a 'Managing Agent', being responsible for engaging with and initially assessing individuals, with provision being delivered by a network of providers serving the whole region.

Whilst most providers were delivering a standard structure of provision, some providers were adding value to the provision by:

- involving employers in the design and delivery of provision, for example:

'Employer support comes at different stages of the programme. Firstly, throughout the programme different employers' help contribute towards the employability skills element of the programme. For example, employers will give talks about recruitment, their sectors, what skills they expect from employees. They also have done tours of their workplaces to let people see the kind of work they can be expected to undertake. Secondly, the programme tries to engage with all employers that participants enter into employment with. This is to encourage both the employee and the employer to undertake a higher level NVQ through Train to Gain.'

A minority of Response to Redundancy providers also engaged with employers to generate job vacancies and job interviews.

- providing aftercare support:

'At completion of training provision, if the individual has not gained work, they will be tracked for 26 weeks to identify subsequent outcomes. Individuals securing work will receive structured in-work support for up to 13 weeks which involves in-work support/career progression detailed in the ILP. We will promote Train to Gain, secure placements through partners and track their progress through to Train to Gain completion.'

- offering further training if people do not get a job.
- providing learner support, for example financial help with travel expenses where necessary, mentoring and direct support, and help for additional learning needs.

An unusual project was the CRUNCH (Countering Recession Through Union Networking, Co-operation and Help) in Cornwall, as summarised below.

Case study: The CRUNCH Project – Cornwall

The project seeks to provide support for people at risk of redundancy, or recently made redundant, by raising awareness and capacity to offer support amongst ULRs. The project rationale is that trade union representatives are well placed to help mitigate the effects of redundancy, and may be amongst the first to be informed when redundancy plans are announced.

The project comprises the provision of training and information to Union Learning Organisations (ULOs) and ULRs, delivered mainly as half-day sessions, although shorter sessions can and have been delivered where appropriate. The sessions comprise a series of common elements – including raising awareness of the issues associated with redundancy for employees and their families (financial and psychological impacts), and providing information on the services that may be available locally (such as re-training/skills development, employability skills support, etc).

The training sessions are also attended by different partners (Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureaux etc) who provide information on the services they offer and how to contact/engage with them.

- **Holistic support** – five projects were offering a range of support depending on identified needs, including working with employers on a geographic or sectoral basis (all of them in Cornwall) or developing learning advocates in the workplace. The projects with a sector or geographic focus included the development of sector-relevant qualifications and accredited provision from Skills for Life/ESOL to Level 4. Providers also offered business support. Delivery took place through a variety of mechanisms, including blended learning, one to one, learning centre based, specific workshops, distance learning and providing specialist equipment. Whilst ESF provided support for single qualifications, one provider delivered more than one and either charged the employer for the additional qualification (e.g. a Level 3) or offered the extra qualification as 'added value'. One project focused delivery of a range of provision on the geographically remote Scilly Isles.

Case study: The Progressive Isles project - Cornwall

The main objective of this project is to 'up-skill the community'. The Scilly Isles pose specific challenges for service delivery, including their remoteness, the distribution of population across the islands and the absence of an established training infrastructure. While the islands have many highly qualified residents who locate there to run businesses or for quality of life reasons, training rates are traditionally low.

The project targets employed residents on the islands aged 16 or more, and with basic skills needs or who do not possess relevant Level 2 and 3 qualifications. There is an emphasis on providing a fully inclusive programme, with priority being given to members of the workforce with learning disabilities and health conditions, those aged 50+, ethnic minorities, females in non-traditional roles, lone parents and those with mental health issues. Targeting these groups is intended to promote sustainable employment and social inclusion, and building a strong and inclusive community.

The project enables NVQs to be funded which cannot be funded under Train to Gain, as well as providing support with transport and accommodation for tutors to deliver on the islands, or for learners to go to the mainland to undertake training if necessary. In some cases the provider may lend learners a laptop. Last year ESOL was delivered on the islands, to serve the migrant workers involved in seasonal horticulture on the islands. Truro College led the ESOL provision, which was designed specifically to be delivered at a distance and included an online component.

Given the close nature of the Islands, a lot of support is given informally to learners – with the provider staff describing how passing people on the street allowed them to enquire how their course was going.

The lead provider also undertakes quality reviews to ensure learners are happy with the provision and monitor where there may be issues. In some cases, it is difficult to follow learners that have completed the training, as many learners leave the Islands at the end of season.

In some cases, learners were allowed to undertake two Level 2 courses, for example a Level 2 in brush cutting and a Level 2 in using a chainsaw, with one being claimed as a qualification and the second as added value.

Some of the project provision, and the administration of the project, takes place at the island's Lifelong Learning Centre. Land-based provision is delivered on the site of the employer, and the ESOL provision was done via distance learning with the exam completed at Tresco Community Centre.

The two advocacy projects involved the development of workplace learning through ULRs and non-union learning representatives. In both cases the advocates are trained in promoting the scheme within the workplace, interviewing people/

undertaking assessments, and identifying relevant provision and learner support funds. The ULR project included ongoing support from a central team, whilst the non-union project included an accredited qualification.

- **Skills for Life and ESOL provision** – four case study projects delivered Skills for Life or ESOL provision, predominantly to migrant workers and delivered mainly in group sessions at the workplace at a convenient time for the individual and employer. However, one provider used learndirect centres to engage with learners whose employers did not want, or the learner did not want their employer, to become involved. One project was targeted at a specific sector (construction) and intended to provide a progression route into NVQ Level 2, as well as including NVQ units in the ESOL provision to enhance progression. Most provision was standalone accredited ESOL and Skills for Life qualifications, but some provision was embedded and non-accredited.

One unique project was the ICE Breakers project in the South West which uses employees as workplace trainers/mentors/coaches:

'Support is provided by partner providers to the ICE Breakers, although the amount provided varies and is not specified, depending on the ICE Breaker's background and experience. Support includes help with materials, advice on how to use materials and how to use the materials. The initial staff member who is selected as the ICE Breaker completes three days training; this includes two days to undertake the City and Guilds 7300 course (Introduction to Trainer Skills), and one day of training to use the ICE materials which have been specifically written for the programme.'

Support is given to the ICE Breaker through the provider, and the provider works with the selected member of staff to identify suitable migrant workers.

ICE Breakers are given a package of materials, to deliver language lessons in the workplace, the materials are sequential and contain lesson plans. In the majority of cases, the ICE Breakers use the materials as they are designed either in a group with migrant workers or on an individual basis.'

- **Higher education provision** – four of the case study projects funded under Priority 5 of the Convergence programme in Cornwall supported the implementation of the Cornwall Higher Education and Skills Strategy. The projects took different approaches to enhancing HE capacity, service provision and target groups. All aiming to increase the level of higher-level skills within the workforce, the projects targeted both existing employees and individual graduates/post-graduates.

The four projects included a graduate placement programme, with a training and mentoring component as well as financial support for employers taking placement students; the provision of post-graduate research funding in sectors of relevance to the local economy; and a project focusing on enhancing the enterprise and entrepreneurial skills of providers and the learners they work with.

The fourth project had the specific aim of promote access to and take-up of HE provision by employers and individuals, and included five strands of activity. These included the development and delivery of modular 'bite-sized' provision, leadership and management training, enterprise and employability provision; and activities to promote the uptake of Level 4 provision within colleges.

- **Other provision** – seven of the projects were difficult to classify due to the specificity of their focus, including one project focusing on converting migrant worker qualifications, two on environmental skills, one on enterprise for graduates, one on developing the skills of Maths tutors, and one on management and marketing training for micro businesses and third sector organisations. The provision varied in duration from single day courses to others lasting nine months, and included a range of delivery mechanisms, accredited and non-accredited provision, progression and post-project support.

Case study: Skills for Technology project – South East

The aim of the project is to provide accredited training for staff in the Aerospace and Marine sectors (both South East England Development Agency priority sectors as they have significant growth potential). This is to support the adoption of new the latest technologies (such as 3D computer aided design (CAD)) to ensure they remain competitive. The provision is targeted towards small and micro businesses that are least likely to support training through their own staff development budgets. A significant proportion of participants are recent apprentices entering the sector.

The project has been led by the employer steering group of the project (which includes BMW and Crown Packaging) and the focus of the provision delivered through the project was developed by the steering groups, the Engineering and Manufacturing group set up by the LSC and the National Skills Academy regional advisory group. It identified that the sector did not want NVQs (which were seen as too big and general) and wanted skills training in particular occupational areas that were seen as cutting edge (such as 3D CAD). This needed to build on existing skills rather than re-teach learners what they already know. For example, most learners will know 2D CAD and therefore the training assumes a general level of competence and moves them from 2D to 3D CAD.

The courses are delivered over one-three days and accredited by EMTA Awards Limited (EAL). It can be delivered consecutively or flexibly. Courses are generally delivered at providers' premises, but where there are sufficient volumes for a particular employer then training is undertaken at the employer's premises. They also have delivery partners share premises where possible to reduce the travel commitments of participants.

The final assessment is through a portfolio although this is not really necessary for a short course.

The final project was one of a suite of Innovation and Transnationality projects supported under the Competitiveness programme, which sought to identify and implement transferable lessons from the German dual training system to the UK context – as summarised below.

Case study: Innovation and Transnationality Project: New Employer Engagement Dual System – Merseyside

The New Employer Engagement Dual System is a multi-partner transnational project led by the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce (LCC) along with partners in Liverpool and Cologne. The project's aim is to learn what elements of good practice in Cologne's 'dual' training system can be replicated in the UK to enhance and improve the current system of training. The dual training system is the process in which the vocational training in Germany is delivered through a partnership approach linking employers, Chambers of Commerce, trade unions and training providers to deliver employer-responsive training and apprenticeships. LCC has engaged a range of partners to ensure that the learning can be put into practice in Liverpool – including Liverpool City Council, Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership and Union Learn North West TUC. Transnational partners include: BZ Koln, Cologne; Berufskolleg Sudstadt, Cologne; Bundesagentur fur Arbeit, Cologne; and Stadt Koln, Cologne.

The main project activity consists of a series of structured meetings between Liverpool and Cologne partners. It is envisaged that Liverpool partners will come together to consider the practice observed in Cologne, and decide what elements can be implemented locally. Each partner is expected to produce reports detailing what they consider to be good practice and what elements they would like to develop, with a view to implementing good practice locally.

Alongside the transnational, good practice sharing, the project is also undertaking a number of discreet tasks to complement the good practice sharing and improve elements of skills provision in the North West. Projects include amalgamating existing data across all partner organisations to create a single database of skills levels of local employers, and help coordinate activity and prevent duplication of information sent to employers. Another activity – conducting skills audits in workplaces using hand-held Personal Digital Assistants, to reduce paperwork – allow skills audits to be discreet and provide data for the central database. A final activity consists of an exchange where 120 Liverpool teachers will shadow their German counterparts to help understand how best to shape their teaching to the needs of local employers.

Continued

Although the project is in the early stages of development, there are already some positive achievements. Local partnership working has improved, and it was recognised that it is unique for the partners, the trade union and Chamber of Commerce, to be working together in such a strategic and coordinated way. Learning and sharing good practice between local and transnational partners provides an opportunity which would not have been possible without ESF funding. The project will hopefully improve employer engagement in the North West region along with enhancing the provision of training in the local area for learners and employers.

3.4.2 Monitoring participant progress

Monitoring progress mostly took place through learner review meetings, which discussed progress against the ILP that was developed when the learner first joined the project. Although the detail of the process differed from provider to provider, the process was essentially the same. For example, a Response to Redundancy provider in the North East described the following processes:

'All learners are given an ILP and goals are identified at the induction stage as well as any skills and learning support needs. Learners' progress is monitored as part of the quality assurance process to ensure that they have completed specified targets and goals. Where goals/actions have not been achieved it is expected that reasons will be logged (i.e. participant received job/declined support etc). At this stage it is not about identifying skills gaps but also identifying skills strengths – this is important to build confidence and ensure that qualifications identified complement existing skills. While participants might not have formal qualifications, because many of them have been made unemployed recently, they do have skills that they can offer and build upon. If Skills for Life needs are identified they are referred to an external provider who can provide this on behalf of the programme. The programme makes a concerted effort to avoid using jargon language – instead of using Skills for Life it promotes it as "improving Maths and English". Participants respond better to this type of language.'

Other providers monitored progress against activities, such as completing workbooks, or by observations of their progress in class. Those delivering short courses did less to measure progress, and concentrated instead on whether the final outcomes of the provision were achieved.

A handful of providers mentioned having formal tracking systems on which learner's progress was logged, with the system alerting the provider to any concerns regarding progress. Two providers also used learner satisfaction surveys.

3.4.3 Barriers to, and facilitators of, effective delivery

Providers were asked to identify any **barriers** to delivering their provision, and if there were any, what steps had they taken to overcome them. Six providers had not experienced any barriers. The main barriers, and means of negotiating them, included:

- **Releasing employees** – 11 providers mentioned employers' not giving employees sufficient time off to attend the training, although there were several aspects to this. On Response to Redundancy programmes, and even though individuals were being made redundant, employers still had orders to deliver which could affect individual release dates. Other providers described the perennial problem of small organisations being unable to give staff time off for training, while larger employers could be reluctant to release large numbers of employees to train, for example alongside Train to Gain provision.

Providers were seeking to address this problem by developing relationships with employers and explaining how the provision can benefit them: by delivering flexibly, e.g. spreading out the provision so it doesn't impact all at once or delivering at appropriate times; and by making the provision relevant to the organisation, for example, by focusing it on real business problems.

- **Delivering in rural areas** – this issue was mentioned by five providers all in Cornwall and the South West, and relates mainly to the economies of scale in delivering provision to small numbers of learners in remote locations. Even if learning can be delivered in informal learning centres, instances were identified where the requirement for health and safety assessments added to the cost of provision.

Providers are addressing this barrier by delivering in central locations (their premises, learning centres or grouping at a central employer's premises), and providing support for travelling.

- There were a number of **miscellaneous barriers** mentioned by one or two providers. These included: ESF paperwork; being able to fund learner support (such as travel and childcare); false expectations of the programmes (redundancy support); covering the range of client languages; recruiting tutors (in the South East and London); delivering at certain times (in the Christmas and summer holidays), and the effects of the recession influencing employers' ability and willingness to participate in training.

Providers were addressing these barriers by delivering flexibly, understanding and developing appropriate mechanisms and processes, redoubling their efforts and going the extra mile.

When asked about the elements of their provision which had **worked well**, there were five main areas:

- **Developing flexible provision** – including: responding to employer requests rapidly, offering one-to-one provision, increasingly delivering in the workplace, delivering at times to suit the learner/employer following roll-on:roll-off delivery models, following blended learning approaches, and providing courses of different durations and at different levels. As one provider described:

'Flexibility through having so many delivery partners and booking things straight away. A big advantage of ESF is the flexibility of the funding as we are able to offer more of what people want. People are more able to choose what they want to do rather than being told nationally what they should do. We work with the individual as an individual so the training is meaningful to them.'

- **Delivering relevant provision** – a common element of effective practice throughout the participant journey is working closely with their clients to better understand their needs, and offering a package of services to meet them. This applies to both employers and employees:

'Making the course as practical and interactive as possible keeps the participants interested in the course. Participants are encouraged to share examples of good practice throughout the delivery of the course; this is a well received part of the course. They emphasise the importance of making participants feel as comfortable as possible at an early stage as the course relies on participants' participation and sharing of experiences. Therefore, they begin the course with the standard 'ice breakers' to get participants interested. They also work in small groups for some activities so as to maximise the participation of participants.'

'Delivery has worked particularly well where it meets the specific needs of both the employer and the employee(s). As a result of the stigmas attached to Skills for Life training, this is likely to involve either embedding Skills for Life training within other relevant training and/or delivering the training using more interactive, fun, interesting and enjoyable approaches, to encourage employee engagement. This also raises the profile of the training more widely and is likely to generate additional demand for the training.'

Delivery has also worked well where it has: added more value for the employer, such as embedding the training within other training relevant to the business; and been delivered in a format, time and location to overcome other potential barriers to training. Specific examples of embedding or 'theming' training to add more value for employers and reduce barriers for learners include: delivering literacy skills training as part of health and safety training related to the employer business and premises; delivering numeracy training as part of generic financial awareness training; delivering literacy and/or numeracy training as part of "IT up-skilling" training.'

- **Links to other provision** – notably Train to Gain and further progression. One provider was able to attract learners into ESOL provision by emphasising the progression to NVQs. Another provider used a ‘hook’ programme which included short courses delivered in an interesting way to show that NVQ delivery can be attractive. Response to Redundancy programmes also offer the hope of a job:

‘It is a simple offer and it gives people what they want, a qualification and a routeway back into employment.’

- **Quality of provision** – frequently and inextricably linked to the quality of the tutors and of the learning experience. This is especially the case with Response to Redundancy projects, where learners can lack confidence and self-esteem:

‘The programme instils a business, can-do, can-work attitude to participants. This helps the quick transition back into employment. The programme builds up the confidence of participants which is crucial; as many have been made redundant this is an important aspect of the programme to enable quick return to work. The overall structure of the programme allows people to gain a qualification at a level appropriate to them and helps them achieve something tangible. The structure of the training helps provide some structure to participants’ lives and helps give them a goal to work towards.’

- **Partnership working** – enabling lead providers to achieve much of the above, such as being able to deliver flexibly and relevantly.

3.4.4 Employer and employee/learner experiences – delivery

While the number of staff from the case study employers participating in the training varied, the majority sent fewer than six (60 per cent) and just under one third (30 per cent) sent between 6 and 20. Most commonly the training was for NVQs at various levels (40 per cent), with one in five employers accessing Skills for Life or ESOL, one in ten management training, and a similar proportion short course provision. Half of employers described how training had taken place ‘on the job’, with two thirds (67 per cent) describing it as involving at least some off-the-job training. Most (80 per cent) was tutor delivered, with almost two thirds (62 per cent) including assessment/portfolio building. Less than a quarter of the provision explored (24 per cent) was delivered by distance learning.

Three quarters of employers considered that the training had been ‘personalised’ to some extent and had taken their specific needs into account – with tailoring resulting from the assessment process or the expertise and understanding of the tutors. While 15 per cent of the employers felt that delivery had not been well tailored to their needs, some recognised that other elements of provision (e.g. mentoring or other business support) had been.

For the most part (59 per cent) employers had not been involved in developing or delivering the provision they received – although over one third (37 per cent) had. This included being involved in developing the provision (16 per cent), delivering the provision (8 per cent), or both (12 per cent).

The large majority of employers (96 per cent) were happy with the training received, with only 2 per cent being dissatisfied (see Figure 3.4). The high levels of satisfaction are largely to do with two factors:

- The **relevance and responsiveness** of the training to the employer:

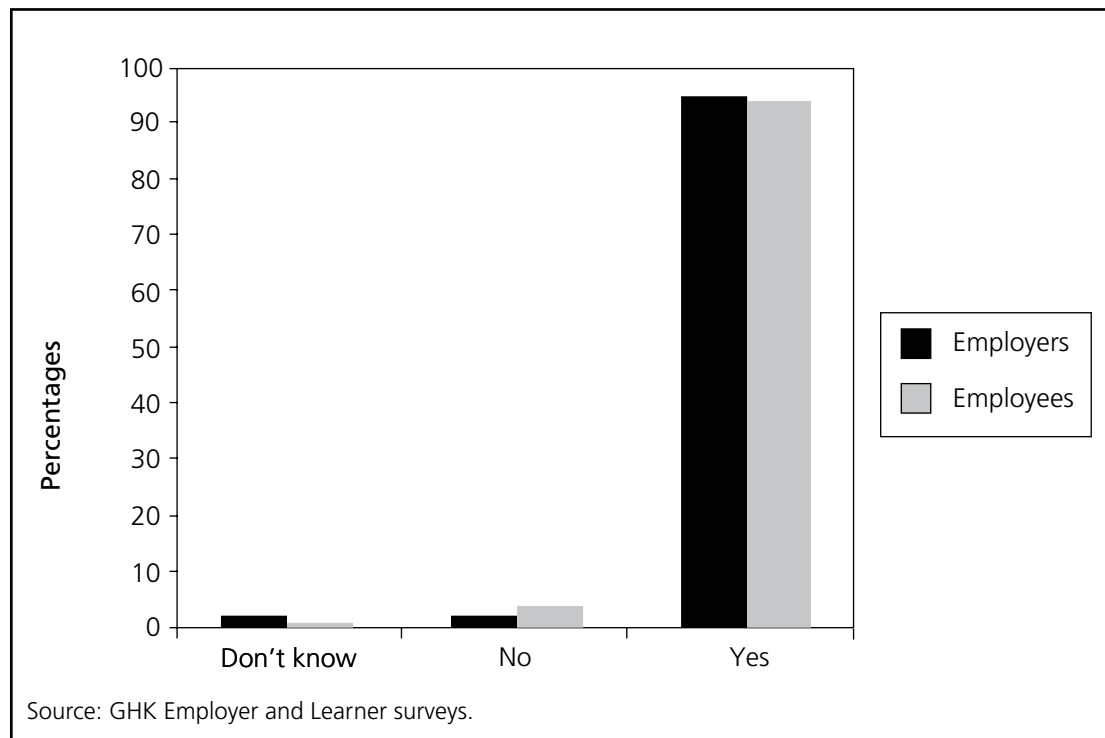
'The way they organise the training at the adult learning centre is good, it fits in with the structure of our day, they make the training available for us, they understand we are not 9-5. They make every effort for us to put the staff through.'

- The **quality** of the tutors:

'...it was very useful, delivered at a good pace, the tutor was very knowledgeable and patient.'

The training received under ESF compared favourably to other provision received for most employers (40 per cent), with particular strengths including its flexibility and relevance. One third were unable to comment as they had not done similar training before, with the remainder describing it as being of a similar standard to previous experiences.

Figure 3.4 Satisfaction with the training



Consequently just under two thirds (63 per cent) of the employers could not suggest any changes to the provision received. Where changes were suggested they varied considerably, as expected given the wide range of provision covered, including: delivering more one-to-one provision within group settings, changing the ways in which NVQs are delivered (e.g. based on paperwork), and tailoring the provision more to their businesses.

In the majority of cases the **employers/learners** described how their training was tutor delivered (76 per cent), involved assessments/portfolio building (56 per cent) and off-the-job training (54 per cent). A minority said the provision involved workplace observation (40 per cent), on-the-job training (34 per cent) or distance learning (21 per cent). Three quarters of learners said that they had received a qualification as a result of the training and 18 per cent said that they had not.

Just under three quarters (73 per cent) of learners said that the training took into account their specific job roles or previous qualifications and experience – and while 16 per cent said it did not, most of these applied to a general course where tailoring was less of an issue. Only one learner respondent felt that their provision was too general to be applicable to them.

More than nine out of ten learners (95 per cent) said that they were happy with the training they had received (see Figure 3.4). Only four per cent of learners were not happy, mainly as they considered that they had not received sufficient support during delivery. Most did not make any suggestions for improvement, although those suggestions received included:

- making training more specific to their job roles – for example, one learner worked in the third sector but the Human Resources unit of the course did not cover volunteers;
- making provision more interesting through broadening the range of activities – as opposed to being taught or given assignments to do on their own;
- including more information and assessment prior to the course – as some learners felt they were doing the wrong level; and
- making courses longer in order to include more material.

The ESF provision also compared favourably to similar training undertaken in the past for the employees and learners – with 30 per cent stating that it was better, mainly because it was more practical and job focused, 12 per cent that it was on par with other training, and just four per cent that it was not as good.

However, some 42 per cent of learners were unable to make a comparison as they had not attended similar provision previously.

3.5 Completion, progression and aftercare

This final step encompasses project completion and disengagement processes, including any aftercare approaches in place or support to enable progression.

Most of the case study providers working with employers were found not to have a progression and aftercare stage in place. In many cases it was assumed or hoped that the final IAG session with the learner would filter up to the employer as an identified need.

In the case of four providers, progression and aftercare was more informal depending on whether any identified needs had been raised during the training:

'The employer signs-off the final ILP. If a particular theme has come up during the training then we will inform the employer. We might also do an award presentation ceremony at some employers as well as get quotes for our publicity.'

Seven providers said that employers would receive a follow-up visit or telephone call as part of the provider's process of developing a relationship with an employer. Six providers said that there was a formal final review session with the employer where future business and training needs were discussed.

Conversely, only five providers said they did not have a disengagement or progression stage for learners; however, two more said that it was largely ad hoc and informal.

For 14 providers, progression was discussed at the final review session or exit interview, typically:

'The employees receive an exit interview IAG session where the learners' achievements are reviewed against the goals and objectives outlined in the initial ILP. Depending on what is required by their employers, they will then go to further learning, for the learner this should be a seamless transition.'

Three providers said that IAG was a consistent theme throughout their programme. However, five providers spoke about this with sole reference to their own provision, for example moving on to a Level 4 after achieving a Level 3 and did not appear to discuss learning needs more broadly.

For Response to Redundancy programmes, a job outcome was the main target, although some providers had extensive progression and aftercare procedures:

'If employees enter into employment before the end of the programme they are actively encouraged to complete the qualification that they were undertaking, they are however actively encouraged to take a job offer as it is an aim of the project to ensure that participants enter into employment. Once a participant enters into employment the R2R [Response to Redundancy] programme maintains contact with that participant for 13 weeks to ensure that they stay in employment. During this 13-week period the programme works with the participant and the employer to try and encourage them

complete a higher-level qualification through Train to Gain. There are some problems with this, as some employers use Train to Gain and higher-level qualifications as a retention and reward tool therefore new employees being offered this qualification can cause tension. Another barrier to getting the participant to progress onto higher learning within the 13 weeks (specified by the ESF contract) is that for some participants induction and training to do their new job can last over 13 weeks. Therefore, because of this employers are reluctant to allow the employee to undertake a qualification until they have completed induction.'

The lack of interest in further training (especially if it is full cost) and remoteness were identified by five providers as a barrier to progression and aftercare.

3.5.1 Employer and employee/learner experience of progression and aftercare

The majority of **employers** (56 per cent) said that discussions had taken place about their future training needs, although this did not happen in 40 per cent of cases. Where it hadn't happened this was mostly because the training was still ongoing, and discussions were expected to take place at a later date.

Most **employees/learners** (41 per cent) described their future intentions to progress to do further training. Almost one in five (17 per cent) said they wanted another or a better job, 15 per cent said they wanted a job and 12 per cent said they wanted to continue in their current job role.

When asked if anyone had spoken to them about these future aspirations, half of learner said 'yes' and half said 'no' – with those saying 'no' including a number of learners who were keen to go on to further learning. In some cases the lack of discussion was because they have just started the course, and in others learners planned to discuss further steps with their employer. However, in a number of cases learners had not received any information or help with further progression even when they have asked for it. One extreme example was from a learner who wanted to go and do a business course:

'No, you don't get much careers advice from the college. Students can travel down to the main campus to see a careers advisor on an individual basis but that is not easy fitting in with working four days a week and doing one day of college studying. They have great facilities at the campuses but there is little support apart from that. When you only do one day a week because of working you can feel a bit left on your own.'

4 Delivering the ESF programme

4.1 Introduction

This section explores providers' experience of delivering under the current European Social Fund (ESF) programme, the main benefits and impacts resulting for employers and employees/learners, and what worked well as well, as areas for further development.

The main findings are:

- Monitoring by Co-financing Organisations (CFOs) was relatively light touch, with CFOs only getting involved in projects which were not meeting their profiles.
- Most monitoring was against targets and profiles, but some providers felt that this misses important achievements such as value added and confidence building.
- There was a particular issue over measuring job outcomes for Response to Redundancy projects, especially the definition of a job and getting evidence.
- Most projects were on track to meet their targets, albeit revised targets in some cases. The largest obstacle to meeting targets was late project starts.
- In interviews with CFOs and Government Offices (GOs), the cross-cutting themes were seen as the most vulnerable aspects. To some extent this has been realised, with a significant minority of providers unaware of the sustainability theme. More were aware of the equal opportunities theme but few providers mentioned CFO support for the cross-cutting themes.

Continued

- Providers believed their main impacts were on skill needs, the learner, job performance, and an increased approbation of learning.
- This largely tallied with the view of learners and employers who mentioned addressing skill needs, confidence and productivity as the main benefits to them. A large number of employers said that their views of training had been positively influenced by their experiences.
- Both employers and learners had very high satisfaction ratings of the provision.
- For providers, the main success factors had been the responsiveness and relevance of their provision, developing effective partnerships, and the quality of their staff.
- The main challenges were engaging with hard to reach employers; getting time off for staff, and quality assuring partner providers.
- The main benefits of delivering via ESF was its ability to: enhance existing provision; support hard to reach employers and learners; developing innovative provision; and increasing the flexibility of provision.
- The main drawback was the paperwork.

4.2 Programme monitoring and support

4.2.1 Monitoring requirements

Most projects are monitored quantitatively against their profiles and targets using the Individual Learner Record (ILR), the providers' internal tracking and data capture systems, or Learning and Skills Council (LSC) data e-portals. In a handful of cases projects also mentioned more qualitative monitoring through CFO quarterly monitoring visits – with many reporting being *'left to get on with it'* as long as they are on profile.

In a minority of cases, projects also report to regular steering group meetings where monitoring against outputs and targets is a standing item on the agenda. Other projects referred to internal meetings between managers and delivery staff to monitor delivery performance, and also to identify any areas that need attention (e.g. learner drop-out).

Few projects therefore monitor progress against anything they are not contracted to deliver. However, there are notable exceptions with some projects having a tiered approach of qualitative and quantitative monitoring – as one project described:

'Performance monitoring at project level involves:

- *Through the project plan which lists all deliverables and the performance against profile. This plan is constantly updated;*
- *Weekly meetings between the Project Manager and the Business Development Coordinators (BDCs) which focus on employer engagement and recruitment;*
- *Weekly project meetings for the whole team, i.e. including Project Director, Project Manager, BDCs and the trainer. Looking at performance across the board and any matters arising;*
- *Monthly meetings between Project Director and Project Manager looking at performance across the board;*
- *Project Director updates to the College Board;*
- *Learner satisfaction surveys; and*
- *An interim evaluation report produced in October 2009.'*

Projects were equally divided on whether the ESF monitoring regime and its requirements fully captured their outputs and achievements. Views tended to be split on regional lines, with the South West, the East Midlands and the North West believing ESF monitoring did not adequately capture project achievements. Projects in the East of England, North East, South East and West Midlands believed that they did.

The projects who did not believe the monitoring regime effectively captured their achievements identified a range of successes that they felt were being missed:

- Value added – although a number of projects were wary of including distance travelled measures due to few standard models being available and the effort they could require to implement:

'I know there is a long-standing interest in distance travelled measures (the Richter scale for example) but this appears to have dropped off the agenda lately. I know from previous experience that using these measures are very laborious.'

- Soft outcomes, especially increased confidence – an important measure particularly for their 'harder to reach' clients, although again there was an interest in efficient and effective measurement models.

The projects also mentioned using other measures, such as assessing innovation and capacity building, relating to their specific delivery activities. Some providers also felt that the narrow range of ESF performance measures can mean they are not seen as delivering value for money if they go the 'extra mile' – and so potentially acts as a perverse incentive. For example, two rural providers mentioned giving learners support with transport, although this could be calculated as a liability in financial terms. Providers also mentioned that as only one destination is permitted, this can lead them to underperform on some targets.

4.2.2 Main outcomes

The main 'hard' or 'soft' outcomes reported by the case study projects were:

- Confidence – both within and outside the workplace, in gaining new skills and helping people to get new jobs:

'Improved confidence. ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] learning has wider implications on individual beyond work to everyday life such as going to the doctor and accessing other services.'

'Many people have dented confidence because they have lost their jobs. The programme helps get this back and increase the confidence overall.'

- Job performance – resulting from acquiring additional skills and increasing motivation:

'Training allowed time-out for reflection, opportunity to think laterally about [their] company, allowed learners and employers to think about implementing new practices to their work.'

- Increased aptitude for, and improved attitude towards, learning – by breaking down barriers to learning for both employers and employees:

'While achieving qualifications is important and a 'hard outcome', the project thinks that much of what it is trying to achieve is to create a culture of learning in workplaces that traditionally have/do not engage in learning. An important outcome would be to create this environment and ensure that everyone who wants to learn and achieve can. This can be a profound change in some workplace environments especially when over 50 per cent of the employees working in the workplaces have no prior record of attainment. This change in culture is difficult to capture and 'bottle' however we are confident that it is happening through the programme. The programme is motivating for employees and makes them feel valued and appreciated. Many participants have not received training before and this makes them feel valued and helps them perform their duties in their job better.'

The main omission from monitoring information was where providers (mostly Response to Redundancy) were unable to count job outcomes. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the definition of a job outcome is sometimes linked to jobs with training and to Train to Gain in particular. However, this was not always possible because: people may be ineligible for Train to Gain as they have an existing Level 2; employers may provide training but not through Train to Gain; some employees can be on probationary periods during which they are not eligible for training; and some people take 'survival jobs' to pay the mortgage and do not want any training.

Providers also said that it is sometimes difficult to get evidence from people who get a job (which in one case represented 20 per cent of their outcomes), even after several attempts to make contact.

4.2.3 Project performance

At the time of the fieldwork more than half of the case study projects were on course to meet the quantitative targets set out in their project plans – although in a number of cases these targets had been ‘scaled back’ (or were under review) on the basis of earlier delivery. Four projects had already exceeded their targets, and while just 15 per cent said they were likely to underperform against their targets, a number said they may require an extra effort to achieve some of their targets in areas where they were currently underperforming.

The main reasons why projects were on target to meet or exceed their profiles were:

- The responsiveness and relevance of provision. Projects were delivering what employers and learners wanted, and if there were any particular barriers to accessing the provision, providers were addressing them.
- Effective engagement. Providers were putting a lot of effort into their engagement activities. Comments on levels of drop out (see below) suggest that, once engaged, the rest of the participant journey is relatively straightforward. Providers also mentioned the extensive partner links involved in employer and learner engagement: the use of sector and community-based organisations, and effective links with Business Link and Jobcentre Plus to promote the offer and for referrals.

Providers also mentioned: the experience of providers; being able to offer financial support to support training; high levels of demand for the provision; pastoral support; effective assessment processes; and the delivery model. In a couple of cases projects referred to positive effects of the recession, by giving employers more time to train employees.

Even when the projects had performed below expectation to date, the majority were confident that they would meet their original, or revised, quantitative targets. The reasons for underperformance were varied and, in some cases, multiple, with the most commonly cited including:

- **Contracting delays** – reported frequently by both performing and underperforming projects, and influencing any initial staff recruitment, new product development and delivery start dates. The extent to which the projects had been able to ‘catch up’ so far varied.
- **Too high targets being set at the outset** – either as a result of provider optimism, CFO expectations or ineffective demand assessment.
- **Promised/expected referrals not being realised** – again due to demand assessment or variable engagement of referral partners.

Providers also mentioned ‘initiative-itis’, especially in former Objective 1 areas such as Cornwall and Merseyside, which meant that employers and learners have been inundated with providers selling them provision. In addition, several underperforming projects described how their projects had in essence been about taking

risks, developing new and locally innovative approaches, or working in new areas/ with new clients, and that their early experiences had been part of a 'learning journey' for them.

Learner drop-out and non-completion did not appear to contribute significantly to project under-performance – and seemed to be minimal with only six providers (mainly in London and the West Midlands) reporting this a problem. Those providers reporting drop-out as an issue mostly blamed: the recession through people losing their jobs, being unable for financial reasons to take time off to train; or a change in their job roles. Other reasons were sickness and maternity leave, not being given time off for the training, and people changing employer.

Again, the flexibility of the provision offered was felt to have helped minimise drop-out rates, and being sufficiently adaptable to accommodate the barriers faced by learners:

'The dropout rate from the programme is low and there are in-built flexibilities which mean that if a participant is struggling to complete, it is possible to defer to the next year. In the past, this has happened with learners developing particularly complex products. There have been rare occasions where particular family/personal problems have forced people to dropout however the door remains open for these people. In general though, the staff are well placed to minimise potential project dropout.'

Providers also minimised drop-out by ensuring that the right people were on the right course in the first place – a clear benefit of effective engagement and assessment procedures.

4.2.4 Cross-cutting themes¹²

As described in Section 1, the current ESF programme has two cross-cutting themes, namely gender equality and equal opportunities, and sustainable development. The extent to which the projects were addressing these themes was explored in the case studies, following a series of interviews with national and regional stakeholders to establish the context for their implementation.

In the first stage of interviews with national and regional stakeholders the cross-cutting themes were seen as one of the more vulnerable aspects of the ESF programme. Interviews with regional GOs and CFOs found that there were different emphases given to the cross-cutting themes. GOs mentioned providing varying levels of advice, guidance and support. However, some GOs felt that more ought to be done as cross-cutting themes tend 'to be the first to go', and are likely to be hardest hit by the recession – for example, equal opportunities and environmental sustainability are less of a concern for employers when trying to stem job losses. Some CFOs had a lot to say, and others less to say, about

¹² The Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned research into the cross-cutting themes. See *Evaluation of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities within ESF*, forthcoming July 2010 and *Sustainable development and Green jobs*, forthcoming October 2010.

the cross-cutting themes. As far as the latter group is concerned, CFOs said that cross-cutting themes were embedded in the commissioning process, contracts and targets. Other regions spoke of having mechanisms and processes in place to monitor and support providers in addressing the cross-cutting themes. Some mentioned running workshops, providing dedicated support and utilising the national support available under Technical Assistance.

The document review of CFO plans found that some regions had developed and interpreted the cross-cutting themes for their regions whilst others had merely copied the paragraphs from national documents.

4.2.5 Provider engagement with cross-cutting themes

Awareness of, and engagement with, the cross-cutting themes varied considerable between the case study projects – and between the equality and equal opportunities and the sustainability strands. This could be because the interviewees were not those responsible for initial bid development, and so not aware of the range of considerations influencing the bid and subsequent planning.

Some 40 per cent of the projects had little or no awareness of the **sustainability theme** when asked what they were doing to address it – having either not heard of it, interpreted it wrongly (e.g. spoke about the sustainability of the provision) or did recall but were doing little about it.

Where providers were trying to implement the cross-cutting theme of sustainability, most were doing it through their activities, such as:

- **Delivering in the workplace or virtually** – to minimise transportation for learners;
- **Behaving in an environmentally friendly way** – such as travelling by train, promoting car sharing;
- **Reducing travelling time** – e.g. through video conferencing and sharing premises;
- **Having e-panels for assessment** – for example, one Priority 5 higher education (HE) project in Cornwall has established an e-panel approach to assessing bids for post-graduate course provision. The panel includes academics and employers from relevant sectors, who help ensure the work area supported is of relevance to their sector;
- **Delivering environmental training** – either this was the main focus of their provision or there were units within other qualifications (e.g. management training); and
- **Having existing or developing environmental policies** – six providers reported having such policies, and one required this of its partners.

Four providers mentioned that they got support from their CFO including visits, audits and workshops.

Awareness of and engagement with the equality and equal opportunities theme was identified more commonly, with the large majority of providers reporting being aware of the theme (although six of the providers were not aware or actively pursuing it). Most providers were addressing equal opportunities through:

- The **monitoring** of their provision – although only ten providers reported having specific targets in this area. In six cases the providers described combining their equal opportunities monitoring with the targeting of clients;
- Implementing their **equal opportunities policies** – with around one third of providers mentioned their policies specifically;
- The **induction process** for participants;
- Providing **additional training** for their staff; and
- Through their **activities**– for example through project work delivering to under-represented groups.

Few providers mentioned support for the equal opportunities theme from their CFO. Indeed, only two mentioned reporting on either of the crosscutting-themes to their CFO.

4.3 Impacts and benefits

The benefits and impacts resulting from the ESF provision were explored with the providers, employers and employees/learners interviewed – with their nature reflecting the breadth of project activities and target groups. Providers also identified a range of tactical and strategic benefits from their involvement in the programme, with the main benefits, impacts and experiences of each group being summarised below.

4.3.1 Employer impacts and benefits

A wide range of benefits and impacts were identified for employers by **project providers**, including direct and indirect impacts on business and training. Reflecting the array of different projects funded by the ESF programme, the main impacts were:

- **Increased business performance** – covering a range of aspects including increased networking, awareness of new opportunities and diversification, application for business support funding, and increased business competitiveness due to environmental efficiencies. One provider said that they had undertaken an employer survey which had identified the following main benefits:

'Improved customer service; improved client retention and relationships; a more flexible workforce – they can now look to deliver to different age groups and in novel ways, and reducing the risk of injury and accidents through increased awareness of health and safety procedures.'

Another provider said:

'It has helped a lot in terms of communication. For one employer, half their employees are Polish, the other half Chinese. It's a problem in the kitchen if the two groups don't speak to each other: through the ESOL classes the employees are more confident, the teamwork has improved and the employer can offer a better service to their customers.'

- **Increased workforce and management skills** – ranging from management through technical and on to basic skills. For those projects with a sector focus, the training helped to address priority skill needs. In some sectors achievement of skill levels is a statutory requirement (e.g. in care and construction), so getting staff qualified is vital to their business. Providers also mentioned that this is partly as a result of being able to deliver customised and flexible provision which attracts employers who would not have undertaken training before.
- **Increased propensity to train** – a number of providers also mentioned that employers are more likely to invest in training in future. This is again linked to being able to provide responsive and relevant provision:

'Delivering innovative training that meets the needs of employers and learners will increase the value of training amongst both groups and improve perceptions of training.'

- **Help with the costs of training** – this particularly applied to the care and third sectors, where the former has to meet statutory qualification standards whilst the latter tend to be small organisations with large numbers of volunteers.

Providers also identified a number of other impacts including: environmental benefits; increased profits; innovation; demonstrating investment in their staff; developing a flexible workforce; addressing recruitment gaps (for Response to Redundancy projects); helping businesses to diversify; and improving the image of NVQs.

The **case study employers** were also asked to identify the benefits and impacts resulting from participation in the projects, across a range of business aspects from 'hard' impacts such as turnover and profitability to softer ones such as improved confidence of employees.

Table 4.4 shows that the main impact was on skill needs, with more than nine out of ten employers (94 per cent) saying that the training had addressed these needs. When probed in more detail, employers described impacts on three main skill areas:

- **Specific skills** needs, including areas such as technical skills, Skills for Life and first aid:

'I wanted to learn presentation skills and that's exactly what I learnt.'

- **General skills and knowledge** in the job:

'Staff are more able to do their jobs without me checking. They are more observant, businesslike, professional and more confident.'

- **Leadership and management skills** of owner managers or employees:

'It has developed our business management skills and introduced greater order and less chaos to our approach.'

Over four out of five employers said that the training had improved the ability of employees to fulfil their existing job functions, and a similar proportion said that staff confidence and motivation had improved as a result.

Almost three quarters of employers (71 per cent) said that workforce relations had improved, two thirds said that employees had taken on enhanced/extended job roles and functions as a result (one quarter of all employers said that staff had been promoted as a result of the training), and over half (57 per cent) said that productivity had increased.

The training had less of an impact on profitability, turnover and recruitment needs.

When asked what had been the greatest impact, most employers said confidence, which also had impacts on productivity and business performance, for example:

'The improved confidence of staff. They are more likely to ask questions and they have a lot more dealings with office staff now.'

Table 4.4 Employers views on the main impacts

Per cent Base = 55	Yes	No	Don't know	Other	Total
Addressed recruitment needs	29	58	4	9	100
Skills needs	94	4	2	0	100
Increased productivity	57	10	23	10	100
Increased turnover	19	38	22	21	100
Increased profitability	28	19	30	23	100
Improved employee's job functions	82	8	4	6	100
Employees taking on enhanced functions	66	19	9	6	100
Increased confidence/motivation	82	6	8	4	100
Increased workforce relations	71	9	11	9	100

Source: GHK Employer survey

The other main impacts were on existing job functions and employees taking on enhanced/extended job functions and roles.

The large majority of employers (86 per cent) said that the employees who went on the training were likely to go on future training. This mostly involved employees going on to a higher level of the same training.

All but one employer would recommend the training to others. Most employers (47 per cent) said that their experience of the project has positively influenced their views on the benefits and practicalities of training for their staff. Just under a third (30 per cent) said that it had not but this was because they were already convinced of the value of training. Some employers said that they would do things

differently in the future, that some were new to management and, for example, would not send as many staff in future. Three quarters of the employers reported that there was nothing they would change about the services they had received.

4.3.2 Employee impacts and benefits

Similarly, providers reported a range of direct and indirect benefits to employees, of which the main impacts were:

- **Improved confidence** – mainly in the workplace but also more widely. This applied to lower skilled workers, those needing language skills who may not have undertaken any training before, and others who had been made redundant by showing them that they had a lot to offer in the jobs market. It also increased people's confidence in their own abilities to train, achieve a qualification, take on new job responsibilities, and try out new approaches: *'They can see they can do it.'*
- **Achieving/increasing qualifications** – some learners had never completed a qualification before, and this represented a significant achievement and recognition. Some people needed certain qualifications to get a job (serving as an entry requirement) or to do a job (if it was a statutory requirement or necessary to achieve a promotion). Others wanted a recognised qualification because it helped their CVs whilst for others it was a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirement of the occupation or sector they were working in.
- **Help with career progression** – this is closely linked to the previous two benefits. Employees were gaining qualifications which were either invaluable or helpful in progressing in their careers (for both those employed and out of work) and/or gaining the confidence to help them up the career ladder either within their current or with another employer.
- **Improved skills** – this particularly applied to Response to Redundancy programmes, which helped redundant workers gain skills to improve their chances in the labour market. It also applied to a range of skills from Skills for Life to management. There were benefits both inside and outside the workplace. For example, one Skills for Life provider said that it helped people to read with their children as well as improving their language skills in the workplace.
- **Improved attitudes to training** – this is closely related to improved confidence and also the relevance and responsiveness of the training. People liked the training they had received and were also more confident to access other training:

'Overcoming the fear of learning. Many people in the industry had bad experiences at school and have not engaged in training for many years. People have said that this taster of training has given the bug to do more and more.'

Providers also mentioned a range of other benefits and impacts, including: improved productivity; increased take-up of training; increased awareness of redundancy issues; business start-ups; and job satisfaction. Few providers (especially Response to Redundancy) mentioned helping people to get jobs and this is probably related to the lack of aftercare.

Employees/learners were also questioned on the main impacts resulting for them, and including both 'hard' and 'soft' impacts.

As Table 4.5 shows that the main impact was to improve employees'/learners' skills. Almost nine out of ten employees (89 per cent) said that the training had helped to improve their skills. When prompted to expand on their responses, most people mentioned developing their: business skills; literacy skills; existing skills in the job; employability skills; and gaining new skills.

Table 4.5 Employees/learner views on the main impacts

Per cent Base = 101	Yes	No	Don't know	Other	Total
Helped to improve your skills	89	7	2	2	100
Helped you to do your job better	75	14	6	5	100
Led to any changes in job function/role	27	60	0	13	100
Improved confidence	77	20	1	2	100
Improved team working	59	31	4	6	100
Increased interest in your job	58	30	7	5	100
Greater job satisfaction	56	31	6	7	100
Other benefits	46	42	8	3	100

Source: GHK Employee survey

The other main impacts were on: improved confidence (77 per cent); helping them to do their job better (75 per cent); improved team working (59 per cent); increased interest in their jobs (58 per cent); and greater job satisfaction (56 per cent). The training had least impact on changing people's job functions and 'other' benefits.

When asked to identify which was the main benefit or impact, employees mentioned:

- **Increased confidence** – including confidence in doing their job as a result of the new skills they had learnt, confidence in dealing with work colleagues and clients, and confidence in the jobs market.
- **Increased awareness** of what the person's job role entailed and also their job role in relation to the wider business.
- **Improved employability skills**, e.g. interviewing and CV writing.
- **Greater job satisfaction**, which is linked to improved confidence, increased awareness but also team working and communication skills.
- **Improved literacy skills**.

When asked if there was anything they would change, over half of respondents (56 per cent) said 'nothing'. The suggestions for change proposed included:

- **Improved tailoring of provision** – this included having units, materials and/or tutors more relevant to the sector they were working in, and not having such wide a range of ability in the learner groups.
- **Better provider organisation** – some learners said there was confusion over, for example, start dates.
- **Premises** – including the location and accessibility of the premises as well as their quality and appropriateness.
- **Longer courses** – some learners found that it was difficult to find time to study over a prolonged period, especially if they were working as well.

Virtually all learners (97 per cent) said they would recommend the training to others. Only one said they would not, and two learners were unsure.

4.3.3 Unanticipated benefits

The main unanticipated or 'spin-off' benefit was increased business for the provider. In some cases this was because ESF helped to fund provision for hard to reach employers who would not have been able to afford the training otherwise; it helped them to develop their organisation to attract new business (for example, one provider was able to become an accredited NVQ centre); or it provided a progression route from or into other provision they delivered:

'There has been a spin off for providers for example engaging some learners in additional training such as skills for life. Where providers have gone into the employer and have got the kudos for securing funding for training, this will hopefully help to build a relationship that will last beyond the programme.'

Providers also mentioned that the project had helped to develop or cement partnership arrangements. This has enhanced delivery, engagement, and also wider awareness of the provision. For example:

'One spin off benefit has been increasing the range of partners we have worked with. This includes creating new partnerships with some providers and increasing the projects knowledge of other providers to signpost too.'

'The wider benefits of the project include capacity building of the partnership and training provision more broadly, and particularly examples of training providers rethinking their approach to Skills for Life training to increase its attractiveness to employers and learners.'

The other main spin-off benefits included: developing the training infrastructure; business development for the provider; and promoting the environmental agenda.

In the case of the Convergence Priority 5 HE projects, one expected impact was supporting the development and delivery of the Cornwall Higher Education and Skills Strategy. Although too early to say whether this impact has been achieved, each of the projects reviewed were aware of the strategy and how their projects could contribute towards its realisation.

4.4 Effective practice

4.4.1 Success factors

Section 3 identified effective practice throughout the participant journey, with four main factors being identified which underpinned successful provision:

- **Flexible provision** – most providers said that having flexible provision was a key element in their success. Flexibility covered a range of factors including: delivery on-site or close to where employers/learners were; having varying end dates not just to accommodate different abilities but also to respond to unforeseen circumstances (sickness, pressure of work etc.); regular start dates, including roll-on:roll-off provision; blended learning including on-site and distance learning; bite-sized courses or units which could be undertaken in short period of time, and one-to-one and/or group provision to respond to different leaning styles and in rural areas where distance was a barrier to attendance. One provider identified a demand for environmental provision, identified the core elements and developed them into core units which can be embedded in a variety of vocational courses:

'The College has a strategy for developing environmental technology provision that it can deliver in the future. We will take the core elements of the project's provision that go with the college's own curriculum, and will use one of the new environmental technology qualification units as a unit within its new land based diploma. Other units could be delivered to other FE and HE land based students, or Food and Drinks students. Whilst the project has been mainly focused on the building services industry the college has succeeded in its original aim of using the project strategically to develop its own curriculum which has nothing to do with building services.'

- Closely related to flexible provision is **relevant provision** – this involved: understanding the needs of the sector, employer or learner group; embedding Skills for Life provision within vocational training so learners develop their vocational skills as well; ensuring the training is linked to 'real' business problems identified by the employer; the involvement of employers and learners in delivery; and redesigning courses:

'Using the sector organisations to provide the link between employers and providers has been successful in enabling employers to input into the content and design of the training provision. This has increased the relevance of the training and interest from employers, which has resulted in increased uptake from employers and employees. A good NVQ example involves ITQs (the standard IT NVQ). The project found it difficult to engage employers, who suggested the training was not relevant. The training was amended to include CAD, Adobe and web-design elements and uptake amongst employers has since increased significantly.'

- **Partnerships** were also fundamental to successful provision, in engaging with employers and learners, and also in developing relevant provision – as far as engagement is concerned, many providers mentioned the use of sector and community-based organisations as an important mechanism for accessing and building-up trust with target groups:

'We have delivered a significant increase in the uptake of training amongst this 'hard to reach' sector. Key to this process has been the recruitment of a specialist skills broker, alongside the other core partners, to identify and engage employers, sell the benefits of training, and understand the specific needs of the employer, before delivering training tailored to meet those needs.'

'Having people on the ground has been helpful. The first programme employed a number of learning development workers who linked with County Council Adult Education who have a network in the area and helped to engage with unemployed people. We also attend consortia meetings to talk about the programme, and this has generated referrals from organisations in the voluntary and community sector. We have also utilised the training provider networks to network with providers who are employer focused.'

As we have seen, sector, third sector and other organisations close to target groups have been effective in developing relevant and responsive provision.

- **Committed and competent staff** – providers also mentioned the commitment and quality of their staff across all aspects of delivering and managing the participant journey. This involved staff training and development generally, but also in terms of delivering the specific project (for example, staff involved in engagement would be given training on the specific project):

'Overall, a good team structure helps effective delivery. We have a good group of well trained tutors who keep participants motivated and interested in learning; good brokers who work with employers to help get participants back into employment; a quality team ensures that all paperwork is complete and up-to-date allowing front line staff to teach. Staff are the most important element of engaging learners, if they are not motivated or interested then learners are less likely to engage.'

Providers also used delivery staff with experience of the sector or client group:

'We build confidence by having assessors that have come up the same route as them. We get high levels of positive feedback and satisfaction on the support learners get from the assessors. We try and match the experience and expertise of the assessor with the client.'

In addition to the above four factors, providers also mentioned: having firm foundations (based on previous project experience in a similar area); having links with other provision (such as Train to Gain enhancements); being able to provide financial support for employers and learners (including helping to fund the training but also support with transport etc.); being able to trial new approaches; having previous experience of ESF funding; and having effective assessment processes.

4.4.2 Main challenges

Providers were also asked to identify the main barriers to delivery and partnership working, and how they have sought to address them. A number of providers did not report any barriers.

The range of delivery barriers cited reflects the array of different projects included in the sample. The main obstacles were:

- **Engaging with employers** – this included generic problems in engaging with hard to reach employers; getting employers to understand the need for qualifications as opposed to skills (in one case this was an issue for engaging with providers) and also Skills for Life; and being unable to engage with larger employers whose employees would benefit from the training (due to de minimis rules).

Providers were addressing these barriers by working closely with employers to explain the advantages of training; rebranding or disguising Skills for Life provision; and learning from other organisations who have overcome these obstacles.

- **Time off for employees** – providers found problems with persuading employers to give sufficient time off. In some cases this was linked to specific incidents (e.g. when there were increases in workload at the provider due to illness etc.), whilst in others it was more of a general problem. In one case the provider delivered to employees after work when the learners were tired after working an eight-hour shift.

Providers were trying to address these barriers by being flexible and making the training as relevant as possible to the organisation, so employers could see the benefits.

There were a number of other barriers mentioned by providers including: being able to contact people before they are made redundant in order to explain the offer; getting job evidence from redundant people when they get back into employment; the logistics of delivering in rural areas; the lack of referrals from Jobcentre Plus; the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) affecting changes in qualifications; Train to Gain eligibility changes; learner apprehension in delivering assignments; the short-term nature of projects which limited investments in innovative solutions; and getting employers to pay their part of the funding.

The main partnership issues concerned working with partner providers, with the main issue being:

- **Quality assuring subcontracted providers** – a number of projects delivered on a wider geographic basis through a network of providers, which sometimes led to concerns over the standard of some of the provision.

Providers were using a range of mechanisms to address this through: better recruitment processes; replacing some providers; better monitoring of subcontractors; issuing clearer guidance; providing subcontractors with targets; and more effective contracting.

Other partner provider issues included: getting region-wide providers to attend meetings; developing common paperwork; getting consistent interpretation of eligibility criteria; and being able to recruit providers in all parts of a region.

The only other partnership issue was when people moved jobs and the need to re-establish relationships with a new person.

There were a number of ESF-specific administrative problems which providers mentioned and these have been highlighted previously.

4.5 Added value of ESF

Providers were able to identify a number of ways in which ESF added value to their provision. The main contribution ESF made to the projects was through:

- **Enhancing provision** – most providers used ESF to further develop their provision to either make it more relevant to their target market or to enhance other provision, such as Train to Gain. This included:
 - adding specific units on to NVQ provision to make them more employer relevant and attractive to employers;
 - funding additional equipment to enhance the learning experience;
 - funding ‘hook’ programmes to entice learners into longer provision;
 - adding vocational provision on to Skills for Life provision; and
 - embedding ESOL provision in vocational provision.

‘It has also delivered equipment and new experiences that have enhanced training and delivered a level of awareness, understanding and experiences of new opportunities that have not been possible through mainstream funding. The workshops have also helped employers to understand the changes affecting the sector and explore future opportunities. This has helped employers to diversify into new activities or pursue and develop opportunities within existing activities and could potentially have a significant impact on the future land-based sector in the area.’

- **Supporting learners and employers to invest in training** – many providers said that without ESF support hard to reach employers and learners would not have been able to take up the provision. This included:
 - provision to redundant workers;
 - delivery in rural areas;
 - hard to reach learner groups, e.g. migrant workers; and
 - hard to reach employer groups, e.g. third sector organisations.

‘Many learners would not be able to access it because employers do not have funds to pay for it. In the other regions where we offer the course ‘off the shelf’ there has been some interest – but it’s only a trickle really. There is a need for this course (take-up demonstrates this) but tight budgets means that employers are not willing to pay for it.’

'It has allowed us to develop provision that responds to a real need in the region which is social and economic. Without the ESF funding we would not have been able to provide provision which was dedicated to getting recently unemployed back into work as quickly as possible. The ESF funding allowed a successful previous model to be adapted and rolled out to respond to the needs of participants and employers in the region.'

- **Developing innovative provision** – ESF has allowed a number of projects to try out new models of, and approaches to, delivery which otherwise would not have been funded. These included:
 - developing sector-wide provision;
 - developing new materials and blended learning approaches to accommodate different learning styles;
 - approaches to addressing hard to reach learners by the use of union and non-union learning advocates; and
 - transnational learning:

'It has allowed us to take a wholly new innovative approach and learn from other member states. There would be absolutely no way that this project would be able to develop without the funding of ESF. It has helped increase the capacity of the region to learn from transnational best practice.'

'The funding has allowed us to develop new qualification units and learning materials in environmental technology that will be delivered to learners in the project after Easter 2010, and can be delivered by any college and training provider in the future.'

- **Improving the flexibility of provision** – as we have seen, increased flexibility is often a successful way of engaging with hard to reach employers and learners by addressing some of the barriers they face, such as time off for learning. This has enabled providers to: be less prescriptive about the type of learning people do (including non-accredited provision); deliver close to groups of learners, or one-to-one provision for those in rural areas; and bring in new providers to deliver to different groups of employers and learners:

'ESF has allowed us to deliver training we would not otherwise have been able to deliver. It allowed us to outsource training to enable participants to get the qualifications and training that they need. The funding also allowed us to tailor the package and provide bespoke support for the client through outsourcing additional provision.'

*'We have been able to support participants in a more flexible way than we were able to do on other projects. Other projects are more prescriptive about the type of learning that learners have to do; this programme gives the flexibility to give learners training that meets **their** needs. It allows us to work with a wider range of participants than they usually do; this is because the programme works with anyone who has recently been made unemployed and does not have a strict eligibility criteria. Also allows us to*

get in external trainers where they are required. Without ESF funding we would not be able to do this. External trainers help increase the capacity to deliver training and meet participants training requirements.'

Providers also identified: the ability to develop wider and more diverse partnerships; enhance Train to Gain provision by delivering to non-eligible groups; capacity building for the provider; increased awareness of their provision; improved links with Jobcentre Plus; and increased the coverage of the provision from a local to sub regional/regional area.

Just under half of providers said that their provision would have continued without ESF funding, but on a much smaller scale, while some providers said that their provision was an enhancement to Train to Gain so the mainstream element would continue but not the enhancements. Other providers would have delivered the provision at full cost, which would have meant a big reduction in take-up, but: they would have not been able to deliver to the same sorts of employers and learners (e.g. small to medium-sized enterprises and the third sector), and they would have not been able to deliver the 'bolt-ons', such as ESOL and Skills for Life. Others would have continued but on a much reduced geographical area.

Two Response to Redundancy providers said their provision would have continued because they would have sought funding from elsewhere.

4.6 Constraints of delivering ESF-funded provision

Providers were asked to detail if there were any constraints in delivering ESF-funded provision. The responses are grouped depending on whether providers had delivered ESF previously.

One quarter of providers who had **previously delivered ESF** said that there had not been constraints. Of those providers who identified constraints, two thirds mentioned the paperwork. Whilst one provider thought that the amount of paperwork was understandable given the amount of funding, the large majority of these providers thought that it was excessive:

'It is very time consuming when this is only a small part of my role. ESF forms are designed to put people off claiming for money. There are 8 or 9 forms all requiring different forms dated at the right point. In Train to Gain it's all electronic but ESF is all manual.'

Some providers thought that paperwork was off-putting to learners and employers, with the de minimis forms coming in for particular criticism. Another specific issue was the need to have forms signed by participants. This often led to providers, especially those delivering Response to Redundancy provision, being unable to claim for job outcomes. For other providers there was an issue with the systems which the LSC had developed on which to input the data returns.

A related issue was the amount of audit required, and why audit processes were different for every programme.

Apart from the paperwork the other constraints were relatively piecemeal. Three providers said that they had been expected to deliver provision other than that which they had bid for. For example, one provider said that they were required to deliver NVQs even though they were not an accredited centre and had bid to deliver Vocationally-Related Qualifications. Other providers mentioned: that there was a greater emphasis on value for money; the length of time it took to clarify details of contracts and the need for greater consistency between programmes; achieving jobs with training for Response to Redundancy projects; and that providers are limited to delivering provision on the Local Authority District.

For the providers who had **not delivered ESF before** the main constraint was again paperwork. It was generally seen as excessive and the de minimis forms were again a particular concern. Other providers mentioned problems with registering learners on the systems and difficulties on recording outcomes.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 The case study projects and strategic fit

The 41 case study projects investigated were selected to cover the broad range of activities, providers, target groups and provision. Within the sample the Competitiveness Priority 2 projects could be grouped into those supporting other mainstream programmes – Train to Gain, Skills for Life and the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) agenda – and those involved in higher-level skills, raising/meeting demand, and enhancing the learning and skills infrastructure. A number of the Convergence Priority 5 projects also covered these areas, with four being developed specifically to support the Cornwall Higher Education Strategy.

The projects also complemented a range of sub-regional, regional and national agendas. However, the fit appeared closest amongst the Convergence Priority 5 projects in Cornwall, where explicit reference was made to a range of local strategic drivers and priority activities. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including existing familiarities between the actors involved, the focus on a smaller number of providers available within the county, and previous experienced and strategic awareness resulting from the previous Objective 1 programme.

The Priority 2 projects had a more implicit strategic fit, which is likely to be due to the influence of co-financing (where the 'contracting' model addresses many of the wider strategic parameters in advance), and may also explain why fewer examples of strategic partnerships were identified. However, operational partnerships were plentiful, and served to broaden the range of provision (sectorally and geographically), enhance progression routes, and provide expertise.

In both cases, it was too early (and sample sizes did not allow) for clear conclusions to be drawn regarding the influence of strategic alignment with project performance and impact. However, in many cases the projects were positioned, and able to articulate their expectations, in terms of making real contributions to local, regional and national priority areas.

5.1.2 Project delivery

In terms of the targeting of project activities, most employers were targeted on the basis of their sector or location. Whilst the projects were working with a broad range of learner groups, the targeting of individuals by specific characteristics was limited. Here Priorities 2 and 5 projects appear to differ from those under Priority 1 – not least as the engagement is with the employer rather than the individual.

Whilst there were examples of innovative projects, including the Innovation and Transnationality project studied, most provision was conventional. This is likely to be due to the more prescriptive nature of contracts under co-financing, and because activities tended to be delivered by experienced providers, to existing customers, and complementing mainstream provision. Most provision therefore operated within certain parameters defined by Co-financing Organisation (CFO) plans and tenders, qualification structures (e.g. National Vocational Qualifications), and years of experience as to what worked.

Most engagement, assessment and provision tended to be undertaken by the providers themselves, only bringing in partners to recruit and work with employers and learners in new sectors or areas.

High levels of satisfaction were expressed by both the employers and learners interviewed (although it should be noted that the contact details of employers and learners were supplied by the providers in question). Providers believe they have developed flexible, relevant and high-quality provision, and this was reflected in the views of the employers and learners, who valued the responsiveness, pertinence and calibre of the training offered.

However, the progression and aftercare stage of the participant journey seems the least developed. Most providers, employers and learners had little to say about this stage. For some this was because they had only just embarked on the training, and most employers expected this discussion to happen. However, some learners had been disappointed by the lack of further information, advice and guidance offered, even when they had asked for it.

The monitoring of European Social Fund projects appears to be light touch, however, this does not seem to have impacted on performance as indicated by the high satisfaction levels of employers and learners who could find little wrong with the provision.

Providers, employers and learners all identified the same range of 'soft' and 'hard' impacts, i.e. addressing skills needs, improving confidence and increasing productivity. Some providers believed that this was due to ESF funding as it helped them to develop or enhance existing provision, support harder to reach learners and employers, and develop innovative and flexible provision. However, providers believed that ESF paperwork was still too excessive, and there was an issue over the definition of, and collecting evidence for, job outcomes for Response to Redundancy providers.

5.1.3 Conclusions against study aims

The research was tasked with addressing four key aims (see Section 1.3). Our conclusions against these aims are provided in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Conclusions against study aims

Main aim/key questions	Conclusion
<p>How effectively has funding been targeted at priority sectors identified in regional ESF frameworks, particularly among sectors with identified skills gaps and shortages, and those traditionally weak in training?</p>	<p>The process of co-financing under ESF has led to a close strategic alignment between project activities and regional and sub-regional priorities in terms of mainstream provision and priority sectors.</p> <p>However, there was little evidence of providers targeting hard to reach sectors, although they expected to ‘pick up’ on these groups in their normal activities.</p>
<p>How well has provision been used to engage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learners facing barriers to accessing and progressing within the labour market, e.g. lone parents, offenders/ex-offenders, young parents, disabled workers, older workers and ethnic minorities? • those least likely to access training, e.g. low-paid and part-time workers, women and those in sectors/businesses traditionally investing less in training? 	<p>Most providers were working with employers they already delivered to, and who had positive attitudes to training (although this may also have been developed through the projects).</p> <p>Employers tended to identify which employees undertook the training.</p> <p>There were a number of projects working with hard to reach employers and learner groups, but little overt targeting of them, particularly where ESF provision supplemented mainstream provision.</p>
<p>What is the impact of ESF provision on individual companies, employees and others (particularly in addressing skills needs to support productivity and growth), soft outcomes gained by participants (e.g. improved motivation and confidence, and a greater value of training), and whether the programme has empowered individuals to progress in their occupation?</p>	<p>There was extensive evidence of impacts on both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ measures. Providers, employers and learners all felt that the greatest impacts had been on addressing skill needs, confidence and motivation, and productivity.</p> <p>In addition, there were positive impacts on employers’ in terms of their future training behaviour, although less impact was identified on learners’ progress in their occupations.</p>
<p>What is the added value of the programme, particularly in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complementing companies’ own investment in skills? • supporting mainstream programmes (e.g. Train to Gain) and strategies (e.g. recommendations of the Leitch Review, the Learning and Skills Council statement of priorities, and regional economic strategies)? 	<p>A key aim of ESF Priority 2 and Priority 5 provision was to support mainstream programmes and agendas. This study has demonstrated progress and success in this respect.</p> <p>In particular ESF has supported the development and delivery of responsive, relevant and high quality provision, which both employers and learners found appropriate and beneficial.</p>

5.2 Recommendations

Our recommendations are as follows:

- **Impacts of co-financing on strategic alignment and innovation** – a key finding of the study was that co-financing has had a positive effect and led to an enhanced strategic alignment due to the consideration and inclusion of a wide range of agendas and partners. Whilst this is a key strength of the current programme, it could be argued that it has led to the funding of more conventional and less innovative provision. However, this may also have resulted from the selection of experienced providers, who are working with employers and learners they know and understand well, and operating within the wider parameters of mainstream provision and other specific constraints (e.g. qualification structures). ***We recommend that the extent to which innovation has been compromised should be monitored, and steps taken at the Managing Authority level, to ensure this important and valued aspect of ESF programming is maintained.***

The recently introduced Innovation and Transnationality strand within the current programme will help support the innovation and demonstration aspects of ESF, and ***we recommend that such approaches are continued and their learning is communicated widely amongst the ESF community and beyond.*** In addition, consideration should be given to ***supporting innovation more widely across the programme,*** for example by adjusting outcome and other performance targets to allow for the failure rates that accompany truly innovative development work.

- **Progression and aftercare** – perhaps one of the more surprising findings from the study was the apparent limited focus on progression and aftercare for employers and learners participating in the case study projects. This is more surprising given the evidence of changed attitudes towards training, as well as an enhanced appetite for learning, resulting from participation. Coupled with the high levels of employer and learner satisfaction, this suggests that opportunities exist for further progression and additional training provision. Given this enhanced engagement and potential take-up is firmly in line with the wider aims of the ESF programme, it is surprising that more was not visibly being done to maximise opportunities for further engagement. It is, of course, possible that such additional benefits are being realised over a longer time period, or via additional funding routes. ***We recommend that an increased emphasis is placed across the programme on maximising the benefits of positive employer and learner experiences through active approaches to progression and aftercare. Such emphasis could be provided through, for example:***
 - ***the requirement to include explicit progression stages and/or strategies in project applications/delivery plans, and the monitoring of the effectiveness of their implementation, and***

- ***the provision of additional support to enhance mechanisms to aid progression, for example by stimulating cross-referrals between projects and provision for mutual gain.***
- **Flexibility and responsiveness** – employers and learners praised the relevance and responsiveness of provision and is a testament to the effectiveness of providers. However, providers reported sometimes having to work within certain inflexible programme parameters. It is not clear whether this is due to the interpretation of ESF by CFOs, the alignment of ESF with regional and other priorities, or specific contracting decisions. However, ESF processes, parameters and definitions, or the interpretations of them by CFOs, should be as flexible as possible in order to support providers in delivering appropriate and responsive provision. In addition, the Managing Authority and individual CFOs should ensure that they accurately communicate the parameters of the current programme to potential providers.
- **Issues of delayed starts** – several of the case study projects reported delays in starting their projects for a range of reasons, a perennial issue affecting many fixed-term funding programmes and by no means confined to those funded under ESF. In this case delays were compounded by the increased Train to Gain flexibilities, which resulted in a number of projects being re-contracted. Train to Gain changes aside, delayed starts resulted in many of the case study projects not engaging with the number of employers and learners expected by the time of study. Other ‘knock on’ effects of delays were also identified, including trying to get learners through NVQs by the year end. In recognition of the importance of this issue, ***we recommend that:***
 - ***the importance of ensuring projects can start promptly post contract finalisation is communicated to new projects, while at the same time the importance of the prompt contract finalisation is also emphasised to CFOs and others.***
 - ***consideration should be given to ‘building in’ an initial pre-delivery ‘set-up’ period into project timetables, to help ensure delivery can begin to time.***

However, we also recognise that in reality some delays are inevitable, and unlikely to be entirely avoidable.

- **Referral mechanisms** – an important issue for several of the case study projects, notably those supporting workers made redundant or at risk of redundancy, was the capacity of referral agencies. This largely related to the increased pressures on agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus and Nextsteps, to manage the increased workload resulting from the current economic circumstances, although issues around the exchange of personal data between referrers and providers was also an issue. However, we also identified that referrers faced the challenge of developing clear understandings of which providers are delivering which programmes, and the specific eligibility requirements of each, to allow effective referral to take place. While many examples were found where clear

and close partnership working helped mitigate these issues, the pivotal role of such agencies suggests ***extra efforts may be required to ensure local and regional 'offers' are communicated, and that the differences and foci of the different programmes available is understood.***

An associated issue related to the extent to which Response to Redundancy projects were able to identify (and seek to fill) vacancies through direct engagement activities with employers. In some cases these links were in place, but this was by no means comprehensive. While recognising the potential sensitivities, particularly around redundancy issues, associated with this area, ***we recommend that the importance of active employer links be emphasised to CFOs and projects, and that they are encouraged to take positive steps to ensure employers can contribute to project design and the effectiveness of delivery.***

- **Capturing benefits and impacts** – the study identified that in many cases some of the key benefits for employers and learners are not monitored and recorded. This is particularly the case with **employers**, where impacts on productivity, staff confidence and motivation, and value added (amongst the chief impacts highlighted by employers and learners) are not routinely recorded or captured directly as part of the ESF Cohort Survey. Whilst the difficulties associated with collecting data of this nature is recognised, ***we recommend that steps are taken to capture wider employer impacts either at CFO level or nationally, to ensure that key impacts of the ESF programme are not missed.*** This would also help ensure that employer experiences were drawn upon to inform ongoing and future delivery.

In the case of learners, although the monitoring requirements of the programme allow for the reporting of 'soft' outcomes, our work with the case study projects suggests that this process can be variable in terms of coverage and approaches followed. Here ***we recommend that CFOs provide guidance and support to help ensure that the focus of data collection on soft outcomes is increased to ensure wider coverage.*** While we do not recommend the imposition of a single approach to data collection on soft outcomes, steps should be taken, both nationally and regionally, to better inform projects on the options available to them to ensure that robust, practical and practicable approaches are followed.

Finally, other evaluation studies have illustrated the positive benefits that can result from the direct or indirect contribution of employers and learners to provision design and delivery. Our suggestions for enhanced local monitoring will provide useful data to support this, which would usefully sit alongside many of the existing mechanisms reported by projects such as the involvement of business and sector representatives in developing effective provision that meets employer and learner needs.

- **Supporting the cross-cutting themes** – both the regional and national stakeholders suggested that the cross-cutting programme themes of equality and equal opportunities and sustainability were the most vulnerable aspect of the current programme. The evidence from the case study projects appears to support this, especially with regard to the sustainability theme. When looking at the relationship between the national and regional ESF Frameworks, the sustainability objective was sometimes ‘cut and pasted’ and not developed or further refined at a regional level. There was also a reported lack of understanding of, or support for, the sustainability theme amongst a significant minority of providers. While the projects had a greater awareness of (if not necessarily active engagement with) the equality/equal opportunities theme, this may be due to equal opportunities being an inherent theme across many learning and skills agendas rather than through ESF. ***We therefore recommend that efforts to raise awareness of, and engagement with, the cross-cutting themes continue, through actions at national, regional and CFO levels. In addition, further efforts should be directed towards supporting implementation, particularly of the sustainability theme, perhaps through the provision of case examples which articulate the coverage of the theme and the benefits engagement with it can provide.***

However, these recommendations are made within the context of significant success in developing and delivering relevant, responsive and high quality provision which has helped meet the skills, business and other needs of employers and learners.

Appendix A

Projects included in the study

Table A.1 Priority 2 Competitiveness Projects

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
East of England	Second Level 2	£2,870,313	Private	People requiring full Level 2 qualifications for their current job (when different to the sector already qualified in).	The aim of the Advantage East project is to deliver high quality flexible training in Skills for Life and full NVQ Level 2 qualifications (or equivalent) for individuals currently ineligible for Train to Gain. Offering total East of England coverage, the project will meet stated needs of employers and individuals that have the desire to develop their skills.
East of England	Regional Maths Centre	£442,000	Private provider	Participants aged 19+ with numeracy needs employed in the region.	Building the capacity of learning providers in the region to deliver quality numeracy and mathematics programmes, by increasing the number of appropriately qualified/experienced numeracy teachers and by supporting providers to deliver innovative numeracy courses.
East of England	Migrant Worker Qualification Conversion	£750,000	Learning Partnership	Migrant workers aged 19+, European Union (EU) citizens or with indefinite leave to remain, in companies with less than 250 employees.	The purpose of this project will be to map the existing qualifications of migrant workers in the East of England to ensure that their skills and previous qualifications are appropriate for their employment intentions in the UK. The project will provide a specialist information and advice service to migrant workers from the EU to help them make best use of their skills to the benefit of the local economy.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
East Midlands	Train to Gain – Northamptonshire	£1,545,939	College	Employees 19+.	To improve competitiveness, efficiency and employability of the workforce through improving the skills and competence of employees.
East Midlands	Train to Gain – Leicestershire	£2,777,845	College	Employees, second Level 2s or Level 3s.	To improve competitiveness, efficiency and employability of the workforce through improving the skills and competence of employees.
East Midlands	Response to Redundancy – Derbyshire	£252,000	Private provider	Employees at risk of redundancy, or those recently redundant.	GLH + Jobs for redundant /under notice of redundancy.
Innovation and Transnationality	New Employer Engagement / Dual System	£941,008	Chamber of Commerce		The project's aim is to identify replicable good practice from Cologne's 'dual' training system to enhance and improve the current system of training.
London	Level 3 Leadership & Management	£705,000	Lead body	Participants: Disabilities/health conditions (15 per cent), aged 50+ (20 per cent), ethnic minorities (37 per cent), females (50 per cent).	The Financial Services Skills Council (FSSC) has identified skill shortages in financial services in managerial and supervisory levels across London. The project will aim to close this gap by delivering up to 156 Level 3 management qualifications to small to medium-sized enterprises by developing employed participants from key priority groups who may be existing managers without the requisite skills, or those who have the potential to move into higher-level management positions.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
London	ESF London L2 provision	£701,500	Private provider	Participants: disabilities/health conditions (15 per cent), aged 50+ (20 per cent), ethnic minorities (37 per cent), females (50 per cent). Sixty-five per cent of participants to achieve Level 2 qualifications.	To support employees in the workplace to achieve an appropriate (2nd) Level 2 qualification across all 33 London boroughs in varying volumes. Seven different qualifications are offered and the project targets those with a Level 2 already or the self-employed.
London	Workplace for Skills for Life	£410,000	Private provider	Employees with low-level skills in low-paid employment.	Deliveries of a series of specific skills intervention to support participants become proficient in the workplace through literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages skills.
London	Ladder to learning	£410,000	College	Employees with low-level skills in low-paid employment.	Skills for Life training for employees working in the construction sector.
North East	TUC Learning For All	£2,993,653	Trades Union Congress (TUC)	Individuals aged over 18 employed in unionised workplaces who are disengaged from learning.	An innovative delivery method utilising funds generated on the project to implement training solutions in employers with individuals furthest disengaged from training. This includes the utilisation of workplace advocates (union learning reps) and ties together with other funding streams in its delivery.
North East	Van Hee Training	£510,978	Private provider	Individuals aged 19 plus who have recently been made unemployed or as a result of an intervention of this project would be ready to re-enter the labour market.	Response to Redundancy provision offering training to unemployed people to re-engage in work. Delivery is in place even though the economic climate has provided a difficult environment to link to job opportunities in sectors supported. Nevertheless the provider has utilised existing employer links to help identify suitable opportunities.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
North East	ESF Response to Redundancy	£999,450	College	Individuals aged 19 plus recently unemployed, or where as a result of this project would be ready to re-enter the labour market.	The project works with participants who have recently been made redundant, to get them back into sustainable employment as quickly as possible, by offering a vocational qualification in a priority sector, and a follow-up NVQ once in employment (Train to Gain). Participants are also provided job-seeking skills training to help improve job applications and interviews.
North West	Employee Engagement	North West £158,759 Merseyside Phasing-In Area £66,869 Total £225,628	Private provider	Non-unionised employees, with priority given to 'hard to reach' employers without Investors In People recognition and not accessing substantial training within the past 12 months. Within these 'hard to reach' employers, primarily non-management employees will be identified.	The Learning Advocates Initiative will increase the skill and qualification levels in companies throughout the North West by: training employees of non-unionised companies to promote learning opportunities to their colleagues; funding innovative workplace projects to increase participation in learning and raise employee confidence levels; building links between non-unionised companies and Train to Gain/Training providers.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
North West	Higher Education Enterprise Skills Routeway	£600,000	University	Awareness-raising stage designed for all undergraduates/postgraduates. The fast track business start programme designed to support 100 students on a summer break between Years 2 and 3 of study; eligible for a sandwich year or work-based learning placement; about to graduate.	This activity will provide Merseyside-based higher education (HE) students with a customised, integrated programme of enterprise training and support – including: large-scale awareness raising; structured experiential learning modules; a bursary award scheme and bespoke business support – to raise awareness of entrepreneurship, stimulate entrepreneurial activity and facilitate new enterprise start-ups amongst graduates, to help diversify the local business base and increase graduate retention.
South East	Enviroskills	£1,726,923	Public business support provider	People aged 16+, in employment; SMEs.	To provide training in environmental and related bio-science technologies, working with businesses to fill gaps in training provision and ensure that relevant training is accessible and relevant. To be done by deploying regional brokerage and sector support partners to help define skills requirements and recruit staff to the programme; establishing a network of HE, further education and other providers to deliver a programme of skills modules to address identified gaps in SME skills provision; and providing specialist advice and TNAs to ensure participants are signposted and supported into the most suitable courses.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
South East	Skills for Technology	£863,540	Private provider	People aged 16+. employed in aero/ marine sectors.	To work with the existing Marine and Aerospace Regional Resource Centres to deliver training. The specialised training will cover key areas such as advanced composite materials, design and manufacturing techniques, mechatronics and skills based on new technologies that are required both now and in the future by these sectors. Quarterly technology forums will be used to present how advances in materials, technology and regulation are presenting exciting career development opportunities in these sectors.
South East	Workforce development at L2 and L3 – Sports Coaching	£332,000	College	People aged 16+, volunteer sports coaches.	To provide a coaching bursary for sports coaches to undertake coaching courses for sporting bodies to up skill the coaching workforce. This project provides coaches with the new coaching standards (the UK Coaching Certificate) at Level 2 and Level 3.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
South West	Reaching Out to Train to Gain	£1,279,454	College consortium	Employees requiring: functional literacy and numeracy; employees without Level 2; employees whose Level 2 qualifications are no longer relevant to their current employment and are not seen as current.	This project will address the barriers to participation and achievement in Train to Gain by providing a range of support activities and raising awareness amongst employers of the benefits of training in terms of productivity and future growth. The project will also create a clear progression route from Level 1 to 3 to create a coherent training offer. Sustainable development will be a key theme and all participants will benefit from training in environmental and waste management best practice.
South West	ICE Breakers	£923,010	College consortium	The migrant workforce in the workplace with language needs; within SMEs and sectors with a high proportion of migrant labour (e.g. food and drink, hospitality, low-skilled manufacturing).	The aim of the ICE Breakers project is to provide an accessible path for migrant workers to acquire the basics of the English language. It will train workplace coaches (known as ICE Breakers) to use a set of multimedia training materials (ICE) to support and encourage migrant workers, at the workplace or in community settings, to ESOL or accredited vocational training. The project will work with both SMEs and larger employers to provide opportunities for the development of individual workers and the teams in which they work.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
South West	Environmental Technologies	£1,034,700	College	Those aged 19+ employed within specified industry sectors, needing to update their qualifications and skills in environmental technologies: employed within an SME.	This project develops courses in Environmental Technology leading to nationally recognised qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 through blended training packages, and delivers these qualifications to 550 employees in the construction, electrical and waste management sectors in the West of England sub region. It adopts an on-site assessment and training approach with web-based learning and support to collaboratively develop key qualifications to enable a greater move into environmental technologies.
South West	Market for Learning	£360,003	Local development agency and partners	19+ age group; low-skilled adults in employment and/or in need of retraining for new Level 2/3 employment; female participants; participants aged over 50; participants with disabilities or health conditions; migrant workers.	Working in identified rural communities within Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon, with employers of low-skilled workers, the project will support learners taking a full Level 2 qualification to achieve by funding additional childcare, transport, development of local learning networks, basic skills and IAG. Other qualifications which improve skills and employability of low-skilled workers, ESOL in the workplace for migrant workers and others with language development needs will also be provided.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
West Midlands	Level 1 NVQs	£400,000	Private provider	Employed.	Providing 500 individuals across Birmingham who are in employment but without a Level 2 qualification with progression development opportunities, in retail and commercial enterprise, hospitality, leisure travel and tourism, business administration and law sectors. Delivering bespoke packages of employer-led Level 1 qualifications, ongoing assessment and one-to-one support, participant support, post project mentoring, preparation and referral to vocational Level 2 qualifications.
West Midlands	Redundancy Redeployment Package	£16,540,384		Employed at risk of redundancy.	A trade union-led consortium involving key agencies drawn from both public and private sectors will deliver a holistic and proactive redundancy support service to employees displaced from all sectors of the West Midlands economy. Over 13,000 participants will receive a programme of targeted support and guidance, life skills training, vocational training and accredited learning tailored to help them return to employment.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
West Midlands	Level 4 leadership and management	£80,000	Trade union	Employed.	BDS Learning's 'Resource Manager' programme offers a flexible and innovative route to broadening manager skills for individual and company benefit, through in-house or open-access groups undertaking resource efficiency or profitability improvement projects, using specialist analytical tools, training and guidance to identify, target and deliver margin/cost improvement, structured through the NVQ4 in Management.
West Midlands	Response to Redundancy	£6,741,720	Private provider	Unemployed, recently redundant.	Response to Redundancy provision offering training to unemployed people to re-engage in work. The project focuses on providing training specific to the needs of the learners and helping them gain sustainable employment.
West Midlands	Level 4 leadership and management in the care sector	£210,000	Private provider	Employed.	Delivering qualifications in the health/social care, transportation and construction sectors via a consortium approach, applying current processes and contacts developed for Train to Gain, offering flexible workplace delivery and developed around employer/learner needs.

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
Yorkshire and the Humber	NVQ Levels 3 and 4 IAG	£26,105	Careers/youth support provider	Voluntary Sector.	NVQ Levels 3 and 4 In Advice and Guidance
Yorkshire and the Humber	Organisation development	£70,098	Private provider		Public relations and marketing, people and organisations, sales & sales process, innovation through diversity
Yorkshire and the Humber	NVQ Levels 3 IAG	£40,000	Careers Service	Private and community sectors.	Delivering IAG Level 3 NVQs to a range of private and community sector organisations.

Table A.2 Priority 5 Convergence projects

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
Cornwall – HE	Graduate Placement Programme	£4,125,000	Cornwall College	Graduates/post-graduates in Cornwall	The graduate placement scheme will offer packages including financial support, expert mentoring and business skills training – with a leadership and management qualification. It will also include a graduate recruitment portal aiming to advertise all graduate-level jobs in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.
Cornwall – HE	Combined Universities of Cornwall Research Programme	£1,564,508	University of Exeter	Post-graduate researchers	This project aims to increase high-quality research and strengthen links between businesses and the Combined Universities in Cornwall. Run by the University of Exeter, the research programme is a partnership to significantly boost the amount and quality of research in Cornwall/Isles of Scilly by developing a research programme tailor made for each institution. This will include encouraging more than 800 people to do post-graduate research gaining PhDs, Masters Degrees or do post-doctoral research. The knowledge and skills gained will be transferred to businesses. As part of the research programme, new courses will be developed to provide higher-level skills in economic sectors with a high growth potential. These include environmental science; environment/human health and design/media.

Continued

Table A.2 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
Cornwall – HE	Developing Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Programme	£937,500	Cornwall College	Undergraduates, graduates, women, older workers, social entrepreneurs, under-employed individuals and new workforce entrants.	The investment will train teachers, lecturers and trainers to teach enterprise and entrepreneurship skills more effectively in all settings, including schools, colleges, the community and workplace. The project will also focus on specific groups to help raise entrepreneurship and enterprise skills, through collaborative activities between the Combined Universities in Cornwall partners, schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, businesses and third sector organisations.
Cornwall – HE	HE Interventions	£3,419,400	Cornwall College	Graduates, post-graduates, SMEs, people without relevant Level 3 or 4 qualifications, people needing to update or upgrade qualifications.	Managed by Cornwall College in partnership with Truro and Penwith Colleges, this project will maximise expertise in providing quality higher level skills opportunities for individuals within the workforce. It will raise awareness of the benefits of participation in HE, widen access to higher-level skills training and provide progression pathways thereby raising workforce skills to support a knowledge-based economy.

Continued

Table A.2 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
Cornwall	DKey sectors	£8,434,500	The Learning Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Participants employed/self employed in a range of sectors; workforce with basic skills needs, without relevant Level 2 or 3 qualifications; workforce with disabilities, aged 50 and over, ethnic minorities and women in non-traditional roles.	This partnership project works with 13 sector organisations, the Skills Brokerage Service and providers to engage businesses in workforce development activity and deliver 445 basic skills and 1862 Levels 2-5 qualifications; develop 11 new qualifications and promote career options to 500 school students. It will also support networking skills amongst SMEs in seven high-growth sectors, create new sector organisations and produce or revise local skills plans for all 13 sectors.
Cornwall	Skills for Work	£4,395,000	The Learning Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Workforce with basic skills needs, without relevant Level 2 or 3 qualifications; with disabilities including learning disabilities and health conditions; aged 50+, black and minority ethnic people and female workforce development in non-traditional roles.	The programme will deliver CPD to the Skills for Life workforce, and ensure that providers have the capacity to deliver broader Skills for Life programmes. It aims to increase participation, including the migrant workforce, and improve the quality and flexibility of provision, so we are able to achieve targets set out in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) demand-led workforce outcome. It will also increase the capacity of business sector organisations and social partners and improve the take up, retention and achievement of Skills for Life for the workforce in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Continued

Table A.2 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
Cornwall	Rural Based Land	£1,140,000	Cornwall College	Workforce with basic skills needs, without relevant Level 2 or 3 qualifications; with disabilities including learning disabilities and health conditions; aged 50 and over, ethnic minorities; the female workforce development in non-traditional roles; and those in rural land based communities.	This project will combine expertise in an unprecedented collaboration of a sector skills council, and private and public sector providers to address the skills development of individuals within the rural land based workforce. Managed by Duchy College working with Lantra and Agribip, the project will focus on the learner and the needs of the employer. The project will drive the uptake of Train to Gain, widening participation in relevant vocational qualifications and on management and leadership qualifications.
Cornwall	CRUNCH (Countering Recession through Union Networking, Co-operation and Help)	£570,000	TUC	Focused on those at risk or recently made redundant.	Unionlearn, Cornwall will lead a joint trade union project which will work with key partners to improve the skills and knowledge of union reps, learning reps and members so that they can better support the needs of fellow workers affected by the risk of redundancy. Activities will build on the good practice developed in other redundancy work through the South West TUC's Learning Works for All Fund and the activities will be coordinated from the newly created Trade Union Learning Centre in St Austell.

Continued

Table A.2 Continued

Region	Project name	Funding ESF	Provider type	Target groups	Project description
Cornwall	The Progressive Isles		The Learning Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Workforce with basic skills needs, without relevant Level 2 or 3 qualifications; with disabilities; aged 50 and over; ethnic minorities and women in non-traditional roles.	The Progressive Isles project will build on the successes of previous projects run by the Council of the Isles of Scilly to deliver a learning and skills programme that will enable individuals, organisations and businesses to fulfil their ambitions and potential on the Islands. The target is to offer 250 Level 2, 80 Level 3 and 100 basic skills qualifications to participants.
Cornwall	Rapid Response to Redundancy	£1,891,070	Working Links	Individuals under notice/newly redundant, and the unemployed ready to return to work after training.	Participants will be offered practical help to overcome redundancy and get back to work quickly. The emphasis is on boosting confidence by giving participants the necessary skills to succeed in today's challenging labour market. Participants will also have access to our Employer Solutions Team who liaise with a wide range of businesses to identify opportunities.

This report presents the findings of research into the nature and effectiveness of European Social Fund (ESF) support for in-work training under the current Competitiveness and Convergence programmes in England. The report is based on the findings of case study research with 41 projects – 31 funded under Competitiveness Priority 2 and 10 under Convergence Priority 5 – which featured a review of project documentation and interviews with Government Offices, co-financing organisations, project leads and key partners, and participating employers and employees.

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