



Evaluation of Durham Upskilling Opportunities (DUO) Executive Summary and Lessons Learned

May 2025

Centrifuge Consulting,
The Core
Newcastle Helix
Bath Lane
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE4 5TF

e: admin@centrifuge.coop

w: www.centrifuge.coop

Contents

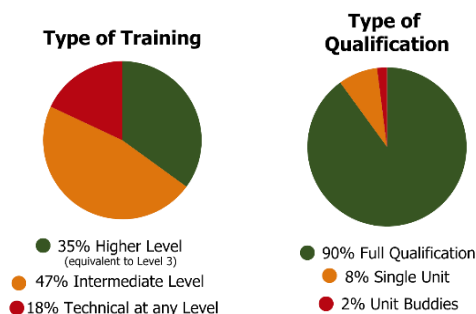
Introduction	3
Learner Outcomes.....	3
Employer Outcomes	3
Business Sectors Supported	4
Durham Upskilling Opportunities UK Shared Prosperity Fund Project Evaluation: Executive Summary	4
What is DUO?	5
Outcomes	6
Key Learning and Recommendations	9
Flexibility and Accessibility.....	9
Units, Licences and Legislative Courses	9
Innovation	9
Employer Networks and Relationships	10
Geographical and Sectoral Focus.....	10
Eligibility of the Self-Employed.....	10
Post Project Progressions	10
Data Capture	11
Data Input	11
Good practice and Lessons Learned	12
Key elements of the DUO Approach	12
Partners: Lessons Learned	13
Challenges.....	15
What Made DUO Different?	16
Other Learning	17
Key Evaluation Questions Summary	19
KEQs	19

Introduction

Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) through Durham County Council, Durham Upskilling Opportunities aimed to support individuals employed in County Durham to improve their skills to contribute to local growth sectors and sectors facing ongoing recruitment challenges.

Delivered through a partnership of local providers across four Geographic lots':

- North Durham and Central Durham - Led by New College Durham with partners including East Durham College, Evolution, ITEC, Learning Curve, Derwentside College, Bishop Auckland College, Rhino Training, Central Recruitment and Smartt Training.
- East Durham and South West Durham - Led by East Durham College with partners including Bishop Auckland College, Evolution, Penshaw View Training, EMS and TSI.



Learner Outcomes

Outcome	% Achieved
Learners achieving their aim	96%
Taking on new workplace responsibilities	6%
Promoted to new role	2%
Reporting a positive impact	98%
Able to do their job better	70%
Improved confidence at work	67%

Employer Outcomes

Outcome	% Achieved
Staff with improved ability to take on new duties	73%
All skill gaps and shortages addressed	63%
Improved business productivity	75%
More likely to invest in staff training	79%
Improved staff retention	54%
Improved staff morale	71%



Business Sectors Supported

Outcome	% Achieved
Transport, logistics & distribution	Less than 1%
Tourism & leisure	8%
Other sectors	23%
Land based	Less than 1%
Health science	1%
Engineering	71%
Energy	1%
Education	5%
Digital industries	Less than 1%
Construction	31%
Business & professional services	4%
Advanced Manufacturing	18%

Durham Upskilling Opportunities UK Shared Prosperity Fund Project Evaluation: Executive Summary

This is the Executive Summary and lessons learned overview for the final evaluation of the Durham Upskilling Opportunities (DUO) project which was funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) through Durham County Council (DCC) and delivered through a partnership of local providers, led by New College Durham¹ in North Durham and Central Durham and East Durham College² in East Durham and South West Durham.

The evaluation has been delivered by Centrifuge Consulting and covers the project to the end of March 2025. It should be noted that the project has been approved for funding through the transition year of UKSPF to the end of March 2026.

¹ Delivery partners for New College Durham, included East Durham College, Evolution, ITEC, Learning Curve, Derwentside College, Bishop Auckland College, Rhino Training, Central Recruitment and Smartt Training.

² Delivery partners for East Durham College, included Bishop Auckland College, Evolution, Penshaw View Training, EMS and TSI.

What is DUO?

DUO aimed to support individuals employed in County Durham to improve their skills to contribute to local growth sectors and sectors facing ongoing recruitment challenges. It therefore sought to simultaneously address the recruitment challenges and skills shortages that are constraints on business growth and development in these key sectors, and enable local employees to develop their skills, progress their careers and contribute to productivity growth.

The Service Specification for the DUO project provided a sample of the subject sectors that should be offered to employers through the project, with flexibility embedded through the opportunity to provide *'single units, unit bundles and recognised qualifications that may be completed as part of an employee's development and learning'*. This included:

- Skills for a low Carbon economy
- Business Admin
- Digital Media
- Managing Workplace Projects
- IT User, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.
- Management and Team Leading
- Contact Centre Operations
- Warehousing
- Conflict Resolution, Changing Behaviours, Challenging Behaviours, etc.
- Licenses to Practice including Fork Lift Truck, Security Badges and CSCS
- Legislative courses, including:
 - First Aid
 - Food Safety
 - Health & Safety
 - Manual Handling
 - COSHH

Lead providers were also able to request additional new priority sectors to be added to their contract where they could provide a clear rationale post contract award. For example, Land based industries were added as a priority sector following a request from East Durham College, as it is an important sector in specific areas of the County and is an important area for skills development linked to food security and the bioeconomy.

The project delivered a wide range of training with considerable specialism among providers in terms of sectors, the type of training and courses delivered. A total of 1,331 employees were enrolled in training through the project with an estimated 185 employers engaged.

Private sector training providers played a key role in project delivery with organisations such as Penshaw View (15%), Rhino Training (12%) and SMARTT (12%) each delivering a higher proportion of learner enrolments than three of the County's four colleges.

Analysis of training by level shows that Level 2 qualifications accounted for 47% of achieved qualifications, Level 3 accounted for 35% and technical qualifications at any level accounted for 18%. Interestingly employees in managerial roles accounted for a lower proportion of learners enrolled in higher qualifications (Level 3) than those enrolled in Intermediate (Level

2) qualifications (16% and 24% respectively); while the majority of technical courses were delivered to learners in operational roles.

Through the specification, DCC also sought to ensure that DUO provided employers with access to flexible training through the provision of single units and unit bundles alongside full qualifications. Importantly a number of partners discussed the development and provision of single units and unit bundles during consultation interviews with the evaluation team. However, only around one in ten learner enrolments involved unitised training through single unit (8%) or unit bundles (2%).

While training was targeted at sectors, the nature of the training itself may not have been directly applicable to that sector in isolation, highlighting the importance of transferable skills. Analysis by training theme shows that First Aid and Health and Safety related provision is estimated to have related to more than half of all enrolments. It should be noted that such provision involved industry and role specific health and safety or first aid qualifications, as well as more general training with examples of sector and role specific training including paediatric first aid and health and safety in a construction environment.

Importantly all of the employers consulted by the evaluation team felt that the project was able to address all or some of the priority skills needs for their existing workforce. However, one lead partner did highlight that the requirement for DUO to deliver accredited training effectively stifled some potential innovation training, by making unit bundles prohibitively expensive and preventing the delivery of new areas of training (for example in the use of newer technologies or software) for which no accredited training had been developed yet.

Outcomes

The project supported 1,331 employed learners from across County Durham with 1,280 achieving qualifications. It reached learners in target sectors and successfully engaged micro and small to medium sized enterprises (88% of all participating firms). Construction businesses accounted for the largest proportion of learners (41%), followed by other sectors (30%) and Advanced Manufacturing (24%).

The project also supported learners of all ages, with occupational analysis showing that operational staff accounted for 60% of learners while managerial and support staff each accounted for 20%. Interestingly the majority of learners consulted by the evaluation team had been with their employer for more than 2 years (64%) when they accessed DUO training; with data showing the project supported a wide range of different employees from new entrants to those who have been with their employer long term.

Dispersed delivery across County Durham (including workplace-based training) and training outside of usual hours (including delivering around employer shift patterns) were important to securing the engagement, participation and progression of a significant proportion of supported learners.

Consulted employers identified a number of different motivations for accessing workforce training via DUO with all unsurprisingly seeking to address skills gaps or shortages among their existing staff, while around four out of ten were seeking to train new or recently

employed staff; and around two out of ten seeking to support staff progression to a new role in their business.

In terms of outcomes achieved project data shows that of those with a recorded outcome:

- 89% completed their training and were continuing in their current role;
- 6% completed their training and were continuing in their current role but with added responsibilities;
- 2% completed their training and received promotion or progressed to a new role with their current employer.

It should be noted that this outcome data is captured by project partners on the last day of training and is therefore unlikely to accurately capture impact unless the participant had a conditional offer of promotion or additional responsibilities on condition of them completing the course. While this suggests that only 2% of learners were recorded as progressing to a new role; it is likely that there will be some further progression sometime after achieving qualifications, with the skills developed providing employees with greater potential for progression than they would otherwise have.

Analysis of those achieving positive outcomes shows that they include learners across all age bands, although older workers were more likely to progress with learners aged 50+ accounting for 39% of all those achieving positive outcomes compared to 28% of all learners. Analysis by qualification shows that 83% of those achieving a positive employment outcome obtained a higher-level qualification equivalent to Level 3, 11% achieved an intermediate level qualification equivalent to Level 2 and 6% achieved technical accreditation.

Learners employed in SMEs were more likely to progress into a positive employment outcome. This could reflect more opportunities for movement within small companies.

Interestingly the majority of those achieving promotion or a new role accessed health and safety focussed training which demonstrates that health and safety related training can play a key role in supporting workforce progression and should therefore be included within training programmes such as this.

Evaluation interviews were used to explore outcomes and impacts further with these finding that:

- The majority of learners identified at least one positive outcome or impact generated by the training they received with only 2% suggesting the training had made no difference to their circumstances or lives
- The most common positive outcomes and impact identified by learners, included:
 - Improving their ability to do their existing job better
 - Improving their confidence
 - Improving their morale
 - Enabling them to take on new tasks in their existing job

This again demonstrates that the skills developed through DUO related more to enabling employees to deliver their existing roles better, thereby enhancing their productivity rather than to enable them to progress to a new job within their workplace. However, 12% of

those consulted had moved on to a better job or obtained a promotion with their existing employer (slightly higher than the percentage shown in project data), highlighting that training did enable a number of learners to make such a progression.

Employer consultation supported these findings with a notable proportion of employers highlighting significant improvements in the following areas:

- Trained staff members ability to fulfil all of their duties (85% of employers)
- Staff morale (71%)
- Likelihood that they will invest more in staff training or access funding for this (79%)
- Trained staff members ability to take on new duties (73%)
- Addressing all of their skills gaps and shortages (63%)
- Staff retention (54%)

Additionally, 75% of employers felt that their business productivity had improved as a result of DUO training, with 67% feeling it had led to small improvements in this area, while 8% felt productivity had improved significantly.

Key Learning and Recommendations

Flexibility and Accessibility

Flexibility in terms of the training provision that could be delivered and the method of delivery itself (including making training accessible through localised and/or in-work delivery or timing delivery to fit employee shift patterns and availability) were key to the success of the project. Such approaches can clearly play a key role in ensuring the relevance of the training offer and enhancing accessibility for employers and their employees. Therefore, embedding and emphasising such approaches should be considered for any future successor workforce development projects.

Recommendations: Successor projects must build on the DUO model and focus on flexibility to enable providers to deliver the training needed by local sectors and employers with a clear requirement for providers to make training accessible through dispersed and community/workplace focussed delivery at times that suit employees

Units, Licences and Legislative Courses

The inclusion of unitised provision and licences and legislative courses enabled providers to deliver training directly relevant to the needs of employers and their employees. Indeed, the ability to provide licenses and legislative courses was highlighted as a critical success factor by most providers. Collectively the ability to offer such provision was highlighted as what made DUO different from other workforce development projects a number of providers had previously worked on.

Recommendations: Successor projects should retain the ability to fund single units, unit bundles, licences and legislative courses

DCC should be given consider whether include an additional data field within future monitoring to capture where single units have been provided to a learner in addition to a full qualification rather than just in isolation

Innovation

By enabling providers to deliver single units and unit bundles the DUO project encouraged innovation among partners, with a number highlighting how they had delivered new training through the project. However, the contractual requirement to deliver accredited training was highlighted by some providers as a barrier to delivering training through unit bundles due to the associated costs of paying for registration and certification. It also acted as a barrier to delivering certain newer areas of training which there was a demand for, but no accredited training yet available.

While there is a clear rationale for focussing on delivering accredited and certified training, with this effectively providing a form of quality assurance in terms of the content of provision; it can also act as a barrier to innovation and meeting employer needs and consideration should be given as to how these factors can be balanced in the design and delivery of future projects and programmes.

Recommendation: DCC should consider flexibilities around the requirement for training to be accredited and certified, particularly in relation to skills where such training is not yet available (such as in the use of new technology) and for unit bundles

Employer Networks and Relationships

The project benefitted from a local delivery partnership, including FE Colleges and smaller private sector providers which had strong networks and relationships with local employers and sector specialisms. This highlights the importance of using providers with a strong local presence and reputations and relationships with local employers. However, the project also enabled local delivery partners to extend their employer networks and relationships and deliver in areas of Durham they had not previously targeted, highlighting the importance of publicly funded training to encouraging and driving workforce development among businesses and reaching into underserved communities and areas.

Recommendations: Existing provider relationships and footprints should be a key consideration in assessing bids to deliver future successor projects

Geographical and Sectoral Focus

The project successfully engaged employers covering a wide range of sectors, including some priority sectors that were not included in the original contract. The project also successfully engaged employers from across County Durham. The content of the contract was key to this, ensuring a focus on target sectors with the use of four lots focussed on different geographies and sectors, helping to ensure that the project sought to reach across the County.

Recommendations: Successor projects should retain a lot based approach to ensure a focus on local priorities and that employers from across the County are targeted

Eligibility of the Self-Employed

The project successfully engaged a significant number of learners within the Construction sector. However, the contract made it difficult for providers to support some in the sector that would have benefitted from support. This was due to self-employed learners being ineligible for the project and contracting structures which are commonplace within Construction, which often sees businesses utilising tiers of sub-contractors rather than employing individuals directly.

Recommendations: DCC should consider whether funding should be available to self-employed residents (in appropriate circumstances) through any successor projects to DUO

Post Project Progressions

The timescales available for delivery and monitoring of the project created challenges for capturing outcomes achieved by learners as these had to be collected on the final day of training; meaning that progression outcomes were arguably lower than they would have been had monitoring been possible over a longer period, which was not possible through UKSPF.

Recommendations: Funders should consider extending the period available for capturing outcomes for any future programmes and projects funded through them

Data Capture

Monitoring and evaluation and ultimately future projects could benefit from the collection of additional data from learners and employers. Examples include pre-conditions, in terms of the length of time employees have been in their current role (to understand the balance between training new entrants or long-term employees) and whether or not employers already have an existing relationship with the training provider. While the project could benefit from other additional fields there is a balance to be struck and these can be captured through external evaluation rather than increasing the administrative burden on providers, learners and employers.

Recommendations: DCC should consider additional data collection to capture evidence of how long employees have been in work and whether the training is being delivered to an employer providers have an existing relationship with or whether this is a new relationship.

Data Input

The evaluation process has revealed inconsistencies in the way data is captured or inputted within the project database (which is derived from Continuous Learner Logs). These inconsistencies were found across, and even within, different providers in terms of how entries for a number of variables are inputted. This includes the name of qualifications, with examples of multiple different entries for the same qualification; sectors, with some businesses being labelled as 'other' when they could have been classified within one of the target sectors; and missing data with relatively high numbers of missing entries for some data fields.

Recommendation: DCC should consider how best to ensure the quality and consistency of data entry from providers

Good practice and Lessons Learned

The evaluation process has identified a number of lessons and key findings that need to be considered and utilised to inform future activity and investment.

The project has demonstrated a clear demand for the training it has provided among employers across key sectors and County Durham, with the table below providing a summary overview of how the project delivered against the intended approach for DUO, as outlined within the original project specification and contract.

Key elements of the DUO Approach

Intended Approach	Practice
Provision of agile training/upskilling solutions required by growth sectors and those sectors facing ongoing recruitment difficulties.	The project has provided a wide range of courses to employers and sectors facing ongoing recruitment difficulties across County Durham. This training has been made accessible through localised and flexible provision, often in employer workplaces and at times to suit their workforce.
Achieved through the provision of flexible workforce skills support Programmes to address intermediate, technical and higher-level skills gaps and shortages by creating opportunities for employees to upskill and/or retrain.	The skills support delivered through the project has supported learning at intermediate, technical and higher levels with consulted employers highlighting how it was tailored to address their skills gaps and shortages.
Undertaking detailed organisational needs analysis with employers through experienced skills brokers.	Employers rated the needs analysis process highly with strong levels of satisfaction with the support they received.
Short course solutions which increase the number of people with technical and job specific skills.	All training was delivered to specifically address the technical and job specific skills of employees within County Durham businesses.
Objectives will be met by delivery of a range of unitised Programmes, tailored to meet the needs of employees delivered to employers including bundles of units.	The project involved delivery of a range of unitised programmes, including single units and bundles of units. However, the need for all training to be accredited was identified as a barrier to delivering more unit bundles due to associated costs.
The inclusion of accredited regulated and non-regulated qualifications.	The project delivered a wide range of accredited regulated and non-regulated qualifications, as shown throughout this report.

The evaluation process has identified a number of lessons and key findings that need to be considered and utilised to inform future activity and investment.

The evidence presented within this evaluation report suggests that DUO has been successful in bringing together a range of providers to support employers to engage and upskill their workforce across a range of sectors across County Durham. The flexibility in training design was appreciated by providers while the main beneficiaries of support have been SMEs and their employees. The following factors have been key to the project's success in doing so:

- Partnership based delivery model with sector specialism and a geographic focus.

- Partner networks and relationships with employers and their willingness to proactively engage new employers.
- Dispersed, flexible and responsive skills and training delivery with training often offered or provided in employer premises with a number of providers delivering around employer's shift patterns.
- Flexibilities in the training offer from full qualifications to unit bundles and single bundles helping to ensure that training can be adapted to meet specific employer needs.

Provider consultation suggests they value the approach adopted through DUO and feel it has made a valuable contribution to employers across the County:

'This was a positive initiative with a bigger impact (than other initiatives) on employers in the funding area.'

'This was an excellent project with a good uptake. College support was excellent and our feedback was good. It is a shame that it finished - barely scratched the surface in terms of meeting the needs.'

This is echoed through employer and learner consultation.

Partners: Lessons Learned

As part of the consultation processes, delivery partners were asked to identify the key lessons they have learned through their involvement in the DUO programme. Collectively these lessons can be grouped within the following themes:

- Need for adequate timescales to aid effective planning at a project and individual employer intervention level
- Importance of collective understanding and action
- Benefits of focussing on outcomes and employer need
- The need for flexibility in training offer and methods of delivery, with the ability to offer technical licences and qualifications and dispersed delivery both highlighted as particularly important to the success of DUO

Examples of key learning identified by providers, include:

'Early appointment would allow for strategic planning and full and more coherent marketing. We all need a shared understanding what other funding is available and what it is for.'

'Up front work with employers and employees was key... we had very robust Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) element to make sure courses met everyone's needs...did a lot of work to ensure locations and courses were approved by all parties.'

'The focus of this project meant there was a real opportunity that companies could actually be improved through the training - this was not simply a tick box exercise to deliver training.'

'This was a positive initiative with a bigger impact on employers in the funding area than some previous projects. Focus on outcomes helped.'

'Our company gained a greater understanding of the methods and requirements under the specification and potential future projects. Our courses are traditionally classroom delivered not online. We had to make changes to ensure that we were able to meet an exacting specification.'

'It has been a great opportunity to provide local employers with a tailored offer that meets their training requirements. Flexibilities in what can be funded have allowed employers who would not typically engage with the college to start conversations about their training requirements.'

One provider highlighted that they had learned valuable lessons around the importance of providing practical support to employers to reduce their administrative burden and make their participation as easy as they could:

'Planning in advance with employers was crucial. We provided them with support...able to do paper work up front to speed up the process. It was not difficult and gave opportunities to employers who would not otherwise been able to have training.'

Another provider also highlighted the importance of working with employers to address this issue:

'The administrative requirements of the project did cause some employers to become reluctant in undertaking training however, by putting in place dedicated Business Development support we were able to overcome this.'

Significantly employers consulted by the evaluation team did not generally identify project bureaucracy and administration as a challenge, particularly those supported through Lots 3 and 4. This contrasts significantly with previous evaluations of workforce development projects funded through other previous programmes, such as European Social Fund and should be seen as a strength of the approach adopted in Durham. Indeed, lead partners spoke highly of the role played by DCC, who provided the lead providers with the opportunity to design project documentation and data requirements in collaboration with them, thereby helping to ensure that such processes focussed on collecting data that served a clear purpose and reduced the burden on employers themselves.

Overall, the lot-based structure for the DUO contract was appreciated by partners and clearly helped to ensure that the project reached employers from across County Durham rather than focussing on more densely populated areas or those areas in which large providers had a base.

Recommendations: Successor projects must build on the DUO model and be focussed on flexibility to enable providers to deliver the training needed by local sectors and employers with a clear requirement for providers to make training accessible through dispersed and community/workplace focussed delivery at times that suit employees

Recommendations: Successor projects should retain a lot based approach to ensure a focus on local priorities and that employers from across the County are targeted

Recommendations: Existing provider relationships and footprints should be a key consideration in assessing bids to deliver future successor projects

Challenges

Like any project DUO has not been without its challenges and partner consultation has revealed a number of challenges, some of which are specific to particular providers (in terms of staffing issues or their need to develop an understanding of the specification), and others which are related to delivery of the project as a whole. From a project perspective the main challenges related to the capacity and availability of employers and their employees to engage in training and the employment structure within one sector in particular. On the latter point, one delivery partner rightly highlighted the inherent challenges of supporting employees in Construction due to the contracting structures which are commonplace within it, which often sees businesses utilising tiers of sub-contractors rather than employing individuals directly:

'There was a major problem encountered because of the nature of the construction industry - which we largely covered - which employs large numbers of contractors and sub-contractors. These are not PAYE status employees and so the scheme did not cover them.'

This is clearly an area for consideration in relation to the design of training programmes and ultimately funding guidance and eligibility. Indeed the successor project should consider whether or not funding should be made available to support self-employed residents of County Durham, both to address the challenge above and provide wider support to the many micro-businesses in the County.

Recommendations: DCC should consider whether funding should be available to self-employed residents (in appropriate circumstances) through any successor projects to DUO

A further challenge for the project as a whole related to supporting employees at risk of redundancy, with **Section 2.1.1** above, outlining the challenges in supporting this cohort due to statutory notice periods and eligibility for support relating to Subsidy Control. While there are some steps successor projects could take to enhance referral process and response times, some of these factors remain beyond the control of project delivery partners or DCC to address.

This evaluation report has demonstrated the numerous steps providers took to reduce the impact of employer and employee capacity to engage, from providing upfront support with completing associated paperwork to providing training in employer premises to aligning the timing of training with workplace shift patterns, to delivering online or blended courses. Collectively this flexibility is a key strength of the project and is arguably critical to the successes of DUO.

Lead partners, largely spoke positively about their delivery partners and vice versa; although discussions with the evaluation team did reveal some examples of lead partners needing to adapt their partnerships to address capacity issues and lower learner numbers than anticipated from a small number of partners.

A final challenge identified through partner consultation related to the need for the DUO to deliver accredited training, with providers highlighting this as a barrier to delivering training through unit bundles due to the associated costs of paying for registration and certification and also acting as a barrier to delivering certain newer areas of training which there was a demand for but no accredited training yet available:

'the need for training to be certified and accredited was a barrier to us being able to tailor training completely to the needs of some employers...we had examples of employers wanting training in areas where accredited qualifications and training just isn't available yet, such as Power BI.'

While there is a clear rationale for focussing on delivering accredited and certified training, with this effectively providing a form of quality assurance in terms of the content of provision; it can also act as a barrier to innovation and meeting employer needs and consideration should be given as to how these factors can be balanced in the design and delivery of future projects and programmes.

Recommendation: DCC should consider flexibilities around the requirement for training to be accredited and certified, particularly in relation to skills where such training is not yet available (such as in the use of new technology) and for unit bundles

The timescales available for delivery and monitoring of the project created challenges for capturing outcomes achieved by learners as these had to be collected on the final day of training; meaning that progression outcomes were arguably lower than they would have been had monitoring been possible over a longer period, which was not possible through UKSPF.

Recommendations: Funders should consider extending the period available for capturing outcomes for any future programmes and projects funded through them

What Made DUO Different?

Ultimately the flexibility, responsiveness and focus on practical skills and outcomes was what most providers identified as making DUO different from other workforce training projects they had been involved in; with some providers highlighting the positive role played by DCC in ensuring these elements were a key component of the service specification for the project.

'Was practically based. Scheme based on the content that could be delivered to meet company's needs.'

'The flexibility to offer training that is not typically funded allowed us to provide employers with a training package that they had not received before. This has had a

positive effect on employers who have engaged with the project resulting in strengthened relationships with the college and in some cases has led to employers recruiting apprentices.'

'The flexibility to offer non regulated provision. Often there is an employer need and an available qualification but no funding attached. This project has addressed those gaps and has been well received by employers.'

'This was developed specifically for employers in Durham. This was a novel access to funding from DCC. It was better and reached more employers.'

The ability to provide licenses and legislative courses was highlighted as a critical success factor by most providers, with one lead partner commenting that:

'The biggest advantage of DUO and what made it different was being able to deliver licenses and other technical courses that just aren't funded elsewhere and generally haven't been in the past...helped secure strong engagement and ensure we are able to provide training that employers and their staff truly needed.'

Recommendations: Successor projects should retain the ability to fund single units, unit bundles, licences and legislative courses

DCC should be given consider whether include an additional data field within future monitoring to capture where single units have been provided to a learner in addition to a full qualification rather than just in isolation.

Lead partners spoke very highly of the role played by DCC throughout the design and delivery of the project, with one stating that:

'The relationship with the funder [DCC] was a key strength...they worked closely with us from the start and it felt like a real partnership...allowed us to design registration and monitoring paperwork...understood the local area and local issues...always available for quick conversation to clarify what we could deliver...always worked to overcome any niggles or concerns...we just haven't been able to have that kind of relationship with funders in the past.'

This highlights the importance of proactive project management from DCC, with project management teams with lead partners both highlighting the importance of DCC's role and commitment to working closely with them to ensure the project was responding and adapting to employer demands and a shifting delivery context; and not just delivering a project based on assumptions made at the design and contracting stage.

Other Learning

The process of analysing project data has revealed a number of potential learning points for DCC and delivery partners. These include:

- **Data capture** – Monitoring and evaluation and ultimately future projects could benefit from the collection of additional data from learners and employers. Examples include pre-conditions, in terms of the length of time employees have been in their current role (to understand the balance between training new entrants or long-term employees), and potential data relating to learner income and employer and/or employee productivity. However, there is clearly a balance to be struck in terms of data collection, particularly where existing requirements are seen to be a disincentive or potential barrier to employer participation. Therefore, employer and employee evaluation consultation processes have a key role to play in addressing these gaps in the evidence base as demonstrated by the evidence presented within this evaluation. However, there are also potential improvements to the ways in which training or qualifications are classified. For example, partner consultation has suggested some providers have supported employees with a full qualification and individual units but the database does not allow such examples to be captured. Therefore, consideration should be given to provide an additional option within future monitoring to capture where single units have been provided to a learner in addition to a full qualification rather than just in isolation.

Recommendations: DCC should consider additional data collection to capture evidence of how long employees have been in work and whether or not the training is being delivered to an employer providers have an existing relationship with or whether this is a new relationship.

- **Data input** – the evaluation process has revealed inconsistencies in the way data is captured or inputted within the project database (which is derived from Continuous Learner Logs). These inconsistencies were found across, and even within, different providers in terms of how entries for a number of variables are inputted. This includes the name of qualifications, with examples of multiple different entries for the same qualification from a single provider (one example of a provider labelling the same qualification four different ways in the database); employer entries with the single employers being labelled inconsistently; sectors with some businesses being labelled as 'other' when they could have been classified within one of the target sectors; and missing data with high numbers of missing entries for date fields or variables such as the role of the supported employee.

Recommendation: DCC should consider how best to ensure the quality and consistency of data entry from providers

Key Evaluation Questions Summary

The table below provides a summary overview of the evidence against the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) developed for this evaluation.

KEQs

Areas of enquiry	KEQs to be answered	KEQ Answers
1. Employee progress towards achieving their career and personal goals through the attainment of qualifications and new work-related skills.	1.1 Have employee goals shifted through participation? 1.2 If yes, how has the contract done this? 1.3 What new qualifications and skills were achieved, and at what level? 1.4 Are there any shortfalls in participation/accessibility and how could these be addressed?	1.1 Employees consulted by the evaluation team reported improved confidence (68%), improved morale (37%) and being better able to do their job better (70%) as a result of the training received through DUO. 1.2 Analysis suggests the contract did this by providing that was suited to the skills needs of the supported employees and their jobs, providing them with practical knowledge and skills to enable them to fulfil the requirements of their role and refresh or grow their capabilities. 1.3 Detail on this is provided in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this report 1.4 Partners worked hard to ensure that training was accessible to learners. This involved flexibility in terms of the location and timing of training. For example, a number of providers delivered training at employer premises with other examples including delivery time to specifically suit shift patterns within workplaces

Areas of enquiry	KEQs to be answered	KEQ Answers
2. Helping employers to increase levels of productivity because of their employees developing greater knowledge and understanding of their workplace, the skills to undertake their job roles more efficiently and effectively, as well as greater satisfaction and motivation to perform their job roles to a high standard.	2.1 What are productivity shifts/expected shifts in firms employing beneficiaries? 2.2 What are the attitudinal changes among beneficiary employees? 2.3 Have beneficiary employees moved into new jobs or taken on new responsibilities? 2.4 Do beneficiary employees remain in their existing jobs/firms? 2.5 What provision has been delivered or made available through the contract? 2.6 How does the provision delivered or made available match local needs identified?	2.1 75% of employers felt that their business productivity had improved as a result of DUO training, with 67% feeling it had led to small improvements in this area, while 8% felt productivity had improved significantly. However, employers were not able to quantify this over the project and evaluation timescale 2.2 Supported employees highlighted a range of relevant outcomes and impact because of support. This includes 70% feeling they are able to do their job better, with 67% highlighting improved confidence and 37% highlighting improved morale 2.3 Project outcome data shows that 6% of learners completed their training and had added responsibilities in their role, with 2% receiving a promotion or progressing to a new role with their current employer. Additionally, 19% of consulted learners had taken on new tasks in their existing job. 2.4 Project data shows that 98% of learners remained in their current role while 98% of consulted learners had remained with their existing employer at the time of being interviewed by the evaluation team, with 2% of these learners moving to a better job with another employer. Interestingly 12% of consulted learners got a better job or promotion with their existing employer. This suggests there is evidence of learners progressing beyond the delivery and monitoring timescales for the project as such interviews were conducted after the end of DUO. 2.5 Section 2.3 of this report shows that a wide range of provision has been made available through the programme. 2.6 The evaluation shows a good match between what has been delivered and local needs with employer consultation demonstrating that training had largely met their needs with flexibility and the range of available provision central to this

Areas of enquiry	KEQs to be answered	KEQ Answers
3. A contribution to the UKSPF Skills Support outputs and outcomes relevant to this contract	3.1 What UKSPF outputs and outcomes have been achieved through the contract? 3.2 Has the activity delivered contributed to any other UKSPF outputs and outcomes?	3.1 This is shown in Section 2.1 of the report 3.2 The project has also contributed to wider UKSPF indicators relating to inclusion and economic growth
4. Provision of agile training/upskilling solutions required by growth sectors and those sectors facing ongoing recruitment difficulties	4.1 How were the solutions designed, and how effective have they been at delivering outcomes and impact? 4.2 How effective have different delivery partners been? 4.3 What areas of provision have been made available and delivered and how do these match needs of target sectors?	4.1 There is good evidence that solutions were developed in collaboration between provider and employers with ongoing intelligence gathering through training needs assessments and less structured discussions with employers to understand and define their needs and agree appropriate training interventions to address them. Evidence presented in Section 4 of this report and Learner and Employer Case Studies in Annexes E and F show that the project has performed well at delivering outcomes and impact. Additionally, it is likely that more outcomes would have been recorded had there been more time to do so. 4.2 As a collective the delivery partners have proved effective. Evidence provided throughout this report shows that levels of performance differ in terms of volume and the outcomes achieved. 4.3 Section 2 of this report shows the areas of provision that have been delivered with outcomes evidence and case studies showing that these have matched some of the needs of target sectors and employers.

Areas of enquiry	KEQs to be answered	KEQ Answers
5. Provision of flexible workforce skills support Programmes to address intermediate, technical and higher-level skills gaps and shortages by creating opportunities for employees to upskill and/or retrain.	5.1 Has the training effectively targeted skills gaps and shortages? 5.2 How do employees access this training? 5.3 What is the employer role on supporting employees to access this support?	5.1 Yes, the training has effectively targeted a number of skills gaps and shortages as demonstrated by learner and employer feedback provided in Section 4 and Case Studies in Annexes D and E 5.2 Employer accessed training largely via their employer with much training offered flexibly to improve accessibility. This included dispersed delivery in local workplaces and to suit shift patterns and also remote or online learning opportunities 5.3 Employers worked with training providers to determine who should access what training and providing opportunities for employees to access this training
6. Undertaking detailed organisational needs analysis with employers through experienced skills brokers.	6.1 What is the distribution of participation and provision across key/growth sectors? 6.2 How does this distribution reflect the level of opportunities and skill gaps/shortages across key/growth sectors? 6.3 Do employers feel their needs were identified and addressed?	6.1 This is shown in Section 2 of this report 6.2 It is not possible to directly compare these variables using available data. However, the project did reach into key growth sectors and support employer within them to address their skills needs 6.3 Yes, evidence shows that most employers felt their needs were appropriately identified and addressed

Areas of enquiry	KEQs to be answered	KEQ Answers
7. Short course solutions which increase the number of people with technical and job specific skills.	7.1 How does short course provision compare to longer terms skills training? 7.2 What impact does this training have on jobs?	7.1 Employers and learners both spoke positively about the availability of flexible short course provision tailored directly to their needs with evidence suggesting this increases their likelihood to engage with training. Indeed, provider spoke highly of the role played by DUO in enabling them to build relationships with employers and deliver training with a practical focus on addressing their needs. 7.2 Evidence presented in Section 4 and Case Studies in Annexes D and E demonstrates that the project has had a positive impact on jobs through some learners taking on new responsibilities and/or new roles and most employers highlighting productivity improvements while the majority of both learners and employers identify the training as having enabled participants to perform better at work. Additionally, the majority of learners also highlighted improved confidence as a result of DUO training.
8. Delivery of a range of unitised Programmes, tailored to meet the needs of employees delivered to employers including bundles of units.	8.1 Has the project delivered unitised programmes tailored to employer needs? If so, how effective have these been? 8.2 How has provision delivered through the contract addressed gaps and complemented mainstream funded activity, and the existing activity by employers? 8.3 Are there displacement effects?	8.1 Units and unit bundles were delivered to meet employer needs, with around one in ten learner enrolments involved unitised training. However, the need for all training to be accredited was identified as a barrier to delivering more unit bundles due to associated costs. Consequently, only five providers delivered single units across fourteen businesses with only one provider delivering unit bundles. Evidence suggests these were effective, where they were delivered. 8.2 Providers worked with partners and employers to ensure provision addressed gaps and complemented mainstream funded activity, with evidence of providers referring employers to training funded via alternative funding streams, where available. 8.3 The evaluation found little evidence of displacement effects.
9. Inclusion of accredited, regulated, and non-regulated qualifications.	9.1 What provision has been delivered? 9.2 What, if any, is the difference in impact between accredited, regulated and non-regulated qualifications?	9.1 Sections 2, 3 and 4 and Annexes B and C demonstrate what has been delivered through the project. 9.2 The evaluation has found no difference in impact between accredited, regulated and non-regulated qualifications.