



# Evaluation of UK Futures Programme

The Robert Woodhead Good to  
Gold programme

**Briefing Paper**  
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# **Evaluation of the UK Futures Programme: The Robert Woodhead Good to Gold programme**

**Graham Thom and Katie MacLeod**

**SQW**

**Hannah Hope**

**Manager**

**UK Commission for Employment and Skills**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 UK Futures Programme

The UK Futures Programme (UKFP) is seeking to provide an innovative approach to tackling workforce development issues. The UKFP is not intended as an extension of previous large scale funding initiatives by UKCES, but instead is adopting a different approach by offering smaller scale investments, targeting particular issues and sectors, and seeking greater levels of innovation. The UKFP has four key aims, to:

- Support collaborative approaches to workforce development issues amongst employers and, where applicable, wider social partners
- Encourage innovative approaches to addressing workforce development issues
- Identify ways to address new or persistent market or system failures which act as a brake on UK workforce competitiveness
- Identify ‘what works’ when addressing market failures in relation to workforce development, for adoption in policy development and wider business practice.

## 1.2 UK Futures Programme evaluation

UKCES has commissioned SQW to carry out a real-time evaluation of the Programme. The aims of the evaluation are to: develop a rich understanding about ‘what works’ in addressing workforce development issues; understand the conditions that can stimulate workplace innovation and learning; actively enable continuous improvement of the investment approach; and communicate the learning in a way that can readily inform and influence policy and wider practice. As part of the evaluation and in order to improve their understanding of key themes UKCES have commissioned SQW to conduct a number of case-studies.

This report summarises the case-study that has been conducted on the Good to Gold programme. This programme has been delivered by Robert Woodhead and is one of seven Management and Leadership in Supply Chains and Networked Organisations projects in Productivity Challenge 2 of the UKFP.

The purpose of Productivity Challenge 2 is to encourage the largest firms (primes), to develop projects that will improve the management capabilities of their supply chain businesses<sup>1</sup>. Poor management has an adverse effect on businesses' ability to respond to global changes and utilise employees' skills effectively. Smaller firms are the most likely to have poor management and not adopt high performance working practices. There is evidence<sup>2</sup> to suggest that if firms are supported to increase their management capabilities, and adopt 'best' management practice then they can become more profitable, productive, grow quicker and survive longer.

The aim of the case study is to collect more in depth insight into the research questions set by UKCES for this case study as well as some wider research questions which were set for Productivity Challenge 2.

The research questions as set by UKCES for this case study are, in order of priority:

- **The strategic influence and role of supply chains in relation to skills and workforce development.** To explore to what extent supply chains can be a vehicle to influence skills investment behaviour across that network. To explore how the lead organisations' structure and (power / influence / dependency) relationships with their supply chains, culture and ways of working enable or challenge the potential use of supply chains to influence workforce development.
- **How operational influence can be exerted through a supply chain to engage them in skills development activities.** To explore how, for example, a prime can influence the supply chain to attend a workshop or launch event.

The wider research questions for Productivity Challenge 2 that the case study contributes to are:

- What motivates primes (major businesses) to develop their supply chains?
- What motivates supply chains to engage?
- Have the challenges of Productivity Challenge 2 been achieved? These are:
  - Raising the capability of leaders and managers to align skills, job design and other workplace practices to support high value firm strategies
  - Boosting demand for management and leadership skills
  - Increasing social capital of managers, levels of interaction, and opportunities to learn from their peers and best practice.

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<sup>1</sup> UKCES (2014). UK Futures Programme Competition brief: Management and leadership in supply chains and networked organisations.

<sup>2</sup> BIS (2012). Leadership and Management in the UK – The key to sustainable growth. Available online at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32327/12-923-leadership-management-key-to-sustainable-growth-evidence.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32327/12-923-leadership-management-key-to-sustainable-growth-evidence.pdf) [accessed 17/09/2015]

## **Methodology**

A qualitative methodology has been adopted for this case study as it enabled rich information to be captured. Information was gathered through nine telephone consultations with stakeholders involved with the Good to Gold programme, including Robert Woodhead employees, an organisation contracted by Robert Woodhead to deliver part of the programme and supply chain businesses of Robert Woodhead's that had attended Good to Gold workshops.

## **2 The Robert Woodhead Good to Gold programme**

### **2.1 Robert Woodhead and its supply chain**

Robert Woodhead is a family owned construction company based in Nottingham and has been operating across the East Midlands and Yorkshire for 70 years<sup>3</sup>. Over this period the company has won awards for the delivery of projects, site management, partnerships and collaborative working. Robert Woodhead's success has led to steady growth. The company has in excess of 100 employees and annual turnover in excess of £28million. The company specialises in the design, construction, refurbishment, conservation and repair and maintenance of buildings.

The supply chain of Robert Woodhead has grown considerably over the past three to five years as the company has expanded geographically, diversified and grown its core business. The growth of the supply chain has been organic, with the addition or use of a supply chain company often dependent on a bilateral relationship with a Robert Woodhead employee. The majority of the Robert Woodhead supply chain businesses are SMEs<sup>4</sup> and almost all are non-exclusive to the company. All the supply chain businesses are approved to be on the Robert Woodhead suppliers list but beyond this there is no formal structure to the supply chain. To be approved businesses must demonstrate that they hold appropriate insurance and licenses. There are no other formal tests.

### **2.2 Introducing the programme**

The Robert Woodhead Good to Gold programme aimed to improve the management and leadership skills of its supply chain businesses. The programme offered businesses the opportunity to receive an Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) and attend learning workshops tailored to their needs.

Good to Gold was thought by Robert Woodhead to be a suitable response to opportunities and challenges that they were conscious of, including<sup>5</sup>:

- Proud of the dedicated, local, small, companies that are their partners as supply chain businesses
- In a growth phase and needing the supply chain businesses to develop with them, and benefit accordingly

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<sup>3</sup> Established in 1946 and incorporated in 1978

<sup>4</sup> They have less than 50 employees

<sup>5</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

- Aware that their supply chain businesses were increasingly asking for their advice and support with issues related to company growth (e.g. about how to hire and employ new staff and be compliant with employment law)
- Aware that their supply chain businesses did not feel equipped for the additional demands Robert Woodhead were asking of them, e.g. in terms of scale, flexibility and meeting quality standards
- Aware of some supply chain businesses reliance on them and they were cautious of a dependency model developing as their own values suggest they should be a good and ethical partner
- Increasingly forced to compete on quality rather than price, meaning that the supply chain businesses needed to add value to that profile.

Good to Gold was created to provide supply chain businesses with support in whichever area was required to help them learn, improve and grow<sup>6</sup>. It was intended that those who participated in Good to Gold were the owners and/or senior managers of the supply chain businesses. These individuals were seen to be the decision makers and best placed to ensure learning from Good to Gold would be implemented.

Neither Robert Woodhead nor the supply chain businesses thought that there were issues with technical and vocational skills. Supply chain businesses identified that their weakest skills were those that are 'off the tools', e.g. around business and office management, or human resources. This self-identified need was consistent with Robert Woodhead's analysis of the skills issues within the supply chain. As Robert Woodhead grew, in many cases the supply chain businesses did too. This was causing issues for the supply chain businesses as in many cases they were run by tradespersons who had little exposure to, or training in, leadership and management. The specific skills issues varied across the supply chain and included financial management, recruitment and project management. Developing the leadership and management skills of the supply chain was important to Robert Woodhead as ultimately their continued growth is dependent on having a supply chain that can deliver to the scale and quality it requires.

*'We (Robert Woodhead) are only as good as our supply chain businesses.'*  
Robert Woodhead employee

Prior to Good to Gold some supply chain businesses had benefitted from awareness raising events organised by Robert Woodhead. An event was organised to inform the supply chain of opportunities in the heritage sector for example. That said, Good to Gold was an entirely

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Woodhead Good to Gold Website, What is Good to Gold, available at <http://www.goodtogold.co.uk/> [accessed 08/09/2015]



new concept for Robert Woodhead and their supply chain, and would address the specific leadership and management skills needs within the supply chain.

The total investment in Good to Gold was £263,000. Of this total figure, £187,000 was invested by UKCES through the UKFP. Robert Woodhead also invested in Good to Gold and provided a cash and in-kind contribution of £76,000<sup>7</sup>.

To ensure Good to Gold was appropriate for the supply chain businesses and to gain their buy-in, Robert Woodhead held two launch events. In total 86 supply chain businesses attended these events. Following these events interested supply chain businesses were contacted and received an ONA (described below). This identified the leadership and management needs in the business.

Following the identification of the leadership and management needs, businesses attended workshops aligned to their skills gaps. Robert Woodhead worked with external providers that senior leaders had met through the Vistage<sup>8</sup> network to develop the workshops. The external providers that Robert Woodhead worked with had previously delivered support to senior Robert Woodhead staff and had wider experience of the construction sector. Content for eight half-day workshops was created. The topics covered across all the workshops were:

- Health and safety leadership
- Construction industry best practice
- Quality development and industry support
- Business planning
- Project management/ Effective use of resources
- Recruitment and Selection/ Coaching skills
- Company finance/ Financial awareness
- Procurement and tendering/ Risk management

Twenty three workshops were delivered (some subjects were covered more than once). These were attended by 143 individuals from 85 supply chain businesses. Many individuals attended more than one workshop, with a total of 476 attendances across all of the workshops.<sup>9</sup> Although slightly fewer businesses were involved than expected (the target had been 100), it was initially thought that they would each attend one session; so the overall number of attendances was far higher than expected.

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<sup>7</sup> Of the £76,000, £10,000 was a cash contribution and the remaining £66,000 was in-kind i.e. staff time

<sup>8</sup> <http://vistage.co.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

As part of Good to Gold, a Supply Chain Steering Group was established to inform the ongoing development of the programme. The steering group was originally intended to have formalised meetings. However, Robert Woodhead found that it was difficult for the supply chain businesses to invest additional time away from their business<sup>10</sup>. In response to this challenge, meetings were held immediately before or after workshops.

There was also an online portal and app created to foster a supply chain community. Use of the app and portal were lower than expected. This is thought to be because the app and portal were launched mid-way through the delivery of Good to Gold. As they were not an integral part of the programme at the outset, businesses did not develop the habit of using them.

Another activity was to map the components of Good to Gold to industry quality standards. This was thought at the outset to be important as it would enable businesses to record their participation and use this as evidence to gain accreditation. In time the accreditation could become part of Robert Woodhead's supplier requirements.

This however was a complex task. Robert Woodhead initially expected that Good to Gold could be aligned to Considerate Constructors, ISO9000 or Investors in People for example. Ultimately this could not be achieved as the programme focussed on individuals not businesses. The mapping process identified that Good to Gold could be aligned to Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualifications. For Good to Gold to be ILM accredited it was necessary for Robert Woodhead to become an ILM Centre. This was achieved and Good to Gold was endorsed by ILM on a tiered basis. The tiers were Bronze, Silver and Gold and the level achieved was dependent on the number of workshops the businesses attended.

Supply chain businesses that participated in Good to Gold had their involvement recognised at a celebration event. At this event, businesses received plaques to thank them for their participation and recognise the investment they had made to improve their leadership and management skills.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

## 2.3 Motivations for engaging

Supply chain businesses were invited by Robert Woodhead to attend launch events that introduced Good to Gold. The language used by Robert Woodhead was gently persuasive to ensure that attendance was good. Robert Woodhead wanted to achieve good attendance as they believed Good to Gold had real potential to assist the supply chain businesses to develop and grow. However, they were clear that attendance was not compulsory or a condition of remaining on their supplier list.

The greatest challenge when engaging the supply chain was 'getting them to put the tools down' and take time away from the business. This was overcome by clear and regular communication about Good to Gold. It was also important that they had a good experience at the first workshop, so that they were motivated to return.

The majority of businesses that were approached by Robert Woodhead attended the launch events. The minority that did not, provided feedback to Robert Woodhead stating that they did not have capacity to take time 'off the tools'.

Of the six supply chain businesses consulted as part of the case study all welcomed the offer of Good to Gold. None of the businesses said that they felt forced to participate but chose to take part for a variety of reasons including that the offer aligned with their needs and appreciation of the need for the supply chain to develop with the prime. The needs of the businesses included support with recruitment, project management and workforce development.

*'Some businesses were concerned that they might be off the list if they didn't participate, for us though it wasn't about that. Good to Gold was exactly what we needed.'*  
Robert Woodhead Supplier

Robert Woodhead's evaluation of Good to Gold found that 98% of their supply chain businesses primarily wanted to engage with Good to Gold as they wanted to support a Robert Woodhead initiative as part of the supply chain/ business network<sup>11</sup>.

The supply chain businesses anticipated that the benefits of participating (i.e. being approached for a contract/be an approved supplier and building a good profile with their prime) outweighed the risks (i.e. not being approached for a contract/not being an approved supplier) of not participating. The risks that the businesses identified related to relationships rather than the operation of the business per se. For the majority of businesses, the main benefits were not expected to relate to improved business practice. Rather, they were focussed on developing their relationship with Robert Woodhead, demonstrating the importance of the prime relationship in generating activity.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

*If there are two identical businesses and one has engaged (with Good to Gold) and is a known face and the other is not. I think Robert Woodhead are more likely to work with the one that engaged.*  
*Robert Woodhead Supplier*

Although the workshops were intended for the owners of the supply chain businesses, there was an instance where an owner thought that Good to Gold would be of more benefit to some of his junior managers. He was concerned that participating would be of little value to him personally. It was agreed that the junior managers could attend and this flexibility was appreciated by the business.

The fact that Good to Gold was part of and developed by Robert Woodhead themselves was a factor for some supply chain businesses choosing to attend. Robert Woodhead has a particularly good reputation locally and is thought to have strong ethical and moral values. This meant that supply chain businesses trusted that Good to Gold had been developed to be mutually beneficial.

All of the supply chain businesses consulted were approved Robert Woodhead suppliers. Each business had an employee, in many cases this was the consultee, who had an existing relationship with an employee at Robert Woodhead. These bilateral relationships were thought by the supply chain businesses to be important to ensuring they were approached with opportunities. None of the businesses thought that the relationship was unique and businesses had similar relationships with other primes.

If Robert Woodhead had not developed Good to Gold the supply chain businesses were unsure if they would have sought support from another source. The general consensus was that the business might have, but they were unsure about where the support would have come from and if it would have been of the same quality.

*'Small firms are focussed on their day-to-day activities and sometimes can't see the wood for the trees. It takes the prime to do something before the supply chain will as they have the capacity and can see the bigger picture.'*  
*Robert Woodhead supplier*

## **2.4 Delivery**

Good to Gold had two main activities that were delivered to supply chain businesses. These were the ONA and workshops.

The delivery of the ONAs and workshops was coordinated by two Robert Woodhead employees. These employees were the day-to-day contacts for Good to Gold. In addition to their coordination responsibilities, they encouraged businesses to participate and undertook follow-up activities.

Supply chain businesses were complimentary of the Robert Woodhead contacts and thought that they were professional and approachable. One business commented that because of their approachability they felt able to ask to attend additional workshops. If they had been less approachable they might not have asked and subsequently would not have benefitted.

#### **2.4.1 Organisational needs analysis**

The ONA was delivered by ICS, a company that had expertise in workforce development. Ninety seven ONAs were undertaken. ONAs were paper based and described as being similar to a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis specific to leadership and management capabilities. The ONAs required the owner/manager of the business to have a one-to-one meeting with a representative of ICS. The ONAs typically took 30 minutes to 90 minute to complete depending on the business. The tight delivery timescale was a challenge and some ONAs were undertaken over the phone rather than face to face as originally intended.

Whether the ONA was over the phone or face to face made no difference to business satisfaction with the process. ICS were supported by the two Robert Woodhead employees throughout the delivery of the ONAs. Their support included contacting supply chain businesses that were difficult to make contact with.

The ONA was mutually beneficial for Robert Woodhead and the supply chain businesses. The ONA was undertaken with a consultative approach which gave businesses the opportunity to discuss their needs. There were no instances of businesses disagreeing with the ONA results. The ONA was useful for confirming skills gaps. Supply chain businesses appreciated the process; mainly because it gave them an opportunity to ask questions about the content of the workshops so that they could make an informed decision about attending. Robert Woodhead found the ONA was useful for engaging and recruiting businesses to attend workshops.

The language used in the ONA changed subtly during the delivery process. ICS found that some individuals would see terms like 'bookkeeping' and think that the workshop would not help them as bookkeeping is traditionally done by their accountant. The wording was subsequently changed to 'financial management' which was more reflective of the workshop and businesses were more positive about attending.

## 2.4.2 Workshops

The workshops were conveniently located at the Robert Woodhead offices in Edwinstowe, Nottingham. The timing of the workshops was also a positive, lasting for half a day and starting in the morning meant that a full day's work was not lost by attending. Similarly the workshops coincided with the quietest time of the year for the construction sector (winter/spring), which helped attendance.

The majority of the workshops were delivered by external speakers, in some cases the speakers were also not typically what would be expected at a construction event. Supply chain businesses particularly liked sessions that were delivered by a motivational speaker. This helped the business leaders to step back and think about their trajectory. Other sessions that focussed on either specific management issues like recruitment or sessions that exposed them to the '*Robert Woodhead way*' were also well received. The businesses found all the workshops to be interactive which they enjoyed, in particular they found it useful to learn from each other and share experiences. For example, when a business shared a workforce issue that they were experiencing; another business that had encountered a similar issue shared how they overcame it. There was an appreciation amongst the businesses that they could learn from each other and because of this businesses opened up and shared what they could. Also, as Robert Woodhead employees were present businesses were keen to demonstrate their skills and build a profile with them.

*'It was interesting to see how different trades' people approached the same task. I learnt things from people I didn't expect to and have a greater appreciation for why some people take the approach that they do.'*

*Robert Woodhead Supplier*

The structure of the workshops meant that there was a degree of flexibility on the day. This was to ensure that the sessions were suitable for the needs of the businesses who attended. Businesses were able to raise issues and the course leader was sufficiently experienced and not tied to a tight curriculum, to be able to respond.

What kept the supply chain businesses engaged was the quality of the workshops. The businesses also appreciated phone calls from the Robert Woodhead employees reminding them about upcoming sessions. A minority of participants attended the first workshops but subsequently stopped. This was not thought by Robert Woodhead to be because of a particular issue, but rather because the workshops were perhaps not aligned to their specific needs or the circumstances of the individual and/or business had changed. There were also instances where businesses attended more sessions than they initially planned. The reasons for doing this were variable and included: recognising that they did not know as much as they thought they did; and being impressed by and benefitting more than expected from the workshops initially attended.

There is evidence of Good to Gold boosting demand for leadership and management skills. As following attendance at the Good to Gold workshops, 73% of supply chain businesses thought they were now more likely to take up future leadership (training) opportunities<sup>12</sup>.

## **2.5 Outcomes**

The previous sections explained how Good to Gold has contributed to the specific research questions for the case study. How the programme has boosted demand for leadership and management skills has also been covered. This section focusses on what outcomes there have been for businesses that participated and feedback is structured around the challenges of Productivity Challenge 2.

As a result of Good to Gold the supply chain businesses that contributed to the case study unanimously thought that their leadership and management skills had improved. Some businesses have also made use of resources that Good to Gold signposted them to. These resources have led to operational changes which have, or it is hoped will, benefit the supply chain business.

Based on survey feedback from 65 supply chain businesses, 63 (95%) reported a positive benefit and just three (5%) said that Good to Gold had not led to any benefits. As Robert Woodhead sought feedback from businesses soon after their attendance at workshops, there is potential for benefits to materialise in the future for supply chain businesses reporting no immediate benefit<sup>13</sup>.

### **2.5.1 Raising the capability of leaders and managers to align skills, job design and other workplace practices to support high value firm strategies**

Good to Gold has raised the capability of leaders and managers in their supply chain businesses. The evaluation of Good to Gold undertaken by Robert Woodhead quantifies the impact of the programme on the practices of supply chain businesses. Following their attendance at Good to Gold workshops 73% of supply chain businesses reported that they had achieved concrete changes to business practice. Over a third of supply chain businesses (37%) reported immediate business benefits and 35% said that they had their individual training needs met<sup>14</sup>.

Examples of these changes, reported through the case study consultations included:

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

<sup>13</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

<sup>14</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

- Encouraged by a workshop activity to write down services that they do not charge for, but could, one business is now systematically charging for abandoned visits. They expect that this will noticeably increase their profitability over the next 12-18 months.
- A business with a growing workforce of tradespersons was aware that a junior employee really did not enjoy the job. This was having an adverse effect on other members of the workforce and the manager was unsure about how to resolve the situation. The situation was particularly difficult as family members of the junior employee also worked for the company and were valued employees. Having been to the workshop on recruitment the manager was able to speak confidently with the owner about the cost of keeping the employee versus the cost of letting him go. The owner subsequently supported the manager and the company worked with the young employee to find them a new job. This approach also improved the already good relationship the company had with the wider family.
- Guidance on how to use gantt charts was particularly useful for one business. The owner/manager had previously tried to encourage all staff to use them, but not being confident on how to use them himself, their use ceased. Having been to a workshop on project management the owner/manager has been able to reintroduce gantt charts and support employees to use them. He thinks that he now has a better grasp on projects and can better foresee when projects are slipping behind. He thinks their reintroduction has improved the project management skills of his workforce and ultimately the quality of the service that is given to contractors is better.
- Having heard about the project management system used by Robert Woodhead at a Good to Gold workshop, one business has subsequently introduced the same system. This was thought to be a sensible change as they hope to work on more contracts with Robert Woodhead. They recognised that they 'cannot be poles apart' in the way they do things if they are to work as a team.

### **2.5.2 Boosting demand for management and leadership skills**

Good to Gold has addressed some latent demand and generated additional demand for leadership and management skills. Good to Gold enabled businesses to identify their leadership and management skills needs. The programme also offered a mechanism for meeting these needs, without it businesses might not have engaged in any activities to improve their leadership and management skills. Once engaged some supply chain businesses also identified further needs. These businesses subsequently attended additional workshops to improve further.



### **2.5.3 Increasing social capital of managers, levels of interaction, and opportunities to learn from their peers and best practice**

Good to Gold contributed to increasing social capital; following attendance at workshops 45% of supply chain businesses had better connections with others in the Robert Woodhead supply chain<sup>15</sup>. There were examples of informal collaboration as a result of workshop attendance. For example, in a family run business which was undergoing a leadership transition from father to son, the son attended Good to Gold and has kept in contact with another individual in a similar position to him. This relationship differs from others as it has focussed on mutual support for management issues rather than sharing contract opportunities. The two individuals have contacted each other on an ad hoc basis for a second opinion on an issue or to share an experience that they think might be beneficial.

As the supply chain businesses have got to know each other over a series of events, there have been instances of some sharing work. The work has been shared when the business initially approached has no capacity to deliver it. The motivation for sharing the work was in the hope that the competitor might reciprocate at a later date. If the competitors had not met and developed a relationship through Good to Gold then the sharing would not have occurred.

A business that already had a collaborative relationship with Robert Woodhead for the purpose of winning contracts thought that the relationship had been strengthened by Good to Gold. The business now hopes to explore opportunities for further collaboration with Robert Woodhead. Without Good to Gold the business owner does not think he would be putting in as much time and effort to try and develop projects with Robert Woodhead. The supply chain businesses thought that having attended Good to Gold they had a greater appreciation for the ethos and growth aspirations of Robert Woodhead. Also practically the supply chain businesses thought that they would be better able to align their day-to-day working practices to those of Robert Woodhead.

### **2.5.4 Outcomes for Robert Woodhead**

There have also been outcomes for Robert Woodhead as a result of Good to Gold. Robert Woodhead think that they have a better understanding of their supply chain, the company has found it reassuring to find that the majority of their supply chain share their growth aspirations. They also have a greater appreciation for who these businesses are. The internal evaluation of Good to Gold summarised the programme's benefits to the company as having<sup>16</sup>:

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

<sup>16</sup> Robert Woodhead Limited (2015). Good to Gold Evaluation Report August 2015

- Provided an evidence base to inform their fledgling supply chain development strategy
- Improved the motivation and leadership capabilities of supply chain businesses and Robert Woodhead staff, which thereby improved the business capabilities of Robert Woodhead as a prime
- Built stronger, face-to-face relationships between supplier facing Robert Woodhead Staff and the supply chain businesses
- Showcased suppliers with a similar ethos to Robert Woodhead

## 2.6 Learning

The outcomes presented in the previous section demonstrate how Good to Gold has contributed to the wider research questions of Productivity Challenge 2. This section focuses on learning in relation to the specific research questions for this case study.

### 2.6.1 The strategic influence and role of supply chains in relation to skills and workforce development

As the prime, Robert Woodhead was able to influence the supply chain to engage in a leadership and management programme. Supply chain businesses were pleased to engage as it offered them an opportunity to get close to the prime whilst also addressing a need for improved leadership and management skills.

Supply chain businesses' welcomed Robert Woodhead's influence and found it useful that some of the content covered the '*Robert Woodhead way*'. As a result, some supply chain businesses have aligned their systems to facilitate more work between the companies. They hope that this will enable a more seamless service to be offered to all clients, not just Robert Woodhead, which may help win them further work. Supply chain businesses welcomed the primes influence on their working practices.

*'We are trying to get to grips with the project management software that Robert Woodhead use so that work together better.'*  
Robert Woodhead Supplier

Supply chain businesses found it beneficial that Robert Woodhead staff attended the workshops as it let them build better relationships with them. The supply chain businesses attended Good to Gold for commercial reasons. At the outset one of the main benefits identified by businesses was the opportunity to have a closer relationship with Robert Woodhead. Having content that informed them of Robert Woodhead ambition (i.e. understanding their growth plans) was commercially useful.

A strength of Good to Gold was the mix of sector specific and wider content that related to business development and growth. The workshops that the majority of businesses enjoyed

and found beneficial were delivered by a motivational speaker, not a speaker from the sector. A manager of a supply chain business had previously attended a talk by the same speaker when they worked in another, completely different, sector. The manager thought use of this speaker was innovative and potentially very beneficial as ‘*men in overalls*’ would perhaps be the least likely to attend a talk by a motivational speaker.

Attending Good to Gold with other supply chain businesses was beneficial for participants. The businesses enjoyed the opportunity to ‘*speak off the job*’ about strategic issues, as conversations between different suppliers on a day-to-day basis are about the delivery of current contracts.

There was one business, which sent junior managers rather than the owner/manager, which found conversations were occasionally restricted as competitors were present. The junior managers were at times unsure what they could and should say. They wanted to share as much as possible but did not want to create a conflict of interest or share commercially sensitive information. This was not an issue for workshop attendees who held a senior position. Overall it was beneficial that the supply chain came together and participated in discussions at workshops. However a certain level of seniority is necessary to enable full participation.

*“David Woodhead said at the launch event,*

*‘we work in our businesses all the time, but work on our businesses none of the time.’*

*I thought he’s right. Good to Gold has given me the opportunity to and reminded me that I should work on, as well as in my business.”*

*Robert Woodhead supplier*

There were also wider benefits to Robert Woodhead as the prime. Although the company started the programme to improve the workings of its supply chain it came to learn of a range of things that they could improve in how they worked with the supply chain, including how work was distributed to different firms. Therefore, Good to Gold has helped them to reflect on their own practices, along with meeting the intended key outcome of more robust suppliers.

### **2.6.2 How operational influence can be exerted through a supply chain business to engage them in skills development activities**

The programme was able to draw on the strength of relationships between Robert Woodhead and its supply chain. This appears to have encouraged firms to attend. Supply chain businesses remarked that Robert Woodhead had a particularly good reputation locally and that participating had the potential to increase the supply chain businesses’ reputation in addition to other benefits.

The supply chain businesses liked that Robert Woodhead employees attended the workshops. This is because it enabled them to work in groups with Robert Woodhead employees, demonstrate their competence and meet the 'right' people. They were able to develop relationships with employees that they otherwise might not have met, for example, HR managers. As a result of meeting the Robert Woodhead managers some of the supply chain businesses feel able to approach the managers for support if they are having a specific issue. For one supply chain business the attendance of Robert Woodhead managers was positive as it removed any perceived 'us and them' barriers.

*'Having the Robert Woodhead employees there made it less about us and them. It was more about what we as a supply chain and prime, rather than individuals, can achieve.'*  
Robert Woodhead Supplier

The geographic coverage of Robert Woodhead operations and the supply chain was relatively contained within the East Midlands and Yorkshire. This meant that workshops and Good to Gold events were accessible and travel was not a barrier to engagement. If more travel had been required some supply chain businesses doubted that they would have been as able to participate due to the time required. Primes that cover a broad area might need to consider if a regional approach to delivery would make a programme more accessible to their supply chain businesses.

It was surprising to one business that none of the other c.25 primes that they work with had tried to develop something similar to Good to Gold. The owner/manager thought that there were a number of potential reasons why other primes had not developed a programme. In particular, he thought that other primes were perhaps 'too big' and as a result they were less able to be reactive to the needs of their suppliers. He also thought that they perhaps did not have the same ethos and were not as visionary as Robert Woodhead. Further research would be necessary to make a judgement about the ability of larger, and smaller, primes to replicate a programme like Good to Gold. The relatively small size of the firm and their community ethos do appear to have played a role in developing and delivering a well-received programme in this instance.

If all the primes delivered programmes similar to Good to Gold one consultee thought that it would require careful risk management to identify what programmes he and his managers should or should not attend. For this business, which was a larger SME, it would not be feasible to attend them all. The commitment that is needed from supply chain businesses should therefore be given consideration to make sure any programme offered by a prime is not too onerous on their time and recognises the actual needs of the supply chain firm.

There were benefits for Robert Woodhead from their staff attending workshops and they learnt lessons primarily on how to communicate with their supply chain. For example, giving feedback on failed tenders, updating their contacts database and providing opportunities to tender rather than relying on bilateral agreement.

As Good to Gold has brought Robert Woodhead and their suppliers closer, Robert Woodhead now have an evidence base which will inform their Supply Chain Development Strategy going forwards.

### 3 Concluding thoughts

Inspired by their own growth ambitions Robert Woodhead have delivered Good to Gold, a leadership and management programme, to their supply chain businesses. Compared to other firms in the construction sector, Robert Woodhead is a relatively small firm, with a supply chain of SMEs. Despite their size, Robert Woodhead have influenced their supply chain to engage in Good to Gold and develop their leadership and management skills. Supply chain businesses' engagement has been mutually beneficial. Robert Woodhead have a greater understanding of the supply chain and have a foundation from which to undertake further development with their supply chain businesses. Benefits for supply chain businesses included:

- a greater appreciation of Robert Woodhead and opportunities to grow together
- new networks with the prime and other supply chain businesses
- practical business improvements
- improved leadership and management skills.

#### 3.1 Key Messages

Arising from these conclusions is a set of key messages for a range of audiences which have been summarised in the table below.

Audience	Key messages
Employers/ Primes	Firms can influence their supply chain to invest in skills development which supports their own business strategy. 'Supply chains are only as strong as their weakest link'.
	To maximise business benefits, primes should consider shifting the basis of their relationship with their supply chain along a continuum from procurement to supply chain management to supply chain development.
	Investing in the capability of the supply chain is mutually beneficial. The supply chain is rewarded with opportunities for development, as well as the opportunity to better understand the prime and its vision for the future. The prime develops a better understanding of how its supply chain operates, a useful basis for a supply chain development strategy.
	Reputation is a draw as supply chain businesses look to enhance their own reputation through associating with well thought of firms.
	To ensure the participation of supply chain businesses: the lead employer should be present, offering businesses the chance to meet in person; expectations of input and commitment need to be proportionate to supply chain business size, this includes limiting travel time to training or events; events should be timed outside of peak work seasons; and benefits to the supply chain need to be built in, recognising their actual needs.
	Employers seeking to develop such programmes should not underestimate the resource required to work with others, e.g. reminders about upcoming courses, following up training activities. To get the best outcome requires time commitment.

<b>Intermediaries working with Supply Chain Businesses</b>	Articulate the benefits for supply chain businesses of working with primes. The most important benefit is skills development, but there are others, which include: the opportunity to get to know the prime and its businesses practices better, the opportunity to showcase skills and building a relationship with them.
	A further benefit for supply chain businesses is that working with other supply chain businesses extends networks and can create commercial opportunities between suppliers.
	To reap the benefits of collaborative working, supply chain businesses should commit someone with seniority to represent their business to ensure they can share information, experiences and business opportunities.
<b>Policy Makers and UKCES</b>	Bringing supply chain businesses together creates collaboration; skills development is a safe start point for further collaboration.
	However, this can be risky, especially where there is little existing and pertinent evidence of the business benefit. Public investment can help alleviate these risks, but should be tied to ensuring the business case is made and the right level of evidence collected and public support is vital to securing that.
	It is important that solutions are owned by employers. There is a huge variation in the management and leadership skills of individual supply chains, the markets they operate in, the influences on their management considerations (e.g. degree of regulation, international competition) and their ambition. Primes are well placed to understand their development requirements and, therefore, to deliver that support.
	Primes can be incentivised to engage and develop the capability of small businesses, where there is a recognised and common issue to address. In this case the wider need was created by the Construction 2020 Strategy which suggests there is a role for industrial strategy in incentivising primes to develop their supply chains.
	Encourage prime led activity by encouraging primes to identify and promote issues which should concern the supply chain. For example, the need to keep up with the market is a key driver to develop.
	Commitment to develop in one area can lead to development in other areas. The process of assessing skills needs for a particular purpose can highlight other areas requiring development. This applies to lead organisations and supply chain businesses. Advise other UKFP projects to anticipate this in setting testing and evaluation metrics.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) is a publicly funded, industry-led organisation providing leadership on skills and employment issues across the UK. Together, our Commissioners comprise a social partnership of senior leaders of large and small employers from across industry, trade unions, the third sector, further and higher education and across all four UK nations.

**UKCES**

Renaissance House  
Adwick Park  
Wath-upon-Deerne  
South Yorkshire  
S63 5NB  
United Kingdom  
T +44 (0)1709 774 800

**UKCES**

Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
Wesminster  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
T +44 (0)207 227 7800

[www.gov.uk/ukces](http://www.gov.uk/ukces)  
[info@ukces.org.uk](mailto:info@ukces.org.uk)  
[@ukces](https://twitter.com/ukces)