



Evaluation of Communicate Programme Final Report – Executive Summary

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Contents

- Executive Summary 2
 - What is Communicate? 2
 - Delivery 2
 - Activity Overview 3
- Effectiveness 5
 - What has been Delivered? 5
 - Learner Engagement..... 6
 - Outcomes 6
 - Outcome Indicators 6
 - Soft Outcomes 7
- Good Practice and Lessons Learned 8

Executive Summary

This is the final evaluation of the Communicate (E34) Project which was funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and delivered by partnerships of providers led by Durham County Council (DCC) through DurhamLearn. The evaluation has been delivered by Centrifuge Consulting on behalf of DCC.

What is Communicate?

Communicate aimed to address the County's literacy gap and build on the experiences of delivering the Multiply¹ numeracy programme to provide a complementary literacy and verbal communication support programme across Durham. Led by DurhamLearn² and delivered by a partnership of providers, Communicate targets support to residents aged 19 and above that are furthest from the labour mark, with limited skills and capabilities in these areas that lead to barriers to them accessing health care and other services, being active members in their communities and progressing into the labour market.

The programme therefore aimed to develop learners' confidence, improve their verbal communication skills and understanding of written words and imagery in order to:

- Increase employability through development of interpersonal skills (Fusion Skills);
- Reduce structural barriers to employment and skills provision, including: access to Services such as care (including childcare), transport, digital and financial;
- Obtain a qualification or completing a course following support.

The programme was therefore seeking to use literacy and verbal communication training and support to:

- Improve the County's literacy skills gap;
- Enhance economic inclusion;
- Increase employability;
- Reduce barriers to employment, education and training; and
- Enable progression and participation in or access to other services.

Delivery

The programme is underpinned by engagement activity to build the project pipeline of learners and is delivered through three intervention areas (labelled A to C), outlined in the table below. This shows the range of activities delivered by different partners to different beneficiary groups. Overall, the project was either delivered directly through DurhamLearn or subcontractors³

¹ [Learn number skills with "Multiply" - Durham County Council](#)

² [Adult learning and job training - Durham County Council](#)

³ Subcontractors for the programme, included Durham Employment and Skills; Education Durham Early Years Team; Education Development Trust; Triage Central Limited; Communicators Training; Lokman Training; Handcrafted Projects; Northern Learning Trust; Sunderland Foundation; and WEA.

Activity Overview

Intervention/ Activity	Duration	Overview	Eligible learners
Engagement Activity	up to 3 hours	<p>What: this involved meaningful activity accessible to all target groups to work with potential learners to encourage engagement in the project to improve their literacy skills.</p> <p>How: This could be through CEIAG discussion or outreach activities such as events and workshops. It is anticipated that majority of participants of engagement activity will progress into more substantive learning activity.</p> <p>Delivered by: Direct delivery team and subcontractors.</p>	All target groups
Intervention A (First Steps)	2+ hours	<p>What: this involved non-accredited courses designed with relatable, everyday context through topic-based learning to increase confidence in literacy for those needing the first steps towards formal literacy qualifications delivered by subcontractors.</p> <p>How: small group sessions delivered at providers premises or in community settings, supported by the use of Individual Learning Plans (ILP) to assess and track progress and demonstrate distance travelled.</p> <p>Delivered by: Subcontractors.</p>	Learners are not eligible if they currently hold a Level 2 qualification in that subject area
Intervention B (Health Literacy)	2+ hours	<p>What: this involved provision designed in partnership with Public Health England to improve functional health literacy, interactive health literacy and critical health literacy.</p> <p>How: Learners took part in a range of activities which enabled them to improve their ability to understand and use information to make decisions about their health and care and the health and care of those in their care such as children. This included developing the skills needed to effectively use and respond to spoken and written communication.</p> <p>Delivered by: direct delivery team (Communicate Champions).</p>	
Intervention C (Employers)	2+ hours	<p>What: Working in partnership with employers to deliver literacy support for those in work to support with career progression, workforce development and fill existing skills gaps. Content of the training developed will be in</p>	Employees

Intervention/ Activity	Duration	Overview	Eligible learners
		<p>partnership with employers as well as 'off the shelf' models.</p> <p>How: Business Development Officer and Communicate Champion will meet with employers to conduct Training Needs Analysis, where relevant and design courses to meet the needs of the employers and employees.</p> <p>Delivered by: Subcontractors.</p>	

Sub-contractors have delivered a range of different provision to learners across the relevant intervention areas. For example, the Education Durham Early Years Team understandably has a strong focus on early years support by collaborating with early years providers (including private and voluntary childcare and nursery providers, childminders and schools), as employers, to improve the literacy skills of their staff and the support their staff give to children. Such an approach has numerous direct benefits for these beneficiaries, as well as helping to address communication and language skills of children, with levels lower than national averages across the County, in disadvantaged communities in particular.

Direct delivery from DurhamLearn includes a number of strands of activity delivered through the Communicate Champions teams, including working with:

- Schools, including:
 - English cafes to offer engaging, interactive sessions aimed at helping parents and caregivers enhance their children's English skills;
 - Online safety courses for parents and carers.
- Community Organisations, including Family Hubs, housing associations and local organisations to deliver:
 - Online safety courses;
 - Health eating courses.

Effectiveness

The project successfully engaged and provided substantive support to a high number of learners across County Durham. **Figure 2.1** below shows that:

- 2,326 learners were engaged in life skills; and
- 2,113 of these completed a course (91% of those engaged).

Notably the project significantly exceeded targets for all outputs, with more than treble the target number of people completing a course through Communicate.

Output Performance

Output	Full Project Target	Full Project Actual	% Achieved
Effective working between key workers and additional services (OP9)	20	23	115%
Number of people supported to engage in life skills (OP12)	750	2,326	310%
Number of people supported onto a course through provision of financial support (OP13)	500	1,809	362%
Number of people who have completed a course or gained a qualification following support (OP14)	670	2,113	315%
Number of people referred from partners onto upskill courses (OP16)	350	1,750	500%

What has been Delivered?

Intervention B delivered directly by DCC through their Communicate Champions accounted for the majority of learners supported substantively through the project (76%).

Delivery by Intervention Area

	% of Learners Supported
Intervention A (First Steps)	21%
Intervention B (Health Literacy)	76%
Intervention C (Employers)	3%
Total	100%

Learner data by training programme shows that provision focussed on reducing anxiety by improving literacy skills, accounted for the vast majority of training delivered directly by NCC and the majority of total delivery. Much of this was delivered through the English Cafes programmes delivered via local schools, with feedback in Sections 3 and 4 of the report emphasising how much this support was valued.

Learner Engagement

The project utilised and benefitted from a range of referral sources for participants. Data shared with the evaluation team includes 16 different referral sources for learners supported through Communicate.

Analysis of project data shows that the project successfully reached learners from across County Durham, with females accounting for the majority of those learners that received substantive support (72%). However, the profile of learners by sex differs significantly by intervention theme, with males accounting for the majority of those that accessed Communicate provision designed to increase confidence with literacy as first steps (Intervention A).

Detailed analysis shows that low levels of males accessed support through Intervention B, is largely due to their low levels of representation among residents accessing support delivered via schools. Additionally, no males accessed support delivered together with employers (Intervention C), although this is perhaps unsurprisingly given the low levels of males in the early year's workforce.

Importantly these figures show that male residents have successfully been engaged by delivery partners, under Intervention A, and consideration may wish to be given as to how to better engage males through direct delivery in the future, particularly where schools are a principal mechanism for engaging and supporting residents.

Outcomes

Outcome Indicators

The project achieved four of its six outcome targets, achieving between two and five times their targets for these.

Outcome Performance

Outcome	Full Project Target	Full Project Actual	% Achieved
Number of people reporting increased employability through development of interpersonal skills funded by UKSPF (OC2)	250	1,378	551%
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support (OC10)	300	2	1%
Number of people in education/training following support (OC11)	150	333	222%
Number of people experiencing reduced structural barriers into employment and into skills provision (OC12)	986	920	93%
Number of people who have received support to gain a qualification or completed a course following that support (OC13)	670	2,113	315%
Number of People with basic skills following support (OC14)	350	1,311	375%

However, while the project demonstrated strong and effective performance against these indicators, it performed less well in terms of the number of people experiencing reduced structural barriers into employment and skills (93%) and performed particularly poorly against targets for the number of people in employment⁴ following support (1%).

Analysis of project data and partner and beneficiary consultation reveals a number of reasons for this, particularly in terms of the number of people in employment. This primarily relates to:

- The nature of provision delivered through the project and its interventions which, (for those not being supported as employees through Intervention C) focussed mainly on early engagement around personal development and taking those first steps into learning and positive activities; or understanding how to improve the wellbeing of themselves and support their families
- Many of those supported through Intervention A being a considerable distance from the labour market.

Soft Outcomes

All of those learners consulted by the evaluation team highlighted an improvement in at least one area of their life as a result of the support received, with:

- Learners most likely to improve their ability to manage their life as a result of support;

⁴ Including self-employment.

- Improvements to their confidence with reading writing and communication the next most cited improvement; and
- Improvements to their ability to gain more skills and/or qualifications the third most highlighted improvement.

All of the schools and community organisations consulted by the evaluation team believed that the Communicate provision delivered via their organisation had brought direct benefits to the individuals supported and themselves as an organisation.

In terms of outcomes for parents and/or children:

- All of the consulted schools felt that the Communicate training provided within their schools had led to improvements to:
 - Parents understanding of the topic covered in session(s) attended;
 - Parental engagement with the school or their likelihood to engage in the future;
 - Parental engagement with the education of their child(ren);
 - Children's understanding of the topic covered in the session.
- The vast majority of schools felt that parents' ability to support their child(ren) with the topic covered had improved with only a small proportion feeling that it had neither improved nor declined.

The evaluation also demonstrated the positive outcomes generated among early years practitioners, with:

- All early years professionals consulted by the evaluation team felt the training had improved their practice in all of the areas covered as well as their confidence;
- All also felt the support had generated positive outcomes for the children they work with.

Good Practice and Lessons Learned

The evaluation has demonstrated that there are examples of good practice through the Communicate project. These in turn align directly to key lessons learned and include:

- Engagement, with the project performing well and providing a strong model for engaging a diverse range of learners across County Durham and across a wide range of settings. This includes targeted delivery with some of the County's most disadvantaged or excluded residents through some of the delivery partners; to targeted work through schools and community organisations and work with early years settings as well;
- The dispersed delivery model made training opportunities accessible across the County. This was aided by the use of sub-contractors or delivery partners through Intervention A; directing activities through schools and community organisations and venues through Intervention B; and the targeting of a particular sector for support across the County through Intervention C;

- The three-stranded approach to delivery provided a coherent framework of delivery and the targeting of different cohorts of learners across different settings and different areas of learning directly applicable to their circumstances and lives;
- Combining interventions to support eligible learners while simultaneously enhancing literacy support for children, through both Interventions B and C, was a strong and sensible approach that has generated positive outcomes and has potential to create a strong legacy if sustained and integrated with other interventions focussed on the supporting of children's development. Indeed schools, organisations and early years settings consulted by the evaluation team all expressed interest in participating or accessing support from any potential successor programme;
- Targeting employer/employee focussed activities at a specific sector which is open to continuous professional development (CPD) and whose development can directly impact on the literacy skills of the County's youngest residents, arguably provided a greater impact than a more general approach to working with employers. The evaluation team have evaluated a number of similar interventions (including Multiply programmes) that have adopted the latter approach and have subsequently struggled to engage employers. The Communicate approach ensured the project successfully engaged employers and maximised the impact of this engagement and training through the group targeted;
- There is evidence that delivery through partners in Intervention A produced positive outcomes, but consultation with a sample of these learners and the providers themselves suggest this was particularly effective when Communicate support was combined with access to other support available through their organisation and aligned provider. This suggests such activity in the future should focus on specific cohorts through organisations that have the capacity and capability to provide additional support through alignment with wider developmental and learning activities and potential supported progression pathways;
- Tailoring courses and messaging to ensure provision was directly aligned with practical support needs (for individuals, communities, parents, children and professionals) was key to the successes of the project and provides valuable learning for future;
- The flexibility afforded by UKSPF and the way in which the project was managed by DCC was also key to this. Allowing their delivery staff and internal and external partners to adapt engagement approaches, courses and training content and other activities allowed the project to be responsive and relevant to a wide range of audiences, settings and communities.
- Representatives from all beneficiary groups highlighted the positive outcomes and impact generated through the project and the way in which provision was delivered with these groups emphasises the importance of Communicate being accessible locally; delivered in a relaxed, friendly and often informal setting and/or environment; focussed on providing people with practical knowledge and skills that

they could apply; and the use of short courses. All of this provides valuable learning for future project delivery;

- Incentives were identified as important in attracting learners, or making training more attractive to particular cohorts of learners and such approaches should be considered again in the future, where appropriate.