



Evaluating the Effectiveness of Line Management Training *Research Plan*

Updated August 2025 to include further details on the Randomised Controlled Trial of the Achieving Your Potential programme.

Motivation for the Evaluation

In the Civil Service, there are over 100,000 line managers. Research from other settings suggests that the quality of management is a key predictor of organisational productivity (e.g. Bloom et al, 2013). An effective civil service thus requires effective management by its line managers.

With this in mind, Government Skills has commissioned four large-scale training programmes – Foundation, Practitioner, Senior Practitioner and Achieving your Potential – to upskill civil servants from across Civil Service departments in line management.

This document sets out a research plan to evaluate – through a process and impact evaluation – whether these trainings are effective at upskilling civil servants in line management, as well as the impacts this has on workforce outcomes such as promotions and team productivity, and how the trainings could be improved further. The evaluation is conducted by academics at University College London, with extensive expertise in using surveys, interviews, focus groups, workforce data analysis and field experiments to robustly evaluate training programme processes and effectiveness.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation design is based on careful theories of change developed for each programme.

All four programmes will be evaluated using:

- Pre-post surveys with all training participants, which measure the extent to which participants after the training (relative to before the training): (i) gain greater competence in line management; (ii) shift attitudes towards line management; (iii) gain greater peer networks; and (iv) change their line management practices towards good practice. The surveys also assess how these effects vary by training delivery model, and by demographic characteristics of participants.



- Interviews and focus groups with a sub-set

of participants, as well as participant observation (shadowing) of select training sessions, to understand the process through which training achieves (or fails to achieve) learning and broader impacts on line management practices in the Civil Service, and to understand how different components of the training design and delivery could be optimised to achieve better outcomes for different learners.

In addition, as detailed next, the evaluation will explore several innovations in evaluation design.

Innovations to improve training evaluation practices in the Civil Service

Beyond informing line management trainings, the evaluation seeks to improve approaches to training evaluation in government more generally, and serve as a catalyst for better future training evaluations in government. The project includes several innovations to advance this aim:

- Training programmes are typically evaluated as individual programmes, even when programmes cover complementary topics and skills. This project will assess the feasibility of a combined programme-level and suite-level evaluation of multiple line management trainings. The suite-level evaluation assesses the way by which programmes function as a collective group of training products in developing line management skills.
- To overcome problems with low response rates in training evaluation surveys, training participants receive a confidential, personalised management diagnostic after completing the training survey, which they can then discuss in class with their training facilitator and peers. This provides training participants with a strong incentive to complete the survey, to be able to participate in class discussions and receive personalised feedback.
- For the upcoming “Achieving your Potential” training programme, the project will assess the feasibility of conducting a wait-listed randomised control trial (RCT), by randomly assigning interested training participants to participate in the training earlier or later. This would enable the project to detect causal effects of the training – i.e. to understand in a robust manner what the training achieved and what not.
- The project will also assess the feasibility of drawing on and analysing micro workforce data from a range of Civil Service departments to assess the broader impacts of management and leadership programmes on workforce outcomes (such as performance ratings, promotion trajectories or retention), as important predictors of greater productivity in organisations. This would pave the way for a more strategic use of workforce data to assess the effects of management practices in the Civil Service. An update on this element of the evaluation as of August 2025 is provided below.



Timeline and Outputs

Survey and participant observation data collection is expected to commence in December 2024 (observations) to January 2025 (surveys). All data collection is expected to be completed by November 2025, and final reporting completed by December 2025.

The evaluation will produce a number of outputs:

- A final evaluation report.
- Results presentations, both in the Cabinet Office and in Civil Service departments with large cohorts participating in the training, with tailored (anonymised) results for their departments.
- A guidance note with lessons learned to inform future evaluations of training in government.
- A toolkit to replicate similar curriculum and training structure assessments in other evaluations.

In case of a positive feasibility assessment on workforce data, the project will also produce:

- Methodological guidance for building Civil Service capacity to use administrative workforce data for future evaluations.
- A training workshop to upskill civil servants in using administrative data to evaluate management practices.

Updated information about the RCT of Achieving Your Potential

Analysis plans for the RCT of the Achieving Your Potential (AYP) are now available on the Open Science Framework ([here](#) and [here](#)). Achieving Your Potential is a programme for aspiring line managers which was designed and is delivered by civil servants.

The RCT evaluation randomly assigns interested training participants to participate in the training earlier or later, with those taking the training later acting as a comparison group for those who took it earlier. If the training improves the target outcomes to a sufficient extent, and we have enough survey participants, this approach will enable us to detect whether the training caused improvements in participants' readiness to manage and leadership skills. The evaluation will also assess how these effects vary by demographic characteristics of participants.

Observations, interviews, and focus groups will also be carried out as part of the AYP evaluation.



Updated information about the use of

workforce data in the evaluation

The feasibility assessment found that it was not feasible at this point in time to use Civil Service workforce data to evaluate the impact of this suite of line management training on longer term outcomes like performance, productivity and retention. The findings of this feasibility assessment, and lessons learned, will be presented as part of the final evaluation report.

This note was originally prepared by Christian Schuster, Professor in Public Management, and Ine Steenmans, Associate Professor in Futures, Analysis and Policy, University College London, for Government Skills. The August 2025 update, including the AYP RCT sections, was prepared with additional contributions from Eleanor Woodhouse, Associate Professor of Public Policy, UCL. This represents a snapshot of our understanding as at August 2025. To learn more about this work, please contact: GovernmentSkills.comms@cabinetoffice.gov.uk