

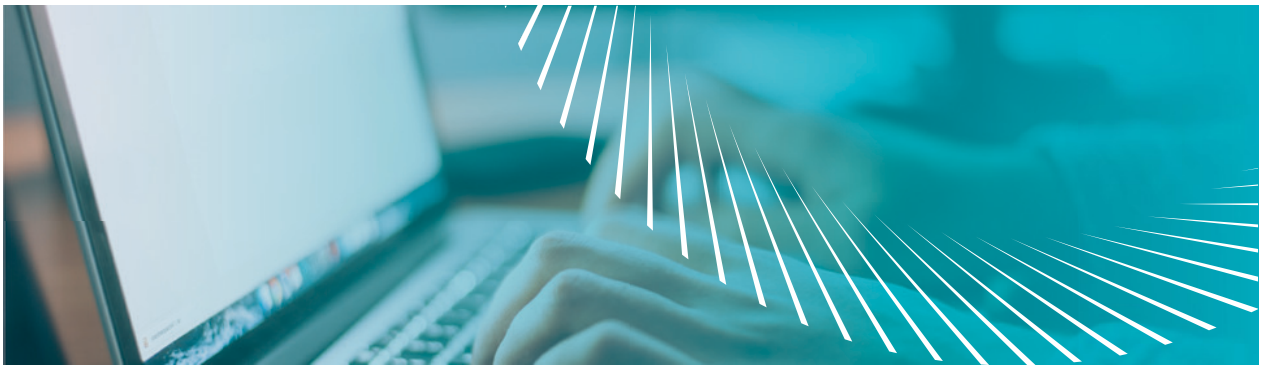
Nottingham Trent University

ESF High Level Skills Programme Evaluation

July 2021



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Executive Summary

Project Background

The European Social Fund (ESF) High Level Skills (HLS) programme is dedicated to addressing high-level skills needs in small and medium-sized businesses in Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The programme was designed to help businesses grow by creating a more diverse, creative and productive workforce through the delivery of two complementary projects: Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and GRADS for D2N2.

- **Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs: Upskilling the existing workforce** - The Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project provides SMEs with fully-funded, bespoke and employer-led training, career coaching and advice to upskill their employees with high-level technical and job-specific skills.
- **GRADS for D2N2: Recruiting and retaining the future workforce** - The GRADS for D2N2 project offers six specific interventions for enrolled SMEs: organisational needs assessments, skills and talent action plans, talent grants and graduate placements, employability advice and workshops, apprenticeship advice and workshops and co-design - putting SME voices at the heart of course design.

A consortium of higher education, further education and local authority organisations are working together across the D2N2 geography to deliver the HLS programme. This is the first-time universities and colleges in the region have worked together on such a large scale to develop learning and training in collaboration with small to medium-sized businesses. Partners in the HLS programme are: Nottingham Trent University (Lead Partner), The University of Derby, Nottingham College, Derby College, Nottingham City Council (GRADS for D2N2 only).

Evaluation Process

In November 2020 Focus Consultants were appointed to deliver an evaluation of the ESF funded High Level Skills programme. The evaluation uses a combination of primary and secondary data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact that the HLS programme has had on D2N2 businesses and residents.

The evaluation considers both the overall HLS programme, and the individual Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and GRADS for D2N2 component projects. This evaluation reviews the participants, outputs, results, targets and financial position for the HLS Programme. It also considers the extent to which the HLS programme has met the outcomes and objectives that it set out to achieve, particularly within the context of the ESF priorities.

The analysis considers feedback from over 300 people involved in the HLS programme, including learners, businesses, staff, stakeholders and graduates.

Outputs and Results

The contracted outputs and results are shown in the tables below, along with the percentage of each output/ result that has been achieved to date.

| Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Outputs and Results | Cumulative Actuals to end Q1 21 | PCR3 Target | Percentage Achieved |
| Total O1 - No. of Participants | 1109 | 973 | 114% |
| Total O4 - Over 50 | 179 | 179 | 100% |
| Total O5 – Ethnicity | 122 | 131 | 93% |
| Total O6 - Without basic Skills | 54 | 212 | 25% |
| Total CO14 - Single adult with children | 73 | 46 | 159% |
| Total CO16 – Disability | 68 | 110 | 62% |
| Total R6 - Gained Level 2 | 183 | 208 | 88% |
| Total R7 - Gained Level 3 | 202 | 373 | 54% |
| Total R8 - Females gaining improved labour market status | 166 | 188 | 88% |

| GRADS for D2N2 | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Outputs and Results | Cumulative Actuals to end Q1 21 | PCR3 Target | Percentage Achieved |
| Total CO23 - No. of SMEs in support | 672 | 711 | 95% |
| Total R9 - No. of SMEs completing projects | 394 | 533 | 74% |

Discussions with the project team highlights that some results remain on a lag as the team cannot claim outputs until they exit participants. However, the O1 numbers, the CO23 numbers and partner and team reassurance and forecasts provided confirms the pipeline is in place to hit targets by early August.

Consultation Approach

A comprehensive consultation process has been undertaken for the programme, including with: learners, SMEs, stakeholders, and project delivery staff. In total over 300 learners, businesses, staff, stakeholders and graduates took part in the consultation to inform the ESF HLS evaluation. The consultation has highlighted a number of key impacts and outcomes that have resulted from the HLS programme. These have been summarised in the table over the page.

| Impacts Achieved by the High Level Skills Programme | |
|---|--|
| for Individuals | |
| Confidence and new specific skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 73% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that the training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to do their existing job 43% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their long term career prospects By summer 2021 the project will have supported 188 females to improve their labour market status <p>Learner Quote: <i>'Super supportive and helped me get a promotion!'</i></p> |
| Confidence to do their existing job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 72% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to do their existing job 41% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training had given them confidence to apply for a higher skilled job By the summer of 2021 the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project will have supported: 937 participants, of which 179 are over 50 years old, 100 have basic skills, and 46 were single adults with dependent children <p>Learner Quote: <i>'I am just more excited with a new sense of purpose. I also boosted my confidence'</i></p> |
| Confidence to secure a new job or position that has more responsibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 57% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to secure a new job or position that has more responsibility 17% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to secure a new job or position that has more responsibility 9% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to secure a new job or position that has more responsibility <p>Learner Quotes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>'Gave me the confidence in myself to push on to the next level'</i> <i>'Growth of confidence to apply for leadership roles'</i> |
| Wages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training through the project had or would increase in their wages in the next five years and 30% said maybe |
| Motivation/ productivity whilst at work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training through the project has had a medium or high impact on their motivation/ productivity whilst at work |
| Businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 38% of businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that support through the programme had increased their recruitment of the Government's Kickstart Scheme 45% of businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that following support through the programme they are more likely to recruit apprentices |
| Graduate placements delivered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of the 31 businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey and made use of the graduate placement opportunities, 52% recruited a graduate before and 68% are now more likely to recruit graduates in future 48% of the graduate placements delivered would not have been provided without the support of the programme. <p>Business Quote: <i>'The business has survived and diversified because of the graduate'</i></p> |
| for SMEs | |
| Staff and workforce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of learners who received support from the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs programme and completed the questionnaire said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their motivation/ productivity whilst at work |
| Businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 41% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire felt that their involvement with the project will lead to an increase in turnover within the next five years. A further 18% said maybe 26% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire felt that their involvement with the project will lead to an increase in turnover within the next five years. A further 18% said maybe 26% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire felt that their involvement with the project will lead to an increase in turnover within the next five years. A further 18% said maybe 25% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire expanded their client base 25% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire expanded their client base 30% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire said that the support allowed them to reach new markets, industries and products |
| Businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that their involvement with the project had allowed them to recruit new talent for the business 54% of businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that their involvement with the project had reduced the costs associated with taking on new employees <p>Business Quote</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>'We had searched for over a year to fill this role, and Derby Uni presented someone to us quite quickly once we started working with them'</i> |
| Businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 61% of businesses said that their involvement with the project has given them a better understanding of their skills needs 90% of learners said that they would recommend the training to a colleague or friend <p>Business Quote</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>'It's helped me identify holes in our management structure'</i> |
| for D2N2 | |
| Businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 42% of businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that their involvement with the project had improved their ability to attract, recruit and retain workers <p>Staff Feedback: <i>'I have seen progression from lower to higher roles, growth in ability and confidence. I personally had one enrolment who was able to use the leadership training as a way to show she was qualified to move up to a directorial role within the company'</i></p> <p>Business Quote: <i>'We had searched for over a year to fill this role, and Derby Uni presented someone to us quite quickly once we started working with them'</i></p> |

Summary and Recommendations for the Future

A summary of the main findings of the HLS evaluation is shown below, along with recommendations for future programmes.

a) Project Development - It was noted that there were some delays in getting the programme up and running in the early stages. Key recommendations with regards to overcoming these delays and other suggestions to improve and develop future programmes include:

- Ensuring that delivery teams are involved at the project development/ application stage to shape and inform proposals.
- Ensuring that there is sufficient staff resource allocated within each partner organisation to support the administration/ reporting requirements.
- Building staff recruitment into project timetables – this can be a lengthy process.
- Building contracting time into project timetables to allow a realistic start date for the programme.
- Agree and define the delivery model from the outset
- Planning meetings at project conception to develop the collaborative working across consortium and team meetings between project partners
- Ensure the partner offers are transparent, clear and fully understood by each consortium member before any bids are submitted
- A stronger emphasis on outcomes and long-term value for future schemes
- A stronger focus on the acquisition of high level qualifications focussed on co-design.

b) Project Management - Discussions with staff suggested that the HLS project management approach was complex. Whilst this had led to some issues around delivery and management through the programme these were identified quickly and dealt with efficiently.

Any issues or concerns at the staff level did not translate into concerns for beneficiaries - with both learners and businesses providing positive feedback with regards to the project management. This shows the ability of the delivery teams to take a complex programme, simplify this and 'hide the workings' from the beneficiaries, providing an end product that met the needs of the businesses and learners. Discussions with staff also suggest that the delivery partners learnt a lot from the delivery of the HLS programme and are now better placed to deliver future programmes.

c) Delivery of the Programmes - The case studies and feedback from businesses and staff shows how interlinked the two programmes have been and how many businesses have received support from both the GRADS for D2N2 project and the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project. Key recommendations with regards to how project delivery can be shaped and improved in future include:

- Bringing together those involved at the delivery/ operational level to discuss best practice and lessons learnt on a more regular basis (subject to ongoing demand from staff)
- An internal newsletter or regular update for the wider project team
- Building a network of businesses and/ or individuals who have been through the training
- Increasing feedback between partners on identified skills gaps.

d) Business/ Education Provider Relationships - It is clear from the case studies that the businesses feel that the delivery partners have 'gone the extra mile' in terms of the support offered and that some significant relationships have developed between the SMEs and the delivery partners over the duration of the HLS programme.

Often it can be making the initial link/ engaging the learner or business for the first time that can be the most challenging part of a programme of this nature. Going forward the partners need to work hard to support and develop the existing relationships that have been developed, and continue to support the learners and the businesses. Suggestions for achieving this could include peer networking, newsletters or a meeting at the end of the intervention to plot out further support opportunities and next steps for businesses.

e) Training/ Learning - The training was clearly well received by the learners who took part in the evaluation questionnaire, with 95% (127) telling us that they were pleased that they undertook the training.

Recommendations made for the future delivery of courses from staff and learners include:

- Offering a wider choice of courses
- Making the most of online offers – a flexible blended approach once the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions are relaxed
- Not forgetting the importance of face-to-face learning, interaction with tutors and networking with peer groups – learners told us that they want more than just online training
- A more flexible training approach that recognises each individual's personal circumstances – including both fast-track options, or longer delivery options to accommodate those who may have to juggle the training around existing commitments
- Ensuring clarity over assignment deadlines
- Additional resources for those with dyslexia
- Addressing gaps in IT knowledge
- Building peer networks
- Streamlined paperwork/ enrolment and use of electronic signatures.

f) Future Skills Needs for Learners and Businesses - Businesses, learners and staff identified digital skills as the main area where skills support is needed. This has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online working (see more details below). Other areas where there is a demand for skills include:

- Change management, leadership and management
- Accounts
- Marketing/ digital marketing/ communications
- Project management
- Business planning/ strategic thinking
- Recruiting/ developing a team
- Carbon literacy/ environment/ sustainability
- Equality and diversity.

g) The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic - Learners, businesses and staff were also asked how the Covid-19 pandemic will shape learning and skills needs going forward. The consultation suggests that the use of online training over the last year has made organisations rethink how training is delivered in future. Many view the switch to online as a positive. Other Covid-19 pandemic impacts were noted by the delivery partners including:

- During the second phase of the Covid-19 lockdown, furloughed staff were engaging with online learning for the first time. This changed perceptions of learning and the online delivery allowed flexibility so that they could do it in their own time.
- Both the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit have heightened the needs for organisation competence; businesses need to be agile, re-appraise their supply-chain and be more strategic.
- A higher importance on staff development/ training to help businesses adjust to new ways of working along with potential recruitment freezes. There will be a higher focus on developing staff to fill existing skills gaps, where they may have previously have recruited.
- In future moving online will have a massive impact with regards to who can attend courses, and this could be considered in future programmes.

Additional skills needed by businesses and learners as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic include:

- **Digital:** IT literacy, making the most of new technologies, digital project management, support for managers regarding how to manage and support home workers (mental health/ motivation) and how to manage remote teams working online, particularly engagement, team working and collaboration
- **Business Transformation and Covid-19 Pandemic Impact:** Business transformation, mentoring, marketing, resilience training, adaptability, leadership, management, budgeting and change management and strategic business planning.
- **Career Changers:** Wider support for those forced to change the industry/ sector they work in

h) Graduates - Positive impacts from the graduate placements for businesses include: good value for money, creativity of graduates, fresh ideas, bringing in new technologies and enthusiasm. Suggestions for developing the Graduate Scheme included:

- **Grants/ Funding**
 - The administration burden of the grants needed to be reduced for businesses.
 - There needs to be more flexibility in the model to allow for multiple grants to be provided to the same organisation.
 - Fully funded graduate options might be beneficial for a lot of businesses.
- **Business and Graduate Support**
 - More comprehensive on-boarding and ongoing support is needed - customer care should be better embedded within the project.
 - Graduates would benefit from being brought together in a peer network, to support one another in remote working and wellbeing.
- **Length of Support**
 - An option for a longer period of support would have suited a lot more businesses.

i) Apprentices - Of the 9 businesses that used the apprenticeship support, 3 had never recruited an apprentice before and 6 are now more likely to recruit graduates in future. (2 no change, 1 less likely). Staff feedback with regards to the apprenticeship scheme included:

- Inclusion of apprenticeships as a measurable target
- Continue to work with employers to shape the training and amend the marketing.

j) Co-Design - Co-design is seen as a major success of the project and something that should be taken forward into future programmes. Staff noted that the benefits of co-design such as increases in apprenticeship numbers take time to be realised and are likely to be outside of the lifetime of the evaluation. With this in mind it was suggested that feedback is provided to businesses on the impacts of co-design during the project lifetime to make sure they know their input has made a difference and ensure they feel valued.

k) Sustainability - Circa two thirds of learners, half of businesses and 29% staff told us that they were not aware of the programme's commitment to sustainable development. This suggests that in future programmes more could be done to raise awareness of this.

Next Steps

Since this evaluation was commissioned, the High Level Skills programme has qualified for a funded extension from ESF as they are regarded by DWP as a well performing programme. This will see activity delivered through the HLS programme until December 2023.

1.0 Introduction and Programme Background

The European Social Fund (ESF) High Level Skills (HLS) programme is dedicated to addressing high-level skills needs in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The programme was designed to help businesses grow by creating a more diverse, creative and productive workforce through the delivery of two complementary projects: Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and GRADS for D2N2.

Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs: Upskilling the existing workforce - The Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project provides SMEs with fully-funded, bespoke and employer-led training, career coaching and advice to upskill their employees with high-level technical and job-specific skills. The project also supports employees that may face additional barriers to gaining high-level skills, including: people who missed out on traditional educational opportunities, people aged 50+, women, people with disabilities, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals.

GRADS for D2N2: Recruiting and retaining the future workforce - The GRADS for D2N2 project offers SMEs a complete package of free and subsidised support to help them benefit from graduate talent and support recruitment and workforce development in the region. The project offers six specific interventions for enrolled SMEs: organisational needs assessments, skills and talent action plans, talent grants and graduate placements, employability advice and workshops, apprenticeship advice and workshops and co-design (putting SME voices at the heart of course design).

1.1 The Delivery Consortium

A consortium of higher education, further education and local authority organisations are working together across the D2N2 geography to deliver the HLS programme. This is the first-time universities and colleges in the region have worked together on such a large scale to develop learning and training in collaboration with small to medium-sized businesses.

Partners in the HLS programme are:

- Nottingham Trent University (Lead Partner)
- The University of Derby
- Nottingham College
- Derby College
- Nottingham City Council (GRADS for D2N2 only).

1.2 Business Environment: The Covid-19 Pandemic

It should be noted that much of the HLS programme has been delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic many businesses closed their premises, many employers were forced to furlough staff, and organisations had to re-think and re-shape their delivery models. The mechanisms used by the HLS programme to overcome the barriers created by the Covid-19 pandemic are set out later in the report, along with the lessons learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic and how these could shape future programmes.

1.3 European Structural & Investment Funds Investment Priority

The Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project and the GRADS for D2N2 project were funded through the European Social Fund (ESF).

- **Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs** - The Priority Skills for D2N2 project was funded under the ESF 2.1 priority which supports projects that: Enhance equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrade the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promote flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences.
- **Grads for D2N2** - The GRADS for D2N2 SMEs project was funded under the ESF 2.2 priority which supports projects that: Improve the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitate the transition from education to work, strengthen vocational education and training systems and their quality, and establish the development of work based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes.

1.4 Outcomes and Impact of The High Level Skills Programme

The HLS programme was shaped and developed to support the requirements of the ESF priorities set out above. The HLS programme was also specifically designed to deliver the following outcomes and impacts set out in the table below.

| Outcome/ Impacts to be achieved by the High Level Skills programme | |
|--|---|
| Outcomes for individuals | Improved employability, skills, abilities and knowledge |
| | Increased earnings potential, motivation, ambition and confidence for individuals |
| | Increased progression rates to apprenticeships for individuals |
| | Improved access to placement/ internship opportunities/ graduate placement opportunities |
| Outcome for SMEs | Motivated staff and a flexible workforce |
| | Increased productivity and business growth |
| | Targeted recruitment support and improved ability to attract, recruit and retain workers at higher levels |
| | Raised awareness within SMEs of their skills needs and a better knowledge of how to address them |
| Outcomes for D2N2 | Better jobs for residents |
| | Graduate retention increase |
| | Higher skilled workforce |
| | Better links between education and business |

Later in this report we set out the progress of the HLS programme towards achieving these outcomes and impacts.

1.5 The High Level Skills Programme Evaluation

In November 2020 Focus Consultants were appointed to deliver an evaluation of the ESF funded High Level Skills programme.

This Programme Evaluation uses a combination of primary and secondary data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact that the HLS programme has had on D2N2 businesses and residents. The evaluation considers both the overall HLS programme, and the individual Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and GRADS for D2N2 component projects.

This evaluation reviews the participants, outputs, results, targets and financial position for the HLS Programme. It also considers the extent to which the HLS programme has met the outcomes and objectives that it set out to achieve, particularly within the context of the ESF priorities.

The analysis considers feedback from over 300 representatives involved in the HLS programme, including learners, businesses, staff, stakeholders and graduates. The report identifies the impact that has been achieved, good practice and lessons learnt for future programmes. It also identifies areas where future skills and workforce development support is needed for D2N2 businesses, particularly in a post Covid-19 pandemic economy.

1.6 Programme Extension

Since this evaluation was commissioned, the High Level Skills programme has qualified for a funded extension from ESF as they are regarded by DWP as a well performing programme. This will see activity delivered through the HLS programme until December 2023.

2.0 Case Studies

To give a flavour of the types of individuals and businesses participating in the HLS programme, and the type of support offered, a selection of brief case studies has been re-produced below.

Note: case studies summarise longer studies which have been prepared by programme staff.

2.1 Businesses Supported by both the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and GRADS for D2N2 Projects

2.1.1 Coles Sewing Centre Limited, Supported by Nottingham College

Coles Sewing Centre Limited was founded in 1996 and offers a variety of products and services for the sewing and textiles industry. Coles completed their Organisational Needs Analysis through the GRADS for D2N2 project and worked together with Nottingham College to build an action plan to help implement some of the recommendations. This included developing staff training plans and professional development reviews to help further develop a progression route for staff. During this process it was established that there was an existing skills gap in Leadership and Management due to a lack of capacity and time of senior management. Two employees were enrolled onto the Level 3 Team Leader apprenticeship delivered through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.

In future, it is planned that Coles Sewing Centre Limited will work alongside Nottingham College's Work Placement Team, offering placements to fashion and engineering students. This will help with capacity at Coles, but also help to develop the skills students need for the industry once they finish their course. Through the project, Coles' extensive industry knowledge has also helped to co-design the College curriculum to ensure it is relevant for current industry needs.

2.1.2 VUS, Supported by Derby College

VUS Ltd are utility infrastructure contractors and civil engineers. VUS has received on-going organisational support through both the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and the GRADS for D2N2 projects which has resulted in the organisation accessing funding and allowing two of their employees to undertake a nationally recognised Leadership and Management qualification.

A VUS Project Manager who began the course earlier this year noted: *'The course has allowed me to understand my role in the business more, allowing me to increase and manage productivity within the workplace. This is the first time I have completed training within VUS and have taken on more responsibility in my job role since starting the course with Derby College Group. I highly recommend the course.'*

2.1.3 Impression, Supported by The University of Derby

Digital marketing agency Impression has experienced rapid growth in recent years, requiring the team to develop new skills and capabilities. The HLS programme provided the opportunity to upskill the whole team and bring the company's marketing strategy to life. The organisation created a graduate scheme, and engaged the University of Derby to ensure staff continue to develop their skills. Through the HLS programme the university created a bespoke course for the business which has enabled them to offer more international services.

2.2 Businesses Supported by the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs Project

2.2.1 Nottingham Women's Centre, Supported by Nottingham Trent University

Nottingham Women's Centre is a community centre providing a range of services to help women gain the skills and confidence to achieve their potential, become stronger and more independent. Karen Feely, operations manager at the centre, took part in NTU's Women in Leadership Programme. When reflecting on her learnings, Karen noted that she had taken away a lot of new knowledge and has been able to implement plenty of changes in a short space of time. Through the programme Karen introduced a process called 'Managing You, Working With Me, Achieving Together' - a series of sessions where she worked with her staff to try to understand the best ways of working together.

Through the course Karen also developed recommendations about what the Women's Centre can do to continue its growth in the future.

Karen said the following about the programme: *'Looking back, I can't sing the praises of the course highly enough, it was brilliant. The additional offer of the career coaching was also fantastic and I'd say a vital part of the learning. I would really encourage anyone that has the opportunity to take up the offer.'*

2.2.2 Airport Information Systems (AIS), Supported by The University of Derby

AIS is one of the leading suppliers of airport management systems. Through the HLS programme, the business enrolled on the Strategic Marketing in a Digital Age short online course which offers highly practical learning. As a result of the course the business refreshed their website, and the newly re-organised site is thought to be a lot more visually engaging.

The information learned during the course has enabled AIS to build a better profile; enhancing their use of the website as a marketing tool. Social media is another area that has been reviewed following the completion of the course. The programme has allowed AIS to benefit from capabilities and expertise that they wouldn't have otherwise had access to.

2.2.3 Customer Plus, Supported by Nottingham College

Nottingham College ran the ILM Level 2 Leadership & Team Skills for Women for 14 learners from local businesses across Nottingham and Derby, giving them the skills needed to progress further within their job roles. The course was designed specifically for women working (or aspiring to be) in a leadership role and those who want to develop their skills to progress within their career and become more effective and confident in their role.

Staff from Customer Plus, a business specialising in supporting companies to improve customer experience, participated in the course. Customer Plus noted that the training has produced "a noticeable difference in their leadership approach since the programme".

Split into three half days, the course brought together coaches to administer a range of interactive courses which enabled participants to build relationships. As a result of the programme, participants who successfully completed the course acquired significant core knowledge and skills and the ability to apply new knowledge to their existing roles and better handle changing leadership situations.

2.2.4 Sustainability and Inclusive Leadership Course

The Sustainability and Inclusive Leadership (SAIL) course offered by NTU through the programme explored the global climate crisis, the very real impact that this will have on the economic landscape, and how important it is for businesses to be more sustainable as they work towards COVID-19 recovery.

Participants were able to consider personal values, ethical decision-making and health and wellbeing, before taking a more focused look at sustainability through the lens of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate action and carbon literacy. The course also looks at the circular economy – an economic system emphasising minimal waste through re-use, sharing, repaid and recycling – and the 'doughnut economy' – a visual framework for sustainable development.

The course has been accredited by NTU, and participants receive 10 credits towards a Level 4 (degree level) qualification.

2.3 Businesses Supported through the GRADS for D2N2 Project

2.3.1 The Treat Kitchen, Supported by Nottingham Trent University

The Treat Kitchen are a confectionary wholesaler who count Harrods, TK Maxx and Wilko among their customer base. Jess Barnett, sales director and co-founder worked with NTU's Employability Team to explore the option of taking on a graduate on a six-week placement. The company recruited Santa, who, through the programme, was able to get involved in everything from poster and brochure design, to product photography and packaging development.

Since completing the placement, Santa has gone from strength to strength within the business, having been promoted to the role of Creative Lead. She now works alongside the head of product development, and line manages a full-time studio artworker. She has also supported work experience opportunities for seven creative interns.

2.3.2 24 Fit C.I.C., Supported by Derby College Group

24 Fit C.I.C are an exercise and wellbeing Community Interest Company established in 2015. Derby College undertook an Organisational Needs Assessment (ONA) for the company which identified three business goals of; business growth, expanding the team, and developing new markets. Gaps in the business were also identified and included: web design, digital marketing /social media, admin/bookkeeping and video production.

The company were able to make use of the College's media students to make a video of one of their classes to add to the website and promote the marketing.

Through the programme the business also received apprenticeship advice, networking support, support to recruit new talent and advice on grant funding. A representative from the company noted: *'I really appreciate the support that has been given through the High Level Skills programme and I look forward to an ongoing strong relationship with the Derby College Group.'*

2.3.3 Smith's of Derby, Supported by the University of Derby

Prestigious Derbyshire clockmakers since 1856, Smith of Derby, have been partnering with the University of Derby's Business Gateway for many years, most recently as part of the graduate recruitment programme. The programme has recently supported the business to grow their workforce with two new University of Derby graduates, Daniel and Oliver, who themselves are both massively benefiting from the development opportunities that working for an SME can provide.

Oliver Beetlestone, Design Engineer/Visualiser and recent graduate employee at Smith of Derby Limited, said: *"Being employed by an SME allows you to work closely with other people and the job role is much more varied than it might be in a large company.... You are up and about overseeing all the different areas of production of what you're designing and developing....I've worked on a number of quite prestigious projects, including my first one, which I designed from start to finish....I'm travelling to the Middle East for Dubai Design Week for the next one. It's a good opportunity to be able to go to these design shows and to grow your own career."*

2.4 Case Studies: Summary

The case studies show how interlinked the two projects are, with many businesses receiving support from both the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs and GRADS for D2N2 projects.

The case studies also show the wide breadth of support that the programme has been able to offer, and how the flexibility of this offer has enabled the individual delivery teams to provide bespoke packages of support to businesses.

It is clear from the case studies that the businesses feel that the delivery partners have 'gone the extra mile' in terms of the support offered and that some significant relationships have developed between the SMEs and the delivery partners over the duration of the HLS programme. Going forward the partners need to work hard to support, maintain and develop these relationships.

The benefits to the recent graduates who have been offered positions as a result of the programme are also clear. This has included opportunities to develop new products, take ownership of work-streams within their organisations and really feel like they are a valued part of the business.

Additional feedback from learners and businesses who took part in the HLS programme is included in later sections.

3.0 HLS Programme Progress – Outputs, Results and Finances

The table below charts the progress of the HLS programme towards meeting the contracted outputs, results and financial spend. Analysis is provided over the page.

| HLS Programme Progress | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Project | O & R / Budget Heading | Cumulative Actuals to End Q1 2021 | PCR3 Target | Percentage Achieved to Date |
| Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs | | | | |
| 2.1 | Total O1 - No. of Participants | 1109 | 973 | 114% |
| 2.1 | Total O4 - Over 50 | 179 | 179 | 100% |
| 2.1 | Total O5 – Ethnicity | 122 | 131 | 93% |
| 2.1 | Total O6 - Without basic Skills | 54 | 212 | 25% |
| 2.1 | Total CO14 - Single adult with children | 73 | 46 | 159% |
| 2.1 | Total CO16 – Disability | 68 | 110 | 62% |
| 2.1 | Total R6 - Gained Level 2 | 183 | 208 | 88% |
| 2.1 | Total R7 - Gained Level 3 | 202 | 373 | 54% |
| 2.1 | Total R8 - Females gaining improved labour market status | 166 | 188 | 88% |
| 2.1 £ | Staff direct | £1.571m | £1.572m | 100% |
| 2.1 £ | Indirect | £0.628m | £0.629m | 100% |
| | Total | £2.199m | £2.201m | 100% |
| GRADS for D2N2 | | | | |
| 2.2 | Total CO23 - No. of SMEs in support | 672 | 711 | 95% |
| 2.2 | Total R9 - No. of SMEs completing projects | 394 | 533 | 74% |
| 2.2 £ | Staff direct | £5.216m | £5.216m | 100% |
| 2.2£ | Non-staff direct | £1.116m | £1.363m | 82% |
| 2.2 £ | Indirect | £0.782m | £0.782m | 100% |
| | Total | £7.114m | £7.361m | 97% |

3.1 HLS Programme Progress

Key points to note with regards to outputs, results and finances include:

- Achieving the contracted outputs was a challenge for the HLS team during the Covid-19 pandemic, but significant progress has been made in recent months and the team are confident that they will be within a 10% margin at the end of the PCR 3 phase.
- The HLS programme has secured an extension which will extend activities until December 2023. It is anticipated that the current lag on results, along with additional outputs and outcomes will be achieved as part of the project extension request.
- There is still a significant gap relating to CO16 Disabled Participants. Discussions with the staff team suggest that this is in part due to participant reluctance to disclose this information. To overcome these barriers the HLS management team have held staff discussions and training and published several articles. Maximising uptake from disabled participants has been, and will continue to be, a focus for the remainder of the current project and for future programmes. The team are also planning new marketing campaigns to address this going forward.
- There are large variances relating to O6 Participants Without Basic Skills. O6 has been removed from the contract with DWP agreement under PCR3. This is because the focus of the HLS programme is predominantly on high level skills rather than basic skills.
- There are large variances relating to R7 Participants Gaining Level 3. Discussions with the team are noted that there is a strong pipeline for R7 as demonstrated through the number of O1s and partner reports. The team are confident that results will come through in the next two quarters.

3.2 Summary: Project Progress

Results remain on a lag as the team cannot claim outputs until they exit participants, at which point they can no longer receive support. However, the O1 numbers, the CO23 numbers and partner and team reassurance and forecasts provided confirms the pipeline is in place to hit targets by early August.

4.0 HLS Programme Progress – Marketing

A brief summary of the marketing undertaken by the team is set out in the diagram below. A more detailed analysis of the marketing of the HLS programme is included in later sections.

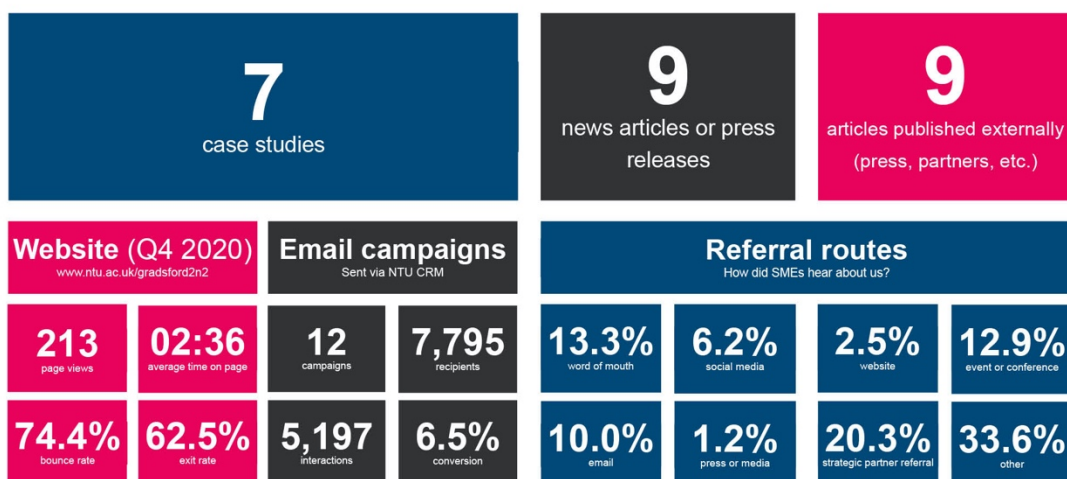
Programme-level marketing stats



2.1 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs marketing stats

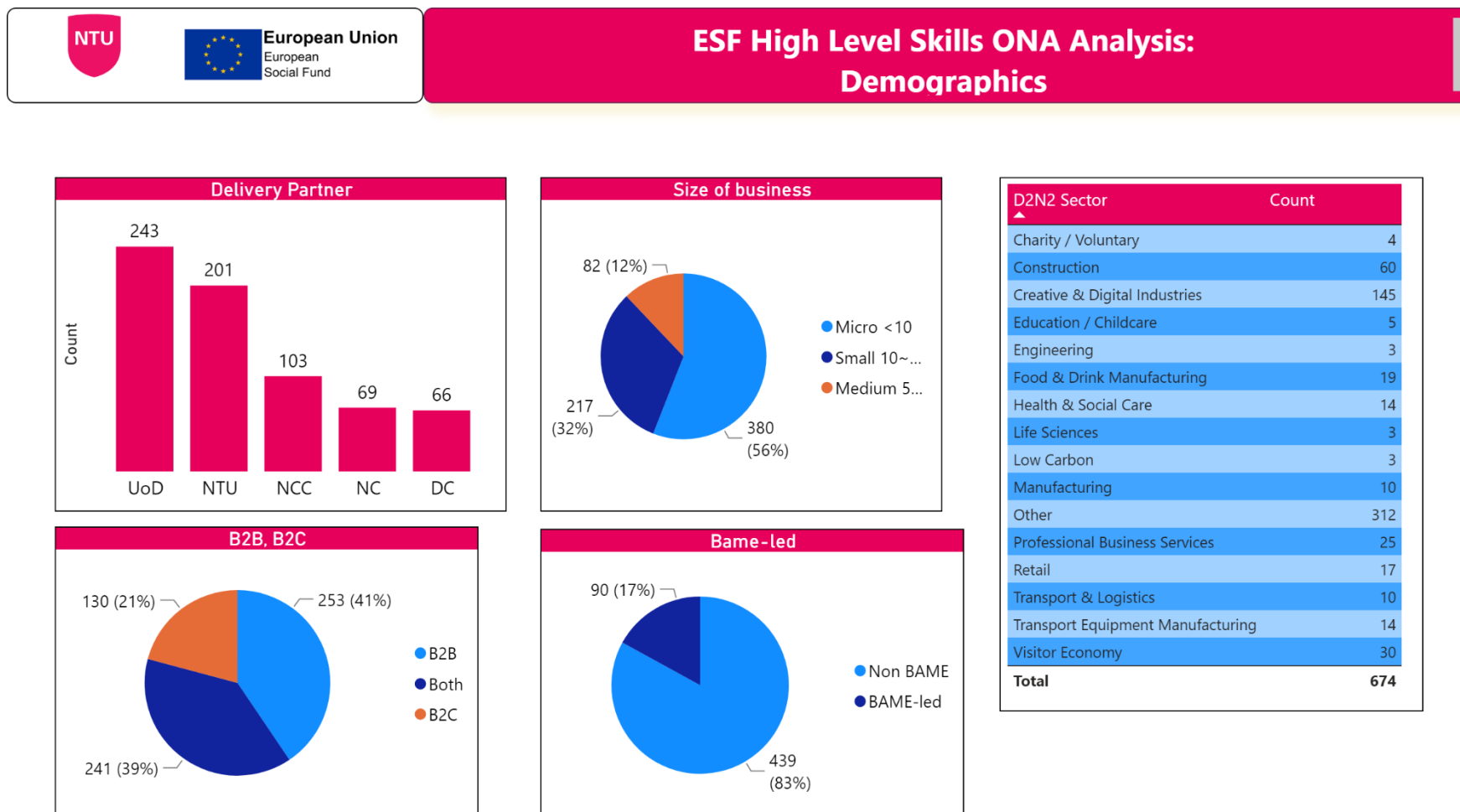


2.2 GRADS for D2N2 marketing stats



5.0 Participation and Beneficiaries: The Organisational Needs Assessment

Businesses supported through the HLS programme undertake an Organisational Needs Assessment (ONA) process. This captures data on business to help to identify the business needs, signposting to the right support available through the HLS programme. The ONA process also captures data on the types, sizes and nature of the businesses supported. Some of the key findings are summarised below



6.0 The Consultation Approach

Key to understanding the impacts, successes and lessons learnt for the HLS programme has been speaking to those involved. A comprehensive consultation process has been undertaken for the HLS programme, including with: learners, SMEs, stakeholders, and project delivery staff. The approach taken is set out below and copies of the questions posed to each group can be found by clicking on the links over the page.

In total over 300 learners, businesses, staff, stakeholders and graduates took part in the consultation to inform the HLS programme evaluation.

- **Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs**

- **Learners:** An online questionnaire was circulated to learners who undertook training through the project. The questions were designed to capture the impacts of the project on the learners and to identify future training and skills needs.
- **Employers:** An online questionnaire was developed for the employers of those who undertook training through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project. This was designed to capture the impact of the employee's training on the business that they work for.

- **GRADS for D2N2**

- **SME Beneficiaries:** An online questionnaire was circulated to businesses who were supported through the project. The questions were designed to help understand whether businesses are still facing skills gaps, the benefits realised from the support provided, the success of any graduate placements, the impacts of the apprenticeship advice and how any future programmes could be better designed to meet business need.
- **Graduates:** An online questionnaire was developed for graduates who have been placed into businesses through the programme. The questions were designed to capture details on the impacts of the scheme and the benefits of the placements for the individuals.

- **Project Delivery Staff**

- Initial face-to-face (virtual) discussions were held at the start of the commission with the delivery team leads from each partner organisation. This allowed the evaluation team to get a good overview of the project. A detailed online questionnaire was then developed for all staff directly involved in the delivery of the HLS programme including those delivering the initial needs assessment, organisational needs assessment, course/ training delivery, coaching, apprenticeship advice and graduate placement activity.

- **Stakeholders**


- A broader online questionnaire was developed to capture the views of those who had an awareness/ oversight of the HLS programme but had not been directly involved in the day-to-day delivery/ operation detail. This included senior staff members within the delivery partner organisations and also those from wider stakeholder organisations such as D2N2 and the Institute of Directors.


6.1 Consultation Questionnaires

The questions posed to each group of consultees can be found by clicking on the following links:



2.1 Priority Skills
For D2N2 SMEs.html


2.2 Grads for
D2N2.html


Staff Survey
HLS.html


HLS Stakeholder
Survey.html


Priority Skills -
Businesses.html


Grads
Questionnaire.html

The consultation findings are set out over the following sections.

7.0 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs

This section sets out the key consultation feedback with regards to the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project. It includes:

- **7A: Learner Consultation** - Key findings from the learners who have taken part in training delivered through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.
- **7B: Learner Impact** - The key impacts for learners who have been involved in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.
- **7C: Employer Consultation** - Feedback from businesses who had employees trained through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.
- **7D: Staff Consultation** - Regarding the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs elements of the HLS programme.
- **7E: Summary** - A summary of the findings for the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project from each of the above sections.

Learner Feedback Regarding the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project

'I am just more excited with a new sense of purpose. I also boosted my confidence'

'Gave me the confidence in myself to push on to the next level'

'Was great to take time out of the business to work on the business'

7A.0 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs - Learner Feedback

This section sets out the key findings from the online beneficiary questionnaire circulated to learners who have taken part in training delivered through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project. It particularly focuses on the success of the training, the lessons learnt and what support learners might need in the future. The impact of the training on the learners is included in later sections.

In total over 139 surveys were undertaken by learners, a response rate of circa 14% across the HLS programme. Some learners completing the survey had received support from more than one partner and these learners were asked to provide feedback separately for each partner. As a result, the survey captures data from 147 separate learning interventions.

Key findings from the learner survey have been grouped into themes and are set out over the following pages.

7A.1 The Learners who Completed the Questionnaires

The learners who took part in the survey were asked to provide some background data:

- 10% (11) consider themselves to be a person with a disability as described by the Equalities Act 2010.
- 83% (99) of the survey respondents were White; English/ Welsh/ Scottish/NI/ British, 5 were White (other), 5% (6) were Asian/ Asian British Chinese, 3% (3) were Asian/ Asian British Indian, 3% (3) were Mixed/multiple - White and Black Caribbean.
- 74% (86) were female, 26% (30) were male.
- 17% (21) worked in the professional and businesses services sector, 15% (17) worked in the creative and digital industries, 11% (12) worked in the charity and voluntary sector, 9% (10) worked in the engineering sector, 5% (6) worked in the retail sector, 5% (6) worked in the health and social care sector and 5% (4) worked in the manufacturing sector. A diverse range of other sectors were represented including landscape gardening, waste and recycling, museums/ heritage, beauty therapy, the motor trade and the wedding industry.
- 35% (50) learners had found out about the course through a recommendation from their employer, 26% (38) had been referred by a friend/ colleague/ acquaintance, 10% (14) had seen a social media advert, 6% (9) had taken part in a previous programme and 5% (7) had found the course following a web search.

7A.2 Delivery and Management

Limited consultation was undertaken with learners around delivery and management; however, some comments were captured which demonstrate that the programme was well received:

- *'Excellent course, delivery and support. Enjoyable too!'*
- *'I enjoyed the training, very informative. The instructor was very good. Thank you very much'*
- *'I thought it was fantastic. The women running it were really friendly and the coaching was excellent. I would recommend this to anyone'*

7A.3 The Training

Questions were posed to learners around the training offered through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project. The results are set out below.

7A.3.1 Recommending the Training

Learners were asked if they were pleased that they undertook the training and whether they would recommend it. The responses give a positive picture of the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.

| Please tell us if you agree with the following statements: | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------|----------------|
| Answer Choice | Yes | No | Maybe | Too early to say | Don't know | Response Total |
| I am pleased that I undertook the training on offer | 95% (127) | 1% (1) | 2% (3) | 1% (1) | 1% (2) | 134 |
| I would recommend the training from the partners to a friend/ colleague | 90% (121) | 2% (3) | 7% (9) | 0% (0) | 1% (1) | 134 |

7A.3.2 Improvements to the Training

Learners were asked: 'Could the training you received have been improved?' 133 learners responded. 25% (33) said yes, that training could be improved, 44% (59) said no, 20% (26) said maybe, 4% (5) said too early to say 8% (10) said don't know. Those that said improvements could be made were asked to expand on their answer. A significant number of answers were received - many commenting about the courses going online and that this lost some of the benefits of face-to-face learning. Additional comments have been grouped into key themes below. Additional Covid-19 pandemic specific comments have been included in later sections.

a) Tailored to the Job Role - There were a number of comments around the need to tailor courses to job roles, and making the learning more applicable in the real world. Comments included:

- 'I felt at times like I was being walked through the theory without walking away with concrete actionable things I could do to improve my personal leadership or my team'
- 'More specific ideas on how to implement, rather than just the principles behind it'

b) Training Mechanisms - There were a number of requests for 1:1 sessions, direct mentoring/ coaching, more interaction with tutors and better networking/ peer group sessions. This demonstrates that in future online courses need to be supplemented with face-to-face activity and that many learners want more than just a purely online offer.

c) Delivery - It was clear that each learner's personal circumstances and needs are different and training needs to be flexible to adapt to this. There were suggestions to offer fast track courses for those who wanted to complete their training quickly, along with courses delivered over longer timeframes for those who had other commitments to fit around. Comments also suggest that a whole day of online learning is considered too much, and online courses should be bite-sized/ last for just a few hours.

7A.4 Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Project

This section captures feedback from learners on the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Priority Skills for D2N2 project.

7A.4.1 Covid-19 Pandemic - Impact on Training

Learners were asked: *'Did the Covid-19 pandemic have any impact on your training, how it was delivered, or the quality of the course?'*

Many learners commented about their course moving online. Whilst it was noted that this had been a steep learning curve for both staff and learners, the effort of the delivery partners to get the courses up and running online quickly was appreciated by the learners. Additional comments received included:

- *'In the circumstances being online was a really good option. I think that if the circumstances had been different, we would have benefited meeting up and discussing ideas. Although we were able to meet up virtually, (and is now the norm), it felt staid at times'*
- *'Online, but this was done really well'*
- *'The networking side of meeting people from other organisations wasn't there. The course did try to facilitate this online but when people are so busy it's the first thing to go as its not deemed essential (myself included, and I don't think this is the fault of NTU)'*
- *'I would have benefited more from face-to-face sessions, but that couldn't be helped'*
- *'Was online and I was furloughed so worked very well indeed'*

7A.4.2 Skills Needed Post the Covid-19 Pandemic

Learners were asked what skills they might need post Covid-19 pandemic – comments included:

- *'I think technology will lead the way. More staff will work from home, which will challenge the work/life balance. It will also challenge people technically, with engagement, team working, collaboration etc'*
- *'I think I will need more training and recognition before moving jobs'*
- *'Resilience training and support. Continued mentoring'*
- *'Working for a charity with a tight ring-fenced budget, there's very little funding for training. The pandemic has caused the charity to pause whilst staff are using the Furlough Job Retention Scheme - has impacted on time spent looking for and applying for available and suitable grants'*
- *'Resource allocation and budget control'*
- *'Continued adaptability and managing teams more remotely'*
- *'Effective digital workflow and digital project management'*
- *'My industry is currently dying. I need to retrain. I want to learn how to help others through counselling and psychology'*

7A.5 Sustainable Development

Learners were asked whether they were aware of the project’s commitment to Sustainable Development and that it was aiming to limit its impact on the environment. 127 learners responded to the question. Of these 21% (27) said yes, 65% (82) said no, and 14% (18) said not sure.

Learners were then asked if they were able to contribute towards the sustainable development objective. Answers can be seen in the table below:

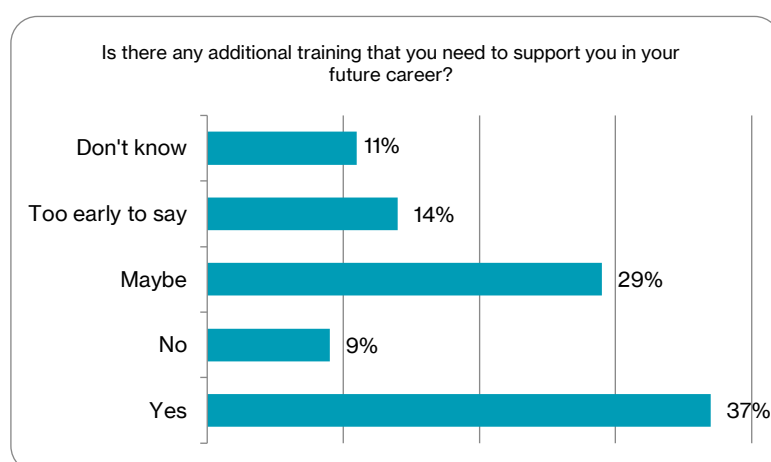
| Do you feel you were able to contribute to this? | | |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Answer Choice | Response Percent | Response Total |
| Yes | 38% | 48 |
| No | 15% | 19 |
| Maybe | 16% | 20 |
| Too early to say | 6% | 8 |
| Don't know | 25% | 32 |
| Answered | | 127 |

Learners were given the opportunity to expand on their answers with regards to how they were able to contribute to sustainable development targets. Most were only able to demonstrate this contribution through the move to online training as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning they had travelled less and used less paper.

With circa two thirds of the learners saying that they weren't aware of the project’s commitment to sustainability, there is the potential to do more in future projects around sustainable development.

7A.6 Future Training Needs

Beneficiaries were asked about their future training needs. Learners were asked: *‘Is there any additional training that you need to support you in your future career?’*



133 learners answered, of which; 37% (49) said yes, 9% (12) said no, 29% (38) said maybe, 14% (19) said too early to say and 11% (15) said don't know.

Learners were invited to tell us about any additional training that they needed. Many different courses were mentioned, but recurring themes included: IT/ digital skills, leadership, management, project management, marketing/ digital marketing/ communications, project management, business planning/ strategic thinking and recruiting/ developing a team.

7B.0 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs – Learner Impact

This section summarises the key impacts that were felt by the learners that have been involved in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.

7B.1 Learner Impact

The table below shows the number of learners completing the evaluation questionnaire who reported a high or medium impact on a range of outcomes.

| What impact has the training had on the following? | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Answer Choice | Medium and High Impact Total % |
| Allowed you to gain specific skills | 73% (102) |
| Increased your confidence to do your existing job | 72% (101) |
| Increased your ambition for your future career | 57% (80) |
| Increased your motivation/ productivity whilst at work | 55% (76) |
| Increased your long-term career prospects | 43% (60) |
| Increased your management and leadership responsibility within your organisation | 43% (60) |
| Given you the confidence to apply for a new, higher skilled job | 41% (58) |
| Enabled you to secure a new job or position that requires higher competencies, skills or qualifications | 17% (24) |
| Enabled you to secure a new job or position that has more responsibility | 17% (24) |
| Provided greater job security | 17% (24) |
| Enabled you to move from a part-time job to a full-time job | 9% (12) |

The table shows that the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMES has had a significant positive impact on learners, particularly around; skills development, confidence building, motivation and productivity and raising ambition.

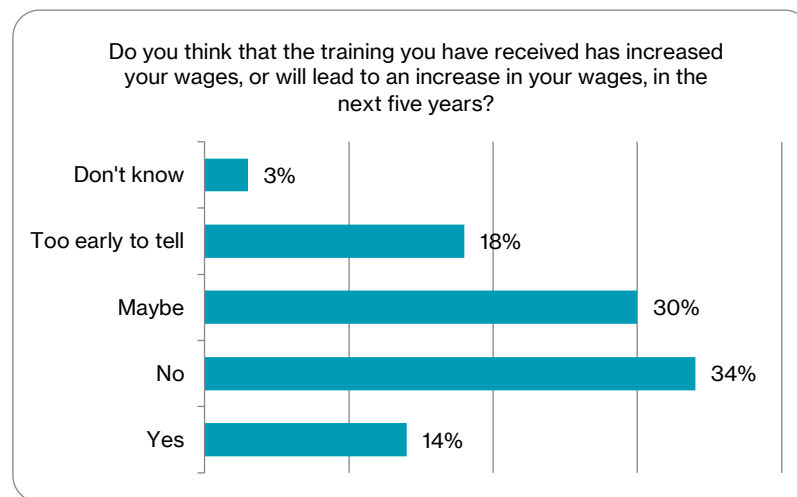
Given the Covid-19 pandemic, it is not unsurprising that there was less of an impact in terms of learners moving to higher skilled jobs or changing employment – many businesses highlighted through their survey responses that they have been focussed on consolidating their operations rather than growing or taking on any new staff over the past 12 months.

Learners were invited to comment on any other positive impacts the training has had for them:

- *'It has given me the confidence to take on a higher level of responsibility within my team'*
- *'Was great to take time out of the business to work on the business'*
- *'It has increased my confidence and I look forward to building upon it as the working landscape improves - for now it is simply a case of hanging in there until the pandemic subsides'*
- *'Gave me the confidence in myself to push on to the next level'*
- *'The group I was a part of has kept in touch. We supported each other through the exam process. We all want to meet up regularly to form a sort of Marketing Mastermind group'*
- *'Growth of confidence to apply for leadership roles'*

7B.2 Impact on Learner Wages/ Earnings

Learners were asked whether they thought the training they had received through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project has increased their wages, or will lead to an increase in their wages, in the next five years.



141 learners responded to the question.

Of these 14% (10) said yes, 34% (48) said no, 30% (43) said maybe, 18% (26) said too early to tell, and 3% (4) said don't know.

7B.3 Impact for Employers

Learners were also asked what benefits they felt that their training had brought for the businesses that they work for. Numerous comments were provided, but key themes emerging were mainly around management skills and confidence building.

Comments included:

Management Skills

- *'It's given me the skills to start training a junior member of staff'*
- *'Handling certain situations and how to take the best action'*
- *'Made me look at the bigger picture'*
- *'Helped me think strategically about our digital strategy'*
- *'I think it's helped me identify holes in our management structure'*

Confidence

- *'I am just more excited with a new sense of purpose. I also boosted my confidence'*
- *'It has helped me develop as a leader and therefore make better decisions and help my team succeed'*

7C.0 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs – Employer Consultation

Due to GDPR constraints the evaluation team were unable to directly contact the employers/businesses which those taking part in learning through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project worked at. Instead, the evaluation used the approach of asking the individual learners whether they would be happy to forward on a questionnaire regarding their training and its business impact to their employer. In total only 10 learners said they would be happy to do this, and of these only 2 employers answered.

Whilst it is impossible to draw anything conclusive from this limited data, it is still worth noting the businesses responses:

The first business responding to the questionnaire had seen employees supported with training from both Nottingham Trent University and The University of Derby. Key points from the feedback from this business included:

- The training provided had given the business a better understanding of their skills needs for the future.
- The business felt that the training has, or will lead, to an increase in turnover for the business over the next five years of circa 21%-30%.
- The training has increased staff confidence.
- This business was still facing skills gaps, particularly around: manufacturing tools and techniques, psychometric evaluation during recruitment, on-going team development, basic business law for small business owners and coaching for performance.

The second business responding to the questionnaire had been supported by Nottingham College. This business had been closed for 12 months but the respondent did feel that the training provided has increased staff confidence.

7C.1 Evaluation Considerations

This method of consultation did not prove to be particularly effective in terms of response rates. We would suggest that in future alternative mechanisms are considered when trying to capture the impact of any training on these secondary beneficiaries.

This could include sending out the evaluation consultation questionnaire immediately after the training has been undertaken so that the involvement of their staff with the programme is still fresh in their minds.

7D.0 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs: Staff Consultation

In total 57 staff members across the five project partners responded to the HLS programme online staff questionnaire. The questionnaire included separate sections covering the GRADS for D2N2 project, the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project and the overall HLS programme.

Of the 57 staff who responded to the overall survey, 34 told us that they had been involved in delivering, supporting, managing, monitoring or overseeing the Priority Skills for D2N2 project.

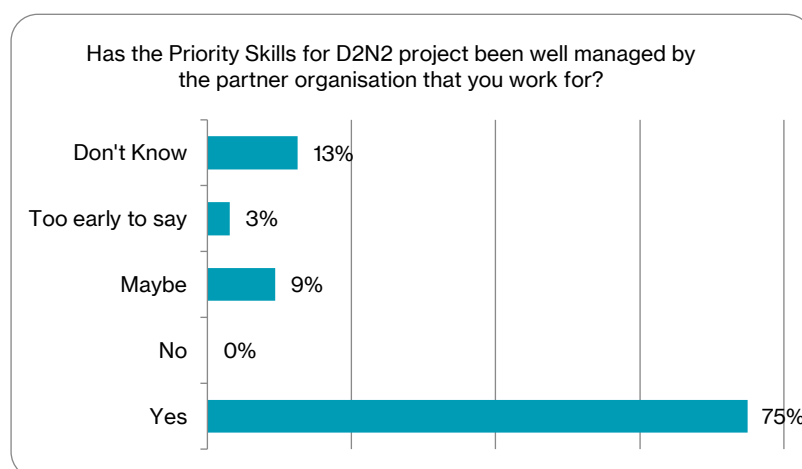
This section of the evaluation report sets out the key findings from this group regarding the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.

7D.1 Management and Governance

Staff involved in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project were asked: *'Has the Priority Skills for D2N2 project been well managed by the partner organisation that you work for?'*

32 staff members answered the question.

Of these: 75% (24) said yes, 0 said no, 9% (3) said maybe, 3% (1) said too early to say, and 13% (4) said don't know.



Staff were invited to expand on their answers. It seems that whilst there were some issues around delivery and management these were identified quickly and dealt with efficiently.

Some example comments included:

- *'The project has faced numerous challenges and I believe knowledgeable management has overcome all of these challenges and will ultimately result in a successful project'*
- *'Very organised, quick to spot and address risks and issues, completed the project in the spirit of the bid and sought to improve skill set of D2N2 area, sought to provide more rather than less'*
- *'... It has been a learning curve for all of us...'*

7D.1.1 Delivery Model

Staff were asked: ‘Thinking about the organisation that you work for, was the delivery model for the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project appropriate?’

32 of the 34 staff members answered the question. Of these: 78% (25) said yes, 0 said no, 3% (1) said maybe, 3% (1) said too early to say, and 16% (5) said don’t know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers, some comments included:

- ‘Any improvement suggestions can be floated upwards and are debated and implemented if a good idea. Otherwise, the delivery has worked well and continually improved and refined itself over the last two years’
- “Delivery was adapted as quickly as possible in line with the feedback from employers through evaluation and in light of CVD19’.

7D.2 The Training

Of the 34 staff members completing the questionnaire who had been involved in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project, 18 had been directly involved in delivering, arranging or supporting the training that was provided. This group were asked a range of questions. Key findings include:

- 16 of the 18 said that in their opinion the training provided through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project had met the needs of the individuals who were trained.
- 16 of the 18 said that in their opinion the training provided to the individuals had met the needs of their employers/ the business that those undertaking learning through the project worked for.

The 18 staff members were asked about any training that could not be delivered through the project and any training needed for the future. 16 staff members responded, they told us:

| The Training Delivered | | | | | |
|--|-----|----|-------|------------------|------------|
| | Yes | No | Maybe | Too Early to Say | Don't Know |
| Was there any training that businesses or individuals asked for that could not be delivered through the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs (2.1) project? | 3 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Is there any training that you think is needed by either D2N2 businesses or individuals that could/ should be delivered in future programmes? | 8 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |

Staff were invited to expand on their answers and tell us what additional courses/ training is needed and why. Key themes emerging included: change management, team leading, business planning, sales, digital, marketing, accounts, HR, carbon literacy and sustainability.

7D.2.1 Impacts of the Training

Staff were asked what impacts they thought the training would have for the learners. Answers included confidence building, career progression and upskilling. Comments from staff include:

- *'I have seen progression from lower to higher roles, growth in ability and confidence. I personally had one enrolment that was able to use the leadership training as a way to show she was qualified to move up to a directorial role within the company'*
- *'Clients have thrived, gaining confidence, knowledge, material, ideas and exposure to new clients and businesses, spreading ideas and thoughts through guidance and conversations.'*
- *'Enable them to be change-agents'*

Staff were asked what impacts they thought the staff training would have for the businesses that the learners worked at. A selection of comments from staff are shown below:

- *'Better planning of strategy, better knowledge of how to manage and engage individuals & team'*
- *'Improved retention, growth in leader position candidates and hopefully further faith in the education system to provide key training to their workforce'*
- *'Progression of staff members onto higher level responsibilities/roles, especially now that the pandemic will have affected business recruitment. Certain skills gaps will have been filled, helping with business capacity and productivity'*
- *'Motivation, improved skills, support'*
- *'Increased productivity, staff feeling more valued, better staff retention, more skilled workforce'*
- *'Staff will have more confidence and competence, improved productivity as a result. The business can also then offer additional services if staff are more technically skilled'*

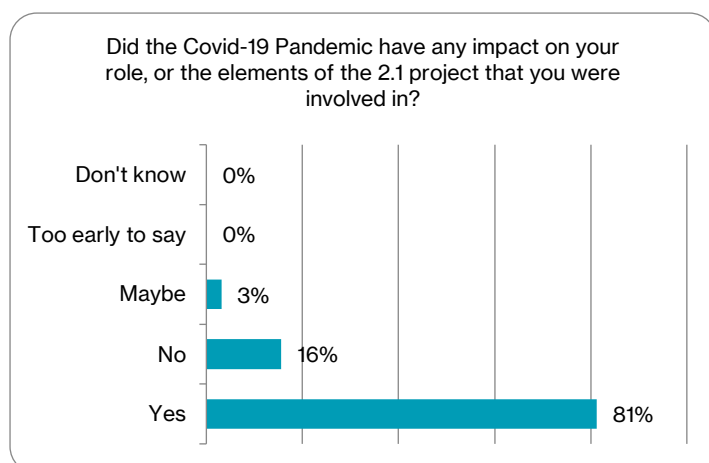
7D.3 Course Completions and Supporting Learners

Staff were asked about any particular reasons for learners dropping out of the training. The main reason cited was the Covid-19 pandemic. Additional comments included:

- *'The majority of learners who did not finish their training assessments were enrolled on the Dementia Awareness training course, and staff capacity in care homes affected staff completing. The pandemic affected this even further due to restrictions and further issues with staff capacity due to sickness and isolation periods'*
- *'The longer part-time courses such as CAD also had a higher dropout rate, which I feel is due to the course duration of over 10 weeks (1 evening per week)'*
- *'DCG have had some recent drop out because they didn't want the commitment to the ESF paperwork notwithstanding the fact that face to face sign up was offered as opposed to digital. Withdrawals across the programme have been for a variety of reasons including the impact of COVID-19 on re-structure and re-evaluation of business needs which has adversely affected their employees'*

Lessons learnt and good practice around reducing drop-outs and supporting learners with individual needs in future programmes suggested by staff included: shorter training courses, blended learning, ensuring clarity over assignment deadlines, flexible delivery, open communication with delegates - supporting them as individuals, additional resources for those with dyslexia, addressing gaps in IT knowledge and building peer networks.

7D.4 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic



Staff were asked: *'Did the Covid-19 pandemic have any impact on your role, or the elements of the 2.1 project that you were involved in?'*

32 of the 34 staff members who had been involved in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project answered the question. Of these: 81% (26) said yes, 16% (5) said no, 3% (1) said maybe, 0 said too early to say and 0 said don't know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers and a wide range of comments were provided, particularly around compliance with paperwork. In general staff felt that they had overcome the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. A selection of comments is shown below, grouped into key themes.

i) Accessing and Supporting Businesses

- *'Had to cancel courses due to the pandemic'*
- *'Companies reluctant to commit to training'*
- *'Accessing employer-s/employees to complete paperwork - most were on furlough or out of the office for much of 2020 leading to delay in capturing signatures/sign off data etc'*

ii) Delivering Training

- *'The main impacts have been adapting to new ways of running the project such as enrolment and delivery of courses. It has been harder to get participants through courses as they have had to work more in their own time. They have had to make time in their home/work life to complete courses, when usually the courses were done in the classroom. This has meant a course that would usually be completed in a day is taking a lot longer. Trying to enrol and achieve participants has also taken longer as this has all had to be done via phone calls/Teams calls and depends a lot on them answering calls/emails. COVID-19 has also had an impact on the number of cancellations/drop outs.'*
- *'Covid-19 had a huge impact on the meeting of compliance requirements, most notably around the completion of documents that our MA had deemed essential to be wet ink signed. It also had a large impact in terms of having to continuously update processes and resources to meet DWP guidance regarding Covid-19, e.g., amendments to forms to indicate they were completed during C-19 period, changes to evidences, provisions of new forms to capture data, relaying information to the wider consortium regarding the cessation of gathering RTRW evidence, and many other changes to ways of delivering information, e.g., MS Teams instead of meetings, etc'*
- *'The requirement to change the offer delivery method, or concept was a challenge, but one we feel we met well'*
- *'Recruitment of delivery staff for specific programmes was harder'*

7D.4.1 Skills and Training Needs Post Covid-19 Pandemic

Staff were asked about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the skills and training needed in the future.

Many comments were received. Some key themes emerging from staff comments include:

- The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated business' plans around digital working. Many have shifted to online communication and ways of working quickly. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the needs for digital skills.
- The need for online training over the last year has made organisations re-think how training is delivered.
- Many view the switch to online as a positive and the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project has allowed this approach to be tested for both accredited and non-accredited courses.
- In future moving training online will have a massive impact with regards to who can attend courses, and this could be considered in future programmes.
- It was suggested that moving to bite size chunks of online learning rather than full days online is more manageable for learners.
- During the second phase of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, furloughed staff were willing to engage with online learning for the first time. This helped to change perceptions of learning and the online delivery allowed flexibility so that they could do it in their own time.
- Other areas for organisation competence have been heightened, both by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit include; the need to be agile, the need to re-appraise supply-chain and the need to be more strategic to identify new and emerging business opportunities.
- There will be a much higher importance on staff development and training in future to help businesses adjust to new ways of working along with potential recruitment freezes. There will be a much higher focus on developing existing staff to fill existing skills gaps, where they may have previously had the ability to recruit.

7E.0 Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs: Summary

This section summarises the key findings from the consultation with staff and learners with regards to the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project.

7E.1 Learner Feedback

Key findings from the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs learner questionnaire are:

- 95% learners (127) who completed the evaluation questionnaire said that they were pleased that they undertook the training on offer through the programme.
- 90% learners (121) who completed the evaluation questionnaire told us that they would recommend the training from the partners to a friend/ colleague. A further 7% said maybe.

Learners who completed the online survey told us that their support through the project had had either a medium or high impact on the following:

- *Allowed learners to gain specific skills: 73%*
- *Increased learner confidence to do their existing job: 72%*
- *Increased learner ambition for their future career: 57%*
- *Increased learner motivation/ productivity whilst at work: 55%.*

7E.2 Course Delivery

Suggestions were received from both staff and learners regarding how the offer could be improved in future. Emerging themes included:

Learner Comments

- Training should be more tailored to an individual's job role, giving them something (an action) that they can take away and implement.
- Increased options for mentoring, 1: 1 support and interaction with tutors, post the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Flexible learning to accommodate all learners, and work around personal commitments – such as those who need longer to complete courses, or those who want to fast track.
- Improved facilitation of peer networking.

Staff Comments

- Shorter training courses, including blended learning or online classes.
- Flexible with regards to the delivery - an open communication with delegates, support them as appropriate.
- Streamlined paperwork/ enrolment approach and use of electronic signatures.

7E.3 Covid 19 Pandemic

Feedback from staff and learners suggests that whilst the Covid-19 pandemic was a steep learning curve in terms of how courses were delivered, the effort made by the delivery partners was appreciated by learners. Comments from learners suggest that going forward, whilst online learning is valued, many missed the face-to-face opportunities.

Emerging implications of the Covid-19 pandemic include:

- The need for online training over the last year has made organisations re-think how training is delivered. Many view the switch to online as a positive.
- In future moving training online will have a massive impact with regards to who can attend courses, and this could be considered in future programmes.
- Other areas for organisation competence have been heightened, both by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit are; the need to be agile, the need to re-appraise supply-chain and the need to be more strategic to identify new and emerging business opportunities.

7E.4 Sustainability

Circa two thirds of learners told us that they were not aware of the project's commitment to sustainable development. This suggests that in future programmes more could be done to raise awareness of this.

7E.5 Future Training Needs

Learners and staff identified a wide range of emerging future training needs. Recurring themes included:

- IT/ digital skills
- Leadership and management
- Marketing/ digital marketing/ communications
- Project management
- Business planning/ strategic thinking
- Recruiting/ developing a team
- Environment/ sustainability.

8.0 GRADS for D2N2

This section sets out key feedback with regards to the GRADS for D2N2 project. It includes:

- **8A Business Beneficiary Feedback:** Key findings from the businesses who have been supported through the GRADS for D2N2 project. *(note: specific comments on the ONA, graduate placements and apprenticeship support are included in the later sections).*
- **8B Beneficiary Consultation - Impact:** The key economic and social impacts that were felt by the businesses that have been involved in the GRADS for D2N2 project.
- **8C Staff Consultation:** On the GRADS for D2N2 elements of the HLS programme. *(note: comments on the ONA, graduate placements and apprenticeship support are included in later sections).*
- **8D Graduate Opportunities:** Feedback from businesses, staff and graduates regarding the impact and lessons learnt from the provision of graduate opportunities.
- **8E Apprenticeship Opportunities:** Feedback from businesses and staff regarding the apprenticeship support.
- **8F Organisational Needs Assessments (ONA):** Staff feedback and lessons learnt from the ONA process
- **8G GRADS for D2N2:** Consultation summary for the GRADS for D2N2 project.

Business Feedback

'Great scheme. The interns and grads added value to our organisation and we look forward to continuing to work with local Universities to provide opportunities for grads, undergrads, postgrads and alumni'

'Fabulous, would recommend all businesses in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire area to get involved, so much support available'

'Knowledgeable team who are devoted to meeting the requirements of your organisation rather than overpoweringly trying to tell you what you need based on their own interests'

8A.0 GRADS for D2N2 – Business Beneficiary Feedback

This section sets out the key findings from the beneficiary questionnaires completed by the businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project. *Note: feedback with regards to the apprentice and graduate schemes and the ONA process are included in separate sections.*

8A.1 The Businesses who Completed the Questionnaire

86 businesses took part in the survey, with an overall response rate across the partner organisations of circa 15%.

- 22% (19) of businesses who took part in the survey operated in the creative and digital industries, 14% (12) were in the charity/ voluntary sector, 13% (11) were in the professional business services sector and 9% (8) were in the retail sector. Other sectors represented included: construction, food and drink, life sciences, health and social care, visitor economy, fitness, recruitment and community radio.
- 65% (55) of the businesses who took part were micro (0-9 employees), 27% (23) were small (10-49 employees), and 8% (7) were medium businesses (50-249 employees).
- 49% (42) of businesses operated locally, 41% (35) operated regionally, 49% (42) operated nationally, and 35% (30) operated internationally.
- 53% (45) of businesses were owned or led by female or BAME individuals.

8A.2 Multiple Support Interventions

Some businesses received support from multiple partners through the GRADS for D2N2 project. Between them, the 86 businesses who took part in the survey received 98 interventions from the partner organisations. Businesses receiving support from multiple partners were able to complete the survey with regards to each separate intervention. *(note: whilst some projects received support from multiple partners, for the purposes of ESF outputs and results reporting each business can only be counted once).*

Of these 98 business interactions:

- 55% (54) of businesses developed a new relationship with the project partner.
- Of these interactions, 94% (90) of businesses said that they would work with the partner again.
- The main ways that businesses had found out about the project were that they had been signposted from the Growth Hub 28% (26), were referred by a friend 17% (16), received a direct call from the organisation 16% (15) or had already taken part in a previous scheme 12% (11).
- 78% (56) of businesses told us that the support on offer met their expectations. Only 6% (5) said that support hadn't met their expectations. Again, these were spread across the partners.
- Only 4% (3) businesses said that they wouldn't recommend the support on offer. 88% (64) of businesses said they would recommend the support on offer to other businesses/ organisations. With a further 7% (5) saying that they might or that it was too early to say. An analysis of businesses who wouldn't recommend the support shows that they were spread across the partners. There was no clear theme or factors that linked the comments.

8A.3 Delivery and Management

As part of the consultation, businesses involved in the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked about the delivery and management of the scheme. Businesses were asked: *'Was the project well managed?'* Responses were overwhelmingly positive and the majority of respondents felt that the project had been well managed. A brief selection of comments include:

- *'It was managed extremely well'*
- *'Yes, well managed, good communication and contact with us'*
- *'Contacts were clear and helpful'*
- *'Well managed, no improvements could have been made'*

8A.4 Improving the Offer

Businesses were asked: *'Could anything have been done to improve your experience?'* and *'Was anything missing from the support on offer?'* A wide range of comments were given (those relating specifically to co-design, ONAs, apprentices or graduates have been shown in later sections). Other key themes from the comments included:

- Administration – too much paperwork
- Use of electronic signatures for forms rather than having to sign and post back
- Better communication with the team
- Speeding up the enrolment process
- Offering 1:1 interaction in addition to online after the Covid-19 pandemic.

8A.5 Referrals

As part of the GRADS for D2N2 beneficiary consultation, businesses were asked: *'Were you signposted to any other business support providers through the project?'* Of the 67 businesses who answered the question, 46% (31) said yes, 38% (26) said no, 7% (5) said maybe, 1% (1) said too early to say, and 7% (5) said don't know.

Businesses were asked what type of support they were signposted to (see comments below). It is clear from the responses that this additional signposting available through the programme was well received. A few businesses mentioned that they hadn't been signposted through the project but this is something that they would welcome in future.

Courses that businesses had been signposted to, or referrals made included:

- *'Obtained one to one business support for CEO'*
- *'Accountancy clinic and courses'*
- *'Business Centre resources at the University'*
- *'From Nottingham Trent to Uni of Derby, it was very useful'*
- *'SWIFt which may become very useful for future development in wireless technologies'*
- *'Women in Leadership course, which led to 2 of our staff joining the course and being skilled up'*
- *'Apprenticeships, covid support and funding'*

8A.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic

Feedback from businesses with regards to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the GRADS for D2N2 project and their future post Covid-19 pandemic training needs are set out below:

8A.6.1 Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Future Recruitment Plans

Businesses were asked about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on future recruitment plans. There was a huge range of responses, with some businesses noting that the recruitment had been put on hold, whilst others noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on business and they are looking to recruit.

It is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all businesses differently.

Some business comments regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on recruitment plans include:

- *'Encouraged us to invest in apprentices'*
- *'We have had to delay plans for placements this year, but intend to increase opportunities in the future'*
- *'Covid-19 thankfully has not affected our position in terms of recruiting new talent. We recently placed a position on FUTURE-Hub and we are signed up to the Kickstarter programme through the Chamber of Commerce'*
- *'This has not affected our chances of providing placement for apprenticeship and graduate Internship. It is our believe the conditions will soon be better than what it looks like now'*

8A.6.2 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Future Training Needs

Businesses were asked how future projects could support any additional training needs resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Comments included:

- *'Supply us with good apprentices and continued support'*
- *'Social media marketing and planning for social media marketing'*
- *'If there is any way in which we could provide additional support while staff members are working from home that would be a helpful insight'*
- *'On-going seminar/webinar online (Zoom.us etc)'*
- *'Ongoing training needs to stay flexible and responsive to the fallout of the pandemic, e.g. young people's mental health and wellbeing, economic impact on charities of the pandemic, continuing to work remotely a percentage of the time, business support and planning when the future is more uncertain e.g. climate catastrophe, of which the pandemic is one aspect'*

8A.7 Support with Promoting Equality and Diversity

The businesses taking part in the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: *'Do you/ your business need any further support around equality, diversity and inclusivity? For example, are there any areas of support you need around gender, race, disability and age in relation to recruitment and developing an inclusive workforce?'*

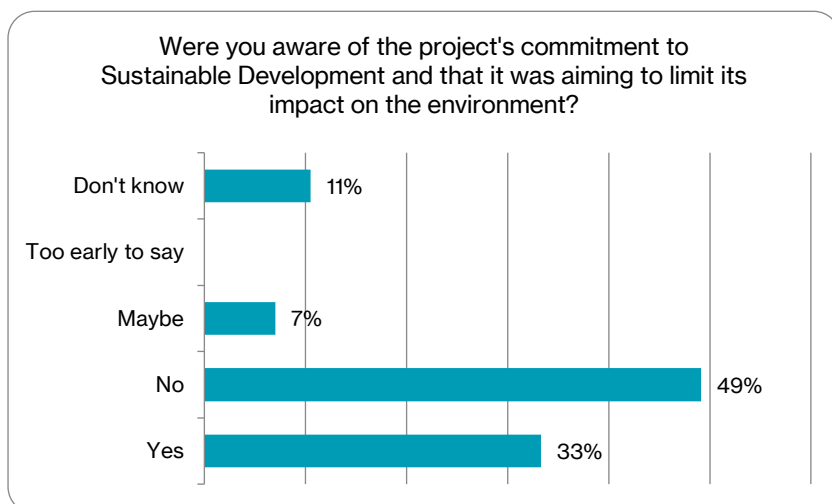
58 businesses answered the question, 34% (20) said that they either needed support or might need support in future. Businesses were invited to expand on any support that they might need.

They told us:

- *'I would welcome any support or advice around this subject for our company'*
- *'Still struggle in some areas of recruitment to develop an inclusive workforce'*
- *'It is an area we would like to consider in the future when we now how we are going to function post covid lockdowns'*

8A.8 Sustainability

Businesses were asked whether they were aware of the project's commitment to sustainable development and that it was aiming to limit its impact on the environment.



57 businesses responded to the question.

Of these 33% (19) said yes, 49% (28) said no, 7% (4) said maybe and 11% (6) said don't know.

Businesses were given the opportunity to expand on their answers with regards to how they were able to contribute to sustainable development targets. Most only told us that the move online had meant that they travelled less or used less paper.

With circa half of businesses saying that they weren't aware of the project's commitment to sustainability, this suggests that more could be done in future to raise awareness of sustainable development issues.

8B.0 GRADS for D2N2 – Beneficiary Consultation: Impact

This section sets out some of the economic impacts that have been achieved for businesses as a result of their involvement with the GRADS for D2N2 project.

8B.1 Business Impacts

Those completing the online questionnaire were asked whether support from the project has led to a range of impacts for the business. The results can be seen in the table below.

We can see that the largest three impacts for businesses from the GRADS for D2N2 project were:

- Filled skills gaps within the organisation - 68% (49)
- Given businesses a better understanding of their skills needs - 61% (46)
- Made businesses more likely to recruit graduates - 58% (42)

| Has your involvement led to any of the following impacts? | | |
|---|--------|------------|
| Area of Impact | Yes | |
| | Number | Percentage |
| Filled skills gaps within your organisation | 49 | 68% |
| Given you a better understanding of your skills needs | 46 | 61% |
| Made you more likely to recruit graduates | 42 | 58% |
| Reduced risks associated with taking on new employees | 37 | 54% |
| Increased networking/ business contacts | 37 | 51% |
| Made you more likely to recruit apprentices | 32 | 45% |
| Improved ability to attract, recruit and retain workers | 30 | 42% |
| Increased your knowledge of the Government's Kickstart Scheme | 27 | 38% |
| Allowed you to reach new markets, industries, products | 22 | 30% |
| Increased profitability | 19 | 26% |
| Expanded your client base/ widened market share | 18 | 25% |

Businesses were asked about any other positive impacts from the programme. Comments were themed around the following:

- Support for planning for the future
- Improved operational efficiency
- Recruitment and forward planning in terms of staff needs
- Developed a good relationship with the careers team at the partner organisation
- Expanded into new areas of business
- Winning awards – awards won included:
 - SME of the year two years running at The East Midlands Chamber Business Awards
 - Sustainability in Print award 2019 and 2020.

8B.2 GRADS for D2N2: Economic Impacts

To measure the economic benefits of the GRADS for D2N2 project businesses were asked about their increased turnover that resulted from working with the project partners.

The table shows that of the 76 responses, 31 businesses felt that their involvement in the project will lead to an increase in turnover within the next five years.

| Do you think the support provided by the project, has, or will lead to, an increase in turnover for the business in the next five years? | | |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Answer Choice | Number | Percentage |
| Yes | 31 | 41% |
| No | 11 | 14% |
| Maybe | 14 | 18% |
| Too early to say | 17 | 22% |
| Don't know | 3 | 4% |
| | 76 | |

We asked these 31 businesses to quantify the impact on their turnover.

The results show that 16% (5) of businesses are predicting a 21-30% increase in turnover as a result of their involvement in the scheme, with 29% (9) predicting an increase of 11-20 and 19% (6) of 6-10%. A further 29% (9) of businesses expect the project to lead to a positive impact on turnover but are not sure by how much.

| Please tell us approximately by how much you think it has, or will increase your turnover by, within the next five years | | |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Answer Choice | Response Number | Response Percent |
| 1-5% Increase in turnover per year | 1 | 0% |
| 6-10% Increase in turnover per year | 6 | 19% |
| 11-20% Increase in turnover per year | 9 | 29% |
| 21-30% Increase in turnover per year | 5 | 16% |
| 31-40% Increase in turnover per year | 0 | 0% |
| 41-50% Increase in turnover per year | 0 | 0% |
| 51% + Increase in turnover per year | 1 | 3% |
| A positive impact on turnover but you are not sure how much by | 9 | 29% |
| | 31 | |

These results help to demonstrate that the project has had a positive impact on D2N2 businesses, and how investment in staff and skills can increase business success.

8C.0 GRADS for D2N2 – Staff Consultation

Key findings from the staff involved in the GRADS for D2N2 project are set out below. *Note – comments regarding the graduate, apprenticeship and ONAs elements have been included in later sections.*

8C.1 Management and Governance

Through the online consultation, staff were asked: *'Has the GRADS for D2N2 project been well managed by the partner organisation that you work for?'* 31 staff completed the question, of which: 84% (26) said yes, 0 said no, 7% (2) said maybe, and 10% (3) said don't know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers. Whilst a few comments were made about excessive paperwork and reporting requirements (which is common for any European Union funded scheme) the responses were predominantly positive. Comments given include:

- *'Organised, quick to address risks, hard-working, keen to succeed and empower participants to succeed'*
- *'I think that whichever organisation manages a project like this is always going to be plagued somewhat by bureaucracy and internal politics. Changes in leadership and differences of opinion between those in senior leadership roles definitely impacted the project earlier on. I feel everyone pulled their finger out, however, and has been on the same page since the pandemic arrived in March 2020...'*
- *'The Project Co-ordination has been excellent and has worked brilliantly as a split role. The teams match funded on 2.2 have been the correct sources of referral and follow up to ensure the success of the project'*

8C.1.1 Delivery

Staff were asked: *'Thinking about the organisation that you work for, was the delivery model for the GRADS for D2N2 (2.2) appropriate?'*

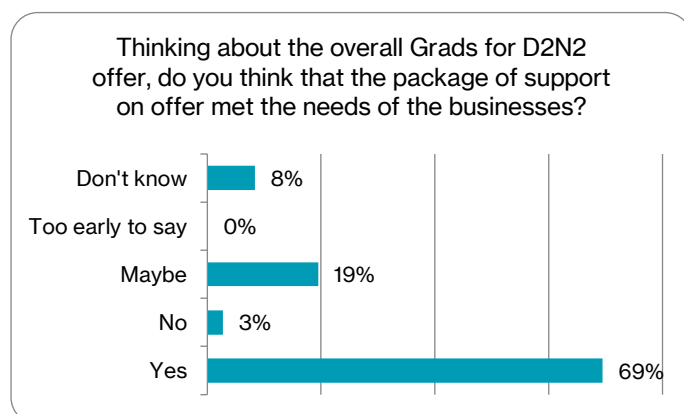
31 staff members answered the question: 71% (22) said yes, 0 said no, 19% (6) said maybe and 10% (3) said don't know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers. In addition to the more general comments around significant paperwork and red tape, key themes emerging included:

- A more detailed definition of the delivery model from the outset, along with allocation of appropriate level of resources and appropriate systems.
- Planning meetings at project conception to develop the collaborative working across consortium and team meetings between project partners to ensure transparency of project offers.
- A stronger focus on outcomes and long-term value.

8C.1.2 Meeting the Needs of Businesses

Staff were asked: 'Thinking about the overall GRADS for D2N2 offer, do you think that the package of support on offer met the needs of the businesses?'

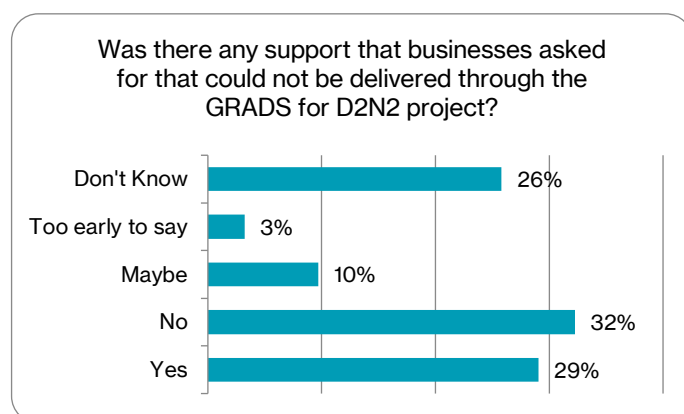


36 staff members responded.

Of these, 69% (25) staff members said yes, 3% (1) said no, 19% (7) said maybe, 0 said too early to say, 8% (3) said don't know.

8C.1.3 Improving the Offer

Staff were asked: 'Was there any support that businesses asked for that could not be delivered through the GRADS for D2N2 project?'



31 staff members answered the question.

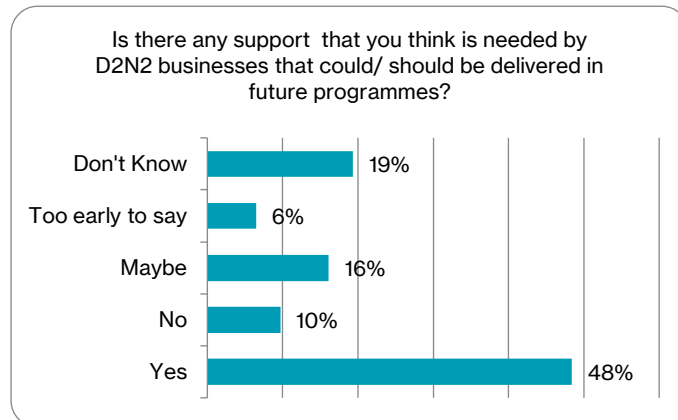
Of these, 29% (9) staff members said yes, 32% (10) said no, 10% (3) said maybe, 3% (1) said too early to say, 26% (8) said don't know.

Staff were asked to tell us about any support that was requested that couldn't be delivered. Comments included:

- 'Not to my knowledge, and felt it was a comprehensive offer'
- '...We wish to extend the co-design element of our programmes with businesses and we will be making further university investment to develop this aspect of our work further'
- 'Support with business accounting training from the university'
- 'We supported business through a lot that we were unable to record as a deliverable'
- 'Where support required fell outside the remit of 2.2, businesses would be signposted/introduced to organisations/ funding that could support individual needs of each business'

8C.2 Future Programmes

Staff working on the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: *'Is there any support that you think is needed by D2N2 businesses that could/ should be delivered in future programmes?'*



31 staff answered the question.

Of these, 48% (15) staff members said yes, 10% (3) said no, 16% (5) said maybe, 6% (2) said too early to say, 19% (6) said don't know.

Staff were invited to provide any suggestions to improve future programmes. Significant responses were received and key comments have been grouped into themes:

i) Skills

- *'Future programmes should be more clearly linked to the acquisition of high-level qualifications, focusing on co-design, incorporating resources to support the development of new programmes desired by businesses'*
- *'Future programmes should expand on course delivery and skills that most relevant to the businesses in the region such as social media, digital marketing, etc'*

ii) Business Support

- *'Would just say that co-design is an attractive engagement model for businesses, and something we should expand on'*
- *'From previous programmes we know that small project design & implementations are of interest, e.g. identified need, solution picked and then consultancy delivery / implementation (12-20 hours of support) has a greater impact and buy-in than individual workshops for example'*

iii) Covid-19 Pandemic

- *'Support adapting to the 'new normal', e.g. remote working, and the many facets that encompasses, e.g. employee health, employee morale, technical readiness, etc'*

v) Environmental Sustainability

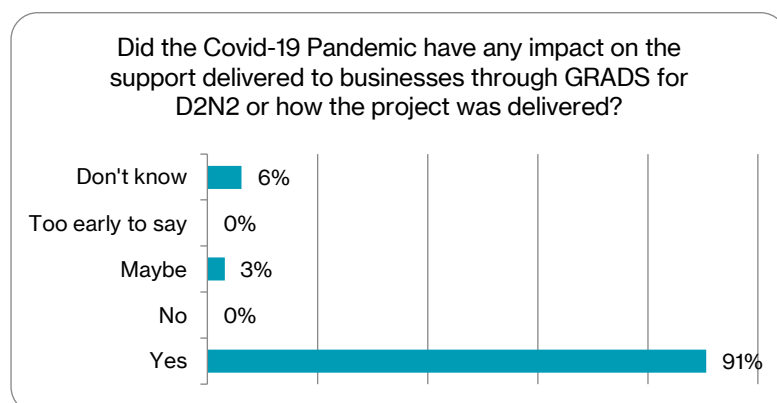
- *'Carbon literacy and sustainability'*
- *'I think that a lot of business are interested in bettering their knowledge on environmental sustainability, and need help with writing policies and procedures'*

8C.3 The Covid-19 Pandemic

Staff working on the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked a range of questions about the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

8C.3.1 Support Delivered

Staff were asked: *'Did the Covid-19 pandemic have any impact on the support delivered to businesses through GRADS for D2N2 or how the project was delivered?'*



32 staff answered the question.

Of which: 91% (29) said yes, 0 said no, 3% (1) said maybe, 0 said too early to say, 6% (2) said don't know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers. A wide range of comments were given, particularly regarding moving online, with staff confirming that all partners successfully moved their offer online within the first quarter of lockdown.

Additional comments regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic include:

Paperwork

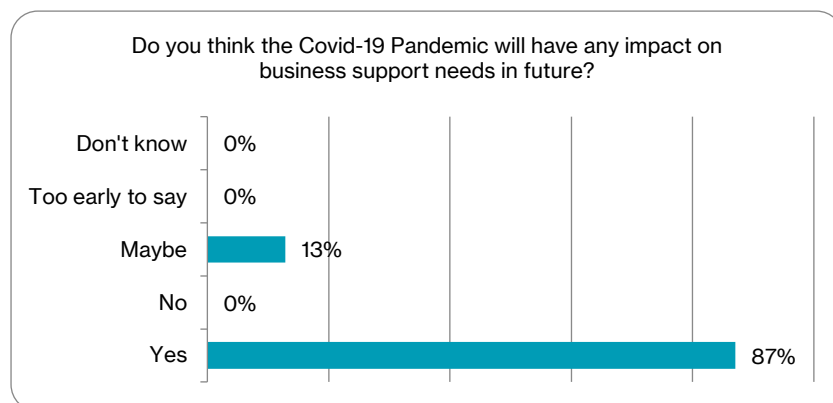
- *'Made it easier in all honesty - the ability to finally be able to take electronic signatures sped up the process of forms across the process'*

Business/ SMEs

- *'SMEs were so badly affected by the pandemic due to forced closures by government that meant many different sectors were completely closed for trading. This in turn lessened the pool of businesses available to interact with. The next facet of the pandemic was businesses went into survival mode for the most part with most only focused on what grants and funding they could tap into to ensure their respective businesses were able to survive'*
- *'We found that it has been harder to engage with businesses as they are either working with reduced staff, have several staff off due to COVID-19 or their business is closed due to lockdowns, so we have a lot of cancelled appointments or no-shows. We have also had business who were interested and then due to different changes have then withdrawn their interest'*

8C.3.2 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Future Business Support Needs

Staff who worked on the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: 'Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic will have any impact on business support needs in future?'



31 staff answered the question.

Of which 87% (27) yes and 13% (4) said maybe.

Staff were given the opportunity to expand on their answers. Comments were mainly around recruitment, skills needs and new business models. Comments included:

Recruitment

- *'It has had a massive impact on recruitment and retaining staff, and we estimate to see a huge appetite for recruiting graduates by the end of 2021 / early 2022 from SMEs, as they will look for skilful workforce that is not costing them too much money. This is predicted by HESA and Graduate Outcomes, and has been highlighted to Universities to start communicating with SMEs on the graduate recruitment support available'*
- *'Businesses will seek to retain the staff they currently have and may begin dipping their toes in rehiring, but predominantly working remotely and any forward-thinking schemes will already be offering packages based on workshops/remote learning/hiring/ideas. They will ditch paper entirely and begin to navigate funding through ideas/initiatives such as sustainability and technology'*

Skills Needs

- *'Digital skills gap has become more apparent and sought after as businesses have been going remote, and graduates / apprentices are in demand in this area. There is also an appetite on training from HE on digital skills'*
- *'The increase use of technology and various ways of working'*

New Business Models

- *'New business models, and opportunity for reshaping operational and cultural behaviours, e.g., sustainability practice, digital operation and delivery and driving productivity'*
- *'To date with the businesses, we have worked with we have evidenced complete change in business models to ensure the continuance of the business together with adaptations to be COVID secure'*
- *'Many organisations will have struggled financially, particularly businesses which have been forced to close during lockdowns. These organisations may have had to make redundancies/downsize, and may require training to ensure a smaller team runs more efficiently'*

8D.0 GRADS for D2N2 – Graduate Opportunities

This section sets out the key findings from the evaluation study with regards to the graduate opportunities provided through the GRADS for D2N2 project. It includes feedback from both the businesses who used the graduate offer, the staff involved in the delivery and a selection of graduates who were placed in businesses.

8D.1 Business Feedback

This section sets out feedback from businesses on the graduate schemes.

8D.1.1 Graduate Recruitment

Businesses who received graduate support through the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: *‘As a result of working with the project has your organisation/ business made use of any graduate placement opportunities or taken on any graduates?’* 59 businesses answered. Of these, 53% (31) said yes, 30% (18) said no, 3% (2) said maybe, 10% (6) said too early to say and 3% (2) said don't know.

- Of the 31 businesses that made use of the graduate placement opportunities or took on graduates, 52% (16) had never recruited a graduate before.
- Of the 31 businesses that recruited a graduate, 68% (21) are now more likely to recruit graduates in future, 23% (7) no change, 3% (1) less likely to recruit a graduate and 7% (2) not applicable. For those who said no change, some were already committed to recruiting graduates. One business told us: *‘I always employ graduates, so no more likely’*
- The business that was unlikely to recruit a graduate noted that there is a high staff turnover with graduates as they move to further their careers, and as an SME they invest a lot of time into training which is expensive and time-consuming.

8D1.1.2 Impact of Recruiting Graduates

The businesses who had made use of the graduate support were asked: *‘What have been the positive implications on the wider workforce or the business as a result of employing a graduate(s)?’* Key themes emerging are: good value for money, creativity of graduates, fresh ideas, bring in new technologies and enthusiasm. Some comments included:

- *‘The business has survived and diversified because of the graduate’*
- *‘Fresh ideas from people outside the organisation utilising different technologies that we hadn't previously considered using’*
- *‘There is an enthusiasm a graduate brings to their first role that provides a welcome energy to the existing team’*
- *‘Interns have brought skills to the organisation that we either didn't have or were in short supply of. The interns brought enthusiasm and fresh ideas’*

One employer noted that their recruits weren't always as good as suggested by their CVs, and that it would be useful to have a more rigorous interview placement. Another suggested that it would be useful to have support, advice and guidance with regards to managing their graduate.

8D 1.1.3 Graduate Impact on Diversity

Businesses who had recruited a graduate through the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: ‘*Did the graduate have an impact in terms of diversifying your team in terms of Gender, Race, Age or Disability?*’

Of the 20 businesses that answered the question, 9 businesses said yes, the graduate had diversified their team.

8D1.1.4 Graduate Recruitment

The 31 businesses who had received graduate support were asked about graduate recruitment, and the impact that the project and the Covid-19 pandemic has had on this. The results can be seen in the table below.

| Graduate Opportunities by all Businesses Taking part in the Survey | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| | Cumulative Total – All Business |
| How many graduates did you offer placements, job roles, internships or work experience to through the project? | 52 graduates |
| How many graduates would you have offered placements, job roles, internships or work experience to without support from the project? | 27 graduates |
| How many of these have (or will) be offered permanent employment within your organisation? | 29 graduates |
| How many do you think you would have been offered permanent employment to if there had been no Covid-19 pandemic? | 41 graduates |

From the table we can see that:

- 48% of the graduates would not have been offered a placement, job role or internship without the support of the project.
- 56% of those offered a placement, job role, internship or work experience have or will be offered a permanent role.
- 79% would have been offered a permanent role were it not for the Covid-19 pandemic.

8D.2 Graduate Scheme: Staff Feedback

Findings from staff members with regards to the graduate support delivered through the GRADS for D2N2 project are set out below.

8D.2.1 Meeting the Needs of the Businesses and Graduates

- Staff involved in the graduate scheme delivered under the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: *'Do you think the graduate scheme met the needs of the businesses that employed a graduate?'* 13 staff members answered the question. 10 said yes, 0 said no, 2 said maybe, 0 said too early to say and 1 said don't know.
- Staff were asked: *'Do you think that the graduate placement scheme met the needs of the graduates?'* 13 staff members answered the question. Of these: 11 said yes, 0 said no, 0 said maybe, 0 said too early to say and 2 said don't know.

8D.2.3 Key Comments Regarding the Graduate Support Offer

Emerging themes from the staff regarding the graduate schemes are set out below:

a) Grants/ Funding

- The administration burden of the grants needed to be reduced for businesses.
- There needs to be more flexibility in the model to allow for multiple grants to be provided to the same organisation.
- Fully funded graduate options might be beneficial for a lot of businesses – particularly micros, SMEs, charities and sole traders, where the business may not have the means to pay for a graduate but would really benefit from graduate level support.

b) Business and Graduate Support

- More comprehensive on-boarding and ongoing support is needed while interns are in post, both with regards to the intern and also checking in with line management.
- Customer care should be better embedded within the project and the funder should allow more time for this, ultimately this will achieve greater retention from the graduates and businesses.
- Graduates would benefit from being brought together in a peer network, to support one another in remote working and wellbeing.

c) Length of Support

- An option for a longer period of support would have suited a lot more businesses. 6 weeks in itself is not a great amount of time if it is just a 6-week placement for a graduate to have an opportunity to really make an impact for the businesses.

d) Business Benefits

- The scheme allows small business employers to "try before they buy" They can employ an individual to work on a short-term project. If the intern has risen to the challenge and impressed the employer they may see fit to offer the intern more work or a full-time permanent contract.

8D.3 GRADS for D2N2– Secondary Beneficiary Impact

Due to GDPR constraints we were unable to directly contact the graduates who had been placed through the programme. Instead, we used the approach of asking the business who had recruited whether they would be happy to forward on to the graduate. In total only 8 said they would be happy, and of these 4 graduates answered.

8D.3.1 Role

Before they took on their roles, 2 of the graduates were unemployed, 1 was still studying and one was in part-time work. All 4 are now still employed in the business that offered them a placement through the programme. All 4 graduates felt valued by the business that they worked for.

8D.3.2 Impact of the Placement

Graduates were asked a range of questions with regards to the impact of their training:

| Do you think the graduate role/ placement has enabled you to achieve any of the following or will do in the future? please tick all that apply | |
|--|----------------|
| Answer Choice | Response Total |
| Improved your long-term career prospects | 3 |
| Provided you with general work experience | 4 |
| Enabled you to enter into employment | 4 |
| Enabled you to gain specific skills | 4 |
| Enabled you to find employment with a specific employer | 2 |
| Increased your confidence in the workplace | 4 |

8D.3.3 Graduate Retention

The graduates were asked: *'As a result of the graduate role will you be more likely to stay in your local area rather than leaving to find work?'* 3 out of the 4 said yes, and 1 said maybe.

8D.3.4 Without the Graduate Role

3 out of the 4 graduates told us that they would not be in a graduate level job without the support from the project. 1 graduate told us that they might be in a graduate level job without the support of the project.

8D.3.5 Summary

This data only provides a small snapshot from a very small pool of graduates. We would suggest that going forward alternative mechanisms are used to capture graduate feedback to build up a bigger picture of the impact that this type of placement scheme can bring. To boost response rates evaluation surveys could also be sent out earlier in the programme, as soon as the intervention has been made rather than waiting. If the surveys were sent out by the existing contact within the University, there may be a higher response rate.

8E.0 GRADS for D2N2 – Apprenticeship Opportunities

This section considers the impact, success and implications of the apprenticeship offer that was run as part of the GRADS for D2N2 project. It considers feedback from both staff working on the programme and the businesses who received apprenticeship support.

8E.1 Business Feedback

8E.1.1 Apprenticeship Recruitment

Businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: *'Has your organisation/business recruited or provided any apprenticeships as a result of the advice and support provided through the project'*. 57 businesses answered the question. Of these: 16% (9) businesses said yes, 67% (38) said no, 4% (2) said maybe, 12% (7) said too early to say and 2% (1) said don't know.

Of the 9 businesses that used the apprenticeship support, 3 had never recruited an apprentice before and 6 are now more likely to recruit graduates in future. (2 no change, 1 less likely).

8E.1.2 Implications for the Workforce

Businesses who received apprenticeship support were asked: *'What have been the positive implications on the wider workforce or the business from providing apprenticeship opportunities?'* Comments included:

- *'Bringing in young people to the workforce'*
- *'Able to recruit at a low cost and offer good work experience'*
- *'We have been able to expand one of our departments bringing in a younger employee to assist some of the senior managers with estimating and quantity surveying'*
- *'A good interaction in terms of training new people'*

8E.1.3 Apprentice Advice Impact

The 9 businesses who have received apprenticeship support were asked about the impact of the GRADS for D2N2 project on their apprentice recruitment. The results can be seen in the table.

| Apprentice Opportunities by all Businesses Taking part in the Survey | |
|--|--|
| | Cumulative Total Across All Businesses |
| How many apprentices did you take on as a result of the advice and support offered through the project | 15 apprentices |
| How many apprentices do you think you would have taken on if you had not received advice and support offered through the project | 8 apprentices |

- Circa 7 of the apprentices recruited by the 9 businesses taking part in the scheme were as a direct result of the support provided through the GRADS for D2N2 project.
- In addition, 5 out of the 9 businesses also told us that the Covid-19 pandemic's impact had had a negative impact on the number of apprentices they took on.

8E.1.4 Apprentice Impact

Businesses who have employed apprentices as a result of advice and guidance provided through the programme were asked 'Did the apprentice have an impact in terms of diversifying your team in terms of Gender, Race, Age or Disability?' Of the 6 that responded 2 said yes, 3 said no, 1 said not applicable.

8E.2 Staff Feedback on The Apprenticeship Scheme

Staff working on the apprenticeship elements of the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked a series of questions. 17 staff members completed this section of the questionnaire. Their comments are shown below:

8E.2.1 Meeting the Needs of Business

Staff involved in the apprenticeship element of the project were asked: 'Do you think that the support on offer around apprenticeships met the needs of the businesses?' 17 staff members answered the question. Of these, 15 said yes, 0 said no, 1 said maybe, 0 said too early to say and 1 said don't know. Comments included:

- *'Mostly. There were occasions where the best standard for their needs was not offered by any local providers'*
- *'The other focuses of the Apprenticeship Team impacted on delivery of the project and made their job harder for them to focus on the 2.2 outputs they were responsible for, impacting on overall enrolment and support of businesses'*

8E.2.2 Lessons of Good Practice from the Apprenticeship Support

Staff were asked for comments on any lessons of good practice around the apprenticeship support that should be noted in the evaluation or that could be used to inform future programmes.

They told us:

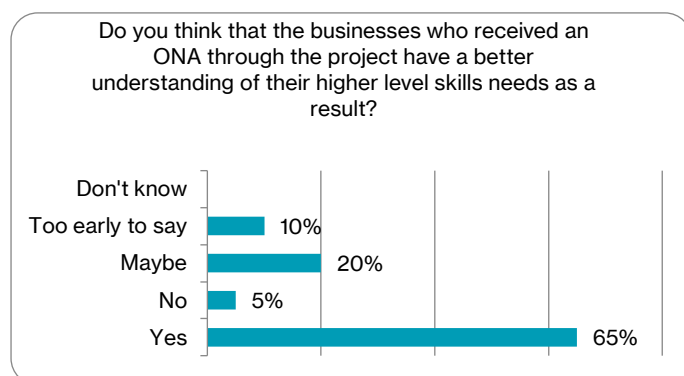
- *'Good practice is to ensure that where businesses have expressed an interest, this is followed up by the relevant team within the organisation, this was a key focus for the core team'*
- *'The feedback from employers allowed us to develop support materials including live workshops which have become popular and are now built into our curriculum'*
- *'The feedback and information from SME's has been invaluable to structure and amend our current marketing and support offer in line with the questions asked, as well as developing/delivering 'stepping stone' short courses and new apprenticeship programmes'*

8F.0 Grads for D2N2 - Organisational Needs Assessments (ONA)

24 staff members told us that they had been involved in the Organisational Needs Assessment process. This group were asked a range of questions about the process.

8F.1 Business Understanding High Level Skills Needs

Staff were asked: *'Do you think that the businesses who received an ONA through the project have a better understanding of their higher level skills needs as a result?'*



Of the 20 staff members that responded, 65% (13) said yes, 5% (1) said no, 20% (4) said too early to say and 10% (2) said don't know.

Staff told us:

- *'The ONA gave the opportunity to discuss all areas of the business and naturally opened up further discussion regarding Higher Level skills needs'*
- *'For many of the organisations on the project, they knew they needed support however weren't always sure what sure exactly of the support they needed. Completing the ONA allowed this to be refined & the companies we work with to have a greater understanding of the high level skills'*
- *'Many businesses did not know the scope of support and option available across NTU - the ONA led to them finding out more that could help their businesses and themselves grow and develop'*
- *'It is entirely dependent upon the key Staff who are working with the businesses'*
- *'This also would be down to the individual going through the ONA and their knowledge of support to pick up on certain answers and information given'*

8F.2 Follow on Support

Staff were asked about what happens after the ONA had been undertaken with businesses:

Thinking about the businesses that your organisation supported with an ONA, what percentage do you estimate went on to receive further business support, guidance, learning opportunities through the GRADS for D2N2 (2.2) project, or the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs (2.1) project?

| Answer Choice | Response Total | Response Percentage |
|---------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 0-25% | 2 | 11% |
| 26-50% | 1 | 1% |
| 51-75% | 8 | 42% |
| 76-100% | 8 | 42% |

Staff were asked why businesses might not go on to use further support, and whether anything else could have been done to support them to access additional services. Many referenced the Covid-19 pandemic (and this is covered in more detail in later sections). Additional comments included.

- *'The organisations that didn't go on to seek further support felt that they were too small, it may not of been suitable at that time, they were busy & could not commit the time, or Covid reasons'*
- *'Some employers did not get back to us after the ONA - small amount just didn't reply to contact via phone or email to chase after support'*
- *'Others which were generally micro SME businesses did not take up extra support via grant funding as they didn't have the means to pay for support initially to receive the grant'*

8F.3 Good Practice from the ONA Process

Staff were asked whether there any examples of good practice or lessons learnt from the ONA process that should be considered for future programmes. Whilst there were some comments made stating that the form could be improved, overall, the process itself appears to have had benefits for the business. Staff comments included:

- *'The ONA is a great process to go through with any new employer who we have not worked with before as it gives a deeper understanding of what courses/ support will be most beneficial.'*
- *'The ONA as a whole acted as a quick, concise insight for staff to get to know the company but also as a reflective piece for the organisation'*
- *'Best thing that helped with process was when we could take electronic signatures as opposed to needing wet signatures. This sped up paperwork being processed to help with support and the talent grant allocations due to the nature of paperwork.'*
- *'Wording could have been thought through on some questions and some questions were vague'*
- *'There is a great deal of duplication with the completion of ONAs from Training Providers, College & Universities perspective. All organisations involved in working with Employers tend to have their own systems and paperwork. Agreement was reached within the partnership to use the same ONA which provides some degree of consistency in information collated'*
- *'Very long form to complete over the phone, it also often requires input from other members of staff from the company. I often emailed it across instead'*
- *'Have as many people as possible on the project able to do the ONA with employers - this leads to more supported companies on the project'*
- *'Have more specific questions related to the support available and work with partners before design as some questions were vague and confusing for both delivery teams and SME's'*
- *'The ability to do an ONA over the phone and receive electronic signatures sped the process saving time / energy when previously we needed to do this face to face. This led to a lot more ONA's being completed, however face to face was better in terms of personal engagement'*
- *'It would have been better to have given the Employability Team have the ability to carry out the ONA's from the start. The process was slower due to enrolments being sent to another team to then work across multiple diaries. Once this changed, things sped up and more businesses were enrolled and supported'*
- *'Expand on SMEs EDI priorities in the ONA, to help inform the Employability team to shape support services and guidance for employers and graduates - to further allow and support NTU's 'Success for All' strategy.'*

8G.0 GRADS for D2N2 - Summary

This section sets out the key findings from the consultation undertaken with regards to the GRADS for D2N2 project.

8G.1 Business Feedback

Key points to note from the business feedback include:

- 94% (90) of businesses who took part in the evaluation said that they would work with the partner again.
- Only 3 (4%) of businesses said that they would not recommend the support on offer from the GRADS for D2N2 project to other businesses/ organisations.

8G.2 Business Impacts

Businesses were asked about the impact of the support from the GRADS for D2N2 project:

- 68% of businesses (49) said that support from the project had filled skills gaps within the organisation.
- 61% of businesses (46) said that support from the project had given the businesses a better understanding of their skills needs.
- 41% of the businesses (31) supported said that the project has, or will lead to, an increase in turnover for the business in the next five years. A further 18% said Maybe.

8G.3 Signposting/ Referrals

28% (26) of the businesses who took part in the survey told us that they had been referred into the project by the Growth Hub. This suggests that there is some excellent signposting going on within D2N2.

Businesses noted how useful the referrals had been both within the project and to other providers. Increased staff awareness of partners offers will only help to promote and further develop the benefits that can be achieved.

8G.4 Sustainable Development

With half of businesses saying that they weren't aware of the project's commitment to sustainability. This suggests that more could be done in future to raise awareness of sustainable development issues.

8G.5 Suggestions for the Future

Suggestions regarding future business support and training programmes from staff and businesses are shown below:

Business Suggestions:

- Reduce the administration – there is too much paperwork
- Use of electronic signatures for future programmes
- Better communication with businesses
- Speeding up the application and enrolment processes
- More grant support in future programmes
- Options of 1:1 interactions and face-to-face support once this is allowed post the Covid-19 pandemic.

Staff Suggestions

- Future programmes should be more clearly linked to the acquisition of high level qualifications
- Future programmes should be more focussed on co-design
- Future programmes should expand on course delivery and skills that are most relevant to the businesses in the region such as social media, digital marketing
- Businesses need support to adapt to the new, post the Covid-19 pandemic, normal
- A more detailed definition of the delivery model is needed from the outset, along with allocation of appropriate level of resources and appropriate systems
- Planning meetings are needed at project conception to develop the collaborative working across consortium and team meetings between project partners to ensure transparency of offers
- Future schemes need a stronger focus on outcomes and long-term value.

8G.6 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Relevant post Covid-19 pandemic trends identified through the staff and business consultation include:

Recruitment

- Some staff estimate that there will be a significant appetite for recruiting graduates by the end of 2021 / early 2022 from SMEs, as they will look for a skilled workforce that is not costing them too much money
- Businesses will focus on upskilling and retaining the staff that they have already.

Skills Needs

- Businesses and staff told us that the following skills are needed to support with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic: digital skills, social media/ marketing/ planning for social media and support for staff working from home (including mental health and wellbeing).

New Business Models

- Businesses have reshaped their operation and cultures and support is needed to help with this.

8G.7 Graduates

- Of the 31 businesses that made use of the graduate placement opportunities or took on graduates, 52% (16) had never recruited a graduate before.
- Of the 31 businesses that recruited a graduate, 68% (21) are now more likely to recruit graduates in future, 23% (7) no change, 3% (1) less likely to recruit a graduate and 7% (2) not applicable.

Positive impacts from the graduate placements for businesses include: good value for money, creativity of graduates, fresh ideas, bringing in new technologies and enthusiasm. Suggestions for developing the Graduate Scheme included:

a) Grants/ Funding

- The administration burden of the grants needed to be reduced for businesses.
- There needs to be more flexibility in the model to allow for multiple grants to be provided to the same organisation.
- Fully funded graduate options might be beneficial for a lot of businesses

b) Business and Graduate Support

- More comprehensive on-boarding and ongoing support is needed - customer care should be better embedded within the project.
- Graduates would benefit from being brought together in a peer network, to support one another in remote working and wellbeing.

c) Length of Support

- An option for a longer period of support would have suited a lot more businesses.

8G.8 Apprentices

Businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 project were asked: *'Has your organisation/ business recruited or provided any apprenticeships as a result of the advice and support provided through the project?'*

56 businesses answered the question. Of these: 16% (9) businesses said yes, 66% (37) said no, 4% (2) said maybe, 13% (7) said too early to say and 2% (1) said don't know.

Of the 9 businesses that used the apprenticeship support, 3 had never recruited an apprentice before and 6 are now more likely to recruit graduates in future. (2 no change, 1 less likely).

Staff feedback with regards to the apprenticeship scheme included:

- Inclusion of apprenticeships as a measurable target
- Continue to work with employers to shape the training and amend the marketing.

9.0 High Level Skills – Overall Programme

This section sets out key delivery staff feedback with regards to the overall HLS programme that has not been included in previous sections. It considers:

- **9A Management and Governance** – Feedback at the HLS programme level
- **9B Marketing** – The success and impact of the marketing
- **9C Co-Design** – Including lessons learnt and best practices
- **9D Diversity and Equality** – Impact and lessons learnt
- **9E Sustainability** – Lessons learnt for future programmes
- **9F Summary** – Of the staff feedback on the HLS programme

Business Feedback

'Keep up the good work, it is a fantastic way to support new businesses who may not have been able to grow without your support'

'Responsive support, professional and most importantly low level of bureaucracy'

'Massive success for my business'

9A.0 High Level Skills Programme Level Review: Management, Governance and Delivery

This section sets out feedback from staff with regards to elements of the programme that cut across both the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project and the GRADS for D2N2 project. It includes thoughts on areas such as the Organisational Needs Assessment process, the co-design approach and the level of success of the partnership working. The analysis has been informed by survey responses from 57 staff members across all five delivery partners, and also from face-to-face (virtual) consultations and interviews with project representatives.

9A.1 Face-to-Face Consultation with Key Delivery Team Members

Face-to-face consultation (virtual) was held with team members across the five delivery partners. The key findings from these discussions are shown below:

9A.1.1 Project Design and Initiation

- The projects got off to a slow start due to delays including contracting. In addition, delivery partners told us that it had taken them a while to get up to speed in terms of understanding the processes, reporting and delivery mechanisms.
- Partners agreed that the HLS programme has a complex set up in terms of the 2.1 and 2.2 elements, although it was recognised that this was needed to meet the ESF bidding criteria. This said, staff told us that they had learnt a lot about ESF processes, that the project had widened their knowledge and that now much of the ground work has been done they are better placed to deliver ESF contracts in future.
- Most partners commented on the different offers being delivered by the programme partners. Whilst this adds some complexities, speaking to partners suggests that this capacity to deliver autonomously, but within a wider programme, is a significant positive for the scheme. This flexibility was particularly welcomed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It was suggested that in future projects a more joined-up approach is needed when bidding. This includes a greater understanding of the actual targets, better understanding of the other partners' offers and funding requests.

9A.1.2 Staffing and Recruitment

- Changing personnel throughout the delivery phase meant that partners were understaffed at points and that key project knowledge was lost. However, partners noted that they had recruited high quality individuals, and that the success of the overall programme was due to the significant effort and commitment of their staff teams.
- There were examples of how more junior members of the teams had stepped up into more complex roles as senior staff left – this offered excellent career development progression.
- The importance of good recruitment and the length of time this can take was flagged up as something that needs to be considered for future schemes.
- Staff members told us how working on the programme, and particularly delivering the ONAs, had broadened their skills and expertise and made them more employable in future.
- It was suggested that wider college support roles should be written into future projects as validation, operation and financial management at partner level were time consuming.

9A.1.3 Partnership Working and Collaboration

- In general, the team told us that there is significant internal cross referral within partner organisations to other programmes delivered within that same organisation e.g., Nottingham City Council were able to refer to initiatives such as the NCC Energy Efficiency Grants Scheme.
- It was generally felt that more could be done in future to promote cross partner referrals.
- Discussions suggest that there might be the appetite to bring together those more involved in the direct delivery/ operational level to discuss best practice/ lessons learnt. Note: meetings numbers have previously been reduced in response to requests, but there was an open invitation to organise additional meetings if required.
- Partners told us that the project has added value in terms of building the partnership for the future, and that this scheme has been a very good foundation for future bids.

9A.2 Online Staff Consultation

An online questionnaire was circulated to all staff involved in the direct delivery of the programme. In total 57 staff members took part in the consultation. Comments/ feedback regarding elements that relate to the wider HLS programme are set out below.

9A.2.1 Management

The 57 staff completing the questionnaire were asked whether they had any thoughts or comments on the overall management and governance of the programme. 11 staff members said yes and this group were asked: *'Thinking about the overall programme, do you think that the ESF HLS programme is/ has been well managed by Nottingham Trent University?'* Of the 11 staff members that responded, 9 said yes, 1 said no, and 1 said maybe. Staff were asked to expand on their answers, comments included:

- *'The central team has given guidance and support throughout this project, and have to applaud their communication in particular to internal delivery staff which has been exceptional and above any other ESIF programme I've worked on to date'*
- *'Given the challenges faced by this programme, I think it has been well managed and supported by NTU at all levels. This is testament in no small part to the knowledge and experience brought by the Programme Manager combined with the higher education partnership experience of the Head of Economic Programmes, Knowledge Exchange. I have learned a lot during my time on this project and have been grateful for the experience'*
- *'Hard to manage so many partners, ambitions, targets. Managed well with clear expectations of partners, clear requirements on providing data, meeting deadlines, etc. Risks spotted before becoming issues enabled the project to pivot so many times, and still achieve overall goals'*
- *'For DCG it was a very different model to those we have been used to as a partner organisation. It has been one of collaboration as opposed to a Lead Provider implementing an agreed fee for the overall management of the project'*

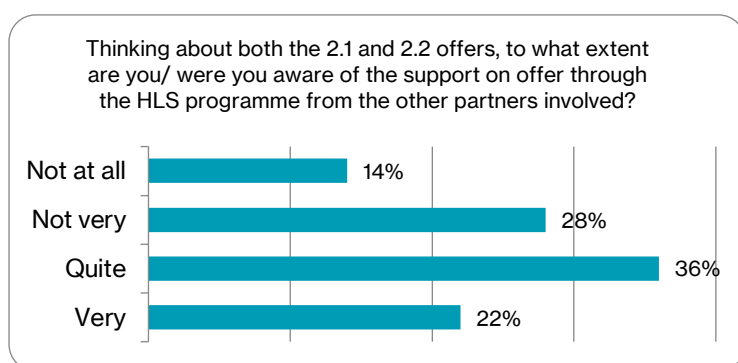
9A.3 Partnership Approach

The 57 staff completing the questionnaire were asked whether they had any thoughts or comments on the overall management and governance of the programme. 11 staff members said yes and this group were asked: 'How successful was the strategic partnership approach to the delivery of the ESF HLS?'

Of the 11 staff members who completed the question, 4 said very successful, 6 said quite successful, 1 said not very successful.

9A.3.1 Awareness of Partners' Offers

The 57 staff who completed the questionnaire were asked: 'Thinking about both the 2.1 and 2.2 offers, to what extent are you/ were you aware of the support on offer through the HLS programme from the other partners involved?'



50 staff members answered the question.

Off these: 22% (11) said they were very aware, 36% (18) said quite aware, 28% (14) said not very aware, and 14% (7) said not aware at all.

It should be noted that in some instances there may be no need for the delivery staff to understand the wider project to successfully do their job. Staff were given the opportunity to expand on their answers. Comments included:

- 'Internal communication (newsletter to operational staff) for sure!'
- 'For the earlier part of the programme, it wasn't clear what partner offers were. This took some time to establish. This was clearer in the latter part of the programme. It's not something I need the specifics for in my normal duties but am aware of the type of support on offer and more details can be accessed on the website if needed'
- 'I have the headlines and understanding of each partner's USP but not necessarily into the details, their strategy or business benefits in the way that I could pitch it to a company'
- 'I feel that more in-depth information about other partner offers could have been made available and updated regularly, and included cross-partner project team meetings to open communication between project teams (engagement)'
- 'I had a better understanding of other partner offers due to attending project partner meetings, however do feel that other team members may not have had the same understanding or relationship with their counterparts'
- 'No overall programme prospectus / brochure / website. Understand it's hard due to nature of evolving offers / projects, but possibly a consortium website offering all programme offers in one space'

9B.0 Marketing

The 57 staff members who completed the questionnaire were asked whether they had been involved in, or had any thoughts or comments on the marketing of the programme. 13 staff members said yes, and this group were asked: *'How successfully do you think the overall programme was marketed by NTU?'* Of the 13 respondents, 12 said the overall programme was very successfully marketed or quite well marketed. Only one person said that the programme wasn't very well marketed.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers. They told us:

- *'There have been varying levels of success in the marketing. Despite some slow progress in the early stages of 2.1, I feel that the effectiveness of this has increased throughout the course of the programme. 2.2 has also seen some levels of success, but with opportunities for improvement. Based on analytics, the proportion of referrals into the programme from marketing sources has increased or remained steady since early 2020'*
- *'Articles, case studies etc has been to the point and relevant and linked in with wider topics/issues. I wish to have seen more impact case studies, but that's just a preference and the timings of NTU in process of redeveloping the website has had an impact on the updates/content that could have been shared in the last 9-12 months'*
- *'Event management and promotion of activity to SMEs has been very good, the messaging is right and good tone to our audience'*
- *'I think across all partners there could have been more marketing about the consortium partnership. Working together to achieve project aims is something that is a very strong selling point that would strengthen the wider project offer. More consortium project networking events would also strengthen this'*
- *'Lead time for central marketing can be disadvantageous to course marketing'*
- *'General marketing emails having less traction than targeted sector based'*
- *'I do feel the overall marketing for this project would be more successful, it had been done centrally and if the different institutions were not in such direct competition with one another when claiming outputs. I think a good broad central marketing campaign for the project would have really helped raise awareness of the consortium and would have encouraged greater join-up, perhaps NTU could have provided this.'*

Staff members were also asked whether there were any lessons learnt or good practice from the marketing that need to be considered for future programmes. Key emerging themes included:

- An internal newsletter for staff
- Better sharing of marketing insight between delivery partners
- A joined-up approach to marketing across all partners
- A central website for all elements of the project
- Increased updates at partner/ senior/ executive level to raise awareness
- Marketing targeted to businesses rather than funders/ delivery teams.

9C.0 Co-Design

This section sets out staff comments on the co-design elements of the programme. Staff told us that co-design took a while to get up and running but it is now a real success story for the project.

9C.1 Success of Co-Design

Staff were asked: *'When co-design took place with businesses, how successful do you think this was?'* 15 staff members responded: of which 10 said 'very' and 5 said 'quite'. They were invited to expand on their answers, some comments included:

- *'Co-design feedback is built into the curriculum planning cycle, which takes time and isn't always able to deliver an instant response. However, as the cycle continues, co-design success will become more evident longer term'*
- *'In a challenging environment where there is a saturation of business support both free and virtual, co-design seems to be valued'*

Staff also noted that the programme has supported (although is not solely responsible for) Industry Advisory Boards, Market Intelligence Workshops and Sector Intelligence Workshops and these have all been viewed as very significant by the partners involved. One staff member told us that *'it's a massive positive that businesses want to be involved in these and help build the skills in their industry. This project has supported with this and has helped in terms of identifying skills gaps, new employment opportunities that are coming forward and gathering data and intelligence'*.

9C.2 Good Practice from Co-Design

Staff were asked: *'Do you have any examples of good practice or lessons learnt in terms of co-design that we can include in the evaluation report or use to inform future programmes?'* Some comments included:

- *'I would say from a marketing perspective the ability to describe it clearly and encourage businesses to engage with the process is paramount, and if businesses are struggling themselves, the concept may not be attractive enough, or seem like another hurdle to receiving more immediate support. Do we co-design without badging as co-design to businesses through another form of support beneficial to them?'*
- *'Our HE Programme Leader has commenced work on the development of a Foundation Diploma in Business together with a BA top up programme. This is as a result of several of the local businesses which are SMEs who attend our Employment & Skills Advisory Board for Business identifying the need for a new progression route to Apprenticeship degrees as an alternative to HNC/HND which they feel has become tired. Our focus as a main objective for the project is to establish progression pathways to, HE'*

Staff noted that the benefits of co-design such as increases in apprenticeship numbers take time to be realised and are likely to be outside of the lifetime of the evaluation. With this in mind it was suggested that feedback is provided to businesses on the impacts of co-design during the project lifetime to make sure they know their input has made a difference and ensure they feel valued.

9C.3 Co-Design - Round Tables

As part of the ESF HLS Programme the team designed and hosted a series of four sustainability co-design round tables commencing in November 2020 and completed in March 2021. These events were evaluated by the Industry Skills Coach and a summary is provided below.

The aim of the events was to support SMEs in implementing sustainability practices through the lens of employability, whilst achieving a co-design deliverable for the Grads for D2N2 Project. Four round tables were hosted, each with two sessions. The first session was comprised of a knowledge exchange and a facilitated discussion/workshop where SMEs communicated their needs and informed the content of bespoke toolkits. The second session comprised of further knowledge exchange, interactive workshop and presentation of the toolkits. Themes covered were: sustainability basics, sustainability in HR and employee engagement, sustainability in leadership and culture and sustainability and circular economy.

The pilot round table held in November 2020, hosted 15 SME attendees across the two sessions. The recent three further round tables held in February and March 2021 were booked by a total of 55 participants, hosted 41 attendees of which 33 were from SMEs with some repeat bookings.

Feedback Summary of SME Needs

The feedback from the SMEs taking part in the discussions is summarised below under relevant themes. The bullet points list areas where businesses feel that they need support or where change is needed in terms of sustainability for businesses in future.

- **Policy**
 - *'Sustainability governance'*
 - *'Better legislation to enforce businesses to be responsible, policy updates'*
 - *'Audits that are accessible to SMEs to show sustainability'*
 - *'Writing sustainability and EDI policies'*
 - *'Government action and increased presence in relation to polluting industries'*
- **Finance**
 - *'Grant support/ grants for innovation in green technologies'*
 - *'Tax breaks for businesses that are sustainable/ landfill taxes for polluting businesses'*
 - *'Triple bottom line reporting support'*
- **Leadership/ Business Strategy**
 - *'Responsible and inclusive leadership'*
 - *'Give businesses a better understanding of what social value is'*
 - *'Support to implement ethical leadership Stakeholder mapping'*
 - *'An outline business planning tool with 'ethical' decision making highlighted'*
- **Culture**
 - *'Mission, vision, values, aims, organisations having a greater purpose'*
 - *'Retaining talent'*
 - *'Encouraging participation and inclusion will help culture'*

- *'Meeting the needs of customers or clients by doing better, rather than expecting it all to be the leaders, making a change and doing things more sustainably'*
- *'Standing up for your beliefs and values and other people'*
- *'Expecting more from leadership/ holding leadership to account'*
- *'Practice what you preach, promoting work-life balance'*
- *'Making organisations happier and doing better'*
- *'Help setting up a business vision, defining realistic targets against a programme'*

- **Business Operations**
 - *'External consultants that can assess businesses and provide strategy of how to improve processes and systems'*
 - *'Transparent supply chains'*
 - *'How to adopt and implement Circular economy principles'*
 - *'Sustainable materials'*
 - *'Increased efficiency'*
 - *'How to embed sustainability within services and operations'*

- **Best Practice**
 - BREEAM Assessor Service Quotation *'Help quantifying the work/ change benefits'*

- **Knowledge Exchange**
 - *'Central information hub'*
 - *'Better signposting for resources and knowledge'*
 - *'Information about digital footprints'*
 - *'Toolkits – a big green light as the most useful online resource, as opposed to newsletters, emails, knowledge share webinars'*
 - *'Wider education for customers so they can better understand benefits of using ethical suppliers and products'*

- **Support**
 - *'Support from others who are leading sustainability in their organisations'*
 - *'Workshops around communicating/listening/marketing ideas in a clear way'*

- **Collaboration**
 - *'Cross industry sharing'*
 - *'Contacts/network of companies who have sustainability at the forefront of their brand.'*
 - *'Collaborations between different local agendas (everything appears siloed between EMC, City Council, D2N2 support initiatives and projects)'*
 - *'Sharing IP and ideas is more important now than ever from everyone – so collaboration is pivotal in the success of any sustainability initiative/agenda'*
 - *'Collaboration between different businesses and sectors seen as an excellent learning opportunity in the context of sustainability'*

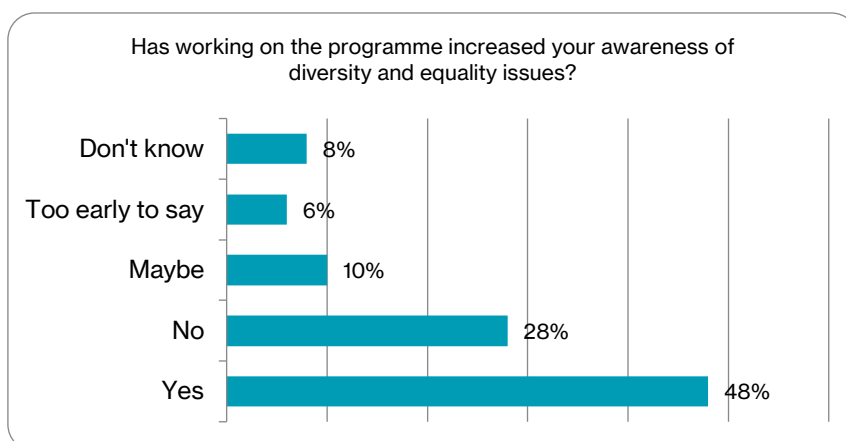
- **Supply Chain and Products**
 - *'How to build transparent supply chains'*
 - *'How to work with the supply chain'*
 - *'Bar codes that show the origin and impact of the product'*

- **Environmental Management Carbon Reduction**
 - *'How to become a low carbon business'*
 - *'Minimise digital footprints'*

- **HR**
 - *'Embedding sustainability into HR processes and the employee lifecycle'*
 - *'A toolkit and/or training for education of staff members'*
 - *'Retaining talent'*

9D.0 Diversity and Equality

Staff were asked: 'Has working on the programme increased your awareness of diversity and equality issues?'



50 staff responded, of which 48% (24) said yes, 28% (14) said no, 10% (5) said maybe, 6% (3) said too early to say, and 8% (4) said don't know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers.

Comments included:

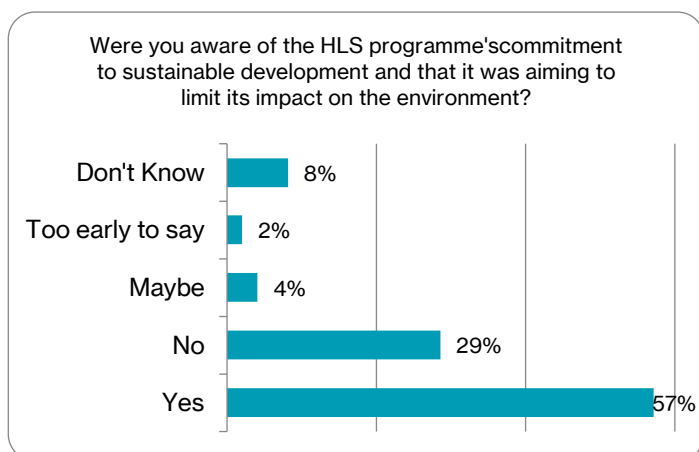
- *'A lot of conditions and struggles can lie below the surface. There have often been times when enrolling someone who seems happy and cheerful that's suffering from depression or someone that's very articulate in their writing that has learning conditions that cause them to struggle'*
- *'The CCTs of the programme and EDI at NTU and in local businesses has increased my own understanding of this issue in both marketing and with regards to local businesses, employment, and access to lifelong learning'*
- *'From my previous experience I have a high awareness in this area already but I think we can do more for future projects by ensuring we engage more with diverse businesses and individuals'*
- *'In the last year, we have had more of a focus on it across teams/departments, training and awareness has been raised. We have an agenda to move it forward and further develop us and our offer in this space'*
- *'Creating a better understanding of BAME-led business, particularly through the partner workshop, was very helpful'*
- *'First time working in the HE sector and seeing this kind of data'*

Some staff members told us that at the start of the HLS programme they had struggled to understand some of the widening participation targets. Through the programme they have built their knowledge and experience of engaging with BAME groups, those with a disability, and the over 50s. It was felt that the teams now feel they have better experience of this and have processes in place to support delivery and can use this on future programmes.

9E.0 Sustainable Development

This section sets out the key findings from staff members around the sustainable development cross cutting theme for the overall HLS programme.

9E.1 Sustainable Development Commitment



Staff were asked: *'Were you aware of the HLS programme's commitment to sustainable development and that it was aiming to limit its impact on the environment?'*

49 staff members answered, of which 57% (28) said yes, 29% (14) said no, 4% (2) said maybe, 2% (1) said too early to say and 8% (4) said don't know.

9E.2 Staff Contribution to Sustainable Development

Staff were asked: *'Do you feel you were able to contribute to this commitment to sustainable development, for example through maximising the use of online content and communication?'* 50 staff members answered, of which 58% (29) said yes, 24% (12) said no, 8% (4) said maybe, 4% (2) said too early to say and 6% (3) said don't know.

Staff were invited to expand on their answers. There were a number of comments around the volume of printed material and the need for wet signatures, in addition staff noted some other suggestions for future projects:

- *'The impact of COVID-19 has meant that a number of these have been achieved by default and will continue for the foreseeable future'*
- *'Working with SMEs has identified where they have not yet developed sustainability policies and procedures and commenced measure to address this'*

9E.3 Suggestions for the Future

Staff were asked for suggestions around how future programmes could be made more environmentally sustainable. There were many comments around paperwork, online form completion and the need to become digitised (as is the case with many EU funded schemes). Other suggestions included:

- *'More thought-provoking articles for SMEs on Sustainability and the changes we are making to act as role model'*
- *'More emphasis on virtual internships and remote working graduate opportunities'*
- *'All forms to be completed online with no exceptions. More of the delivery to be done remotely'*

9F.0 High Level Skills: Summary

This section summarises the findings from the staff feedback on the overall HLS programme.

9F.1 Future Project Development and Delivery

- The flexibility of the HLS programme was particularly welcomed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It was suggested that in future projects a more joined-up approach is needed when bidding.
- The importance of good recruitment and the length of time this can take was flagged up as something that needs to be considered for future schemes.
- Staff members told us how working on the programme, and particularly delivering the ONAs had broadened their skills and expertise and made them more employable in future.
- It was suggested that wider college support roles should be written into future projects as validation, operation and financial management at partner level were time consuming.
- It was generally felt that more could be done in the future to promote cross partner referrals.

9F.2 Marketing

Staff members were also asked whether there were any lessons learnt or good practice from the marketing that need to be considered for future programmes. Key emerging themes included: An internal newsletter for staff, better sharing of marketing insight between delivery partners, a joined-up approach to marketing across all partners, a central website for all elements of the project, increased updates at partner/ senior/ executive level to raise awareness and marketing targeted to businesses rather than funders/ delivery teams.

9F.3 Co-Design

Co-design is considered a key success of the project, and something that should be built into future schemes. Staff noted that the benefits of co-design such as increases in apprenticeship numbers take time to be realised and are likely to be outside of the lifetime of the evaluation. With this in mind it was suggested that feedback is provided to businesses on the impacts of co-design during the project lifetime to make sure they know their input has made a difference and ensure they feel valued.

9F.4 Diversity and Equality

48% (24) of staff told us that working on the programme had increased their awareness of diversity and equality issues. Some staff members told us that at the start of the HLS programme they had struggled to understand some of the widening participation targets. Through the programme they have built their knowledge and experience of engaging with BAME groups, those with a disability, and the over 50s. It was felt that the teams now feel that they have better experience of this and processes in place to support delivery and can use this on future programmes.

9F.5 Sustainable Development Commitment

57% (28) staff were aware of the HLS programme's commitment to sustainable development and that it was aiming to limit its impact on the environment. This suggests that more could be done in future to raise awareness of sustainable development issues.

10.0 Stakeholder Consultation

As part of the consultation approach an online questionnaire was developed for those individuals from the partner organisations who have had an overview of the project, but have not been directly involved. This same questionnaire was also used to capture feedback from representatives from stakeholder organisations who may have been involved with the scheme. Consultees were able to complete the questionnaire anonymously so a full list of those that responded is not available.

However, the analysis does show that in addition to senior members of staff from all of the partner organisations, responses were received from the Institute of Directors (IoD) and the D2N2 Growth Hub. In total 18 responses were received.

10.1 Key Points

Key points to note from the Stakeholder consultation are:

- All stakeholders felt that the programme is still relevant for D2N2 businesses and learners
- It was acknowledged that the offer should be reviewed in light of the Covid-19 pandemic
- All stakeholders felt that there was an ongoing need for this type of programme
- Stakeholders were very positive in terms of how the project has been managed, particularly given the challenging times and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
- A number of stakeholders had referred businesses into the programme. They had all received positive feedback from these businesses regarding the programme.

10.2 Key Successes

Stakeholders felt that the key successes from the programme were:

- Getting businesses to recognise the benefits of supporting high level skills
- Increased engagement with D2N2 employers, raising the profile of ESF projects/ partners
- Supporting employers who are not able to commit to apprenticeships/ pay for courses
- Upskilling members of staff within organisations to increase productivity
- The development of the online offer during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Supporting businesses to develop during their offer post Covid-19 pandemic
- Supporting learners to reskill in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

10.3 Recommendations for the Future

Stakeholders' recommendations for future delivery included:

- Continuing to integrate with complimentary projects
- Making the most of online offers – a flexible blended approach
- Improved joined up offer between partners
- A more flexible training approach – with both fast-track options, or longer delivery options
- Increased updates at partner/ senior management level.

Outputs and Impacts Achieved from the High Level Skills Programme

Below summarises how the HLS programme has met the outcomes and objectives it was aiming to achieve.

Impacts Achieved by the High Level Skills Programme

for Individuals

| | |
|---|---|
| Confidence and new specific skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 73% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that the training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to do their existing job 43% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their long term career prospects By summer 2021 the project will have supported 188 females to improve their labour market status <p>Learner Quote: <i>'Super supportive and helped me get a promotion!'</i></p> |
| Confidence to do their existing job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 72% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to do their existing job 41% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training had given them confidence to apply for a higher skilled job By the summer of 2021 the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project will have supported: 937 participants, of which 179 are over 50 years old, 104 have basic skills, and 46 were single adults with dependant children <p>Learner Quote: <i>'I am just more excited with a new sense of purpose. I also boosted my confidence'</i></p> |
| Confidence to apply for a higher skilled job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 57% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their ambition for their future career 17% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence to enabling them to secure a new job or position that has more responsibility 9% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their confidence enabling them to move from a part-time job to a full-time job <p>Learner Quotes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>'Gave me the confidence in myself to push on to the next level'</i> <i>'Growth of confidence to apply for leadership roles'</i> |
| Wages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training through the project had or would result in an increase in their wages in the next five years and 30% said maybe |
| Motivation/ productivity whilst at work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of learners taking part in the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs survey said that their training through the project has had a medium or high impact on their motivation/ productivity whilst at work |
| Businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 38% of businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that support through the programme had increased their recruitment of the Government's Kickstart Scheme 45% of businesses who took part in the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that following support through the programme they are more likely to recruit apprentices |
| Businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey and made use of the graduate placement opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of the 31 businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey and made use of the graduate placement opportunities, 52% had recruited a graduate before and 68% are now more likely to recruit graduates in future. 48% of the graduate placements delivered would not have been provided without the support of the programme. <p>Business Quote: <i>'The business has survived and diversified because of the graduate'</i></p> |

for SMEs

| | |
|--|---|
| Businesses who received support from the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs programme and completed the questionnaire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of learners who received support from the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs programme and completed the questionnaire said that their training has had a medium or high impact on their motivation/ productivity whilst at work |
| Businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 41% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire felt that their involvement with the project will lead to an increase in turnover within the next five years. A further 18% said maybe. 26% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire felt that their involvement with the project would increase their profitability 25% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire expanded their customer base and widened their market share 30% of businesses who received support from the GRADS for D2N2 project and completed the questionnaire said that the support allowed them to reach new markets, industries and products |
| Businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey and told us that their involvement with the project had allowed them to recruit new talent for the business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that their involvement with the project had allowed them to recruit new talent for the business. 54% of businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey told us that their involvement with the project had reduced the costs associated with taking on new employees <p>Business Quote</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>'We had searched for over a year to fill this role, and Derby Uni presented someone to us quite quickly once we started working with them'</i> |
| Businesses who completed the GRADS for D2N2 survey and told us that their involvement with the project had given them a better understanding of their skills needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 61% of businesses said that their involvement with the project has given them a better understanding of their skills needs 90% of learners said that they would recommend the training to a colleague or friend <p>Business Quote</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>'It's helped me identify holes in our management structure'</i> |

for D2N2

12.0 Summary and Recommendations for the Future

A summary of the main findings of the HLS evaluation is shown below, along with recommendations for future programmes.

12.1 Project Development

It was noted that there were some delays in getting the programme up and running in the early stages of the HLS programme.

Key recommendations with regards to overcoming these delays and other suggestions to improve and develop future programmes include:

- Ensuring that delivery teams are involved at the project development/ application stage to shape and inform proposals.
- Ensuring that there is sufficient staff resource allocated within each partner organisation to support the administration/ reporting requirements.
- Building staff recruitment into project timetables – this can be a lengthy process.
- Building contracting time into project timetables to allow a realistic start date for the programme.
- Agree and define the delivery model from the outset
- Planning meetings at project conception to develop the collaborative working across consortium and team meetings between project partners
- Ensure the partner offers are transparent, clear and fully understood by each consortium member before any bids are submitted
- A stronger emphasis on outcomes and long-term value for future schemes
- A stronger focus on the acquisition of high level qualifications focussed on co-design.

12.2 Project Management

Discussions with staff suggested that the HLS project management approach was complex. Whilst this had led to some issues around delivery and management through the programme these were identified quickly and dealt with efficiently.

Any issues or concerns at the staff level didn't translate into concerns for beneficiaries - with both learners and businesses providing positive feedback with regards to the project management. This shows the ability of the delivery teams to take a complex programme, simplify this and 'hide the workings' from the beneficiaries, providing an end product that met the needs of the businesses and learners.

Discussions with staff also suggest that the delivery partners learnt a lot from the delivery of the HLS programme and are now better placed to deliver future programmes.

12.3 Delivery of the Programmes

The case studies and feedback from businesses and staff shows how interlinked the two programmes have been and how many businesses have received support from both the GRADS for D2N2 project and the Priority Skills for D2N2 SMEs project. Key recommendations with regards to how project delivery can be shaped and improved in future include:

- Bringing together those involved at the delivery/ operational level to discuss best practice and lessons learnt on a more regular basis (subject to ongoing demand from staff)
- An internal newsletter or regular update for the wider project team
- Building a network of businesses and/ or individuals who have been through the training
- Increasing feedback between partners on identified skills gaps

12.4 Business/ Education Provider Relationships

It is clear from the case studies that the businesses feel that the delivery partners have 'gone the extra mile' in terms of the support offered and that some significant relationships have developed between the SMEs and the delivery partners over the duration of the HLS programme.

Often it can be making the initial link/ engaging the learner or business for the first time that can be the most challenging part of a programme of this nature. Going forward the partners need to work hard to support and develop the existing relationships that have been developed, and continue to support the learners and the businesses. Suggestions for achieving this could include peer networking, newsletters or a meeting at the end of the intervention to plot out further support opportunities and next steps for businesses.

12.5 Training/ Learning

The training was clearly well received by the learners who took part in the evaluation questionnaire, with 95% (127) telling us that they were pleased that they undertook the training.

Recommendations made for the future delivery of courses from staff and learners include:

- Offering a wider choice of courses
- Making the most of online offers – a flexible blended approach once the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions are relaxed
- Not forgetting the importance of face-to-face learning, interaction with tutors and networking with peer groups – learners told us that they want more than just online training
- A more flexible training approach that recognises each individual's personal circumstances – including both fast-track options, or longer delivery options to accommodate those who may have to juggle the training around existing commitments
- Ensuring clarity over assignment deadlines
- Additional resources for those with dyslexia
- Addressing gaps in IT knowledge
- Building peer networks
- Streamlined paperwork/ enrolment and use of electronic signations.

12.6 Future Skills Needs for Learners and Businesses

Businesses, learners and staff identified digital skills is the main area where skills support is needed. This has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online working (see more details below). Other areas where there is a demand for skills include:

- Change management, leadership and management
- Accounts
- Marketing/ digital marketing/ communications
- Project management
- Business planning/ strategic thinking
- Recruiting/ developing a team
- Carbon literacy / environment/ sustainability
- Equality and diversity.

12.7 The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Learners, businesses and staff were also asked how the Covid-19 pandemic will shape learning and skills needs going forward. The consultation suggests that the use of online training over the last year has made organisations rethink how training is delivered in future. Many view the switch to online as a positive. Other Covid-19 pandemic impacts were noted by the delivery partners including:

- During the second phase of the Covid-19 lockdown, furloughed staff were engaging with online learning for the first time. This changed perceptions of learning and the online delivery allowed flexibility so that they could do it in their own time.
- Both the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit have heightened the needs for organisation competence; businesses need to be agile, re-appraise their supply-chain and be more strategic.
- A higher importance on staff development/ training to help businesses adjust to new ways of working along with potential recruitment freezes. There will be a higher focus on developing staff to fill existing skills gaps, where they may have previously have recruited.
- In future moving online will have a massive impact with regards to who can attend courses, and this could be considered in future programmes.

Additional skills needed by businesses and learners as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic include:

- **Digital:** IT literacy, making the most of new technologies, digital project management, support for managers regarding how to manage and support home workers (mental health/ motivation) and how to manage remote teams working online, particularly engagement, team working and collaboration
- **Business Transformation and Covid-19 Pandemic Impact:** Business transformation, mentoring, marketing, resilience training, adaptability, leadership, management, budgeting and change management and strategic business planning.
- **Career Changers:** Wider support for those forced to change the industry/ sector they work or are trained in.

12.8 Graduates

Positive impacts from the graduate placements for businesses include: good value for money, creativity of graduates, fresh ideas, bringing in new technologies and enthusiasm. Suggestions for developing the Graduate Scheme included:

a) Grants/ Funding

- The administration burden of the grants needed to be reduced for businesses.
- There needs to be more flexibility in the model to allow for multiple grants to be provided to the same organisation.
- Fully funded graduate options might be beneficial for a lot of businesses.

b) Business and Graduate Support

- More comprehensive on-boarding and ongoing support is needed - customer care should be better embedded within the project.
- Graduates would benefit from being brought together in a peer network, to support one another in remote working and wellbeing.

c) Length of Support

- An option for a longer period of support would have suited a lot more businesses.

12.9 Apprentices

Of the 9 businesses that used the apprenticeship support, 3 had never recruited an apprentice before and 6 are now more likely to recruit graduates in future. (2 no change, 1 less likely).

Staff feedback with regards to the apprenticeship scheme included:

- Inclusion of apprenticeships as a measurable target
- Continue to work with employers to shape the training and amend the marketing.

12.10 Co-Design

Co-design is seen as a major success of the project and something that should be taken forward into future programmes. Staff noted that the benefits of co-design such as increases in apprenticeship numbers take time to be realised and are likely to be outside the lifetime of the evaluation. With this in mind it was suggested that feedback is provided to businesses on the impacts of co-design during the project lifetime to make sure they know their input has made a difference and ensure they feel valued.

12.11 Sustainability

Circa two thirds of learners, half of businesses and 29% staff told us that they were not aware of the programme's commitment to sustainable development. This suggests that in future programmes more could be done to raise awareness of this.