Evaluation of the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund

Final Impact Evaluation Report

November 2021

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Contents

Glossary

AAT	Association of Accounting Technicians
AWS	Amazon Web Services
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAD	Computer aided design
CIMA	Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
CMM	Coordinate-measuring Machine
CRM	Customer relationship management
CSS	Cascading Style Sheets
CV	Curriculum vitae
CySA	Cyber security analyst
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DfE	Department for Education
DSP	Digital Skills Partnership
GIS	Geographic Information System
GM	Greater Manchester
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
GVA	Gross Value Added
HM	Her Majesty's
IT	Information technology
ITF	IT fundamentals
J-STD	Joint standard
LDSP	Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LPIC	Linux Professional Institute Certificate
MATLAB	Matrix laboratory
PCAP	Certified Associate in Python Programming
PCEP	Certified Entry-Level Python Programmer
SQL	Structured Query Language
SSV	Skills Shortage Vacancy
UX/UI	User experience design
VfM	Value for Money

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

This report provides an independent assessment of the impact of the Fast Track Digital Workforce (the Fund), funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Fund was delivered by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership (LDSP). This executive summary provides an overview of the Fund, the evaluation objectives, methodology, achievement of outcomes, conclusions, learnings and recommendations.

1.2 The Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund

The Fund aimed to identify and fill digital skills shortage vacancies of Greater Manchester (GM) and Lancashire employers. Its participants were local employers, training providers, and local residents and employees as trainees. The Fund facilitated partnerships between training providers and local employers who designed and delivered training courses together. Training courses were specific to the needs of employers who were required to provide match funding, either in kind (e.g. volunteering hours) or cash. A description of all projects can be found in Annexes D and E. The Fund sought to reduce the digital skills gap of participating employers within their existing workforce. As a result, the Fund was expected to give employers the ability to offer new or different services, including software development or cloud engineering.

The Fund also aimed to benefit local people, primarily those in low skilled, low-paid occupations, who were able to take part in the training courses as trainees. By participating in training courses, local people's digital skills were to be developed. As a result, trainees' chances of securing better quality, higher paid job roles were expected to improve. Employees of the participating employer partners were also eligible to take part in training courses as a trainee. In these cases, the Fund expected to support employees' career progression with their current employer.

Targeted groups were primarily people in low-skilled, low-paid roles. This included those seeking a career change, returners to the technology industry, returners to work, underemployed or unemployed graduates, and groups who are underrepresented in digital roles. In particular, the Fund aimed to support people with protected characteristics with a view to improving diversity in digital jobs. As Manchester has a very young workforce, another target group in this area was people over 50. Younger people were a target group in Lancashire.

Through partnership with employers, the Fund aimed to improve training providers' understanding of local digital skills gaps. Another important goal of the Fund was to create longer-term partnerships between employers and training providers.

DCMS provided £3m for the Fund: £2.73m of this was allocated to training courses, £200,000 for grant administration, and £70,000 for an independent evaluation. Following the internal development of the Fund by DCMS, GMCA and LDSP, two rounds of funding were awarded: project delivery of round 1 began in November 2019 and concluded in July 2020; and round 2 project delivery began in October 2020. Round 2 is scheduled to conclude in November 2021 (originally May 2021).

This report covers insights and findings from both funding rounds.

1.2.1 Covid-19

The Fund, under which training courses began in November 2019, covered the period when the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in the UK from March 2020 onwards. The pandemic, and the required measures to limit its spread announced by the UK Government on 23rd March 2020 (e.g. lockdown), impacted training delivery for round 1 projects. It also delayed the announcement of successful round 2 projects from March 2020 to May 2020.

- Projects in round 1 adjusted their delivery to adhere to lockdown rules by switching from in-person to remote delivery of training courses when lockdown rules were put in place on 23rd March 2020.
- Projects funded in round 2 delivered hybrid training in order to adhere to lockdown rules. This meant they were able to provide some face-to-face training when Covid-19 restrictions allowed this, for instance small group work. Self-learning modules remained online.

As a result of the pandemic, three of the outcomes of the Fund that were formulated before March 2020, have been adversely affected – see section 1.6 below.

- Employers were not able to hire as many trainees as expected due to the economic downturn. This impacted on the Fund's aim to reduce skills shortage vacancies (SSVs).
- In addition, employers were not able to provide their office locations for course content such as project work. This impacted on employer's abilities to co-deliver courses as originally intended.
- Trainees faced additional, unforeseen barriers. These included the need to care for children or family members. In turn, this contributed to lower-than-expected completion rates, another of the Fund's intended outcomes.

1.3 Evaluation objectives

DCMS commissioned this evaluation to:

1) understand how the Fund was delivered, what went well and what could be improved;

2) understand the impact of the Fund on trainees, such as improving advanced and specialist digital skill levels and improving employment outcomes;

3) understand the impact of the Fund on the local area. The impacts include improving employer productivity and reducing employers' skills shortage vacancies (SSVs) in digital sectors. This applies to both employers that engaged with the Fund and those based in the local area;

4) assess additionality and determine if the Fund delivered Value for Money (VfM);

5) determine which models of developing digital skills could be taken forward in other regions, and how employers and/or training providers should adapt to facilitate this;

6) determine if any changes in legislation or funding are needed to enable this; and

7) determine if these solutions have addressed the market failures associated with this Fund.

Note: Section 1.6 (conclusions) provides an assessment of whether each objective has been met. Lessons about what could be done differently (objective 1) are included in section 1.7 (learnings).

1.4 Methodology overview

Further details of the methodology can be found in section 2 and Annex F. Note, 'Fund' in this report refers to the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund, 'programme' to similar training approaches, and 'course' to training courses funded under the Fast Track Fund. The methods used for this research were as follows:

- desk research and analysis of primary data including funding applications;
- interviews with training providers (19), unsuccessful training provider applicants (5), employers (20) and stakeholders in DCMS, GMCA, LDSP, Job Centres and the Department for Education (DfE) (10);
- surveys with training providers (19) and trainees (235 for the initial survey and 106 for the follow-up survey); and
- eight online focus groups.

1.5 Summary of desk research

Desk research conducted for this evaluation focused on evidence relating to national and regional digital skills shortages. Detailed findings are included in section 3 of this report. These findings demonstrate a clear need for the Fund.

In summary, research highlighted that almost half of UK businesses have recruited for advanced digital jobs in the past two years. At the same time, they have struggled to fill these roles[1]. Across the UK, approximately 1.2m digital jobs are estimated to be available by 2022[2]. A recent projection suggested that by 2025, 3m more jobs requiring digital skills will be created across the UK[3]. In June 2019, 7.7m job openings across the UK required digital skills which was 82% of all job adverts. 3.9m of these job openings were for high-skilled digital roles[4].

At a regional level, there are specific and differing needs relating to digital sectors:

- In Lancashire, the digital sector's economic contribution grew less than in the North West or England. In this region, GVA grew by 14% between 2012 and 2019, which is one percentage point less than the North West as a whole and nine percentage

[1] Opinium and DCMS (2021) Quantifying the UK Data Skills Gap [Available online]: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quantifying-the-uk-data-skills-gap/quantifying-the-uk-data-skills-gap-full-report [Date accessed: 17/08/2021].

[2] UKCES (2015) Sector insights: skills and performance challenges in the digital and creative sector [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433755/Skills_challenges_in_the_digital_and_creative_sector.pdf [Date accessed 29/07/2021].

[3] TechUK (2021) Fast Forward for Digital Jobs [Available online]: https://www.techuk.org/shaping-policy/fast-forward-for-digital-jobs-report.html [Date accessed: 18th October 2021].

[4] Burning Glass Technologies and DCMS (2019) No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807830/No_Longer_Optional_Employer_Demand_for_Digital_Skills.pdf [Date accessed: 15/10/2021].

points less than England as whole[5]. In the UK, GVA growth between 2012 and 2019 for the digital sector was 33.5%[6]. One third of Lancashire businesses reported having digital skills vacancies that were hard to fill[7].

- GM is a fast-growing digital tech city, with investment having grew by 277% from 2018 to 2019[8]. The digital sector share of total businesses in GM was 7.2% in 2020. The digital sector share of employees in 2019 was 3.7%. The digital sector share of GM's GVA was 5.7% in 2019[9].

[5] Steer economic development for DCMS (2021) [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020409/Appendix_C_NUTS2_Dashboards_v3.pdf [Date accessed 18/10/2021]
[6] In 2012, the digital sector's GVA was £112.7bn (see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/959053/DCMS_Sectors_Economic_Estimates_GVA_2018_V2.pdf). In 2019, the digital sector's GVA was £150.6bn (see: DCMS Economic Estimates 2019 (provisional): Gross Value Added - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).
[7] Lancashire's Digital Landscape (2019) [Available online]: https://www.lancashireskillshub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Lancashire-Digital-Report-FINAL-FC.pdf [Date accessed: 21/10/2021].
[8] Tech Nation (2020) UK Tech for a Changing World [Available online]: https://technation.io/news/tech-nation-report-2020/ [Accessed 21/10/2021].
[9] Steer economic development for DCMS (2021) [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020409/Appendix_C_NUTS2_Dashboards_v3.pdf [Date accessed 18/10/2021].

1.6 Achievement of outcomes

Tables 1 and 2 provide a brief narrative overview of achievement against the Fund's target outcomes and impacts. These outcomes and impacts form part of the logic model of the Fund, which was developed in November 2019 in partnership between RSM and DCMS. The logic model formulates what the Fund intended to achieve as a result of its activities. More detail can be found in section 4.3. Outcomes are expected to be the direct result of the training courses delivered through the Fund. Impacts are longer-term changes to which the Fund's outcomes are expected to contribute. Because they are longer term, we do not have the evidence to assess the impacts.

Table 1 – outcomes

Outcome	Evidence	Achieved?
Trainees have improved digital skills	Trainees reported a range of improved digital skills as well as improved employability related soft skills. Employers reported that candidates they employed had new or improved skills that they needed. They had positive views on the quality of skills developed by the trainees. The most common improved skills were 'Computer networking', 'programming languages', 'Linux' and knowledge of 'cybersecurity'.	**Yes**
At least 85% of trainees to complete training	Overall, 73% of recruited trainees (633) have completed the training at the time of writing the report. In round 1: 239 trainees were recruited and 205 completed the training (86%). In round 2: 428 of the 626 trainees recruited completed the training (68%). The 85% completion target was set prior to the pandemic. As this report highlights, Covid-19 has resulted in unforeseen barriers.	**No**
Increase in confidence for trainees	Approximately 27% of trainees report they have improved their confidence in soft skills, including interview and social network skills. In a small number of cases, training providers have fed back that candidates have improved their confidence in their own skills and abilities.	**Yes**
Reduce number of SSVs due to digital skills	Due to Covid-19, the small number of trainees relative to the local workforce and the size of many of the employer partners, training providers and employers reported that the skills gaps have reduced for individual businesses, but not on a significant scale.	**Partially achieved**
Businesses turn away fewer clients due to skills shortage	Despite the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn there is little evidence of businesses turning away clients. Moreover, some employers mentioned they can offer new services, despite difficult economic conditions.	**Partially achieved**

Outcome	Evidence	Achieved?
Increased productivity of employers directly engaged with Fund	Employers reported that the candidates they employed have developed new or improved digital skills. In some cases, this has contributed to new services being offered. This may in time lead to an increase in their productivity levels.	**Too early to say**
Businesses feel more positively towards digital skills training	Businesses interviewed stated they would recommend participating in similar training courses to other businesses.	**Yes**
Attributable impact, insight into 'what works' and value for money of the Fund	The Fund has developed the digital skills which it set out to develop. Monitoring data shows that 273 candidates (31%) are in a digital job three months after the training. Covid-19 has limited the extent to which employers were able to offer jobs. Employers reported that through the Fund they were able to access training they would not otherwise have been able to afford.	**Yes**

Table 2 – impacts

Impact	Evidence	Achieved?
Increased productivity in GMCA/Lancashire area	No evidence of this impact could be tested within this evaluation's timeline. If companies' productivity increase, it is likely that regional productivity may also increase in due time.	**Too early to say**
Improved engagement between training providers and employers to develop relevant digital skills training	Training providers and employers regard improved engagement with each other as a key success of their involvement in the Fund. There is likely scope to further improve engagement between training providers and employers, if in future programmes applicant training providers have access to local employer networks. A small minority of training providers we interviewed suggested that employers need to be supported to develop a more strategic approach to talent development.	**Yes**
Increased output of local digital economy	There is no evidence of this impact at this stage. As noted, there is evidence of some employer partners being able to offer new services.	**Too early to say**
Increased diversity of digital occupations in the GMCA/ Lancashire area	The Fund has successfully targeted and reached specific groups. They include women, ethnic minority communities, and recent graduates. 66% of women, 86% of people from ethnic minority communities, and 79% of recent graduates completed the training (which compares to an overall completion rate of 73%). It is not yet clear whether this will translate into an increased diversity in digital occupations.	**Too early to say**

Impact	Evidence	Achieved?
Development of responsive training that shows value for money and a suitable model for future delivery	Training content was tailored to employer needs, as reported by employers. This demonstrates the responsiveness of the model. Going forward, a balance of flexibility and trainees support will need to be found. Due to Covid-19, providers shifted the delivery channels they used to a hybrid model with predominantly digital delivery.	**Yes**

1.7 Conclusions

This section presents conclusions for each of the evaluation objectives listed under 0.

1.7.1 Process conclusions

Due to Covid-19, hybrid delivery models, whereby content was delivered in a classroom-based setting where possible while self-learning modules were moved online, were offered to training participants. The resulting flexibility was highlighted by trainees as a way to allow them to balance other responsibilities with the course. Where providers included strong individual mentoring, trainees reported stronger engagement with the course. A small minority of providers engaged with social care workers to engage hard to reach groups thereby contributing to the diversity of trainees. **Hybrid delivery models that target very specific skills needs and include dedicated individual mentoring support could be taken forward in other regions (objective 5)**. In addition, employer-training provider partnerships were reported to have been a success both by employers and training providers. The main driver for this success was that **employers were involved from inception of the training courses onwards so that training was specific to each employers' needs (objective 5).**

Under the National Skills Fund[10], DfE have provided £43m for Skills Bootcamp training across England. These Skills Bootcamps offer training for digital skills, but also for construction, engineering and manufacturing, green skills and rail. Similar to the Fund, the Skills Bootcamps work as partnerships between employers and training providers. **RSM's research did not highlight needs for changes in legislation (objective 6)**. The governance arrangements adopted for the Fund were effective in allowing GMCA and LDSP to focus on delivery and support for consortia. This was achieved by giving GMCA and LDSP the accountability for Fund delivery, while DCMS maintained overall oversight. The latter was enabled through monthly progress and risk updates provided by GMCA and LDSP to DCMS. It is worth noting that some unsuccessful applicants felt they could have benefitted from additional guidance on how to successfully bid for public funding.

GMCA and LDSP brought together training providers to focus on regional skills shortages through engagement events and application support. **This meant that training providers were better aware of the regional needs than would otherwise have been the case (objective 7)**. The Fund gave employers an effective way of accessing training specific to their needs.

Partnership working and involvement of local and regional government are areas that worked particularly well in the delivery of the Fund (objective 1). The Fund fostered stronger relationships between local authorities, employers, and training providers. Employers and training providers alike reported they would participate in similar programmes.

1.7.2 Employment and skills conclusions

The Fund successfully **developed advanced and specialist skill levels and improved employment outcomes (objective 2)** for the trainees. It promoted the involvement of employers in training design. This meant that training courses were specifically focused on digital skills needed in the workplace, such as programming languages (e.g. SQL). Employers' contribution to training delivery, e.g. in the form of masterclasses, gave

[10] See: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-skills-fund.

trainees insight into the day-to-day applications of these skills in the workplace. Employers' involvement in delivery and effective communications through ongoing feedback loops meant that they were able to cooperate with providers to adjust to Covid-19. Employers stressed that the quality of the skills which trainees developed was high.

The make-up of the trainees was more diverse than the digital workforce as a whole. For instance, across rounds 1 and 2, 35% of trainees were women. Out of all trainees who completed the training, a similar proportion (36%) were women. This compares positively to the 25.5% of digital jobs which were held by women across the UK, and 25% in the North West in 2019. Similarly, while 41.7% of digital jobs across the UK and 39.4% in the North West were held by people under 35 in 2019, 68% of the Fund's trainees and 71% of the trainees who completed the training were under the age of 35. Finally, 15.2% of digital jobs across the UK and 9.5% in the North West were filled by people from BAME backgrounds in 2019. 25% of the Fund's trainees and 27% of trainees who completed the training were from a non-white ethnic background[11].

The Fund made a partial difference in terms of **reducing vacancies in digital skills and filling other digital roles in employer partners (objective 3)** by providing trainees with the skills businesses needed. As a result, these employers can offer new services, although due to Covid-19 they have hired fewer new candidates than planned - around 20% of planned objectives. Out of the 20 employers that were interviewed for this evaluation, only 6 employers hired trainees for a total of 21 trainees. The 20 interviewed employers initially intended to employ 116 trainees as a result of receiving the Fund. Based on monitoring data, of the 865 trainees who participated in training courses, a total of 273 candidates (31%) are in digital employment three months after completing the training. This includes employment with employers that were interviewed as part of this evaluation. The collaboration between training providers and employers was a crucial element of the Fund (e.g. to promote employment of trainees). Employers were satisfied with the quality of training delivery. **It is too early to say whether this will translate into improved productivity (objective 3).**

Smaller employers stressed that some specialist training provided through the Fund, such as specialist cybersecurity training, is expensive to access without government support. To some extent, therefore, **the Fund enabled employers to access training courses that they would otherwise have struggled to access (objective 4)**, providing employers with value for money. However, it is not clear from this evaluation whether this represents value for money for the government as we are not able to assess the monetary value of the outcomes.

1.8 Lessons learned

The following learnings have been identified through this evaluation. These have been categorised into set-up, programme delivery, training course delivery, and evaluation learnings. Each learning is also marked as either Covid-19-related or general learning.

1.8.1 Learnings on Set-up

Ensuring all stakeholders who influence governance, design or objectives are involved from the inception phase:
GMCA and DCMS began collaborating on the Business Case before LDSP joined the stakeholder group. Discussions to refine the Business Case continued once LDSP

[11] Tech Nation (2021) Diversity and Inclusion in UK Tech [Available online]: https://technation.io/diversity-and-inclusion-in-uk-tech/#executive-summary [Accessed 18th October 2021].

joined. While GMCA was able to conduct stakeholder consultations to support this process, LDSP did not have the time to do so. DCMS had high expectations of the Fund and discussed these with GMCA and LDSP. For example, match funding requirements were initially set at 50% but changed to 'a significant amount' to enable small and medium sized businesses to participate. **Ensuring all stakeholders who influence governance, design or objectives are involved from the inception phase is important to allow wider consultations to take place in time (general learning).** This consultation would allow wider stakeholders such as local employers and training providers to engage with the proposed programme. In turn, early engagement with and between wider stakeholders could improve the quality of applications to similar programmes.

Some providers who were not successful in their applications felt they could have benefited from further support on the level of detail needed to secure public funding. **Additional guidance, especially for organisations who have not previously applied for public funding, could increase the quality of bids (general learning)**.

1.8.2 Learnings on Programme delivery

Pre-engaging with trainees to clearly set out syllabus and expected learning outcomes:
The trainees had mixed views on what content should be prioritised: they valued individual mentoring support and employability skills but would have valued more focus on the knowledge needed to pass certification or qualification exams. **Training courses should be preceded by engagement events for trainees so that training providers can clearly outline expectations (general learning)** of trainees and the skills they will develop. This can also help training providers understand possible support trainees may need to access and complete the course.

Reviewing other training courses to complement trainees' upskilling:
In the absence of this Fund, a majority of trainees would have accessed other training. This suggests that an in-depth review of existing training courses should be conducted prior to any similar programmes in future to avoid over-saturation. Such a review should cover further education and other bootcamp style training,

Delegating accountability for the delivery of the Fund to GMCA and LDSP meant that the programme focused on local needs (general learning). DCMS meanwhile maintained effective oversight through monthly progress and risk reporting from GMCA and LDSP.

1.8.3 Learnings on Training course delivery

Putting in place appropriate staffing to complete monitoring requirements:
Training providers struggled to provide GMCA and LDSP with the monitoring data required in a timely manner. GMCA and LDSP highlighted that training providers did not always have appropriate staffing in place to complete the monitoring requirements of the Fund. **Providers must commit appropriately experienced staff to complete monitoring processes and should ensure that these staff members attend relevant meetings and calls both before and during delivery phases.** GMCA offered extensive support to providers with the aim of enabling them to efficiently complete monitoring requirements. Written guidance on how to complete these processes could have enhanced the processes that were put in place by giving providers an easily accessible document detailing how to complete these requirements

Being clearer to trainees and employers on training pace, time commitment and prerequisite skills:
In open text responses of the trainee survey and in employer interviews, a minority of trainees and employers stated that the pace of training was too fast. They also felt that clearer communications about the time and skillset needed to successfully participate would have been helpful. Existing employment or caring responsibilities, which were exacerbated due to the pandemic, were cited as reasons for drop-out. It should be noted, however, that trainees who participated in focus group discussions felt that the training courses spent the right amount of time on each of the course components. It should also be noted that round 1 providers began delivery before the onset of the pandemic. For their trainees, caring commitments changed after training courses began. **Knowing how much time they needed to commit to the training could have helped these trainees make an informed decision about their participation (general learning)**. It would also have allowed employer partners to ensure their trainee delegates were given sufficient time alongside their work to complete the course. A minority of employers and providers said that the requirements on the length of training courses can be limiting, depending on the skills that are needed and the trainees that are targeted. However, this is a general point for consideration in similar programmes rather than specific to this Fund. **Additional consideration of realistic course durations, either shorter or longer, would further help alleviate pressures on trainees and employers (general learning)**.

A mixture of classroom based learning and remote, online learning worked well during the pandemic (Covid-19-related learning). It gave trainees flexibility while still providing employers with skills they needed. The shift to such a hybrid model was supported by the employer-training provider partnerships formed for the Fund. Employers were able to provide masterclasses and seminars which complemented other training content online, while trainees were able to complete self-learning modules remotely. **Employer involvement in the delivery of training gave trainees an understanding of how the skills they develop relate to the workplace (general learning)**. It also increased exposure of trainees to potential new employers.

The majority of employers highlighted that their skills needs have changed due to the pandemic. For these employers it means that their digital skills gaps have shifted, rather than closed. This suggests that an **updated understanding of local and regional needs following the pandemic may be needed through ongoing engagement between GMCA/LDSP and employers (Covid-19-related learning)**.

Most barriers that were reported were related to Covid-19. Trainees, providers, and employers stressed that the ability to deliver face-to-face training would have increased the value of training by introducing more practical elements and group work. Hybrid models enabled trainees to complete training at their own pace but meant that training providers had to closely monitor progress of individual trainees.

All the trainee participants in one focus group stressed that they have gained higher paid digital jobs after completing the training course. This training course focused on cybersecurity related skills and on trainees who already had a basic understanding of digital security. Trainees pointed out that the salary gains were in the region of £10,000 to £15,000. Over time, in the form of tax receipts, this increase in salaries will likely recoup the cost of the training course to the taxpayer.

1.8.4 Learnings on Evaluation

The economic outcomes of the Fund are not yet clear. However, due to the pilot nature of this Fund it was not intended that it would conclusively be able to demonstrate economic impacts at a local or regional scale. **Future evaluations of similar bootcamp or other skills training courses should develop a baseline of the skills needs landscape and specific training course objectives**. They could also include the development and tracking of early productivity proxy indicators at a business level. Evaluations can then compare actual training course achievements against the baseline. In addition, this evaluation has demonstrated that employers' skills needs shift quickly. **Future evaluations should therefore consider approaches to capture and understand these needs in real time**.

1.9 Recommendations

The following table presents recommendations that are based on the findings and learnings of this report. The table lists at what stage of a programme (prior to the programme, during set-up, or delivery) the recommendation should be considered and to who the recommendation is for. Additionally, it notes why the recommendation is important.

Table 3 - recommendations

Number	Stage of the Programme	Recommendation	For whom is this recommendation?	Why is it important?
1	Prior to future programmes	Build on existing research on digital skills shortages, particularly focusing on how this has changed because of the pandemic.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies	To better tailor future programmes based on the specific needs of employers relative to the future of the labour market.
2	Prior to future programmes	Review existing training courses and consider changing needs following the pandemic. This review should be complemented by building connections between existing training courses and programmes with the aim of establishing processes through which trainees are matched to the best possible course for their needs.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies, and training providers	To ensure that similar programmes do not duplicate other existing training courses/education provision, or to provide increased capacity of a particular training course or provider to reach a larger population. This also helps trainees access the most appropriate training for their needs.
3	Prior to future programmes	Replicate the approach taken on this Fund whereby local authorities, Digital Skills Partnerships and other local bodies are involved from inception onwards. Local bodies should have accountability for delivery of training programmes.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies	This is relevant where a program is tailored to a specific region or a small number of local areas. Doing so helps to improve outreach to local employers and residents. It also means that training courses can be tailored to local needs.

Number	Stage of the Programme	Recommendation	For whom is this recommendation?	Why is it important?
4	Prior to and during set-up of future programmes	Involve all stakeholders as early as possible so that roles, expectations and responsibilities can be clearly delineated and defined early in the process.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies	This can avoid individual stakeholders having mismatched expectations and improves working relationships.
5	Prior to and during set-up of future programmes	Involve employers in the design stage of similar programmes and ensure that communications about similar programmes are targeted at a wide group of employers.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies, and employers	This would help to ensure that the training is tailored to the skills employers require. This would also ensure trainees gain these skills with practical references to how this could be applied in the workplace.
6	Prior to and during set-up of future programmes	Future evaluations of skills development programmes should include robust baselines of training course level objectives and employer productivity proxies against which progress can be measured. This should take place in addition to a wider baseline of the local or regional skills needs and economic landscape. Future evaluations of similar programmes should also consider whether a broader range of outcomes should be captured, such as self-employment and further learning.	DCMS and other funding bodies, and evaluation providers	This will improve the robustness of evaluations. However, it requires that all stakeholders in future programmes, including employers and training providers, are committed to providing information for such a baseline.
7	During set-up of future programmes	Ensure that training providers communicate the expected workload of the training courses to all trainees. Training providers should be encouraged to commit enough time to the recruitment of candidates.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies, and training providers or other implementers	This helps to prevent dropout of candidates who did not or were not able to assess the time they are required to commit to the training. Employers should be required to provide their employees with the time necessary to complete the course.

Number	Stage of the Programme	Recommendation	For whom is this recommendation?	Why is it important?
8	During set-up of future programmes	Providers must attend all pre-delivery meetings with relevant, experienced staff, who have to be committed throughout the delivery of the training programme. Funders should provide written guidance detailing monitoring requirements and how to complete forms and processes properly. Depending on legal requirements, funding bodies should consider whether grant agreements should be replaced with contracts with detailed terms and conditions in order to be able to hold providers accountable.	Training providers, DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies.	Without adequate staff and staff time, providers struggle to complete monitoring requirements. This then necessitates additional support from GMCA and can affect the quality of monitoring information.
9	Prior to delivery of future programmes	Conduct training webinars or events for organisations who have not previously applied to receive public funding.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies	To enable organisations that have not previously applied for public funding to write bids that meet required levels of detail. This can increase the reach of public funding by leading to a higher number and wider breadth of proposals. In turn, more proposals can enable funders to choose potentially higher-quality proposals and projects.
10	During set-up and delivery of future programmes	Consider the need to commit resources to providing individualised trainee support. In particular, for hybrid or virtual-only training delivery and to conduct pre-training trainee engagement to learn more about potential trainee support needed.	Training providers or other implementers	This helps to maintain trainee momentum and increase the likelihood that trainees complete the course. It also enables training providers to tailor their delivery methods to individual trainees' needs, where possible. In addition to support from providers, team building activities among trainees can help maintain trainee engagement.

Number	Stage of the Programme	Recommendation	For whom is this recommendation?	Why is it important?
11	During set-up and delivery of future programmes	Bootcamp style training should be delivered in a hybrid format with strong, individual trainee mentoring. Employers should be part of training delivery offering practical insights into workplace applicability of skills.	DCMS, GMCA, LDSP and other funding bodies	Hybrid training models worked well during the pandemic and are likely to work well in future given the trend towards more remote working. It provided trainees with flexibility to complete courses by allowing them the time to conduct self-learning modules when it worked best for them. By showcasing how skills are used in the workplace, trainees develop a clear understanding of how the skills they are learning can be applied in the workplace. Employer involvement in training delivery gives trainees direct exposure to a wider group of employers, increasing the opportunities to gain employment following training.

The following infographic highlights the key findings and recommendations of this report.

What worked well

- Partnership between employers and training providers – delivered relevant skills locally
- Support provided by GMCA and LDSP
- Individual support from tutors and mentors as well as employer involvement in the programme

What can be improved

- Address trade-offs between flexibility of training delivery and the pace at which trainees complete training on the one hand and the need for trainees to progress on the other hand
- Trainees needed clearer communications about the time and skillset needed to successfully participate
- Stronger focus of training content on industry recognised certifications

Outcomes achieved by:

Employers

- Upskilled employees and high quality of candidates interviewed
- Enhanced partnerships and improved engagement with local training providers

Trainees

- Developed and improved digital skills as well as employability related soft skills
- Increased confidence in skills and abilities
- Employment opportunities for some candidates

Training providers

- Enhanced partnerships and improved engagement with employers

Recommendations

- *Recommendation 1*: Build on existing research on digital skills shortages, particularly focusing on how this has changed as a result of the pandemic.
- *Recommendation 2*: Review existing training courses and consider changing needs following the pandemic.
- *Recommendation 3*: Replicate the approach whereby local authorities, Digital Skills Partnerships and other local bodies are involved from inception onwards.
- *Recommendation 4*: Involve all stakeholders as early as possible so that roles, expectations and responsibilities can be clearly delineated and defined early in the process.
- *Recommendation 5*: Involve employers in the design stage of similar programmes.
- *Recommendation 6*: Future evaluations of skills development programmes should include robust baselines of training course objectives and employer productivity proxies.
- *Recommendation 7*: Ensure that training providers communicate the expected workload of the training courses to all trainees.
- *Recommendation 8*: Providers must attend all pre-delivery meetings with relevant, experienced staff.
- *Recommendation 9*: Conduct training webinars or events for organisations who have not previously applied to receive public funding.
- *Recommendation 10*: Consider the need to commit resources to providing individualised trainee support and to conduct pre-training trainee engagement to learn more about potential trainee support needed.
- *Recommendation 11*: Bootcamp style training should be delivered in a hybrid format with strong, individual trainee mentoring. Employers should be part of training delivery offering practical insights into workplace applicability of skills.

2. Introduction and Methodology

2.1 Introduction and purpose of this report

RSM UK Consulting LLP (RSM), were commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to complete an evaluation of the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund in October 2019. The fund was designed to address the identified issues of employers in the GM and Lancashire areas having multiple hard-to-fill, skills shortage vacancies (SSVs) due to a lack of locally available digital skills. This report covers the period from July 2019 to July 2021. One training course is ongoing and still collecting data. This data is outside the scope and timeframes of this evaluation.

It was a collaboration between GMCA, DCMS and LDSP which brought together employers and training providers to run innovative digital training schemes linked to SSVs[12].

2.2 Evaluation objectives

The evaluation assesses the outcomes and impacts of the fund to help build the evidence base on 'what works' in the development of digital skills. DCMS commissioned this evaluation to:

1) understand how the Fund was delivered, what went well and what could be improved;

2) understand the impact of the Fund on trainees such as improving advanced and specialist digital skill levels and improving employment outcomes;

3) understand the impact of the Fund on the local area. The impacts include improving employer productivity and reducing employers' skills shortage vacancies (SSVs) in digital sectors. This applies to both employers that engaged with the Fund and those based in the local area;

4) assess additionality and determine if the Fund delivered Value for Money (VfM);

5) determine which models of developing digital skills could be taken forward in other regions, and how employers and/or training providers should adapt to facilitate this;

6) determine if any changes in legislation or funding are needed to enable this; and

7) determine if these solutions have addressed the market failures associated with this Fund.

2.3 Methodology

The methods used for the research for this report include:

- **desk research** to guide the development of the logic model and to review the digital skills needs landscape in GM and Lancashire. The research demonstrated that both GM and Lancashire faced specific needs in the digital sector and workforce. GM has a digital workforce that needs diversification. Lancashire's digital sector and

[12] GMCA (2019) [Available online]: https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital/digital-talent-pipeline/fast-track-digital-workforce-fund/ [Date accessed: 10/03/2020].

workforce has shown growth that has, however, been below growth levels seen across England and the North West as a whole. GMCA and Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have governance structures in place that support the development of the digital sector and workforce. Such structures include LDSP, for instance. See section 3 for details;

- **analysis of primary data** including funding applications and monitoring data to assess completion rates of trainees and numbers of trainees gaining employment after the Fund. We developed summaries of each funded training course based on the funding applications. The applications also provided target numbers of trainee completions;
- **interviews** with training providers (19), unsuccessful training provider applicants (5), employers (20) and stakeholders in DCMS, GMCA, LDSP, Job Centres and DfE (10). These enabled us to gain in-depth insights about outcomes achieved and reasons for participating in the Fund. Interviewees expressed what worked and did not work in the delivery of the Fund and of training courses, and information was provided regarding what lessons DfE learned from the Fund for its Skills Bootcamp programme; and
- **surveys** with training providers (19) and trainees (235 for the initial survey and 106 for the follow-up survey) to gain insights about outcomes achieved, reasons for participating in training courses and the Fund, and what worked and did not work in the delivery of training courses.

Table 4 – who we interviewed/surveyed and why?

Stakeholder	Why we interviewed/surveyed them	What we covered in the interview/survey
Training providers	Training providers are key stakeholders as they delivered the training courses.	• reasons for participating in the Fund; • employer involvement in design and delivery of the training courses; • what worked and did not work well in the delivery of the Fund and the training courses; and • outcomes achieved.
Unsuccessful training provider applicants	Unsuccessful applicants can provide an insight into what they did instead of the Fund and how the application process could have been improved.	• reasons for applying to the Fund; • what worked well and not well in the application process; and • what they did in the absence of the Fund.
Employers	Employers were key design and delivery partners for training courses alongside training providers.	• reasons for participating in the Fund; • employer involvement in design and delivery of the training courses; • outcomes achieved; and • what they would have done in the absence of the Fund.
DCMS	DCMS provided funding and oversight for the Fund.	• Fund-level progress; • what worked well and not so well; and • lessons learned.

Stakeholder	Why we interviewed/surveyed them	What we covered in the interview/survey
GMCA and LDSP	GMCA and LDSP were DCMS's delivery partners for the Fund. They administered the Fund and conducted stakeholder engagement in GM and Lancashire.	• aims in participating in the Fund; • outcomes achieved; and • what worked well and not well.
Job Centres	Job Centres worked with GMCA and LDSP to promote the Fund and to recruit trainees.	• outcomes achieved.
DfE	DfE are overseeing the national Skills Bootcamp programme which extends this Fund nationally.	• lessons learned from the Fund.
Trainees	Trainees are key beneficiaries of the Fund.	• reasons for participating in training courses; • skills prior to the courses; • skills developed; and • what worked well and not well in the delivery of the training courses.

- **8 online focus groups** to bring together the perspectives of training providers, employer partners, and trainees from a sample of the training programmes to stimulate collective discussion on their experiences of the training courses.

2.4 Report outline

The remainder of this report is set out as follows:

Table 5 – section descriptions

Report section	Content
3. Policy context and the need for intervention	This section discusses the demand and supply for digital skills in the UK and in particular the context in Lancashire and in GM. This section details the rationale for the Fund.
4. The Fast Track Fund	This section includes a review of the Fund's aims, delivery mechanisms, process, governance structure and a breakdown of the profiles of trainees
5. Performance	This section provides a quantitative assessment of the Fund's against targets as well as costs per trainee, and the cost per completion.
6. Findings	This section presents findings from the interviews and surveys with training providers, employers, trainees and stakeholders in relation to Fund processes. It also discusses the outcomes and impacts achieved, and lessons learned.
7. Conclusions and recommendations	This section concludes on key findings and recommendations to inform future programmes.
Annexes	Annexes include: A – case studies; B – survey and interview guides; C – logic model references; D/E – successful applicant project descriptions for rounds 1 and 2 respectively; F – methodology; and

G – detailed tables.
Annexes are included in a separate document.

3. Policy Context and the Need for Intervention

This section outlines the policy context and UK digital skills landscape (section 3.1.1). It also discusses the digital skills gap in GM and Lancashire (section 3.1.2). This information was used to inform the logic model in Section 4.3.

3.1 Policy context

Evidence suggests that prior to the Fund, while the UK has a strong digitally enabled workforce, there remains a digital skills shortage as demand outstrips supply. The 2017 Employer Skills Survey reported a third (33%) of all SSVs were attributed, at least in part, to a lack of 'digital skills' in the workforce[13]. Similarly, the 2019 Open University Business Barometer[14] showed that a third (32%) of employers report that their organisations lack the required digital skills.

Evidence from after the Fund suggests that there remains a digital skills shortage in the UK as Covid-19 increased demand for digital skills. The 2019 Employer Skills Survey reported that under a third (30%) of all SSVs (which amounts to 67,800 SSVs) were attributed, at least in part, to a lack of 'digital skills' in the workforce[15]. Meanwhile, the 2020 Open University Business Barometer reported that a little over half (56%) of employers believe there needs to be improvement in digital skills in their organisations as the use of technology has rapidly grown with Covid-19.

In 2015 before the Fund, it was estimated that 1.2 million new technical and digitally skilled people will be needed by 2022 to satisfy future skills needs[16]. The digital skills required are likely to change over time, which means that employers need to be able to regularly train their internal workforce to ensure they have the appropriate digital skills for their roles. The rate of change in digital skills is also likely to be too fast for the school and university pipeline to be able to fill the digital skills gap. This is because the IT curriculum is not updated regularly enough to reflect these changes in digital skills.

The provision of digital skills training is fragmented. It is difficult for employers to understand which training courses are providing the digital skills that they need and to recruit people with appropriate digital skillsets[17].

In terms of diversity, 25.5% of digital jobs were held by women across the UK, and 25% in the North West in 2019. 41.7% of digital jobs across the UK and 39.4% in the North

[13] IFF Research (2017) Employer Skills Survey 2017 [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf [Accessed 15/10/2019]
[14] Open University (2019) Business Barometer 2019 [Available online]: https://www.open.ac.uk/business/Business-Barometer-2019 [Accessed 20/07/2021].
[15] IFF Research (2019) Employer Skills Survey 2019 [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936488/ESS_2019_Summary_Report_Nov2020.pdf [Accessed 18/10/2021]
[16] UKCES (2015) Sector insights: skills and performance challenges in the digital and creative sector [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433755/Skills_challenges_in_the_digital_and_creative_sector.pdf [Accessed 29/07/2021].
[17] CBI (2019) Delivering Skills for the New Economy: Understanding the digital skills needs of the UK [Available online]: https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2836/final_digital-skills_june.pdf [Accessed 29/07/2021].

West were held by people under 35 in 2019. 15.2% of digital jobs across the UK and 9.5% in the North West were occupied by people from BAME backgrounds in 2019[18].

3.1.1 Demand and supply of digital skills in the UK

In June 2019, 7.7m job openings across the UK required digital skills, accounting for 82% of all job adverts with 3.9m of these job openings specifically for high-skilled digital roles[19]. More specifically, the skills recorded as having the most severe shortages relate to cybersecurity, cloud-based development and management, and emerging technologies[20]. One in three business leaders reported inadequate cybersecurity capabilities; a similar share described capability gaps to successfully integrate new technologies or data sources. A third of leaders also reported that they do not have the development and management skills required to move to cloud-based infrastructure[17].

The Bridging the Digital Divide report[21] highlights the significant impact that the digital skills gap has in the UK. This study found that 90% of organisations across Great Britain acknowledged a shortage of digital skills, with many expecting deficiencies to increase in the next five years. Over half of the organisations surveyed reported that these skills shortages have already negatively impacted productivity, with 50% expecting their profitability to be negatively affected in the next five years. Four in 10 business leaders reported that their digital skills shortage is negatively impacting their competitive edge.

The 2019 Employer Skills Survey reported that nearly two-fifths (38%) of the skills gap involved deficient digital skills, including basic computer literacy and IT skills (28%) and/or more advanced or specialist IT skills (20%). A lack of complex analytical skills was most prominent for the Information and Communications and Public Administration sectors and accounted for 58% of all skill-shortage vacancies. Despite these continued reported shortages in digital skills, the proportion of employers who offered training decreased to three-fifths (61%) and is the lowest proportion since the Employer Skills Survey began in 2011.

'The No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills report'[22] published by DCMS in June 2019, concluded that digital skills are becoming a near-universal requirement for employment. They found that over 75% of job openings at low, middle, and high skill levels now requested digital skills. It was recognised that digital skills are also critical for job seekers to be promoted into middle- and high-skill roles. In addition to this, the report also showed that roles requiring digital skills pay a significant wage premium above those which do not require digital skills. This is evident at all skills levels and increased with skill level[23].

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[18] Tech Nation (2021) Diversity and Inclusion in UK Tech [Available online]: https://technation.io/diversity-and-inclusion-in-uk-tech/#executive-summary [Accessed 18th October 2021].
[19] Burning Glass Technologies and DCMS (2019) No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807830/No_Longer_Optional_Employer_Demand_for_Digital_Skills.pdf [Date accessed: 15/10/2021].
[20] Ibid.
[21] Open University (2019) Bridging the Digital Divide (2019) [Available online]: http://www.open.ac.uk/business/bridging-the-digital-divide [Accessed: 15/10/2019].
[22] Burning Glass Technologies (2019) No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807830/No_Longer_Optional_Employer_Demand_for_Digital_Skills.pdf [Date accessed: 15/10/2019].
[23] Ibid.

Significantly, demand for digital skills can be seen across all sizes of firms in the UK. 'The No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills report'[24] reported that small, medium and large businesses had a demand for digital skills in at least 70% of their jobs. Although digital skills are more commonly required by large firms, with 79% of job openings requiring digital skills. The report also highlights that digital firms are growing faster than non-digital firms. It suggests that the development of the digital skills of workers in small and medium sized businesses could be a good strategy to increase the growth of these entrepreneurial firms. However, the report also found that digital roles are needed across the economy in a broad range of sectors and not just limited to digital firms.

The report 'Quantifying the UK Data Skills Gap', published in May 2021 after delivery of the Fund began, showed that UK businesses continue to struggle to fill their digital roles, for which they have a growing demand. This is illustrated by the fact that UK businesses are currently recruiting between 178,000 and 234,000 roles which require hard data skills. Nearly half (48%) of companies are recruiting for such roles and almost half (46%) have struggled with recruitment for such roles in the last two years.[25]

Evidence from after delivery of the Fund began shows that cybersecurity and emerging technologies such as AI are still suffering from severe shortages with businesses having digital skills gaps and employers struggling to recruit for these roles. The 'Cyber security skills in the UK labour market' 2021 survey[26] found that half of UK businesses lack basic cyber skills and that nearly two-fifths (37%) of cyber related vacancies since early 2019 were hard to fill. Meanwhile, the 'Understanding the UK AI labour market' 2020 survey[27] reported that demand is expected to outstrip supply. The survey found that 63% of businesses had faced issues with technical AI skills gaps but 67% of firms expected demand to increase in the next year.

It may be too early to understand the impact Covid-19 and the increased amount of remote working arrangements (employees having more digital needs as they work remotely and businesses building their digital capabilities) have on digital skills. However, it is evident that over 2020 and 2021 more people have engaged daily with digital interfaces than before. For example, 60% of people now have high levels of digital capability. However over 20 million adults still have low or very low digital engagement, and a further 2.6 million people are completely offline, demonstrating that there is an ongoing need for digital skills development and inclusion[28].

3.1.2 Baseline (2019) in Lancashire LEP and GMCA

The Fund is focused on Lancashire LEP and GMCA. See figure 1 for a map of the areas covered.

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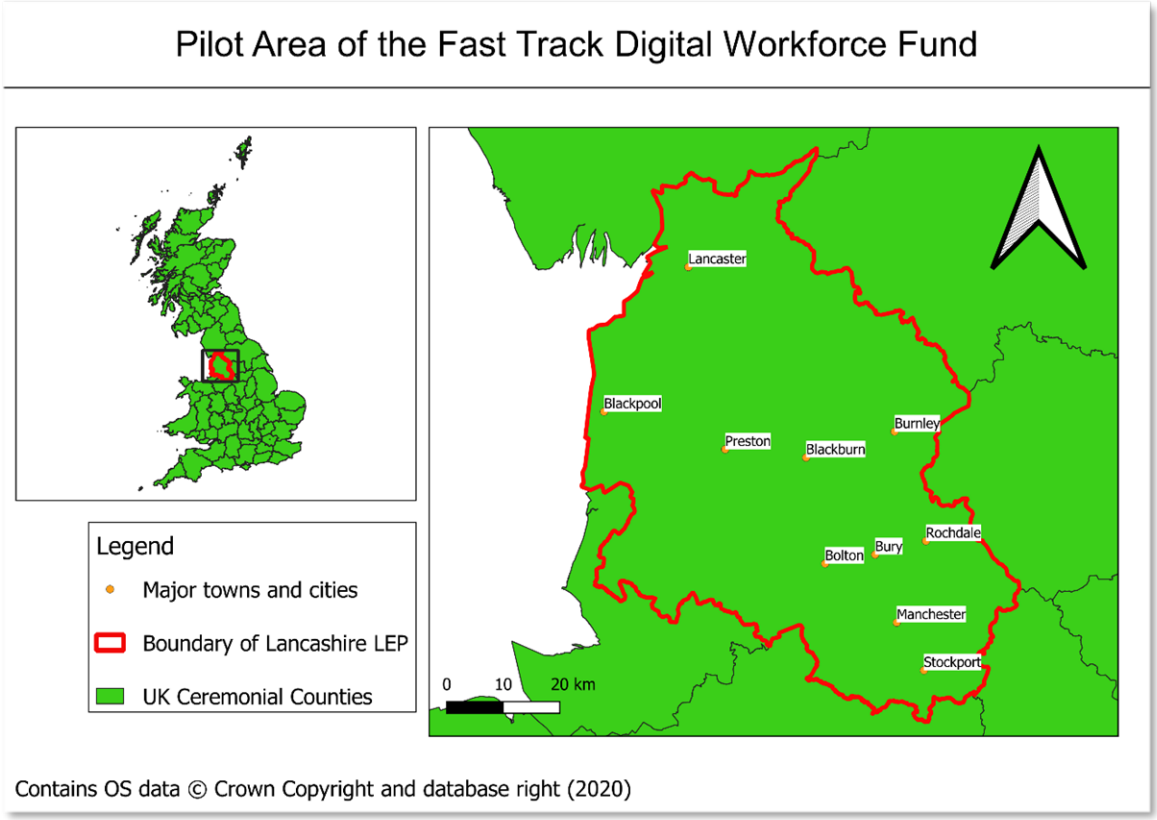
[24] Ibid.
[25] Opinium and DCMS (2021) Quantifying the UK Data Skills Gap [Available online]: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quantifying-the-uk-data-skills-gap/quantifying-the-uk-data-skills-gap-full-report [Date accessed: 17/08/2021].
[26] Ipsos Mori (2021) Cyber security skills in the UK labour market 2021 [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973802/Ipsos_MORI_Cyber_Skills_in_the_UK_2021_v1.pdf [Date accessed: 18/10/2021]
[27] Ipsos Mori (2021) Understanding the UK AI labour market: 2020 [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/984671/DCMS_and_Ipsos_MORI_Understanding_the_AI_Labour_Market_2020_Full_Report.pdf [Date accessed: 18/10/2021]
[28] Lloyds Bank (2021) UK Consumer Digital Index 2021 [Available online]: 210513-lloyds-consumer-digital-index-2021-report.pdf (lloydsbank.com) [Accessed 29/07/2021].

From published research, DCMS were aware that Manchester has a strong digital economy and is the largest tech cluster outside of London. A recent report noted that the North of England was at the forefront of the booming digital economy and GM was found to have the second highest demand for digital workers[29]. GM also mirrors the national picture with employers finding it hard to fill about one third of their vacancies which is in part attributable to a lack of digital skills.

Figure 1 - Map of the area in which the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund was piloted



In 2017, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found that the digital skills gap in the North West was the highest in the UK[30]. The North's digital economy is worth £9.9bn to the national economy and one in 20 of the North's workforce is employed in the digital economy. Employment in the North digital tech sector has risen 28% in the past five years (2013 – 2017), which was 10 times faster than the North's non-digital sectors. The IPPR report also estimated that if current growth rates continue over the next 25 years, 1.23 million workers will need to be supplied by 2050. The challenges presented by the growth of the digital sector in the North means that policy must be directly implemented to assist the development of available digital skills.

In 2021, evidence from the UK Regional Digital Ecosystems[31] report found that in the North West, the digital sector has experienced GVA growth of 4.8% from 2014-2019. Additionally, it is also estimated that the digital sector in the North West could potentially grow by at least £2.7 billion in annual GVA by 2025, resulting in the creation of

[29] Manchester Digital (2019) Digital Skills Audit 2019. [Available online]: https://www.manchesterdigital.com/post/manchester-digital/digital-skills-audit-2019 [Accessed 18/10/2021]
[30] Institute for Public Policy Research, (2017) https://www.ippr.org/publications/devo-digital.
[31] Steer economic development for DCMS (2021) [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020407/Digital_Regional_Ecosystems_report_v9.1.pdf [Date accessed 15/11/2021]

additional 50,000 jobs. The report notes, however, that accessing talent remains a challenge to ensure that the region capitalises on its digital growth.

In Lancashire

Whilst all businesses need digital skills to some extent, technology companies tend to have the greatest needs and require digital skills in specialist areas. As of 2019, there were 2,840 digital sector organisations in Lancashire, accounting for 5% of the total business base[32]. The largest number of organisations are in computer programming, consultancy and related activities (73%) and the second largest is Telecoms (8%). The UK Regional Digital Ecosystems[33] reported that in 2020 after the Fund, digital sector organisations in Lancashire accounted for 5.4% of the total business base.

Between 2012 and 2019, the number of businesses in Lancashire's digital sector has grown by 30%. However, this growth is five percentage points less than other areas of the North West (35%) and just over six percentage points behind the rest of England (36%), indicating that growth has been slower in Lancashire[34].

Prior to the Fund, the digital sector in Lancashire was valued at just less than £1.02bn in 2017, equal to 3% of Lancashire's total GVA (similar to the digital sector's share of overall employment in Lancashire) and 14% of the total North West digital sector[35]. In 2019, the digital sector share of Lancashire's GVA rose to 3.5%, the digital sector's share of overall employment in Lancashire dropped to 2.2%, and Lancashire's share of the total North West digital sector dropped to 13%[36].

In terms of GVA, the digital sector in Lancashire has grown by 14% since 2012, one percentage point less than the North West and nine percentage points less than England over the same period[37]. However, one of the findings of the Lancashire Digital Business Survey was that one third of businesses in Lancashire had vacancies in digital skills that are hard to fill[38].

These statistics highlight the need for the Fund in Lancashire, as growth in Lancashire's tech sector has been slower than other regions of the UK. The percentage of employees working in Lancashire's tech sector is lower than in other regions of the UK and employers struggle to find employees with adequate digital skills for vacancies, suggesting that there is a lack of locally available digital skills.

In Manchester

Prior to the Fund in 2019, the GM area was a digital hub as there were 8,000 digital and creative businesses which employed over 82,300 people and generated £4.1 billion in

[32] Ekosgen and Lancashire LEP (2020) Lancashire's Digital Landscape 2019.
[33] Steer economic development for DCMS (2021) [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020409/Appendix_C_NUTS2_Dashboards_v3.pdf [Date accessed 18/10/2021]
[34] Ekosgen and Lancashire LEP (2020) Lancashire's Digital Landscape 2019.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Steer economic development for DCMS (2021) [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020409/Appendix_C_NUTS2_Dashboards_v3.pdf [Date accessed 18/10/2021]
[37] Ekosgen and Lancashire LEP (2020) Lancashire's Digital Landscape 2019.
[38] Lancashire's Digital Landscape (2019) [Available online]: https://www.lancashireskillshub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Lancashire-Digital-Report-FINAL-FC.pdf [Date accessed: 21/10/2021].

annual GVA[39]. In 2018, there were circa 164,000 digital tech job openings in Manchester[40]. However, GM struggled with recruiting for digital roles and building their talent pipeline. The Manchester's Digital Skills Audit 2019[41] found that 29% of firms had been unable to recruit in 2018. It also found that less than a third (31%) of businesses had turned work away as they were unable to recruit the right digital skills. These statistics highlight the digital skills shortage in Manchester, and the barriers faced by employers in the city. This highlights the need for government intervention to incentivise organisations to focus on providing digital skills training for local residents.

Evidence demonstrates that GM remains as a fast-growing digital tech city, with investment having grown by 277% from 2018 to 2019[42]. The digital sector share of total businesses in GM is 7.2% in 2020, the digital sector share of employees in 2019 is 3.7%, and the digital sector share of GM's GVA is 5.7% in 2019. Annual real growth in digital sector GVA from 2014 to 2019 in GM was on average 5.7%[43].

3.1.3 DCMS Skills intervention: the Digital Skills Partnerships (DSPs[44])

The UK Digital Strategy[45] states that "to develop and maintain our position as a leading global digital economy, we will also need to develop a range of specialist digital skills to fill specific digital jobs". This strategy outlines the establishment of DSPs, which bring together public, private and charity sector organisations to help increase the digital capability of individuals and organisations in England[46]. DSPs also act as a mechanism to share knowledge and best practice with the aim of improving coherence of the digital skills landscape and support the development of Local DSPs[47] alongside LEPs and Combined Authorities.

SUMMARY

This evidence highlights the need for government funding to incentivise businesses to invest in digital skills training. As digital skill needs vary from company to company, it is imperative that any support is focused on ensuring that skills are developed in line with business needs. This can be achieved through collaboration between employers and digital skills training providers.

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[39] Manchester Digital Strategy 2018-2020 [Available online]: https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1090/digital-strategy-2018-2020.pdf [Date accessed 18/10/2021]
[40] Tech Nation (2019) A Bright Tech Future [Available online]: https://technation.io/bright-tech-future/#uk-tech-jobs [Date accessed 18/10/2021]
[41] Manchester Digital (2019) Digital Skills Audit 2019. [Available online]: https://www.manchesterdigital.com/post/manchester-digital/digital-skills-audit-2019 [Accessed 18/10/2021]
[42] Tech Nation (2020) UK Tech for a Changing World [Available online]: https://technation.io/news/tech-nation-report-2020/ [Accessed 21/10/2021].
[43] Steer economic development for DCMS (2021) [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1020409/Appendix_C_NUTS2_Dashboards_v3.pdf [Date accessed 18/10/2021]
[44] The six initial local DSPs were: Lancashire, Heart of the South West, West Midlands, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Cheshire and Warrington and the South East. For an evaluation of these initial six, see: Amion Consulting (2021) Evaluation of the Local Digital Skills Partnerships [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1021163/Evaluation_of_LDSP_final_report_270921.pdf [Date accessed: 19/10/2021].
[45] UK Digital Strategy (2017) [Available online]: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-digital-strategy [Date accessed: 16/10/2019].
[46] Digital Skills Partnership Blog (2020) [Available online]: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-skills-partnership.
[47] Ekosgen and Lancashire LEP (2020) Lancashire's Digital Landscape 2019.

4. The Fast Track Fund

4.1 Description and aims of the Fund

The Fund facilitated employers to work in collaboration with training providers to[48]:

- identify Skill-Shortage Vacancies (SSVs);
- co-design and co-deliver training courses to effectively trained staff and potential employees; and
- to fill digital roles employers are struggling to recruit for.

As a result, employers were to be able to recruit sufficiently trained staff, grow their business and offer new services.

The Fund intended to benefit employers by filling their SSVs. Increasing business productivity and being able to plan business activity with confidence were longer-term goals of the Fund.

For trainees, the aim of the Fund was to improve their digital skills or equip them with new digital skills. As a result, trainees were expected to be better placed to secure higher quality, better paid digital job roles.

Training providers were intended to build relationships with employers. As a result, the Fund's intention was to increase their knowledge of local employers' digital skills needs. In turn, this was to enable the development of more targeted training, offering better value to their trainees and employers.

A key aim was to help set in place longer-term, sustainable local partnerships that are more responsive and adaptable in providing training provision to meet the ever-evolving digital skills needs of the industry. The Fund aimed to ensure that training was accessible to a wide range of residents and to improve the diversity of the digital talent pipeline.

Targeted trainee groups were primarily people in low-skilled, low-paid roles. This included those seeking a career change, returners to the technology industry, returners to work, but also underemployed or unemployed graduates, and groups who are underrepresented in digital roles. In particular, the Fund aimed to support people with protected characteristics with a view to improving diversity in digital jobs.

4.2 Fund development

The process used to develop the Fund was extensive and involved engaging with employers at each stage in the process. It commenced with DCMS engaging with employers within the digital sector in GM in December 2018 to find out what skills were needed to address the skills shortage in the sector.

Employers suggested that formal education did not adapt quickly enough to meet employers' needs for digital skills in their workforce and that a more effective approach was required (e.g. bootcamps). Discussions with local stakeholders also confirmed that training providers and employers were not communicating and working together well, which was a key issue to be addressed.

[48] The Fund was open to organisations that might not strictly be defined as training providers. However, in all applications it was necessary to demonstrate training capability.

DCMS were aware of the Assured Skills programme in Northern Ireland which runs short courses and has been effective in addressing skill shortages with an 80% success rate in terms of getting people into employment[49]. This prompted DCMS to find out what worked well and what lessons could be used to implement a similar scheme.

DCMS also researched coding bootcamps and the impact and outcomes of running short, intensive training courses. Findings from the Employer Skills Survey[50] helped identify market failures in the digital skills space. It also showed a lack of diversity within technology roles, for example in GM, 80% of digital roles were filled by men. Further information on digital skills gaps and the lack of diversity within Lancashire's digital sector is included in Section 3 of this report.

4.3 Logic model

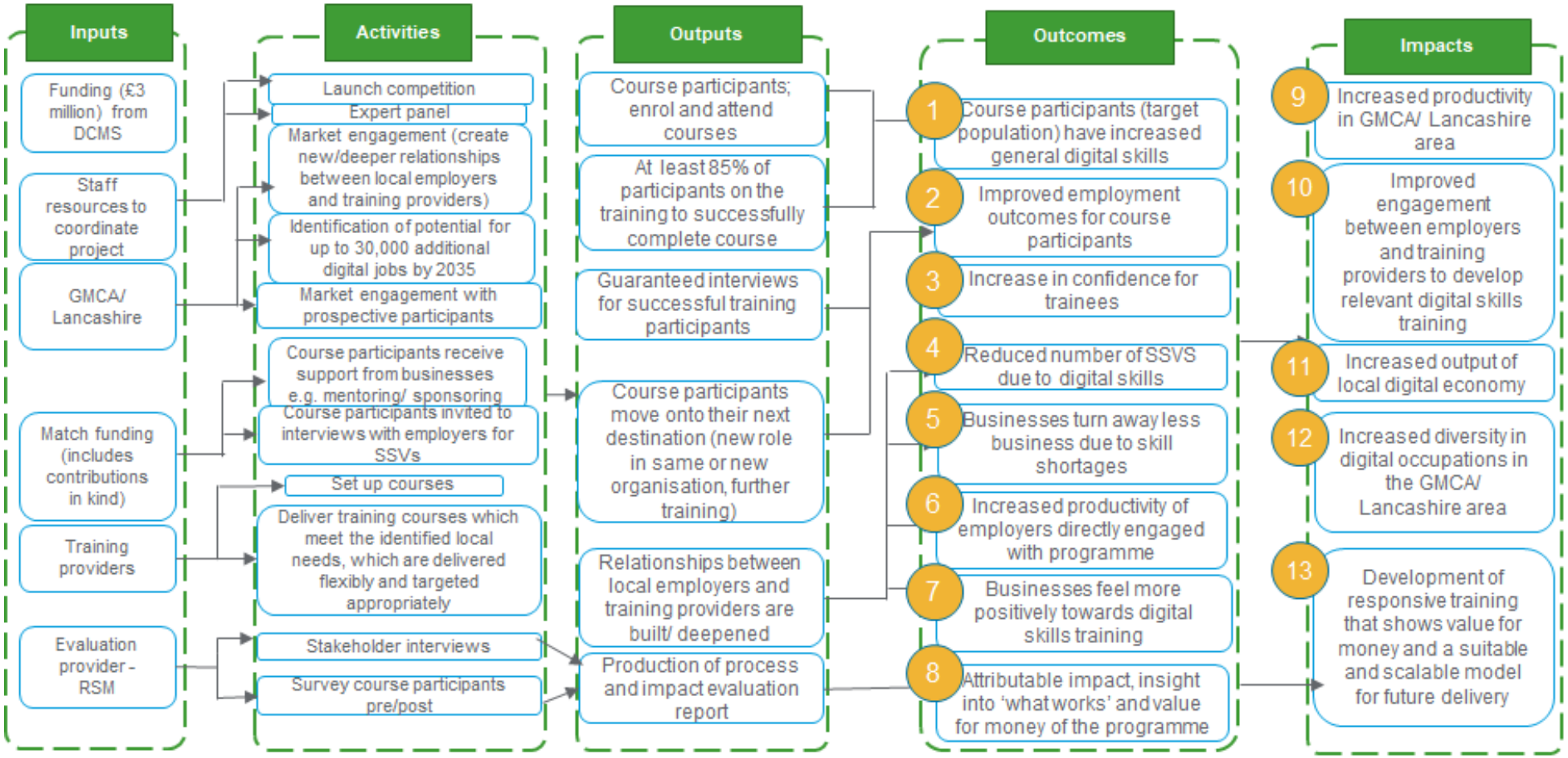
Following HM Treasury guidance on policy evaluation[51], a logic model was prepared which sets out the various pathways by which the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund could be expected to benefit the Lancashire and GM areas.

The logic model on the following page shows how the inputs and activities are expected to deliver outputs which in turn, are expected to lead to the projected outcomes and impacts.

The outcomes and impacts are based on findings from the desk research, the references to which are in the yellow circles and can be found in annex C.

[49] NI Assured Skills programme evaluation.
[50] DfE (2017) Employer Skills Survey 2017 [Available online] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2017-uk-report [Accessed 29/07/2021].
[51] HM Treasury (2020) Magenta Book for Policy Evaluation [Available online]: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879438/HMT_Magenta_Book.pdf [Accessed 29/07/2021].

Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund Logic Model



4.4 Delivery of the Fund

This section sets out how the Fund was delivered. It also described the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved.

4.4.1 Timelines

Two rounds of funding were awarded following the internal development of the Fund. This report covers both rounds.

The Fund started in July 2019 and, at the outset, was estimated to be completed by August 2020. However, its delivery was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the announcement of successful round 2 applicants was also postponed from March 2020 to May 2020.

Table 6 - initial and revised dates of the milestones of the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund

Milestone	Initial dates	Revised Dates
Applications for round 1 opened	July 2019	July 2019
Deadline for round 1 applications	September 2019	September 2019
Successful round 1 applications notified	October 2019	November 2019
Applications for round 2 opened	October 2019	December 2019
Deadline for round 2 applications	December 2019	31 January 2020
Round 1 projects mobilised	September 2019 – December 2019	November 2019 – February 2020
Successful round 2 applications notified	March 2020	May 2020
Round 2 projects mobilised	March 2020 – May 2020	May 2020 – July 2020

4.4.2 Key partners

The key partners involved in the Fund are;

- DCMS;
- GMCA;
- LDSP;
- Local employers; and
- Training providers.

4.4.3 Roles and responsibilities of key partners

The roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the Fund are as follows:

- **DCMS** - developed the initial policy outline and ambitions of the Fund. DCMS supported GMCA and LDSP in the delivery of the Fund. DCMS was on the assessment panel and assist GMCA and LDSP to mark bids and make decisions on which projects get funded;
- **GMCA** - have overall financial accountability of the Fund. They are responsible for administering the Fund and ensuring that the funded projects meet their contractual

requirements in the grant agreements. GMCA lead the assessment panel and process of assessing applications. They involve local partners in this process; and
- **LDSP** - provide strategic oversight of the fund alongside GMCA. They are leading on stakeholder engagement in the wider Lancashire area. LDSP work alongside GMCA in the management of the Fund and are represented on an expert decision-making panel to decide on the grant recipients.

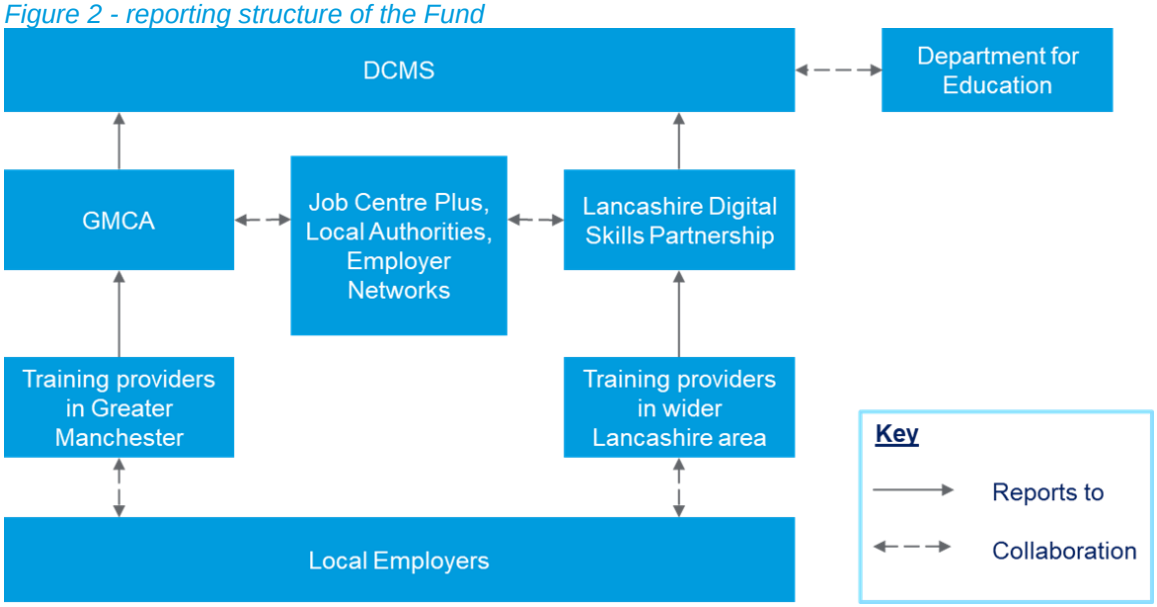
Other partners of this Fund include:

- **Jobcentre Plus** – have worked alongside LDSP and GMCA to recruit trainees onto the Fund. When each of the training courses start, they promote them to customers in the job centre as well as assisting with making decisions on the most suitable employers for the courses;
- **Local Authorities** - There are 15 local authorities in Lancashire consisting of 12 District or tier 2 authorities, two unitary authorities, and one tier 1 authority (Lancashire County Council). These local authorities have made important contributions to the success of the Fund to date by promoting opportunities to residents via social media and advertisements in local newspapers. This has helped to encourage local residents to take part in the courses;
- **employer networks** – have assisted GMCA and LDSP by bringing together employers by organising events to promote the Fund as a way of filling skills shortages; and
- **training providers** – design and delivery of digital skills training courses.

4.4.4 Reporting structure and accountability

Figure 2 shows the reporting structure for the Fund.

Figure 2 - reporting structure of the Fund



DCMS, GMCA and LDSP, worked together on policy ambitions and were keen to ensure that employers were contributing with match funding. LDSP joined DCMS and GMCA following early conversations between DCMS and GMCA. All three partners were closely involved with the design of the Fund and its processes.

DCMS met with GMCA and LDSP, regarding progress, risks, delays etc. GMCA report to DCMS monthly and oversaw the Fund. GMCA and LDSP prepared a monthly

progress report which contained information on the numbers of trainees per project, and the number of trainees that recruited into digital roles. They also provided feedback on what they were learning from their training models and how issues were resolved.

4.4.5 Funding

HM Treasury approved the allocation of £3m at the Autumn 2018 budget for the Fast Track Digital Skills Workforce Fund. The breakdown of funding is shown below:

Table 7 - breakdown of funding received from DCMS

Allocation of funding	FY 2019-20
Course funding (Fund allocation for skills provision)	£2,730,000
Grant administration	£200,000
Independent evaluation of Fund	£70,000

Source: business case for Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund

4.4.6 Application process

Round 1 application process and feedback

The application process began with an engagement event each in GM and in Lancashire for training providers and employers. These events were used to make providers and employers aware of the Fund and to encourage them to apply.

GMCA and LDSP received constructive feedback on applicants' experiences with applying in round 1. This was used to improve the application process of round 2. Several unsuccessful round 1 applicants felt that the application process was complicated and that additional guidance was needed when completing their applications. LDSP and GMCA also interviewed round 1 consortia to learn about their experiences of the application process.

It was found that successful bids had the following characteristics:

- identified specific job vacancies that the Fund focused on, with guaranteed interviews;
- clearly defined target groups and adapted recruitment and delivery model to remove barriers to participation;
- proposed wrap around care that supported participants at all stages from recruitment to employment;
- proposed something entirely new or using the Fund to make significant changes to existing boot camps;
- established partnerships (many of which were new) with clear roles and responsibilities; and
- engaged with drop-in sessions and asked questions.

Round 2 application process

Following feedback from round 1 applicants and DCMS's own lessons learned from undertaking the assessment process, DCMS, GMCA and LDSP made amendments for the second round of applications.

These amendments included:

- increasing the upper limit of funding from £180,000 to £250,000 to support place-based bids that bring together multiple areas in a region under one grant;
- updating the application form to lead the applicants through what the assessment panel wanted to see and have the structure of questions set out the ideal thought process for designing the training;
- re-designing the application form leaving less scope for free text and asking more questions with shorter word counts;
- removing the stage of the process where bids were eliminated before applications were read. This allowed new consortia with no experience of working together to be fully assessed, whereas such consortia were eliminated in round 1;
- due diligence checks were conducted at the end of the process whereas in round 1 these checks took place at the start of the process;
- facilitating additional support sessions in January 2019 and December 2020 from GMCA and LDSP to ensure that applicants had all the information they needed to adapt bids and talk with their partners;
- decreasing the overall word count to reduce onus on consortia;
- simplifying the wording around the objectives;
- emphasising that bids did not have to focus on Manchester, and that it was preferable to have a better spread across Lancashire and GM's wider geography;
- emphasising that bids should describe how their training will be flexible and providing more clarity on what DCMS meant in terms of flexibility;
- changing criteria on course length: instead of specific length requirements, guidance was provided;
- emphasising that applicants must specify details on pledges from employers around vacancies and make it clear what role potential applicants would fill;
- changing the requirement around who forms part of a consortia so that it’s not a requirement for a training provider to be involved. This meant that potentially a group of employers with training experience could work together to put in a bid;
- making it clear within the application forms that the bid must specify how the projects would offer value for money;
- emphasising that applications should state why the proposed training course is different from existing provision, rather than asking specifically for innovations as applicants interpreted innovations in very different ways;
- encouraging round 1 bidders to apply again if they could demonstrate a new element to their bid; and
- making it clear that no more than 5% of the funds were to be used for travel and subsistence expenditure for training providers.

The application window for round 2 applications was extended to allow time for the changes to be communicated to prospective applicants and for them to seek advice on their applications from GMCA and LDSP. It also considered the Christmas period. The application window originally opened in October 2019 and closed in December 2019. The revised dates were December 2019 to January 2020.

One of the aims of the Fund was to increase engagement between training providers and employers. A progress report produced by GMCA for March 2020 stated there were over 100 local employers who expressed an interest in being involved with the Fund, either by co-design and co-delivery of the training or by offering interviews to successful trainees. GMCA and LDSP used engagement sessions and networking events to make

local employers aware of the Fund and how it could help to resolve digital skills shortages in the local area. Employers from the digital sector were invited to these events, and it was not restricted to employers with known SSVs. The increased quality in the bids received in round 2 demonstrated that this was effective. GMCA reported that employers have been engaging more with training providers throughout Fund delivery, especially throughout the round 2 application process.

4.4.7 Application criteria

The selection criteria for the training courses were that they must:

- be aligned to the GM Local Industrial Strategy and Lancashire priorities;
- include detail on how trainees from a diverse range of backgrounds would be recruited;
- support and encourage consortia building to devise and deliver digital skills training;
- be focused on specialist or high-level digital skills;
- involve at least one employer and one training provider in each partnership, although the requirement to have a training provider was removed for round 2; and
- involve collaboration between local partners.

Training courses were expected to run for 10 to 24 weeks. Employers who have specialist digital vacancies and were willing to guarantee interviews to participants that satisfactorily complete courses were encouraged to get involved. Employers were also expected to contribute match funding either in cash funding and/or in kind (such as use of premises/equipment). Furthermore, employers were to be involved in the co-design and co-delivery of training.

The success rate of applications increased from 30% in round 1 to 61% in round 2.This demonstrates that the increased engagement for round 2 applicants achieved its aim of achieving a higher success rate among applications. It should be noted that funding available was not sufficient to make awards to all applicants who met eligibility criteria.

All six of the successful round 1 applications were based in Manchester. Round 2 providers were spread across Manchester and Lancashire.

Table 8 - location of training providers who applied for Fund

Geography	No of appl. received round 1	No of awards round 1	Round 1 approval rate	No of appl. received round 2	No of awards round 2	Round 2 approval rate
GM	17	6	35%	15	8	53%
Lancashire	3	0	0%	11	8	73%
Total	20	6	30%	23*	14**	61%

Source: round 1 and 2 application forms.
** Three applications are in both GM and Lancashire*
*** Two successful applications are in both GM and Lancashire*

In round 1 there were few applications received from training providers based in Lancashire and none of these were successful. Interviewees from LDSP and DCMS felt this may have been because LDSP were brought into the Fund at a later stage than GMCA. Therefore, these providers did not have as much time to communicate about the Fund with employers from Lancashire, outside of the GM area. In round 2, with increased resourcing and engagement, there were significantly more applications covering Lancashire and the majority of these were successful.

4.4.8 Profile of training provider applications

There was demand for training in digital skills to be aimed at beginners and career changers in the Lancashire/Greater Manchester area as this would encourage people with an interest in the digital sector, but little experience, to apply. Once people have acquired a foundation in specific digital skills, they can potentially advance these digital skills in future – hence almost half of awards were made to providers who did not require previous qualifications. While some skills areas are more prevalent in both applications and awards (e.g. software or web development or digital marketing), there are nonetheless varied other areas, including AI and cloud engineering, reflecting the variety of digital skills gaps regionally. In addition to these technical skills, training providers also sought to include 'softer' (non-digital) skills, such as CV development and interview skills.

Table 9 shows the different groups which providers targeted. Providers were able to target multiple different groups.

Table 9 - target groups of applications from providers

Target group	No of applications received	No of awards at round 1	No of awards at round 2	Approval rate
Long term Unemployed People	8	1	1	25%
Underemployed graduates	13	1	7	67%
Returning to tech sector	12	1	5	50%
Disadvantaged young people	4	1	1	50%
Women	17	1	8	53%
Ethnic minority	16	1	5	38%
Over 50s	2	0	2	100%
Workers with disabilities	4	0	1	33%
Ex-armed forces	2	0	2	100%

Source: monitoring Information provided by GMCA and application forms[52].

Table 10 shows the different skills areas which providers covered with their training.

Table 10 - skill areas

Skill area	No of applications received*	No of awards	Approval rate
Software/web development	13	6	46%
Cloud engineering	1	1	100%
Coding	8	4	50%
DevOps	3	2	67%
Linux engineering	3	3	100%
Digital marketing	10	2	20%
Social media	7	2	29%

[52] Most providers targeted a diverse group of beneficiaries; some, like Tech Manchester, with overlapping groups. In round 2, the applications showed more diversity in terms of target groups.

Skill area	No of applications received*	No of awards	Approval rate
CRM and digital design	7	2	29%
Production skills	5	2	40%
Artificial intelligence, robotics, automation	4	2	50%
Cybersecurity	8	4	50%
Analytical skills and application development	8	1	13%

Source: monitoring Information provided by GMCA and applications
** Applications and awards can target multiple skills areas.*

Across the successful courses, the following accredited skills-related certificates were offered:

Table 11 – qualifications offered by training courses

Red Hat & LPIC Essentials;	Amazon Web Services (AWS) web practitioner;
Linux+ and Cloud Essentials;	CompTIA Security +, CompTIA CySA+ (cybersecurity analyst);
CompTIA IT Fundamentals;	Tech Lancaster Level 1 certificate and either IPC J-STD, 610, 7711/22 or CID;
CompTIA A+ 7 Network+;	Python PCEP Python PCAP Microsoft Azure Fundamentals Professional Scrum Master I.

Of the providers, there were 12 that did not offer specific qualifications. Instead, they either provided a certificate of completion or did not provide any qualification.

4.4.9 Recruitment of trainees

Overall, 73%, or 633, trainees have completed the training as of writing this report (October 2021). Due to ongoing reporting by two providers and ongoing delivery by one provider, the number of trainees who completed the course is not final. More detail can be found in section 5. Table 12 provides a breakdown per round. Tables 13 and 14 provide a breakdown by gender (all trainees vs. those who completed the training).

Table 12 – recruitment of trainees and completion rates

Round	Trainees recruited	Trainee completed	Completion rate
1	239	205	86%
2	626	428	68%
Total	865	633	73%

Gender diversity

Table 13 - gender diversity of all trainees (overall, N=865)

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	540	62%
Female	311	36%
Non-binary	9	1%
Choose not to identify	5	1%

Source: Monitoring Information provided by GMCA

Table 14 - gender diversity of all trainees (completed, N=633)

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	397	63%
Female	227	36%
Non-binary	6	1%
Choose not to identify	3	0.5%

Source: Monitoring Information provided by GMCA

The tables above show that the Fund successfully targeted women. The proportion of women trainees was higher in round 1 (53%) than in round 2 (31%). In contrast, in 2019, 25.5% of digital jobs were held by women.[53]

Courses such as those run by Tech Manchester in both rounds were exclusively aimed at women: these two courses trained 33 women and two non-binary persons, which represents 11% of the overall female trainees. They advertised in the local area and arranged an open day so that women interested in taking part in the course could find out more and apply.

In round 2 and overall, women were not in the majority of trainees. This may be due to the broader range of target audiences in round 2. They included a significant amount of training aimed at recent graduates, ethnic minority communities, and people returning to the tech sector.

Ethnic diversity

Table 15 shows that training providers have been successful in recruiting trainees from a wide range of ethnicities across the Fund. It should be noted that in round 2, providers shifted focus to target recent graduates and career changers. This resulted in a much stronger representation of English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and Irish trainees when compared to round 1.

[53] Tech Nation (2021) Diversity and Inclusion in UK Tech [Available online]: https://technation.io/diversity-and-inclusion-in-uk-tech/#executive-summary [Accessed 18th October 2021].

Table 15 – ethnicity of trainees

Ethnicity	Number of trainees overall (%)	Number of trainees completed overall (completed) (%)
African	35 (4%)	26 (4%)
Any other Asian background	37 (4%)	27 (4%)
Any other Black background	9 (1%)	5 (1%)
Any other ethnic background	10 (1%)	7 (1%)
Any other mixed background	29 (3%)	22 (3%)
Any other White background	45 (5%)	36 (6%)
Arab	8 (1%)	7 (1%)
Asian and White	16 (2%)	15 (2%)
Bangladeshi	7 (1%)	6 (1%)
Black and White African	25 (3%)	19 (3%)
Black and White Caribbean	16 (2%)	9 (1%)
Black British African*	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)
Black Caribbean*	1 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)
Caribbean	12 (1%)	12 (2%)
Chinese	9 (1%)	7 (1%)
Eastern European*	8 (1%)	6 (1%)
English, Scottish, Welsh, N Irish, Irish	515 (60%)	358 (57%)
Indian	26 (3%)	26 (4%)
Pakistani	43 (5%)	35 (6%)
Prefer not to say	13 (2%)	8 (1%)
Total	865	633

*Source: monitoring information provided by GMCA *Not recorded in round 1*

Age

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the proportions of trainees in each age group.

Table 16 - age profile of trainees overall

Age	Number of trainees	Number of trainees (completed)
18-24	288 (33%)	224 (35%)
25-34	305 (35%)	229 (36%)
35-44	169 (20%)	109 (17%)
45-54	70 (8%)	49 (8%)
55-64	24 (3%)	16 (3%)
65+	1 (0.1%)	0 (0%)
Age not disclosed	8 (1%)	6 (1%)
Total	865	633

Source: Monitoring Information provided by GMCA

In round 2, the age profile was younger, including a larger proportion of 18-24 year olds. Round 2 providers had a stronger focus on recent graduates and career changers which may explain the changed age breakdown for round 2 trainees compared to round 1.

The age profile of trainees who completed the training is marginally younger than that of trainees overall.

Target group

Table 17 below provides a breakdown of the number of trainees from each target group. It should be noted that in round 2, providers recruited more recent graduates and career changers than in round 1. This contributes to the gender, ethnic background and age breakdowns discussed above.

Table 17 - number of trainees in each target group

Target group	Number of trainees overall	Number of trainees overall (completed)
Women	114 (13%)	75 (12%)
Career changers	233 (27%)	147 (23%)
Returners to tech industry	13 (1%)	11 (2%)
Person with health condition	18 (2%)	13 (2%)
Returners to work	14 (2%)	8 (1%)
Ethnic minority	92 (11%)	81 (13%)
Person with disability	14 (2%)	13 (2%)
Socio-economically disadvantaged	27 (3%)	18 (3%)
Recently out of job market	70 (82%)	57 (9%)
Person over 50	17 (2%)	12 (2%)
Graduate not utilising their degree	144 (17%)	117 (18%)
Other	109 (12%)	81 (13%)
Total	865	633

Source: monitoring information provided by GMCA.
Note: only one target group classification could be selected per trainee. Therefore, the number of trainees who fall into the 'women' target group is lower than the number of women who participated in the training.

Overall, the increased number of successful training providers in round 2 led to an increase in the number of trainees. These trainees were less diverse than in round 1 as round 2 providers focused more on targeting and reaching recent graduates and career changers. Nonetheless, trainees were from diverse target groups and a broad range of ages. This was the case in part because the graduates targeted by at least one provider in round 2 were very diverse with high numbers of female trainees. A notable success of round 2 was to widen coverage of training into Lancashire.

Across rounds 1 and 2, 35% of trainees were women. Out of all trainees who completed the training, almost the same proportion (36%) were women. This compares positively to the 25.5% of digital jobs which were held by women across the UK, and 25% in the North West in 2019. Similarly, while 41.7% of digital jobs across the UK and 39.4% in the North West were held by people under 35 in 2019, 68% of the Fund's trainees and 71% of the trainees who completed the training were under the age of 35. Finally, 15.2% of digital jobs across the UK and 9.5% in the North West were occupied by people from

BAME backgrounds in 2019. 25% of the Fund's trainees and 27% of trainees who completed the training were from a non-White ethnic background[54].

[54] Tech Nation (2021) Diversity and Inclusion in UK Tech [Available online] https://technation.io/diversity-and-inclusion-in-uk-tech/#executive-summary [Accessed 18th October 2021].

5. Performance

This section outlines quantitative descriptive statistics based on monitoring data. These statistics include numbers of trainees who started and completed their courses; cost per trainee; and cost per completed trainee.

Section 6 discusses qualitative insights based on interviews and surveys.

SUMMARY

- Number of **completions varied** between courses. Some outliers experienced high drop-out rates for very specific reasons. Generally, other commitments such as childcare or family care or illness were reasons for drop-out.
- **All providers had employers who contributed match funding** either in kind or in cash.
- **The actual number of completions by trainees and number of candidates who found employment in a digital job is lower than projected**. One course (Stockport Council) has not completed, and two courses have not provided their final reports (Milliamp and Open University). Therefore, the number of trainees who completed the courses will only be available after November 2021, when Stockport Council's course finishes.

5.1 Performance against targets

5.1.1 Number of participants completing the course

Table 18 shows the target number of trainees, actuals and the completion rate.

Table 18 – target/actual number of trainees and the number that completed their training course

Training provider	Target number of trainees[55]	Actual number of trainees	Target number of trainees that complete the training	Number of trainees that completed the training (completion rate[56])
SharpFutures (round 1)	20	20	20	20 (100%)
SharpFutures (round 2)	20	20	20	20 (100%)
West Lancashire College	20	7	20	7 (100%)
CompTIA	30	30	27	29 (97%)
Radio Reform	30	32	30	31 (97%)
Generation	75	81	69	78 (96%)
IN4.0	70	70	70	66 (94%)
Growth Company	20	17	16	16 (94%)

[55] GMCA reported that the target numbers for trainees who start the course, who complete the course, and who gain employment after the course were revised after application stage. The revisions took place in negotiations with the provider and were captured in grant agreements. The target numbers in this report are based on these grant agreements.

[56] Those who completed out of those who actually took part in the training course. The completion figures are based on July 2021 data. These numbers are expected to increase until all courses have finalised their reporting.

Training provider	Target number of trainees[55]	Actual number of trainees	Target number of trainees that complete the training	Number of trainees that completed the training (completion rate[56])
University of Salford	30	30	28	28 (93%)
QA Ltd	20	20	20	18 (90%)
Tech Manchester (round 1)	16	18	14	16 (89%)
Tech Returners	48	55	45	49 (89%)
Raytheon	64	67	58	56 (84%)
Themis	58	51	52	39 (76%)
Tech Manchester (round 2)	18	17	18	12 (71%)
Enterprise4All	54	63	48	39 (62%)
We Are Digital	45	45	45	24 (53%)
Milliamp	100	136	66	63 (46%)
Open University	35	35	31	13 (37%)
Stockport Council	50	51	44	9 (18%)
Total	823	865	741	633 (73%)

Source: monitoring information provided by GMCA for actual number of trainees and actual number of trainees who completed the course, and grant agreements for target number of trainees and target number of trainees that complete.

Drop-outs reasons

“Themis” (24%), "Enterprise4All" (38%), and "We Are Digital" (47%) reported high proportions of dropouts from their training courses. Milliamp and Open University have not provided their final reports to GMCA (these are due in October and November 2021 respectively). Stockport Council is due to complete its course in November 2021. Therefore, as of writing in October 2021, the final completion data for Stockport Council is not available. The reasons that candidates provided for dropping out were:

- lack of time/other commitments, e.g. childcare and home schooling, work and looking after sick family members;
- setting course expectations: some participants felt the course was too advanced, whilst others felt that the course material and training were too basic. They felt were already using all the concepts and skills that the course taught in their current jobs;
- logistical issues: the current public health situation changed living arrangements for some trainees, and they did not have a place to 'sit and complete the course properly';
- change of circumstances: some trainees could not, or did not, wish to commit the necessary time as they were freelancers or changed their career aspirations;
- found other employment opportunities; and
- suffered from ill health or mental health issues themselves.

These reasons reflect most drop-outs across the different providers in general. It may suggest that targeting and expectation management could be improved by training

providers or that additional resources to support individual trainees are needed to prevent high drop-out rates.

5.1.2 Costs per trainee

One of the aims of the Fund was to train 900 people across the £2.73 million funding pot, i.e. £3,033 per person trained.[57]

In round 1, costs were as follows.

- The total funding allocated to round 1 was £841,281. Actual drawdown for round 1 was £842,461.
- 239 people were enrolled in a training course and 205 completed the training.
- The cost per trainee (i.e. person enrolled) was £3,520.
- The cost per person trained (i.e. trainees who completed the course) was £4,110.

The actual cost per person trained in round 1 was 4% higher than expected. DCMS anticipated that approximately 15% of trainees would not complete the training courses, meaning that 203 of the 239 trainees who enrolled were expected by DCMS to complete the course.

In round 2, costs were as follows[58].

- The total amount of funding allocated to round 2 was £1,86m (£1,63m excluding Stockport Council). The amount drawn down by round 2 training providers is £1,55m.
- 626 people were enrolled in round 2 training courses.
- The drawdown amount for round 2 is not final as of writing this report. Therefore, the following costs per trainee are not final.
- If all funding is drawn down as allocated by round 2 providers, the cost per trainee (i.e. person enrolled) will be £2,966.
- 428 (419 excluding Stockport Council) of the trainees have completed their course, which equates to an actual cost of £3,626 (£3,704 excluding Stockport Council) per completion.

The actual cost per person trained in round 2 is currently 5% higher than initially planned (10% higher excluding Stockport Council). DCMS anticipated that approximately 15% of trainees would not complete the training courses, meaning that 532 of the 626 trainees who enrolled were expected by DCMS to complete the course.

Overall, the **current cost per trainee who completed the course is £3,783** (£3,837 excluding Stockport Council). As noted, final comparisons of actual total costs per trainee are not possible as of writing as Stockport Council has not completed its training course.

5.1.3 Provision of match funding

All successful applicants confirmed match-funding for their training courses. Table 19 shows the amount and proportion of match-funding from employers for each provider.

[57] £270,000 out of the full £3m Fund are allocated to Grant Administration and the evaluation.
[58] As of writing, Stockport Council has not completed its training course. The course is due to complete in November 2021. Therefore, we have provided numbers and values for all round 2 providers with numbers and values for all round 2 providers excluding Stockport Council in brackets.

Table 19 - proportion of total funding that is match-funding

Training provider	Total funding	Match-funding[59] (both in kind and cash)	Percentage of total funding
Tech Returners	£308,629	£128,661	42%
Tech Manchester (round 1)	£121,600	£53,355	44%
We Are Digital	£186,351	£37,100	20%
Generation	£395,598	£216,850	55%
QA Ltd	£394,045	£223,595	57%
CompTIA	£218,518	£81,464	37%
Enterprise4All	£302,988	£82,542	27%
IN4.0	£777,005	£575,480	74%
Milliamp	£249,000	£63,500	26%
Raytheon	£568,174	£318,362	56%
Radio Reform	£187,228	£81,388	43%
University of Salford	£145,272	£76,272	53%
SharpFutures (round 1)	£123,000	£27,000	22%
SharpFutures (round 2)	£87,062	£30,608	35%
Tech Manchester (round 2)	£144,099	£73,552	51%
Themis	£270,760	£131,878	49%
Growth Company	£77,079	£24,972	32%
Open University	£167,707	£78,300	47%
Stockport Council	£289,450	£64,000	22%
West Lancashire College	£108,125	£53,125	49%

Source: grant agreements, drawdown data

5.2 Project value

Training courses were delivered by a combination of private and public training providers in partnership with employers. The Fund did not provide cost per trainee targets as the courses were of different lengths of time and had different content and delivery modes. They were therefore not directly comparable. The differences in content and delivery mode help explain the differences in costs per trainee between training courses.

5.2.1 Projected targets and actuals by provider

The following tables show the projected targets for trainee completions (table 20) and number to find work in a digital role after completion (table 21). They also show actual completions and numbers who were in work following the training, along with the amount of funding awarded by GMCA. Note amber background shows higher cost/lower number of trainees than expected. Blue background shows lower cost/higher number of

[59] Match funding in kind could be, for example, staff time to design or deliver masterclasses, or to provide materials and facilities. Examples of how successful applicants calculated match funding in-kind include: specifying the cost per hour of staff time or the cost per day of providing facilities, and estimating the hourly cost of providing a trainee with technical mentoring support. Most employers provided match funding in kind, rather than in cash. In round 2, only four of the 14 training providers received match funding from employers in cash. These four providers had employer partners who provided a mix of in kind and in cash match funding.

trainees than expected. Stockport Council has not drawn down funding, therefore actual costs per trainee are not provided. Themis and Growth Company have not reported trainees gaining a digital job three months after the training course. Hence, the cost per trainee who moved into a digital job is given as N/A.

Table 20 - expected and actual cost per trainee who completed the training

Training provider	Funding awarded by GMCA	Funding drawn down from GMCA	Number of trainees projected to complete	Number of trainees that completed the training	Expected cost per completed trainee	Actual cost per completed trainee
Raytheon	£249,812	£249,812	58	56	£4,307	£4,461
Stockport Council[60]	£225,450	£0	44	9	£5,124	N/A
Enterprise4All	£220,446	£220,446	48	39	£4,593	£5,652
IN4.0	£201,525	£201,525	70	66	£2,879	£3,053
Milliamp	£185,500	£185,500	66	63	£2,811	£2,944
Tech Returners	£179,966	£179,967	45	49	£3,999	£3,673
Generation	£178,750	£178,749	69	78	£2,591	£2,292
QA	£170,450	£170,450	20	18	£8,523	£9,469
We Are Digital	£149,250	£149,250	45	24	£3,317	£6,219
Themis	£138,382	£138,382	52	39	£2,661	£3,548
CompTIA	£137,054	£137,054	27	29	£5,076	£4,726
Radio Reform	£105,840	£105,840	30	31	£3,528	£3,414
Sharp Futures (round 1)	£96,000	£96,000	20	20	£4,800	£4,800
Open University	£89,407	£69,604	31	13	£2,884	£5,354
Tech Manchester (round 2)	£70,547	£70,547	18	12	£3,919	£5,879

[60] Stockport Council has not drawn down any funding. The course offered by Stockport Council is due to complete in November 2021.

Training provider	Funding awarded by GMCA	Funding drawn down from GMCA	Number of trainees projected to complete	Number of trainees that completed the training	Expected cost per completed trainee	Actual cost per completed trainee
University of Salford	£69,000	£46,000	28	28	£2,464	£1,643
Tech Manchester (round 1)	£68,045	£68,045	14	16	£4,860	£4,253
Sharp Futures (round 2)	£56,454	£56,451	20	20	£2,823	£2,823
West Lancashire College	£55,000	£50,000	20	7	£2,750	£7,143
Growth Company	£52,107	£20,842	16	16	£3,257	£1,303
Total	£2,698,985	£2,394,464	741	633	£3,642	£3,783

Source: application forms from training providers, drawdown data from GMCA, monitoring data from GMCA.

Table 21 – expected and actual cost per trainee who moved into the digital workforce

Training provider	Funding awarded by GMCA	Funding drawn down from GMCA	Expected number of trainees projected to work in a digital job after completion of training	Actual number of trainees working in a digital job 3 months after completion of training	Expected cost of training person to move into digital workforce	Actual cost of training person to move into digital workforce
Raytheon	£249,812	£249,812	28	23	£8,921	£10,861
Stockport Council[61]	£225,450	£0	41	16	£5,499	N/A
Enterprise4All	£220,446	£220,446	42	19	£5,248	£11,602
IN4.0	£201,525	£201,525	52	38	£3,875	£5,303

[61] Stockport Council has not drawn down any funding. The course offered by Stockport Council is due to complete in November 2021.

Training provider	Funding awarded by GMCA	Funding drawn down from GMCA	Expected number of trainees projected to work in a digital job after completion of training	Actual number of trainees working in a digital job 3 months after completion of training	Expected cost of training person to move into digital workforce	Actual cost of training person to move into digital workforce
Milliamp	£185,500	£185,500	66	18	£2,810	£10,305
Tech Returners	£179,966	£179,967	41	24	£4,389	£7,498
Generation	£178,750	£178,749	60	37	£2,979	£4,831
QA	£170,450	£170,450	18	5	£9,469	£34,090
We Are Digital	£149,250	£149,250	36	9	£4,145	£16,583
Themis	£138,382	£138,382	52	0	£2,661	N/A
CompTIA	£137,054	£137,054	22	20	£6,229	£6,852
Radio Reform	£105,840	£105,840	30	20	£3,528	£5,292
Sharp Futures (round 1)	£96,000	£96,000	20	7	£4,800	£13,714
Open University	£89,407	£69,604	29	2	£3,083	£34,802
Tech Manchester (round 2)	£70,547	£70,547	14	7	£5,039	£10,078
University of Salford	£69,000	£46,000	5	8	£13,800	£5,750
Tech Manchester (round 1)	£68,045	£68,045	16	6	£4,253	£11,340
Sharp Futures (round 2)	£56,454	£56,451	20	9	£2,822	£6,272
West Lancashire College	£55,000	£50,000	20	5	£2,750	£10,000

Training provider	Funding awarded by GMCA	Funding drawn down from GMCA	Expected number of trainees projected to work in a digital job after completion of training	Actual number of trainees working in a digital job 3 months after completion of training	Expected cost of training person to move into digital workforce	Actual cost of training person to move into digital workforce
Growth Company[62]	£52,107	£20,842	0	0	N/A	N/A
Total	£2,698,985	£2,394,464	612	273	£4,410	£8,770

Source: application forms from training providers, drawdown data from GMCA, monitoring data from GMCA.

[62] GMCA explained that Growth Company focussed on upskilling trainees and therefore did not have a target number of trainees gaining a digital job within three months of finishing the course. Instead, the training intended only to enable trainees to gain higher skilled employment after course completion. Based on data received from GMCA, 12 of Growth Company's trainees gained higher skilled employment following course completion.

5.2.2 Reasons for variances

There are significant variations in the number of trainees working in a digital job three months after completing their training and therefore a much higher cost per trainee. Covid-19 has negatively affected the ability of employers to hire new staff as the economic downturn has changed their business needs. Therefore, across all training providers with the exception of the University of Salford, the number of trainees who gained a digital job three months after training is lower than expected.

Nine of the 20 training courses exceeded or met the expected number of trainees who completed their course. They also had lower than anticipated costs per trainee who completed the training.

6. Findings

This section provides a summary of interviews and surveys with key stakeholders. It presents their feedback on:

- course development;
- the application process;
- Fund governance;
- the success of the Fund to date, and
- what has worked well.

The following interviews and surveys fed into this section:

- interviews with training providers (19), unsuccessful training provider applicants (5), employers (20) and stakeholders in DCMS, GMCA, LDSP, Job Centres and DfE (10);
- surveys with training providers (19) and trainees (235 for the initial survey and 106 for the follow-up survey); and
- eight online focus groups.

The key outcomes of the Fund were as follows. This section refers to outcomes in their short form to help the reader understand evidence against each outcome. Such references are included in **bold purple**.

Table 22 – outcome references

#	Outcome/impact	Outcome short form (for reference as used in this section)
1	Course participant have improved digital skills	**Trainee digital skills**
2	At least 85% of trainees to complete training	**Course completion**
3	Increase in confidence for trainees	**Trainee confidence**
4	Reduce number of SSVs due to digital skills	**SSVs reduction**
5	Businesses turn away less business due to skills shortage	**Employers turning away business**
6	Increased productivity of employers directly engaged with Fund	**Employer productivity**
7	Businesses feel more positively towards digital skills training	**Employer views of training**
8	Attributable impact, insight into 'what works' and value for money of the Fund	**Attributable impacts**
9	Increased productivity in GMCA/Lancashire area	**Regional productivity**
10	Improved engagement between training providers and employers to develop relevant digital skills training	**Training provider-employer engagement**
11	Increased output of local digital economy	**Regional economic output**

#	Outcome/impact	Outcome short form (for reference as used in this section)
12	Increased diversity of those in digital occupations in the GMCA/Lancashire area	**Diversity**
13	Development of responsive training that shows value for money and a suitable model for future delivery	**Sustainable training and VfM**

6.1 Vision for the Fund

It was envisioned that the Fund would bring businesses and training providers together to create innovative, responsive short courses. These courses were intended to fill SSVs gaps for employers, develop the current and future digital workforce and improve the diversity of the digital workforce in Manchester and Lancashire.

- **DCMS** wanted to test a new, responsive way to deliver digital skills training that would help to fill SSVs caused by a lack of digital skills. They also aimed to improve productivity and encourage more investment from employers in training.
- **GMCA and LDSP** wanted to increase employer/training provider collaboration to improve the digital skills of the workforce and that this would consider local needs through local delivery.
- **DCMS, GMCA and LDSP** wanted to build a digital workforce that supports the needs of employers in the GM and Lancashire areas.

The vision and overall ambition remained unchanged from the inception to the end of the fund.

6.2 Partnership approach with employers

SUMMARY

- Existing working relationships between training providers and employer partners **improved because of the Fund**.
- **Nearly 60% of providers** established **new relationships with local employers due to the Fund**.
- Training providers who were not successful with their application reported they found it **difficult to engage with employers** and that they did not receive enough support to do so.

Relevant outcomes: employer views of training; training provider-employer engagement; sustainable training and VfM.

Employer involvement

Levels of employer interest in the fund varied between Lancashire and Manchester. LDSP felt that there could have been more employer engagement from the start of the Fund. A number of projects noted that they did not have employer partners in place as they thought it would be easy to secure interviews and placements. GMCA felt that employer interest was sufficient and that overall, there is a rich local system with various facilitating organisations. Both GMCA and LDSP reported sufficient training providers to deliver the Fund.

GMCA have advised that three out of the five training providers who were successful in round 1 demonstrated in their applications that they communicated with employers and made them aware of how their training courses could help them fill their digital skills gaps. The communication between employers and training providers was more frequently demonstrated in round 2 applications, providing evidence of increasing involvement with employers in the design of the training courses. This was done to ensure employers and training providers who were interested in a particular skill could be identified and encouraged to work together to design a course. It was also key to ensuring that courses met employer needs.

GMCA and LDSP reported that, prior to the launch of rounds 1 and 2, local employers and training providers were emailed and invited to attend market engagement events. At these events, the Fund could be advertised, and applications encouraged. In round 2, consortium bids were encouraged. Consortium rules were further clarified.

What employers contributed

All training providers across both rounds worked with employers to develop the training, with some variation across the training providers in terms of depth of involvement. A majority of employers supported training providers by providing feedback which helped to align the training courses with business requirements. Additionally, approximately 55% of the employees were involved in co-developing content and delivering parts of the training in the form of masterclasses, workshops, and CV sessions. Employer partners mainly provided the following types of support:

Table 23 – types of employer support

Forms of employer support
Feedback on Curriculum
Master classes
Industry talks
Mentoring sessions
Industry projects
CV preparation
Practice interviews
Full-time employment opportunities
Work placements

Trainees and providers reported that the support provided by the employer partners made a tangible difference on the course. It provided candidates with a path into employment, helped them understand the industry, and validated that the course was fulfilling employer needs.

Working relationships between employers and training providers

The majority of training providers found that there was a moderate or very close partnership in terms of co-design and co-delivery from employers. The 19 training providers were asked to rate the extent of employer co-design and co-delivery on a scoring system of 1-5, where 1 = no partnership and 5 = total partnership. Training providers also provided more detail about their rating, which is summarised overleaf along with the median score and score distribution (presents how many training providers responded with a particular score):

Table 24 – extent of employer partnership

Theme	Median score	Score distribution	Positive feedback	Negative feedback
Co-design	4	Score of 1: 0 Score of 2: 1 Score of 3: 6 Score of 4: 9 Score of 5: 3	• Employer made suggestions and adjustments to the course on content and trainee selection process (although one provider would have preferred more input from employers). • Constant in-depth discussions with employers on professional certifications and soft skills they are expecting. • One respondent said that all their participants were from employers so co-design was key.	• Employer took on a reviewer role and helped to coordinate design of the workshops. • Employer had reduced capacity to contribute to training design due to Covid-19 affecting their business.
Co-delivery	3	Score of 1: 0 Score of 2: 4 Score of 3: 6 Score of 4: 8 Score of 5: 1	• Approx. half of the respondents stated employers provided placements, mentoring, and masterclasses. • The other half had employer partners who delivered parts of the training	• Employers supported in terms of masterclasses, guest speakers, and workshops however some had difficulties committing later on due to external circumstances. • One provider stated that larger employers were able to provide more resources

Half of the training providers felt that the partnership with their employer partners was highly positive. They cited that this was likely due to them already having had an existing working relationship with the employers prior to the fund and having employer partners who shared the same vision. The other training providers found it more difficult to work with the employer partners. Lack of engagement from employer partners was flagged as a key reason (e.g. undefined skill gaps, lack of clarity on available jobs, and embargos on future recruitment). One training provider found it difficult at first due to the employers not fully supporting the diversity aspect of the course. The provider had to strongly encourage employer buy-in and it 'took a while until they spoke the same language'.

Another training provider's employer partner froze recruitment due to Covid-19 restrictions. The training provider had to retract any guaranteed interviews and reach out to other employers in their network to fill the gap.

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively affected employers' ability to recruit trainees. This was confirmed by 17 employers interviewed, who nonetheless still plan on recruiting five to 20 trainees each, when feasible. One training provider reported they are investigating other ways of establishing connections between trainees and employers as support after the end of training courses. Such options include remote shadowing and placements via working from home.

More than half of the employers provided match funding in-kind mainly in terms of time and support through masterclasses, training design and delivery, and practice interviews for trainees. They were generally happy to provide in-kind funding. Employers felt that this requirement was fair and laid out clearly from the beginning and that it helped the course. The one interviewed employer that provided cash funding claimed it was a 'great way for them to tap into a larger pool of possible employees.'

6.2.1 Developing provider – employer relationships

Majority of training providers improved their relationship with employer partners because of the Fast Track Fund, demonstrating progress toward the **Fund's training provider-employer engagement outcome**. The overall responses and their general themes are summarised below. First, these are shown for employers with whom the providers were working with through the training design or delivery, and then with local employers in general:

Table 25 – training provider-employer relationship development

Did the provider develop a better relationship with employers already working with as a result of the Fast Track Fund?

Yes (n=16)	No (n=3)
• Increased understanding of employers and their needs. • Future work in terms of more training and more projects for training providers. • Increased engagement and support.	• Already had an effective working relationship. • Business focus changed during lockdown.

Did the provider develop a better relationship with employers in the wider area as a result of the Fast Track Fund?

Yes (n=12)	No (n=7)
• Raised visibility and increased interest from other employers. • Stronger network: gained new clients and new contacts. • Increased engagement and support.	• Focused on existing relationships. • Lockdown made it challenging to promote the course.

Approximately 74% of the training providers already had an existing working relationship with their employer partners prior to the Fund. As the providers and employer partners worked together before, providers were able to understand employer needs well and the employers trusted them to deliver quality training. Even though most relationships were not new, the Fund was successful in improving these relationships and raising awareness of training among employers involved.

Improving employer-training provider relationships

These relationships have grown because of the Fund, with training providers developing an even deeper understanding of their needs and how they work as well as of the industry, resulting in more communication both ways and evolved relationships. Aspects of the Fund that contributed to this improvement in relationships include through the co-design and co-delivery of courses. Specifically:

- employers fed their needs into training content directly; and
- employers were able to access and communicate with a wider range of trainees and to showcase their own businesses.

> *'They started to see us not just as training providers, but as a partner they can work with.' – Fast Track Digital Fund Training Provider*

Approximately 64% of the employers interviewed confirmed that they already had an effective working relationship with the training provider they partnered with prior to engagement with the Fund.

Employers' awareness of training available

As a result of the Fund, employers acknowledged that they possessed a greater awareness of the opportunities available to them through training providers and equally, training providers are now more aware of employers' needs which has resulted in an improved relationship. A significant majority of employers indicated that they intend to maintain this relationship or would be interested in working with the training providers again. The evidence presented here demonstrates progress against the **Fund's employer views of training outcome**.

Maintaining relationships after the training

More than 60% of the training providers that have established new relationships are confident that these relationships will last as they are seeing demand from these employers to fill their skill gaps. There have already been employers hiring trainees, employers asking for support in recruitment and training, and training providers running similar types of training with them.

Training providers are now able to provide better-matched candidates. Employers trust that the training providers can deliver these candidates. This contributes to the **Fund's sustainable training outcome**.

Focus group insight: Open University found the Fund highly beneficial in terms of developing a new relationship with its employer partner, DXC. Indeed, Open University felt that out of four similar training courses they have offered in the past 15 months, the course funded via the Fast Track Fund was ' the only one to date where we've worked so closely with an employer. It has brought so much in the programme design and co-delivery and real-world contact which is so valuable.'

A significant majority of employers said that they will continue to maintain their relationship with training providers beyond the Fund. One employer has had initial conversations with another training provider who was successful in the Fund. Only one employer thought it unlikely the relationship would last as the relationship with the

provider was based on the employer partner's owner's own relationship with the provider – but ownership of the employer company changed during the pandemic.

In addition to deepening existing relationships with employer partners, nearly 60% of training providers created new relationships with local employers because of the Fund.

6.2.2 Views of unsuccessful applicants on employer relationships

Overall, unsuccessful training provider applicants, five of whom were interviewed, felt that there was too much emphasis placed on the partnership approach between training providers and employers during the application process. Unsuccessful applicants highlighted that they found it **difficult to access employers**, that a lot of work was required to engage employers and **very little support was provided** by GMCA/LDSP which had a negative impact on their experience. Although GMCA/LDSP did suggest employers, unsuccessful applicants reiterated that *'support to network and connect with employers was very low'*.

Unsuccessful applicants said that it would have been *'helpful'* for GMCA/LDSP to provide access to employer networks/partnerships, particularly as a lack of employers' partners were cited in the application feedback for a significant majority of the unsuccessful applicants. Such activities could have improved the achievement of the **Fund's training provider-employer engagement and employer views of training outcomes**.

Going forward, unsuccessful applicants suggested that activities such as **webinars** should be hosted early on to allow for direct communication between training providers and employers. If another round of funding was run, a significant majority of unsuccessful applicants highlighted that **access to employers** would be an important factor if they were to consider applying.

Furthermore, one employer indicated that it's difficult for employers to predict their hiring needs months in advance and described the idea of involving employers so early in the process as *'too rigid'.* As a result, unsuccessful applicants felt that there was **too much weight allocated to employer partnerships** throughout the application process.

6.3 Application process

6.3.1 How successful training providers found the application process

SUMMARY

- **Awareness of the fund** for training providers was mainly through their **networks with GMCA/LDSP.**
- Training providers generally found the **application process easy and straightforward**, except a couple that felt there were a few repetitive questions.
- **Support** provided by GMCA/LDSP was **beneficial, particularly regarding feedback they provided on applications.**
- Majority of training providers reached out to **employers in their existing network** to form the consortia.

Relevant outcomes: sustainable training and VfM

Awareness of the Fund

The training providers were made aware of the Fast Track Fund through their existing networks and relationships with GMCA/LDSP. At least half of training providers attended market engagement events, but all of them were already aware of the Fund prior to attending.

Ease of applying

The training providers reported that the Fund was easy to apply for, as it was clear what information about their proposed training courses they needed to provide. Information on what skills they planned to teach, and how they were planning to achieve this, how employers were to be engaged, and track record were all required on the forms. The successful training providers acknowledged that they may have found the application easy to complete because they were used to completing proposal responses. They felt that it may have been likely that training providers with less experience of putting together bids would struggle with the amount of information required.

Training providers suggested the application process was clear and comparatively easier than submitting other tender responses because less detail was required. Successful providers in round 2 agreed that the application process and form were helpful and clear. The three training providers that applied to both rounds found the round 2 application process to be simpler compared to round 1.

Support for successful applicants

All interviewees reported that they received support and guidance from GMCA and LDSP during the procurement process, mainly in the form of online question and answer responses (which were transparent and shared with other applicants). This support helped to align applications to the Fund's priorities. The providers highlighted the value of application guidance drop-in sessions held by GMCA and LDSP and would recommend anyone implementing a bid process to hold these sessions. GMCA's and LDSP's involvement contributed to the **Fund's sustainable training and VfM outcome** by helping applicants design appropriate training courses.

> *'…drop-in sessions and advice given there were worth their weight in gold' – Fast Track Digital Fund Training Provider*

There were mixed views on the feedback provided on applications submitted. One training provider commented that they got feedback in a negotiation meeting, but it was not clear if they had been successful until a few weeks later. They felt that it would have been better to receive more feedback at the negotiation meetings and to have been told if their application was successful. However, at this stage the assessment panel had not decided if the application was successful. LDSP and GMCA explained that the purpose of the negotiation meetings was to provide an indication of their view of the proposal and if the bid was promising.

6.3.2 How unsuccessful applicants to round 2 found the application process

SUMMARY

- 60% of round 2 unsuccessful applicants felt that the application process was **difficult, labour intensive** and required **too much detail** with **repetitions and lack of clarity**.
- Unsuccessful applicants felt that the application process **favoured larger businesses**.
- Mixed opinions were received on the support provided. More than half of unsuccessful applicants found the support unhelpful; others found it helpful but were unsure if it benefited their application.
- All unsuccessful applicants indicated that **feedback took longer than they anticipated**.
- A couple applicants felt that the **feedback they received was unfair**, particularly where value for money or employer engagement was cited.

Ease of applying

60% of unsuccessful applicants had negative experiences of the application process. Unsuccessful applicants highlighted that they felt *'bogged down'* by the significant detail required on the application form and described the process as *'labour intensive'.* The word limit on some questions did not allow them to accurately convey the complexity of their training course.

> *'Found it very onerous. There was lots to do, very detailed and lots of cross-referencing'. – Unsuccessful Applicant, Fast Track Digital Fund*

Unsuccessful applicants indicated that they found the application form to be repetitive, and in some cases unclear. A small number of unsuccessful applicants expressed concerns around the application portal used in the procurement. They felt that notifications are easily missed leading to very short windows in which to provide information.

Unsuccessful applicants highlighted that the application process was particularly difficult for smaller businesses who don't have much experience around bid writing or significant resources to dedicate to the process. This may have deterred other small companies from applying.

In contrast, one unsuccessful applicant indicated that they found the application process to be positive and *'easier to fill out and follow'* than other funding application forms they have previously completed. This training provider felt that there was sufficient flexibility to counteract the rigidity of the questions with a 250-word limit. This applicant found the form useful as it forced the organisation to think about key deliverables, what was achievable within the timeframe and budget.

Support received

Overall, the five interviewed unsuccessful applicants had mixed views on the support they received. Although there was support available such as briefing/pre-submission

meetings, unsuccessful applicants did not find these to be helpful. Applicants found that the guidance provided at these meetings was not enough; furthermore, at this early-stage applicants were unsure of which questions to ask; more support during the writing of the bid would have been more beneficial. Only one applicant indicated that they received any benefit from the briefing meetings. LDSP stressed that unsuccessful bidders were less engaged with pre-submission meetings and briefings than successful applicants.

'Don't think they were super helpful. When you're in the thick of writing it, that's when you need guidance, but we only received answers to technical questions. We asked a lot of questions on social value but didn't get a decent response to help us out' – Unsuccessful Applicant, Fast Track Digital Fund

Whilst about half of unsuccessful applicants emailed GMCA/LDSP to ask questions, only technical questions around word count and the use of bursaries were answered. Unsuccessful applicants suggested that they received blanket responses, rather than specific tailored advice which they felt would have improved their applications. Applicants felt that there was limited guidance on how to fill out the application form or around what would make an application successful; applicants suggested that the presentation made available was not helpful in explaining how to fill out the application. One unsuccessful applicant who applied to both rounds suggested that they would have preferred some more clarity on the differences between what the fund was looking for in rounds 1 and 2.

However, where applicants arranged direct meetings with GMCA/LDSP they agreed that these were helpful in shaping their applications and that the representatives from each organisation were supportive despite their bid ultimately being unsuccessful. Applicants who applied as part of a consortium had a more positive experience of the application process as they found the support from the consortium to be beneficial. Whilst applicants who applied as part of a consortium did not have access to any additional support from GMCA/LDSP they did highlight that representatives from these organisations were supportive.

Application feedback

Unsuccessful applicants highlighted some variance between the time they expected to receive feedback and the time feedback was received; 80% of the unsuccessful applicants interviewed suggested that this feedback was more delayed than expected. Although unsuccessful applicants were unclear of the reasons for this delay, they acknowledged that Covid-19 played a role due to the timing of their submissions (January 2020). LDSP stressed that the delay was fully due to Covid-19. GMCA, LDPS and DCMS had to pause the process to assess what the pandemic meant and how to respond to it.

Unsuccessful applicants had mixed views when asked if they understood the reasons and the feedback around their application being unsuccessful. Nearly half of unsuccessful applicants felt that the feedback provided was *'clear and sufficient'*, these applicants were able to implement this feedback in other bids which were ultimately successful. Although they felt that the feedback given was clear, one unsuccessful

applicant suggested that more tailored feedback would have been appreciated if there was time from the evaluation panel to provide personalised feedback. LDSP pointed out that feedback was tailored to applicants in all cases. Due to the limited amount of funding available, not all applications that met eligibility criteria were successful. Feedback to these unsuccessful applicants was minor. This was, however, not a reflection on low quality but on the fact that the Fund was oversubscribed.

However, two applicants described the feedback received as *'unfair'*.

> *'We felt like they were trying to find reasons [to reject us], rather than valid flaws in our application' – Unsuccessful Applicant, Fast Track Digital Fund*

When asked if they would re-apply to the Fund, unsuccessful applicants provided mixed responses. Overall, applicants recognised that *'there's an appetite for such programmes in the local community'*. However, in a couple of cases the complexity of the process would deter them from applying. Unsuccessful applicants were asked to provide feedback on how the application process could be improved. Responses included:

- more time for clarification questions;
- more detailed advice on specific skills needs;
- more support to smaller or newer training providers;
- more active engagement from DCMS, GMCA and LDSP;
- provision of clearer examples especially for budget sheets and social value questions; and
- direct access to employer networks.

However, GDPR requirements mean that providing lists of employers is not possible. LDSP and GMCA facilitated every introduction they were able to.

6.4 Targeting trainees

SUMMARY

- **Variation in level of success** of training providers **targeting trainees.**
- Those **that were successful** took a more **bespoke targeted approach** to reach relevant groups.
- Target groups mainly selected due to **underrepresentation of these groups** in the digital sector.

Relevant outcomes: diversity.

Approximately 60% of providers reported successful targeting of trainees and reached most or all their target groups. For these training providers, they achieved this through the following actions.

- Partnerships with employers as they had a direct line to the target group.
- Ensured the course was accessible to the target group and was flexible to their needs.
- Built relationships with relevant community organisers and networks – including through Jobcentre stakeholders.

- Marketed online and print media popular with target groups and made the recruitment accessible (focus on personal development and attitude, rather than technical skills) and relevant (appropriate imagery and careful consideration of text).
- Use existing knowledge of skill shortages and the local area to target relevant employers (for those focused on existing employees).

For the other 40% of providers that reported mixed success in targeting of trainees, they felt that the following circumstances hindered their success.

- They had ambitious course content and therefore high skill level requirements for potential trainees. This provided a barrier to entry that was too high for the course's target groups. Without lowering the ambition of the course, the provider was unable to reduce skills requirements.
- They needed more lead-in time to some groups of people as the pandemic meant a lot of key workers (which are prevalent in Lancashire) did not have time for the course, and other groups (such as university graduates or armed forces leavers) only became available at certain points in time.

The specific target groups were selected by the training providers because of the following interlinked reasons:

- wanting to address the skills gap and diversity in their local area;
- underrepresentation of these groups in the digital skills and technology sector; and
- difficulty of these groups in finding employment.

The training providers mostly felt that they contributed to the **Fund's diversity outcome** as they managed to get a range of underrepresented groups into employment and offer a diverse range of candidates to employers (see also: annex G and section 4.4.6 and 5.1). However, the providers are aware that trainee sizes are small and most of their impact was on specific employer partners. In particular, training providers pointed out that more work needs to be done to target women from a younger age.

The **trainee survey** asked trainees to provide information about their age, ethnicity, employment status and gender at the end of their training course. 235 trainees completed the survey. Details of respondents' age, ethnicity, employment status and gender are included in annex G, as tables G.3 to G.8.

Trainees' reasons for getting involved in the training course

The trainees had different reasons for getting involved in the training course. The breakdown is shown below, with the most popular reasons being 'gaining new skills' and 'improving career prospects'. Note that trainees were asked to select all reasons for getting involved, and several trainees had different reasons for getting involved, hence the base number is 553.

Table 26 – trainees' reasons for getting involved in a training course broken down by employment status upon completion of the course.

Trainees' reasons for getting involved in the fund	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Improving existing skills	70 (56%)	56 (44%)	126 (23%)
Gaining new skills (e.g. learning a new programming language)	106 (57%)	81 (43%)	187 (34%)

Trainees' reasons for getting involved in the fund	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Improving career prospects (e.g. to apply for a promotion)	84 (58%)	61 (42%)	145 (26%)
To receive an increase in salary	44 (65%)	24 (35%)	68 (12%)
Other (please specify)	13 (48%)	14 (52%)	27 (5%)
Total	317 (57%)	236 (43%)	553

Source: trainee survey

The reasons for getting involved in the training do not vary much depending on the employment status of trainees upon completion of the course.

Those that answered 'Other' were prompted to specify their reasons for getting involved. These reasons are:

- career change/finding a job in a new sector/getting employment; and
- seemed interesting and relevant.

Focus group insight: trainees said they applied to the training (Raytheon) due to the prospect of gaining a certification in a skills area in which they already had an interest. In some cases, trainees participating in focus groups were using the skills trained on the courses as a hobby and wanted to deepen their knowledge without seeking to find a job (Milliamp). Others wanted to develop new skills in their semi-retirement as part of freelance work to be able to deliver different services (Milliamp).

Trainees' skills prior to joining the course

There is a mixture of skills that trainees had prior to joining the course. The breakdown is shown in the table below. The most common technical skills were 'Social media', 'Programming languages' and 'Computer networking' and the least common were 'Ansible' and 'HashiCorp Stack'. Respondents that did not provide a response and responses of 'Don't Know' were not included in the analysis. Note that the skills with less than 200 responses were added during March, thus there are fewer responses than the other skills. Also, the total responses for each skill is less than the 235 surveyed trainees because not all trainees provided a response for each skill.

Table 27: skills trainees had prior to joining the course (total responses for each skill is less than 235 because not all trainees provided a response)

Technical skills	Trainees who responded 'Yes'	Trainees who responded 'No'	Total
Testing (e.g. software testing, prototype testing)	43 (27%)	116 (73%)	159
User Experience design (UX/UI)	19 (12%)	142 (88%)	161
Use of AWS	23 (15%)	130 (85%)	153
Web development	53 (33%)	107 (67%)	160
Agile project management	24 (15%)	136 (85%)	160
Cybersecurity	36 (23%)	120 (77%)	156
Social media	175 (77%)	53 (23%)	228
Programming languages (e.g.	104 (46%)	124 (54%)	228

Technical skills	Trainees who responded 'Yes'	Trainees who responded 'No'	Total
SQL, Python, HTML, JavaScript)			
Cloud	60 (29%)	147 (71%)	207
Ansible	5 (2%)	214 (98%)	219
HashiCorp Stack	1 (0%)	218 (100%)	219
Linux	41 (19%)	176 (81%)	217
Computer networking	90 (42%)	123 (58%)	213

Soft skills	Trainees who responded ‘Yes’	Trainees who responded ‘No’	Total
Interview skills	109 (71%)	45 (29%)	154
Preparing a CV	188 (84%)	36 (16%)	224
Project work	132 (61%)	83 (39%)	215

Source: trainee survey

The respondents were also prompted to provide any other digital/IT skills they had prior to the course that were not listed. These skills are:

- basic IT knowledge including some network and HTML/CSS knowledge;
- CAD;
- MATLAB;
- PC hardware knowledge – industrial control systems;
- Microsoft Office suite;
- Firewall Configuration Oracle server build;
- GIS; and
- ITIL Foundation in Service Management, AAT and CIMA.

6.5 Fund governance

SUMMARY

- Governance arrangements were **effective** to DCMS to maintain oversight.

6.5.1 Performance and risk management

GMCA and LDSP reported that the partnership with DCMS has been effective. There is regular communication via monthly telephone meetings and progress reports detailing:

- general resourcing/project management updates;
- update on delivery of projects (including timelines);
- any feedback from stakeholders on delivery of Fund;
- risks and risk mitigation; and
- progress of training courses and likelihood of meeting objectives of the Fund.

The report has a simple structure, which GMCA and LDSP have reported has been easy for them to complete and send to DCMS. The consistent reporting structure also makes it easy for DCMS to track progress of the Fund delivery over time.

A key part of Fund governance is the partnership working between GMCA and LDSP as well as their shared partnership with DCMS. GMCA and LDSP's experience of the different partnerships can be summarised as follows.

Table 28 – stakeholder partnerships

GMCA's experience with DCMS	LDSP's experience with DCMS
• In the beginning, the partnership was challenging: DCMS was more involved in detailed decisions and had high expectations. • Working relationships improved once roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. • A strong relationship developed over time. GMCA found that DCMS invested in digital skills partnerships and understood the importance of engaging with regions.	• In the beginning, DCMS was more in control. There was a mismatch of expectations. • Over time, DCMS became more supportive especially once the Covid-19 pandemic started, and it became clearer regarding what could feasibly be delivered. • Defining roles and responsibilities took some time, but once this was achieved it helped to create a strong working relationship.
LDSP's experience with GMCA	
• Very positive working partnership. • GMCA and DSP had an initial meeting to set out the vision for the fund, project details, and what the teams wanted and didn't want to achieve. • Roles and responsibilities were easy to agree on with GMCA. • Novelty of the scheme led to some initial challenges, though these were ironed out quickly.	
GMCA's experience with LDSP	
• The dynamic was initially difficult as LDSP was involved late after initial discussions between GMCA and DCMS. • GMCA – LDSP relationship is now strong with each partner having unique viewpoints and strengths. • GMCA had an established network of tech businesses and a digital skills ecosystem while LDSP had innovative ways of working.	

Overall, the definition of roles and responsibilities helped DCMS, GMCA and LDSP to develop a strong, positive working relationship. GMCA and LDSP reported a positive mutual partnership despite some initial challenges with the Fund due to its novelty and LDSP's relatively late involvement.

6.6 Enablers and barriers to implementation

SUMMARY

- **Non-Covid-19 related barriers** include recruiting trainees, learner engagement, and reduced employer commitment. Majority of training providers were able to overcome these barriers and resulted in a mixture of impact on outcomes.
- **Covid-19 related barriers** impacted training delivery with providers having to **adapt to virtual delivery** while about 20% of providers felt an **impact on reduced job outcomes**.
- While nearly all providers were **unaware of DCMS's role in the fund**, all found the **support provided by GMCA/LDSP helpful and valuable**.

Relevant outcomes: sustainable training and VfM; training provider-employer engagement.

Key **enablers** included:

- engagement with the Fund between different government departments (e.g. HM Treasury and the Department for Education) from the outset;
- engagement and buy-in from key stakeholders such as local employers, key training providers, and Job Centre Plus to promote the Fund to local residents and employers;
- collaboration between employers and training providers on the skills required and training design;
- GMCA and LDSP working with employer networks to raise awareness of the Fund among employers and encouraged them to discuss their digital skills needs with training providers. This has led to good collaboration between training providers and employers, which has been particularly evident in the applications received for round 2; and
- launch events for both rounds that were run by GMCA and LDSP which helped raise awareness of the Fund amongst local training providers. These events encouraged training providers to apply to the Fund.

There have been some **barriers** to the implementation and delivery of the Fund. More than half of these barriers were pandemic related. The barriers included:

- there were initial delays due to limited resource and capacity in GMCA at start of project, however this was resolved quickly;
- the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting social distancing measures meant that classroom-based training was halted in March 2020. Training providers had to switch to remote training, which initially caused delays, before being able to continue;
- the pandemic also impacted the signing off of successful bids which meant some of those bidders had to delay their start dates;
- training providers reported difficulties recruiting trainees due to the pandemic and increased pressures on candidates in terms of childcare responsibilities, work requirements, or ill health. Issues relating to ongoing work requirements were exacerbated for two providers who were upskilling existing trainees;

- the pandemic also resulted in local employers furloughing staff which meant that they were unable to recruit trainees that successfully completed their training courses; and
- employers found they could not employ as many candidates as they intended as the pandemic-related recession changed recruitment plans or meant that service delivery had to shift. Employers did, however, offer mock interviews in cases where they could not hire candidates anymore.

Focus group insight: one training provider in a focus group (Raytheon) pointed out that recruiting trainees and providing everyone the right kind of access is always a challenge, even in non-pandemic settings.

Stakeholder support as an enabler

While about 65% of training providers were not aware of DCMS's role in the fund, they generally felt that GMCA/LDSP were helpful, sympathetic to their concerns, and offered support. The responsiveness of GMCA/LDSP and support provided enabled them to fully grasp the priorities of the fund and adapt their response accordingly.

> *'…[we] have worked with four different funders over the past year, and LDSP and GMCA showed great understanding and skill and [they] were amongst the best partners [we] have worked with' – Fast Track Digital Fund Training Provider*

However, additional feedback was provided by the providers of what they would like to see in the future from both DCMS and GMCA/LDSP. This is related mainly to increasing employer engagement and provision of support to access employer networks, more marketing and industry outreach, more flexibility with timings and contract, and a greater understanding of what they were looking for in the Fund.

GMCA noted that it was challenging to balance scale and innovation. Whilst DMCS wanted to launch innovative approaches and invest in new and novel ideas, GMCA had a need for scale (e.g. more software developers to fill existing skill gaps). Thus, it was a challenge to fulfil these two priorities, and GMCA did not say whether they felt this was addressed adequately or not.

6.7 Ambitions of the Fund

SUMMARY

- The skills shortages identified varied from employer to employer depending on the industry in which they operate.
- The number of vacancies employers intended to fill with trainees from the Fund ranged from 0-20.
- Approximately a third of employers were unable to offer roles due to Covid-19 and internal issues such as complete restructuring or organisational change.
- Nearly a third of employers used the Fund to upskill existing employees as intended.

The main ambition of the Fund is to help local employers fill digital SSVs while improving the diversity of those working in digital roles; particularly in terms of ethnic and gender

diversity. It is hoped that this can be achieved by employers and local training providers working together to develop flexible training that meets employer needs.

For the Fund to be rolled out it was suggested by DCMS that the following must be evident:

- a significant number of people complete the training course and a significant number of these go into digital roles;
- progression in the development of digital skills;
- improvement of diversity within the digital sector, especially more women and ethnic minority candidates being recruited into digital roles; and
- improvements in employer contribution to training, especially with regards to providing match funding.

6.7.1 What employers told us about their participation

Employers mentioned a broad range of skills shortages faced within the past three years. The skills required varied according to the nature of the employer in terms of their size, ownership structure and the industry in which they operate.

Focus group insight: employers who participated in focus groups stressed they have longstanding difficulties in filling entry level roles and recruiting engineers who have digital skills. This is particularly so because employers participating in the Fund are often smaller and cannot compete with salaries offered by larger companies.

The skills shortages identified included:

- front and back-end development of websites and apps;
- SQL;
- CAD software;
- data analysis, reporting and visualisation;
- software programming;
- third line engineering;
- creative digital skills such as digital marketing and video editing and production;
- cybersecurity;
- design, drawing and control;
- UX/UI;
- public cloud (AWS and other systems);
- project management; and
- Linux (including specific variants).

As a result of the skills shortages identified, employers identified vacancies in certain job functions within their organisations. Vacancies included:

- digital content and marketing roles;
- cybersecurity and industrial control systems;
- quality systems engineers;
- CMM inspectors;
- logistics and material planners;
- network support engineer roles (Linux and Windows);
- robotics engineers; and
- design engineers.

Out of those employers that were interviewed, the number of vacancies they had expected to fill with trainees from the Fund ranged up to 20. This did not differ materially from the application stage, where the interviewed employers intended to fill one to 20 vacancies. Of the 20 employers interviewed overall, six reported they recruited trainees to fill vacancies which they had, for a total of 21 hires. Only one of the round 1 employers hired any trainees at the time of the interview in October/November 2020. Overall, the **Fund's SSVs reduction outcome** was only partially successful.

Three of the employers interviewed also explicitly intended to use the training to upskill existing employees. Most employees who were being upskilled completed the course; a small number dropped out as the **requirements and level of skill** required to complete the course were higher than anticipated.

6.7.2 Unsuccessful training provider applicants

Unsuccessful applicants provided various, unique reasons for applying for the Fund. These are summarised as:

- to get ahead of the curve in terms of providing digital skills training;
- to engage with the local community;
- to make effective use of existing community spaces/hubs;
- to increase the mobility and diversity of training programmes already offered;
- the training provider was actively encouraged to apply by another organisation;
- to receive match funding; and
- to receive continued funding from successful round 1.

One applicant applied as they identified a likely increase in digitals skills shortages five years prior to the Fund being established and wanted to get *'ahead of the curve'* to establish a competitive advantage. Another unsuccessful applicant applied to the Fund as they already offered similar training courses with very successful outcomes. This applicant wanted to help diversify and increase mobility in the sector.

6.8 Quantity and quality of applications received

SUMMARY

- In Round 1, stakeholders were not satisfied with the quality and quantity of applications, and they therefore implemented changes ahead of Round 2.
- As a result, there were **more applications in Round 2,** and these were of a better quality including successful applications for training courses in Lancashire.

GMCA and LDSP noted increases in the quantity and quality of applications received from round 1 to round 2, which were mostly well aligned with local skills needs. They reported a two to three times increase in volume of applications. While the strongest applications scored 65-68% in round 1, some providers in round 2 scored 80-90%. The higher quality and quantity of applications received was be driven by:

- simpler application process with reduced paperwork and streamlined questions;
- more support provided to training providers;
- more time to form partnerships and establish consortia; and
- clearer concept of what was needed in each region.

Despite the increase in quantity and quality of applications, GMCA wondered if there was more they could have done in terms of targeting specific skills or target groups in their requirements. They also regretted not receiving as many applications from colleges who are more established providers. LDSP echoed this, stating they would have liked to see a few more colleges and FE providers in the mix.

6.9 What has worked well and areas for development in delivery of the Fund

6.9.1 Training delivery successes and areas for development

SUMMARY

- Training courses have generally been positively received by training providers, employers and trainees. A significant majority of these would recommend to Fund to others or participate again.
- Course elements that **worked well** include the training content and flexible delivery, recognised certifications, industry exposure and practical elements, peer support, employer engagement. These led to full-time employment opportunities and a gain in technical and personal skills and increased access to qualified candidates for employers.
- Training providers **would have improved their training delivery** by holding induction sessions, having longer timescales, focusing more on a topic, expanding the number of available spaces, and being more prepared for virtual delivery. Employers recognise that face-to-face delivery would have been desirable, but impossible in the circumstances.
- **Unintended outcomes** of the Fund include support and friendship developed between trainees, and unexpected career journeys taken by trainees.

Relevant outcomes: attributable impacts; trainee digital skills; trainee confidence; SSVs reduction; employers turning away business; employer productivity; employer views of training; training provider-employer engagement; diversity.

Training provider views

All the training providers sought feedback at various stages from their employer partners and trainees. The following means were used to gather feedback:

Table 29 – capturing feedback from employers and trainees

Employer feedback	Trainee feedback
• Regular meetings, either weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. • Informal feedback delivered ad-hoc throughout the course. • Progress assessments.	• Student evaluations/internal survey/online polls/focus groups/feedback forms/case studies. • Informal feedback via support sessions, Slack, workshops, discussion boards etc. • Feedback on candidate experience through academics/independent staff.

From these feedback processes, more than half of the training providers made changes to their training content and delivery according to trainee and employer feedback. They

did so, for instance, by adding soft skills sessions to meet employer needs or by providing additional personal support to trainees who faced particular barriers.

Based on their experience, five of the training providers felt that there were several things they would have done differently in delivering the training. The training providers provided a variety of answers to this question, with no common theme between them. These are:

- hold induction sessions for each cohort individually rather than having multiple cohorts at once;
- longer timescales and time to identify the right trainees as well as being able to go more in-depth in the training;
- increase the focus on a certain topic in their course (e.g. deliver more workshops / sessions on PHP than planned);
- increase the number of spaces available in the course by budgeting for more spaces during the application stage; and
- be prepared for virtual delivery.

All training providers think that the way they work together with employers can be improved. Some suggestions include:

 **increased or improved communication** and collaboration between employers and training providers, alongside better understanding from both sides. This would mean an enhanced understanding from training providers on the employer's sector trends, challenges, and how training providers can support them in their business needs. As well as an understanding from employers on the available support the training provider can provide and the value they can bring to building their skills pipeline;

 **incentives for training providers** to provide training with practical elements as these skills are valuable for difficult to fill vacancies but 'expensive to run'. Employers should be encouraged to support practical elements, e.g. by providing their facilities for trainees;

 **encouraging employers to develop talent** rather than depend on buying skills and having employers see the value of using training providers to build this pipeline;

 **further government support** or funding for a fund like the Fast Track Fund; and

 **employer engagement can be improved.** Poor employer engagement due to Covid-19 or otherwise can be incentivised with recognition or improved with employers being held accountable if they fail to engage with the course. Memoranda of understanding between training providers and employer partners are a possible route to achieving this.

Training providers found that the type of trainee support they offered that worked well were those that helped the trainees with securing full-time employment opportunities and ensuring the trainees are equipped with relevant professional skills. These ranged from providing employment and employability advice, CV and interview preparation,

signposting to relevant job opportunities, mentoring sessions, to potential employer introductions.

Employer views

Employers had positive perceptions of the Fund and the outcomes achieved. They felt that the *'training was spot on'* in terms of quality and that the *'course itself was very well run'* despite the transition to remote learning due to Covid-19 and the range of skill levels present.

> *'We are completely satisfied. Especially in the context of Covid-19: hats off to the trainees and the trainers' – Employer, Fast Track Digital Fund*

Employers were satisfied with the quality of candidates who completed the training. Of the employers who hired candidates directly from the training course, all agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of the candidates. They also agreed that these candidates are *'doing very well'*. Similarly, all the employers who utilised the training to upskill employees agreed that their employees were successful in gaining the new skills required because of the course, one employer even suggested that some of the skills gained by their employees were *'more advanced than needed'* but *'it's good to have those skills at hand'.* This evidence demonstrates progress against the **Fund's trainee digital skills and SSVs reduction outcomes.**

Employers who did not hire any candidates or upskill any employees were also satisfied with the quality of candidates, highlighting that they were *'willing to learn, keen and could take initiative'.* Employers were positive about the skills gained by candidates who *'learned the content really well'*, however, employers also signposted additional skills displayed by candidates because of the course. This included facilitation and business development skills, which were unexpected yet beneficial to the employer. Additionally, candidates were able to pinpoint areas for improvement in terms of their skills which were both beneficial and impressive for employers, who recognised that *'the course can't teach everything'*.

Almost all employers who had vacancies were able to fill these vacancies with trainees from the Fund. Employers who were not able to fill their vacancies indicated that this was because of issues around employment eligibility or the business could not offer adequate roles at that specific time. It should be noted that employers did not think it was possible to directly compare the quality of applicants from the training to others, as the trainees were specifically targeted.

> *'There is absolutely a difference, this in-depth course meant that the new hires came in with a depth of energy and skills. It was also valuable that they came in having had experience of a long programme with group work and interacting with people, so the soft skills were great too'. – Employer, Fast Track Digital Fund*

As well as skills, candidates' motivation and attitude were key factors for employers when assessing the quality of candidates. Employers described the candidates as *'good, engaging individuals who benefitted from the course and understood what they wanted to achieve'.* The enthusiasm of candidates who completed training through the Fund was emphasised as a positive factor.

Overall, employers felt that the Fund worked well. They were particularly keen to emphasise the positive effects of the level of employer engagement and ability to provide and receive feedback, which contributes to the **Fund's employer views of training and training provider-employer engagement outcomes**. More face-to-face delivery was a common area highlighted for improvement, however, employers acknowledged whilst *'physical delivery would have been better, this was unavoidable due to Covid-19'*.

Majority of employers interviewed indicated that they would participate in the Fund again, given the opportunity. In general, employers felt that the Fund offered the right skills and qualifications for their needs and enabled them to *'find and retain the right talent'*; the Fund was particularly beneficial for small businesses with little resources. Similarly, a significant majority of employers interviewed would recommend the Fund to other employers as it adds clear value to organisations. Employers emphasised that the Fund does not require substantial financial investment from employers, produces high quality trainees, facilitates links between local businesses and goes some way towards reducing the digital skills gap. This evidence contributes to an understanding of **sustainable training** models.

In the absence of the fund, employers highlighted that training would have been much more costly. Whilst a couple of employers wouldn't have been able to recruit directly due to the expense, others would have continued to rely on their usual methods of recruitment. Examples include reaching out to colleges / universities or recruiters which the employer described as *'costly and less informed'.*

Employers who recruited from the Fund or upskilled their employees agreed that it had the following impacts on their business, demonstrating contributions to the **Fund's employers turning away business and employer productivity outcomes**:

- raised awareness of technical roles available;
- improved team morale;
- provided access to local talent at minimum cost to the Employer;
- reduced skills gaps;
- improved efficiency;
- fostered relationships with other organisations;
- more engaged staff and apprentices;
- ability to sell the skills of upskilled staff to clients;
- increased productivity; and
- improved the Employer brand.

The elements of the partnership that training providers and employers highlighted as things that worked well or things that did not work well are listed in the table overleaf. They are a key component to the Fund's ambition to learn what works and therefore to its **attributable impacts outcome**.

Table 30 – what worked well and not well: training providers and employers

What worked well	What did not work well
Training provider views	
• Effective employer relationships and employer engagement, including with students through mentoring, mock interviews, masterclasses, guest speakers. • Training courses opened employers to the local talent pool and helped them increase diversity in their team. • Pivoting delivery of training courses quickly to online formats, using bespoke methods to engage candidates. • Supporting candidates via open days, Slack, peer support, interview and application support. • Masterclasses, face to face workshops, and mentoring sessions. • Upskilling of candidates and addressing skills gap. • Development of personal skills and increased employability.	• Issues such as employer pull-out which could have been mitigated by having more flexibility with the run-in time given the impact Covid-19 had on the Fund. • More funding as money was only sufficient with employer match funding and time. • Covid-19-related issues preventing courses being delivered in person • Employers' expectations: employers' expected people with good skills but were not willing to pay higher wages. • Managing employer expectations that the fund is short-term. • Communication in the partnership. • Timing - delay from bid submission to course delivery meant a short lead-in time and rushed roll-out. • Not enough support for learners. Examples of where more support could have been made available include progress coaches, early warning systems and provision of IT equipment to mitigate connectivity issues. • Training content itself such as too many exams/needing more practical elements/being more interactive.
Employer views	
• Flexibility and bespoke nature of training, particularly for employers who were upskilling existing employees. • Strength of the relationships between employers and the training providers. • Application of skills on a practical project. • Masterclasses, workshops and the provision of mentors. • The ability to access high quality candidates directly through the training provider rather than recruiters or other means.	• The length of courses was too short to fully develop employers' skills base. • Communications were not clear enough regarding the requirements for time and skill levels of learners. • Lack of face-to-face delivery time due to the impact of Covid-19.

What trainees thought worked well or could have been developed

The trainee follow-up survey asked about the outcomes trainees achieved three months after completion of the training whether they gained qualifications through the training (106 trainees completed the follow-up survey). 47% of trainees received formal qualifications / accreditations from the training course, with the remaining 53% not receiving formal qualifications / accreditations. Of those that received qualifications/accreditations (n = 50), they received qualifications such as:

- CompTIA ITF+;
- CompTIA Security+;
- CompTIA CySA+;
- CompTIA Network+;
- CompTIA A+;
- AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner; and
- BTEC Level 3 in Engineering[63].

Trainees also provided their views about what worked and what did not work well. These are summarised as in table 31.

Table 31 – what worked well and not well: Trainees

What worked well	What did not work well
Trainee views	
• Useful CV and interview prep workshops. • One-to-one tutorial sessions. • Mentor interaction. • Employer involvement (e.g. work experience, final projects, masterclasses etc.).	• Relevance of course content for exam content. • Lack of clarity on requirements from trainees (e.g. pre-orientation).

Some of the following areas received **mixed feedback**.

- **Training content and delivery**: slightly more than half of the trainees felt that content was well structured, and delivery was effective. Others felt that the information was too dense, and content was too complex which made it hard to follow. Approximately a tenth of the trainees wanted more interactive remote learning as well as more experienced and engaging trainers.
- **Soft skills and employability sessions**: about a quarter of trainees reported they found the soft skills elements of the training valuable. However, nearly 10% would have welcomed more such sessions.
- **Networking**: approximately 40% of trainees felt that communications tools (e.g. Slack) worked well to help them network and access support. A fifth of trainees stated that would have liked to have experienced more collaborative teamwork.
- **Practical work experience**: practical elements of the training were received well, however about 20% of trainees would have preferred more of it.
- **Pace of training**: very mixed responses on the pace of training, varying from too slow to too fast.

[63] Only two trainees mentioned this qualification. None of the providers listed it among the qualifications they offered.

- **Pre- and post-training support**: for about a quarter of trainees, the support that was offered was valuable, while approximately another 20% would have preferred more support from the provider, particularly in finding a job.

Focus group insight: participants in one of the focus groups (Raytheon) felt the pace of training at times too fast, especially for participants who had less relevant skills coming into the course. However, participants of another focus group discussion (Milliamp) felt that training could have been delivered at a faster pace. These trainees, however, have previous skills in the area they were being taught.

Feedback demonstrates that some areas were perceived uniformly positively, including the CV and interview preparation sessions, one-to-one tutorial sessions and mentor support, and the involvement of employers in the delivery of training. On the other hand, feedback also highlights some areas which trainees would want to be improved. These include more practical sessions, a stronger tailoring of content to the exams and additional specific qualifications, and improved clarity on time requirements or skills requirements.

Overall, there is clear evidence for the Fund successfully achieving its **trainee digital skills outcome**. Trainees reported improved or new skills. Employers and training providers had positive views of the skills candidates gained.

What trainees did after completing the training

There was a mix in what trainees did after completing the training. The majority of those who responded to this question reported through the trainee follow-up survey either a 'New role in a new organisation', 'Further training', or 'Other'. The breakdown is shown in the table below.

Table 32: what trainees did after completing the training

What trainees did after completing the training	Number of trainees
New role in a new organisation	37 (37%)
New role in the same organisation	2 (2%)
Further training	29 (29%)
Other (please specify)	31 (31%)
Total	99

Source: trainee follow-up survey

Those that answered ‘Other’ were prompted to specify what else they did after completing the training. Their responses were:

- still seeking employment/job hunting/apprenticeship searching; and
- pursued further studies at university.

Skills developed

Trainees reported developing a wide variety of new skills through the training they received. The breakdown is shown in the tables below, with the most common technical skills and knowledge areas being 'Programming languages', 'Computer networking', 'Cloud', 'Linux' and ‘Cybersecurity’ and the least common skills being ‘User experience design (UX/UI)’ and ‘HashiCorp Stack’. Trainees that did not provide a response were

not included in the table below. The table reflects the broad range of skills which the Fund supported.

Table 33: skills trainees developed in the training

Technical skills	Trainees who responded 'Yes'	Trainees who responded 'No'	Total
Testing (e.g. software testing, prototype testing)	11 (26%)	31 (74%)	42
UX/UI	8 (18%)	36 (82%)	44
Use of AWS	8 (19%)	34 (81%)	42
Web development	17 (36%)	30 (64%)	47
Agile project management	22 (49%)	23 (51%)	45
Cybersecurity	38 (81%)	9 (19%)	47
Social media	31 (66%)	16 (34%)	47
Programming languages (e.g. SQL, Python, HTML, JavaScript)	58 (66%)	30 (34%)	88
Cloud	57 (72%)	22 (28%)	79
Ansible	4 (6%)	59 (94%)	63
HashiCorp Stack	3 (8%)	36 (92%)	39
Linux	51 (63%)	30 (37%)	81
Computer networking	62 (72%)	24 (28%)	86
Soft skills	**Trainees who responded 'Yes'**	**Trainees who responded 'No'**	**Total**
Interview skills	32 (70%)	14 (30%)	46
Preparing a CV	83 (86%)	13 (14%)	96
Project work	75 (80%)	19 (20%)	94

Source: trainee follow-up survey

Trainees reported they left the course with a variety of improved skills. The most prevalent were soft skills, such as preparing a CV or project work. This reflects the fact that most training courses included sessions targeted at improving such employability skills and broader skillsets.

Focus group insight: participants in the focus groups recognised the value of CV skills and project work experience as a transferable skill irrespective of the other training content. In other focus groups, trainees highlighted specific skills such as CAD which they are now using on the job. Trainees who participated in the CompTIA focus group were particularly positive about the skills they have learned. They uniformly said that the cybersecurity qualifications which they have gained through the training have allowed them to gain digital jobs. In addition, these jobs are highly paid: one of the participants said they have received an uplift of between £10,000 and £15,000 because of the training course.

A wide variety of technical skills were reported by trainees to have been improved through the training, including niche skills such as user experience design, 'HashiCorp Stack', and 'Ansible'. Out of the 106 trainees who responded to the follow-up survey, approximately half reported improved skills in programme languages, 'Cloud', and 'Linux'.

Overall, these reported outcomes reflect what training courses intended to deliver.

Focus group insight: a trainee participant in a focus group with Open University said that their confidence has received a boost through the course. This was because they felt that after ten years being a homemaker, they have pushed themselves to gain the skills needed to re-enter the workforce.

6.9.2 Fund level successes and areas for development

SUMMARY

- From the point of view of GMCA, LDSP and DCMS, the design of the Fast Track Fund successfully **encouraged engagement between employers and training providers.**
- It is **too early to assess the wider economic impact** of the Fund on regional productivity and economic output, although stakeholders feel that the Fund has contributed to an increased diversity in the sector's workforce.
- **Data collection requirements** were at times not clear to training providers and could be made easier to follow.

Relevant outcomes: regional productivity; regional economic output; employers turning away business.

Working with training providers

The majority of the project leads were reported by the key stakeholders to have performed very well. These wanted to be involved whenever there was more funding or opportunities presented.

While LDSP did not note a reduction in engagement from key stakeholders throughout the fund, GMCA reported improved engagement between the first and second round of funding. DCMS and GMCA/LDSP increased their efforts to build relationships with the applicants in round 2, which training providers responded well to. For example, GMCA noted that DCMS attended the market engagement event in the second round and GMCA did more to broker partnerships. This reportedly contributed to an increase of quality in applications in the second round. However, GMCA and LDSP noted there were a few training providers that did not engage as much with the process.

GMCA also reported that there were also some training providers that reduced their engagement throughout the delivery stage once funding was received, which could be due to poor communication with GMCA.

DCMS echoed the sentiment above, noting that even earlier engagement with a broader set of local stakeholders would have been beneficial, although there were already more sessions in the second round compared to the first. This is crucial to understanding what local capacity looks like and where they can build on. With a pilot focused on regional needs, they needed to ensure that the baseline capacity is present.

In addition to those already mentioned above, GMCA and LDSP think that the below worked well for the Fund:

- ✓ giving autonomy to providers to enable them to do a good job;
- ✓ supporting and facilitating relationship building between providers and employers;
- ✓ strong regional focus including local branding for Fast Track and building on that;

- ✓ strong partnership between DCMS, DMCA, and LDSP;
- ✓ focus on employer involvement in design and delivery of the course; and
- ✓ allowed to target and meet a broad range of skills needs and gaps.

Aims and objectives

In terms of whether the fund delivered on its aims and objectives, as far as they are aware, GMCA/LDSP report that:

- it is recognised that although leaving employer engagement to the individual providers is more sustainable for local authorities, events such as career fairs could have improved the process;
- the Fund has delivered on its aims and objectives in terms of testing and piloting a model to help retrain people, though it has not necessarily delivered on job outcomes which they wanted at the beginning; and
- there are instances of better employer/training provider cooperation, and of improved diversity in trainees. DCMS, LDSP and GMCA report that this demonstrates a success of the Fast Track Fund as it demonstrated the value in provider-employer partnership approaches.

GMCA, LDSP, and DCMS agree that any achievement of aims and objectives need to be presented against a backdrop of Covid-19, as it impacted delivery and employer engagement. In those cases, the employer had to guarantee that their role will be enhanced. Additionally, GMCA noted that for job outcomes, there were instances of trainees establishing their own businesses rather than becoming an employee.

DCMS, GMCA and LDSP all reported that there were some difficulties in requiring providers to collect and share consistent monitoring data. LDSP pointed out that some reporting requirements were not easily understood by providers. GMCA reported that some training providers did not invest sufficient resources into administration processes.

Local economic impact

GMCA and LDSP were unsure and unaware of increases in the output of the digital economy in the local area. They stressed that measuring the reduction of the level of local companies turning away new businesses due to increased local digital skills is difficult. GMCA also noted that this cannot be completely solved by skills intervention and it would require examination of employer behaviours. Overall, it is too early to say with certainty what the Fund's contribution to **regional productivity, regional economic output, and employers turning away business outcomes** will be.

The Department for Education drew some learning from round 2 to inform its Bootcamp programme: DfE reported that round 2 was particularly impactful as it emphasised employer needs and how to deliver training that would fulfil those needs. Additionally, DfE copied the approach taken by the Fast Track Fund where previous qualifications were not compulsory for trainees: rather, whether a qualification was needed was left to be decided to training providers. This meant that the focus was on skills developed and the training to deliver these skills to ensure they meet industry and employer standards.

6.9.3 Reducing skills shortages

SUMMARY

- Most training providers felt **they managed to reduce identified skills shortages for their employer partner**.
- Training providers need to make allowance in their content for **tailoring to employer needs** and **understand employer challenges and priorities.**
- Employers need to have a **better understanding of their own skill gaps and requirements**, be able to articulate their specific skill requirements, as well as think strategically and plan long-term for development of skills.

Relevant outcomes: SSVs reduction.

Out of the 14 training providers, 11 reported that the employers knew their SSV needs well and were able to articulate them clearly. Those that knew their needs well were also reported by providers to have identified specific corresponding vacancies. However, a minority of respondents stated that Covid-19 changed the extent to which employers understood and articulated their needs: either through redundancies in the sector or a shift in needs due to new ways of working or services offered.

A significant majority of providers pointed to a need for employers to be more strategic and forward looking about how they develop their skills: these providers said there is a need to help employers to 'develop rather than buy skills', while balancing employers' 'nice to haves' compared to what is critical, to develop skills in a needs-driven, targeted, way.

When asked whether their understanding of employers' SSV needs has changed, almost half of training providers reported that it has not changed. For those that reported a change in understanding, most have been impacted by Covid-19 regarding the following:

Recruitment and onboarding:

- harder to fill roles as remote onboarding is challenging;
- employers are also less willing to hire inexperienced staff as they feel less able to support candidates to develop key skills and don't have the resources to provide the necessary mentoring and managing; and
- holds on recruitment: some employers froze recruitment during the pandemic.

Changes:

- businesses' recruitment and skills needs have changed due to new ways of working or new services on offer; and
- businesses have also undergone organisational changes which similarly affect their recruitment needs (e.g. change of ownership).

On the other hand, there were three training providers that have been able to obtain a clearer understanding of employers' needs. Two of the three said that employers have articulated their soft skills needs in addition to technical skills.

Training providers were also able to learn more about matching trainees with employers to address specific skills gaps. The providers discovered that more can be done by both the training providers and employers.

Table 34 – lessons learned: training providers and employers

Training providers	Employers
• Training content needs to be tailored to the employer's specific business needs. • Training providers need to understand what challenges employers have and whether they are willing to commercially commit to reducing those skill gaps.	• Employers require specific skills rather than the ones taught in a general tech related degree and they need to articulate this clearly. • Employers can be unsure of their own requirements and skills gaps; in both the range of skills a role needs and the practical details (e.g. how many vacancies and when they need them filled). • Strong employer engagement and employers need to rethink ways to recruit and develop talent on a strategic and long-term level.

A few training providers offered these potential approaches to improve strategic support to employers:

- DCMS and its partners (including LEPs) could showcase employers who successfully engage with training programmes like this and on long-term planning of talent development;
- having a platform that brings together Local Government (e.g. Local Authorities) central government (e.g. DCMS), employers and trainers. Such a platform engages employers with planning ahead and committing resource into training that addresses long-term skill gaps; and
- a more modular localised approach to be used for upskilling existing employees and a national programme targeted at people who are out of the workforce but are looking to go back into it[64].

85% of training providers believed that the programme has reduced identified skills shortages for their employer partners. GMCA and LDSP found it difficult to say if the Fund reduced the number of SSVs in the local area as the cohort sizes are too small to fill all the SSVs present. However, both recognised that although the gap was not immediately closed by the Fund, it contributed to its reduction.

Focus group insight: focus group employer and trainee participants (Milliamp) shared the sentiment that the Fund has helped to address their immediate skills shortages while acknowledging that the Fund as a pilot couldn't close regional gaps

There is also consensus from both that the aim of the Fund was to influence future policies and education through a test and learn approach. GMCA also noted that employer buy-in remains crucial, not least for ongoing and sustained relationships between employers, training providers and local stakeholders.

[64] DfE is currently delivering the National Skills Fund. The Fund includes Skills Bootcamps funding.

6.9.4 Additionality of the Fast Track Fund

SUMMARY

- A majority of training providers who were unsuccessful **chose to apply to other schemes**, including DfE bootcamp funding.
- Almost half of trainees themselves reported that they would have applied to another course, with a large minority also saying that they would not have applied to any other training courses.
- In both cases, **responses suggest that the training did offer a way to access skills that providers and trainees need**.
- Evidence is not strong enough to say with certainty whether the Fund offered training that was not otherwise available.
- Satisfaction with the courses amongst trainees was, however, high.

Relevant outcomes: attributable impacts.

Training provider views on what they would have done

In the absence of funding from the Fund, three of the unsuccessful round 2 applicants applied for DfE bootcamp funding and were successful. Two of these mentioned that while they were waiting for round three funding (part of Wave 1 DfE pilot funding), they managed to receive funding over two rounds from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority for similar training.

Another applicant launched their own deferred payment scheme for diversity. They considered bidding for round three but felt that the round three extension was more appropriate for the time they would need to deliver training. This provider has been successful in receiving the round three extension funding.

Focus group insight: both the employer and the training provider project manager who participated the Open University focus group discussion pointed out elements that they felt were additional benefits of the Fund: the employer said they would have had to go down traditional recruiting routes to access talent, while the provider said they would not have had the chance to develop as close a relationship with the employer partner.

Alternative options for trainees if they had not received the training

43% of the trainees would have applied to another course. However, a significant number of trainees would not have applied to another course (28%). The breakdown of what trainees would have done is shown in the table overleaf, split by employment status of the trainees:

Table 35: alternative options for trainees if they had not received the training

Alternative options	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Would have applied to another digital skills programme offering similar support	41 (56%)	32 (44%)	73 (32%)
Would have applied to another digital skills programme offering different support	6 (55%)	5 (45%)	11 (5%)
Would have applied to another programme focused on other skill areas	6 (40%)	9 (60%)	15 (7%)

Alternative options	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Probably would not have applied for another programme	37 (67%)	18 (33%)	55 (24%)
Definitely would not have applied for another programme	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10 (4%)
Don't know	27 (61%)	17 (39%)	44 (19%)
Other	13 (59%)	9 (41%)	22 (10%)
Total	135 (59%)	95 (41%)	230 (100%)

Source: trainee survey

Those that answered 'Other' were prompted to specify what else they would have done had they not received the training. Responses to this included:

- looking for smaller scale online courses;
- self-taught learning on digital skills;
- used Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) for the specific skill they want to learn;
- taken on a part-time job and start a master's course the year after; and
- applied to jobs which provide training.

Therefore, most of the respondents would have accessed some other form of training.

Focus group insight: a trainee in the course offered by Open University said she would have sought self-taught opportunities, recognising that this would not have been as easy or successful as the OU training.

Trainee satisfaction with training elements

There is a mix of trainee satisfaction with different training elements. The breakdown of trainee responses to this question in the trainee survey is shown in table 36 below, with the majority being 'Satisfied' or 'Very satisfied' with all the training elements. Note that the Microsoft Teams element was added during round 2 as providers began to shift their learning online, thus there are less than 200 responses for this element. Detailed breakdowns are included in annex G, table G.8.

Table 36: trainee satisfaction on different training elements (overview)

Training elements	Very satisfied	Satisfied	No opinion	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable	Total
Classroom based delivery	106 (46%)	46 (20%)	12 (5%)	5 (2%)	4 (2%)	57 (25%)	230
Video webinars	100 (43%)	93 (40%)	14 (6%)	9 (4%)	5 (2%)	9 (4%)	230
Online slack messaging	71 (31%)	53 (23%)	34 (15%)	7 (3%)	3 (1%)	62 (27%)	230
Project weeks	85 (37%)	62 (27%)	20 (9%)	10 (4%)	4 (2%)	48 (21%)	229
Trainee presentations	79 (35%)	65 (29%)	23 (10%)	4 (2%)	5 (2%)	52 (23%)	228
Employer engagement	64 (28%)	72 (32%)	30 (13%)	11 (5%)	12 (5%)	39 (17%)	228
Microsoft Teams	47 (29%)	44 (27%)	25 (16%)	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	40 (25%)	161

Source: trainee survey

All aspects of the training were received well by trainees. The highest levels of dissatisfaction among trainees were the level of employer engagement: 10% (n = 23) of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. However, 60% (n = 136) of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied suggesting that only marginal improvements could have been made to employer engagement from the point of view of trainees.

Additional support/advice trainees would have liked to receive

About 80% of trainees did not have any additional support or advice that they would have liked to receive but did not. For the remaining 20%, the additional support or advice they would have liked was:

- stronger and clearer mentoring and assistance, including for practical or final projects/exams and employer/job fit;
- more and clearer communications about time or skills requirements and possible job pathways as well as qualifications and courses available to them;
- a stronger focus on core technical skills alongside employability skills;
- more time for training delivery to consider peoples' other commitments including work;
- access to all training modules instead of just the 'beginner' levels; and
- access to laptop and solutions for better internet connection.

The respondents who provided these suggestions felt that some of these changes would have helped them to develop and gain new skills faster. They also said it would have helped them to be more visible to employers and increased their chances of finding employment.

Some of the trainees (almost 40%) reported unexpected outcomes through the trainee follow-up survey. These unexpected outcomes which trainees mentioned were:

- ✓ establishing support networks within the tech sector;
- ✓ developed stronger confidence in their skills and in their ability to find work;
- ✓ improved soft skills (e.g. teamwork and communication) needed in the workplace when working with different stakeholders; and
- ✓ new certifications gained beyond the training course.

Focus group insight: some of these were also mentioned by trainees on the focus group discussions, especially the fact that trainees were able to build their confidence levels through the group exercises.

6.9.5 What has worked well

SUMMARY

- ➢ The **application process** was reported as being straightforward and easy to understand by successful applicants although unsuccessful applicants highlighted some areas for improvement.
- ➢ Employers felt the **partnership approach** allowed them to shape and access training that was tailored to their needs. In this context, they understood that match funding requirements were a key component of the Fund.
- ➢ Trainees valued the **involvement of employers** in the training courses.

The following points were reported by the training providers interviewed to have worked well:

- the application process was less complex than other tenders some of the organisations have responded to in the past, particularly following the improvements made between round 1 and round 2;
- the method and digital skills that could be taught were flexible, which makes these Funds accessible to a wide range of people;
- feedback provided was clear which is useful for when the organisations put together bids for other Funds in the future;
- support, engagement and communication were better than a typical process for applying for funding;
- round 2 allowed GMCA and LDSP to streamline the process based on lessons learned from round 1; and
- engagement with employers was generally very positive. Almost all the training providers already had existing relationships, but those who didn't also reported positive engagement. Employers added value to both design and delivery of the training by sharing their specific needs and delivering masterclasses, talks and work experience opportunities.

The following points were reported by employers to have worked well in the delivery of the Fund:

- collaboration between employers and training providers in the design of the curriculum, through sharing lists of skills employers require or providing feedback on the curriculum. Employers report that training providers were receptive to feedback;
- regular communications from providers throughout delivery meant that employers were kept up-to-date on progress. Employers also had the opportunity to speak with trainees; and
- employers understood the rationale for match funding and valued the opportunity to contribute to both delivery and design of the course. This allowed them to create and access training that was tailored to their needs.

Trainees found the following areas worked well:

- the involvement of employers in delivery of the course meant that participants had a clear view towards career pathways post-training completion;
- sessions on CV skills and interview skills were very well received by the trainees; and
- they also particularly valued personalised support by engaged tutors and mentors.

6.9.6 Areas for development: local delivery

SUMMARY

- Additional clarity on skills and time requirements would have helped trainees assess whether the training course was a good fit.
- Training providers would have appreciated access to local employer networks during the application stage.
- Everyone recognised that Covid-19 presented barriers that had to be overcome with different to usual delivery channels.

The following points were reported by interviewees as ways of improving the Fund:

- the negotiation meeting that was part of the application process was not long enough to address all questions regarding feedback and next steps;
- the more specific the skills were that training providers aimed to deliver; the more employers felt the training met their needs. Training should therefore be specific rather than trying to provide an overview of digital jobs;
- local stakeholders should be involved from the very beginning to avoid teething issues or lack of clarity if other bodies (e.g. local authorities) are included at a later stage;
- providers would have valued access to local employer networks to improve their ability to identify and communicate with consortium partners locally. However, GDPR limits the extent to which contact information can be shared;
- while the majority of providers felt that while a bootcamp approach can work well, a more strategic approach to encouraging employers to develop their talent rather than 'buying talent' through external courses such as ones funded under this Fund would be more sustainable;
- while providers understood that funding decisions for round 2 were delayed, they also fed back that this left them with little time between contract award and scheduled start date to fully develop the training. In a couple cases, this led to content not being completely ready (including typos in material, for instance, which trainees noted);
- employers and trainees suggested the training could have been improved by more face-to-face delivery, while acknowledging that remote delivery was the only option due to Covid-19; and
- trainees also felt that time and skills requirements could have been made clearer prior to the courses starting as some had to drop out due to time requirements or a mismatch between their own skillsets and that needed for the training courses.

Focus group insight: in one of the focus groups (Raytheon), both employer and training provider recognised that skills shortages in their sector (cybersecurity) will not be removed by bootcamp style training courses only. In another focus group (Milliamp), the role of local education providers in solving skills shortages was highlighted. In the Burnley College/Themis focus group the employer partner highlighted that the course was used to upskill their apprentices. The employer stressed that as a result, the apprentices developed multiple skills that have increased the value these trainees add to the business. As a result, the employer felt that the course had contributed to the retention of the apprentices.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section outlines the conclusions and recommendations developed from the evaluation evidence.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- Most training providers already had existing relationships with employer partners. However, these relationships improved as a result of the Fund.
- Trainees' and employers' skills needs have been met. Due to relatively small numbers of trainees and due to training completing recently, skills gaps have been reduced but not closed.
- Due to the impacts of the pandemic, fewer trainees than expected were in a digital job three months after completion of their training: 273 candidates were in a digital job compared to the expected number of 612.
- Regional economic outputs and productivity cannot, at this stage, be said to have been affected in any meaningful way.
- The candidates reached were diverse. Round 1 had a higher female and non-white representation than round 2.
- Round 2 saw more and better-quality training course applications than round 1, including in Lancashire, due to changes made to the application process following Round 1.
- Governance processes worked well, as reported by DCMS, GMCA and LDSP.
- The role of GMCA and LDSP has been positively received by training providers who felt support from these bodies was beneficial during the application stage and after.

7.1 Aims of the Fund

The Fund aimed to identify and fill digital skills shortage vacancies of Greater Manchester (GM) and Lancashire employers. The Fund facilitated partnerships between training providers and local employers who designed and delivered training courses together. The Fund also aimed to benefit local people, primarily those in low skilled, low-paid occupations, who were able to take part in the training courses as trainees. By participating in training courses, local people's digital skills were to be developed. As a result, trainees' chances of securing better quality, higher paid job roles were expected to improve. Employees of the participating employer partners were also eligible to take part in training courses as a trainee. Through partnership with employers, the Fund aimed to improve training providers' understanding of local digital skills gaps. Another important goal of the Fund was to create longer-term partnerships between employers and training providers.

The following tables provide an overview of whether the Fund achieved its intended outcomes and impacts in detail. Overall, the Fund has partially or fully achieved eight of its 13 outcomes and impacts. For one of its outcomes and three impacts it is too early to assess the Fund's success. Only one outcome was not achieved (the proportion of trainees who complete their training), but this outcome was affected by Covid-19.

Table 37 – outcome achievements

Outcome	Evidence	Outcome achieved?
Trainees have improved digital skills	Trainees reported a range of improved digital skills as well as improved employability related soft skills. Employers reported that candidates they employed had new or improved skills that they needed. They had positive views on the quality of skills developed by the trainees. The most common improved skills and knowledge areas were 'Computer networking', 'programming languages', 'Linux' and knowledge of 'cybersecurity'.	**Yes**
At least 85% of trainees to complete training	Overall, 73% of recruited trainees (633) have completed the training at the time of writing the report. In round 1: 239 trainees were recruited and 205 completed the training (86%). In round 2: 428 of the 626 trainees recruited completed the training (68%). The 85% completion target was set prior to the pandemic. As this report highlights, Covid-19 has resulted in unforeseen barriers.	**No**
Increase in confidence for trainees	Approximately 27% of trainees report they have improved their confidence in soft skills, including interview and social network skills. In a small number of cases, training providers have fed back that candidates have improved their confidence in their own skills and abilities.	**Yes**
Reduce number of SSVs due to digital skills	Due to Covid-19, the small number of trainees relative to the local workforce and the size of many of the employer partners, training providers and employers reported that the skills gaps have reduced for individual businesses, but not on a significant scale.	**Partially achieved**
Businesses turn away fewer clients due to skills shortage	Despite the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn there is little evidence of businesses turning away clients. Moreover, some employers mentioned that they can offer new services, despite difficult economic conditions.	**Partially achieved**
Increased productivity of employers directly engaged with Fund	Employers reported that the candidates they employed have developed new or improved digital skills. In some cases, this has contributed to new services being offered. This may in time lead to an increase in their productivity levels.	**Too early to say**
Businesses feel more positively towards digital skills training	Businesses interviewed stated they would recommend participating in similar training courses to other businesses.	**Yes**

Outcome	Evidence	Outcome achieved?
Attributable impact, insight into 'what works' and value for money of the Fund	The Fund has developed the digital skills which it set out to develop. Monitoring data shows that 273 candidates (31%) are in a digital job three months after the training. Covid-19 has limited the extent to which employers were able to offer jobs. Employers reported that through the Fund they were able to access training they would not otherwise have been able to afford.	**Yes**

Table 38 – impact achievements

Impact	Evidence	Achieved?
Increased productivity in GMCA/Lancashire area	No evidence of this impact could be tested within this evaluation's timeline. If companies' productivity increase, it is likely that regional productivity may also increase in due time.	**Too early to say**
Improved engagement between training providers and employers to develop relevant digital skills training	Training providers and employers improved engagement as a key success of their involvement in the Fund. There is likely scope to further improve engagement between training providers and employers, if in future programmes, applicant training providers have access to local employer networks. A small minority of training providers we interviewed suggested that employers need to be supported to develop a more strategic approach to talent development.	**Yes**
Increased output of local digital economy	There is no evidence of this impact at this stage. As noted, there is evidence of some employer partners being able to offer new services.	**Too early to say**
Increased diversity of digital occupations in the GMCA/ Lancashire area	The Fund has successfully targeted and reached specific groups. These include women, ethnic minority communities, and recent graduates. 66% of women, 86% of people from ethnic minority communities, and 79% of recent graduates completed the training (which compares to an overall completion rate of 73%). It is not yet clear whether this will translate into an increased diversity in digital occupations.	**Too early to say**
Development of responsive training that shows value for money and a suitable model for future delivery	Training content was tailored to employer needs, as reported by employers. This demonstrates the responsiveness of the model. Going forward, a balance of flexibility and trainee support will need to be found. Due to Covid-19, providers shifted the delivery channels they used to a hybrid model with predominantly digital delivery.	**Yes**

7.2 Effectiveness of the governance and management of the Fund

There is evidence to suggest that the governance and management of the Fund has been effective. Processes are in place to monitor progress. GMCA receives progress updates from the training providers. GMCA and LDSP reviewed the reports together. They then summarised key points for DCMS. DCMS, GMCA, and LDSP conducted monthly meetings at which issues and necessary actions were discussed. However, in round 1 they were limited by the discrepancy in the quality of monitoring information received from the training providers. Risks were clearly and regularly communicated with DCMS in the form of monthly risk logs. These risk logs outline the likelihood of each risk, the action taken and future mitigation strategies, as well as the person responsible for implementing those actions. These processes demonstrate that the Fund, overall, was managed and governed effectively.

7.3 Barriers to the Fund

There have been some barriers to achieving the objectives of the Fund which are as follows:

- difficulties engaging with hard-to-reach demographics were compounded by the need to adapt courses to remote, hybrid delivery models. Providers had to put in extra effort to monitor candidates and support their progress;
- trainees come with different pre-existing skills levels. Some courses required trainees to have certain skills prior to participating in the training. Other training courses did not have such skills requirements. In cases where training providers did not have specific skills requirements, training delivery had to accommodate very different skill levels;
- Covid-19 pandemic has caused disruption as training providers had to switch training delivery to hybrid models. Trainees had to balance home learning with family and social commitments, working from home, or being furloughed or made redundant; and
- Covid-19 brought uncertainty and led to the UK economy entering a recession. It is important that GMCA and LDSP revisit local employers to understand their immediate digital skills gaps and whether these have changed in the current environment. At least one employer reported that their digital skill needs, and available vacancies changed because of the pandemic. They also said that this impacted on their ability to employ trainees.

7.4 Lessons and recommendations

The lessons that have emerged are listed below along with associated recommendations.

Table 39 – lessons learned and recommendations

Lessons	Recommendations
The majority of employers highlighted that their **skills needs have changed due to the pandemic**. For these employers it means that their digital skills gaps have shifted, rather than closed. This suggests that an **updated understanding of local and regional needs** following the pandemic may be needed through ongoing engagement between GMCA/LDSP and employers. Approaches that factor in **local needs and that involve local authorities and regional stakeholders such as Local Digital Skills Partnerships** as oversight or support bodies are seen as responsive. They are therefore well received by employers and training providers. Access to local employer networks would benefit training providers in future similar programmes, as it reduces the time spent on finding and contacting employers.	**Recommendation 1:** Build on existing research on digital skills shortages, particularly focusing on how this has changed as a result of the pandemic. **Recommendation 2**: Review existing training courses and consider changing needs following the pandemic. This review should be complemented by building connections between existing training courses and programmes with the aim of establishing processes through which trainees are matched to the best possible course for their needs. **Recommendation 3:** Replicate the approach taken on this Fund whereby local authorities, Digital Skills Partnerships and other local bodies are involved from inception onwards. Local bodies should have accountability for delivery of training programmes.
It is important to ensure that **all key governance, delivery and oversight partners are involved as early as possible**. This allows the partners to engage more widely with all relevant stakeholders.	**Recommendation 4:** Involve all stakeholders as early as possible so that roles, expectations and responsibilities can be clearly delineated and defined early in the process.
Providers feel there is a need for a long-term approach to developing talent within companies that goes beyond bootcamps. However, the bootcamp format is perceived	**Recommendation 5:** Involve employers in the design stage of similar programmes and ensure that

Lessons	Recommendations
as a model to be adopted more widely. When adopting a bootcamp approach, funders need to carefully consider length of courses, class sizes, trainee needs, and employer and local skills needs. This is key to ensuring that training providers develop appropriate courses with the right level of candidate support. However, **the involvement of employers was universally seen as a positive element of the Fund**.	communications about similar programmes are targeted at a wide group of employers.
It is unclear what the economic impact of the Fund is in GM and Lancashire. The Fund did not have defined proxies for business level productivity outcomes. In addition, there were no clearly defined VfM measures. Evaluations of future skills development programmes could benefit from developing robust baselines in cooperation with all key stakeholders including training providers and employers, if relevant. Such baselines could go beyond regional macro-economic indicators.	**Recommendation 6:** Future evaluations of skills development programmes should include robust baselines of training course level objectives and employer productivity proxies against which progress can be measured. This should take place in addition to a wider baseline of the local or regional skills needs and economic landscape. Future evaluations of similar programmes should also consider whether a broader range of outcomes should be captured, such as self-employment and further learning.
Some trainees were unaware of the intense nature of the training courses. Training providers should consider using an assessment stage of potential trainees to communicate the required workload.	**Recommendation 7:** Ensure that training providers communicate the expected workload of the training courses to all trainees.
Providers must commit appropriately experienced staff to complete monitoring processes. They should ensure that these staff members attend relevant meetings and calls both before and during delivery phases. GMCA offered extensive support to providers with the aim of enabling them to efficiently complete monitoring requirements. Written guidance on how to complete these processes could have enhanced the processes that were put in place by giving providers an easily accessible document detailing how to complete these requirements.	**Recommendation 8:** Providers must attend all pre-delivery meetings with relevant, experienced staff, who must be committed throughout the delivery of the training programme. Funders should provide written guidance detailing monitoring requirements and how to complete forms and processes properly. Depending on legal requirements, funding bodies should consider whether grant agreements should be replaced with contracts with detailed terms and conditions in order to be able to hold providers accountable.

Lessons	Recommendations
Based on feedback from unsuccessful applicants, **additional guidance could be beneficial in improving applications for public funding in general**. This could be particularly helpful for organisations who have not before sought public funding.	**Recommendation 9**: Conduct training webinars or events for organisations who have not previously applied to receive public funding.
Trainees faced additional pressures due to the pandemic and virtual delivery meant that some trainees fell behind, and in some cases dropped out. While flexibility is valuable to allow trainees to complete training in their own time, it means that providers need to monitor progress even more closely and provide strong pastoral support. Some trainees, especially those who are already employed or who have childcare responsibilities, need support 24/7. Trainees need access to support through a variety of channels.	**Recommendation 10:** Consider the need to commit resources to providing individualised trainee support, especially for hybrid or virtual-only training delivery and to conduct pre-training trainee engagement to learn more about potential trainee support needed.
As demonstrated, **the Fund has achieved or fully achieved eight of its 13 outcomes and impacts**. Trainees valued different aspects of the courses: most had positive views of soft skills and employability skills content and mentoring provided. However, some noted that a stronger focus on learning knowledge required to pass exams would have been welcomed. Particularly successful training courses were those that developed very specific skills and skillsets, such as cybersecurity or CAD. Limited evidence was found for any need for changes to legislation or funding. However, one employer stressed that flexibility with how the apprenticeship levy is used would be beneficial to enable more, short training to be sourced. Some training providers felt that the Fund's focus on small, short courses can limit the number of trainees on each course. However, this was necessary, as DCMS specified that the expenditure per project should be relatively low to improve VfM. Furthermore, the Fund was set up to test the bootcamp approach. Providing fewer delivery consortia with larger amounts of funding would have meant less models tested and greater risk if they were unsuccessful. Projects did have the opportunity to increase their funding by securing appropriate match-funding.	**Recommendation 11:** Consider bootcamp style training approaches that incorporate hybrid training models and have tailored trainee support.