

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Introduction

This is the latest of a series of independent impact evaluation reports of the Workforce Development Fund (WDF, also known as ‘the mainstream fund’), Individual Employer (IE) funding and the Essential Training programmes. It incorporates findings from primary research undertaken between May and August 2024 focused on delivery in 2022/23 and 2023/24. The evaluation was commissioned by Skills for Care and was completed by a team of researchers from York Consulting LLP.

This latest evaluation was undertaken in the context of an anticipated change to funding for learning and development in the adult social care sector. This was in the form of an Adult Social Care Training and Development Fund to be claimed through a new digital service and administered by NHS Business Services Authority. In July 2024, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) [announced that these new plans would not proceed](#) but that there would be ongoing funding for adult social care learning and development at levels in line with previous years’ spending. Subsequently, [guidance for the new Adult Social Care Learning and Development Support Scheme \(LDSS\) for 2024/](#)

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IE funding: accessible, meeting specific needs and improving PA retention

Most individual employers and ULOs praised the IE and ULO funding models. Both types of stakeholder highlighted strengths associated with accessibility, communication and support during the claims or application processes, and the range of training available. ULOs were appreciative of the ULO fund's flexibility and the autonomy this gave to identify and meet the needs of their specific services. However, some thought that smaller ULOs may not have the resource or time required to apply for the fund.

A series of impacts were identified as resulting from the IE and ULO funding, linked to skills development, job satisfaction, partnerships, quality of care and retention.

Impacts for individual employers

- Improved knowledge and confidence of responsibilities and rights as an employer, which include staff recruitment and direct payments.
- Meeting other employers outside of ULO settings and sharing best practice.
- Affordable training for individual employers who would not have access otherwise.
- Stronger retention of PAs following training and therefore less re-recruitment needed.
- Better awareness of where to access information and resources on employment issues and knowledge sharing.

Impacts for PAs

- More knowledgeable, more informed and know where to access support.
- Improved self-confidence and skills-building following access to peer-support sessions.
- Greater level of job satisfaction and subsequent increase in retention.
- Better able to deal with challenging situations.

ULO also highlighted the added value of the funds (ULO and IE) in providing support otherwise not available for individual employer and PA workforce development. Equally, the local insight and knowledge of ULOs had driven decisions on training delivered via the ULO fund.

Essential Training programmes: underpinning fundamental skills development and contributing to quality care

Employers agreed that the Rapid Induction and Refresher Training programmes were relevant and of quality, acting as a good introduction to new entrants in the sector while also improving the performance and knowledge of more experienced staff. They were satisfied with the number and range of endorsed learning providers and with delivery methods and access to training.

As seen for the previous evaluations, 90% or more of employers said that Essential Training programmes had an impact on their ability to address skills gaps, continuity and quality of care, and infection control. Most also said the programmes helped them to more effectively train staff, keep staff skills up to date and save costs. For some employers, especially smaller, independent providers, no training would have taken place without having access to the essential training.

Table ES2: Impacts of the Essential Training programmes

	Significant or some impact (% of employers)
Quality of care	95%
Addressed skills gaps in the workforce	94%
Infection control	91%
Continuity of care	90%
Ability to meet demand/need	90%
Improved the skills of the workforce	86%
Source: Essential Training employer survey (n= 78).	

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