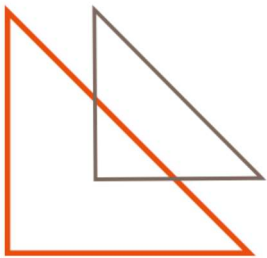# Digital Skills Training Pilot

Final Evaluation

Prepared for
West Midlands combined Authority
by
Winning Moves Ltd

April 2021

WINNING MOVES ®
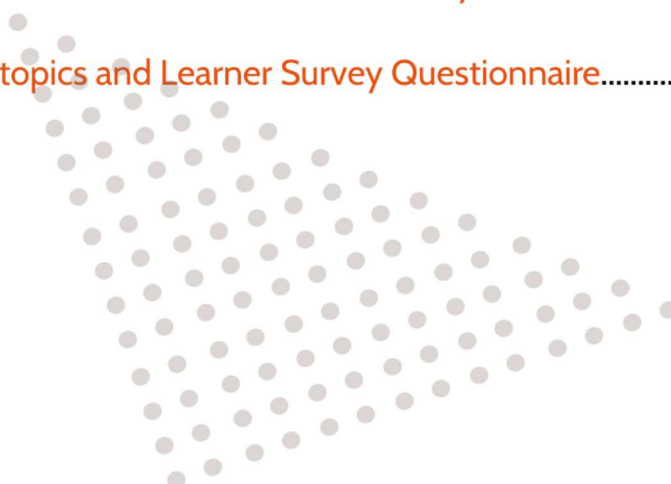
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1 Introduction

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) commissioned Winning Moves to complete an evaluation of their Digital Skills Pilot, which aims to:

'support unemployed and employed [combined authority] residents from the West Midlands to enter and/or progress into employment within digital occupations'

Invitation to Express Interest & Submit Proposals Descriptive Document: Digital Skills Training Pilot' West Midlands Combined Authority, May 2019.

Funded in conjunction with the Department for Education (DfE), this pilot has been implemented to move people into work and will also inform the DfE's future approach to a new National Retraining Scheme. This scheme will provide individuals with access to free or subsidised training to improve their digital literacy and technical skills.

Pilot Objectives

The Digital Skills Pilot in the West Midlands was the first to be introduced in a combined authority (CA) area, with subsequent programmes established in five other CA's, including Greater Manchester and Lancashire and Liverpool City Region[1]. Following a competitive procurement process, WMCA selected 20 training providers to deliver digital skills training in a wide range of specialisms, such as cybersecurity, coding and software development. The overarching objectives of this pilot were to:

| Provide combined authority residents with greater access to higher level and technical training at Level 3 and above | Move 70% of unemployed learners into full or part-time employment within 90 days of completing their course | Support employed learners, working in low paid roles, to upskill and progress into roles with higher salaries and greater responsibility | Test the effectiveness and viability of bootcamp delivery as a mechanism for moving learners into employment | Encourage new training providers to engage with the programme and deliver training using innovative approaches |

[1] Similar schemes were established in five other combined authority areas, across two implementation waves. Greater Manchester and Lancashire and Liverpool City Region were introduced alongside the West Midlands in the first Wave, while Leeds City Region, The Heart of the South West and, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire started towards the end of 2020

Scope of the evaluation

The main aim of this evaluation is to evidence the extent to which the Digital Skill Pilot has achieved the above objectives. In doing so, WMCA are expecting this report to:

✓ Identify and explore key outcomes and impacts of the programme on learners, training providers and the wider economy, with particular emphasis on provision of Level 3 courses, innovative delivery and learner destinations (securing employment or job progression);

✓ Detail what specific elements of programme management, delivery and monitoring have contributed to these outcomes and impacts;

✓ Provide an assessment of what aspects of delivery have worked well, together with suggestions for possible improvements; and

✓ Outline next steps that WMCA might want to take over the next 12 to 18 months, to further strengthen their assessment of programme performance.

Evaluation approach

To collate the necessary qualitative and quantitative evidence to deliver WMCA's requirements, we implemented a fieldwork approach organised into the following principal tasks:

Review of strategy and project documentation

We reviewed the content of several strategy and programme documents, including the Local Industrial Strategy and Regional Skills Plan, WMCA's Invitation to Express Interest and Submit Proposals document (sent to prospective training providers), and all training provider delivery plans, to further understand:

The rationale for implementing the Digital Skills Pilot	How the pilot intended to support and improve the skills profile of WMCA residents and contribute to the economic performance of the West Midlands region	The approaches that training providers have taken to deliver their courses.

Stakeholder consultations

Our research team completed face-to-face and video interviews (using Microsoft Teams) with the following stakeholders:

Training providers: 14 of the 21 providers delivering training under the Digital Skills Pilot. These included discussions with college principals, owners and Chief Executives of independent training providers (ITPs) and course tutors.

6 employers involved in supporting the design and delivery of course content and/or in the offer of job interviews and employment.

3 WMCA programme staff, with responsibility for managing the programme and monitoring provider performance.

All interviews were conducted using structured topic guides, the content of which are detailed in Annex Two. A full list of stakeholder organisations interviewed is detailed in Annex One.

Student/learner survey

At the end of interviews with training providers, we asked that a provider-specific link to an online survey questionnaire be sent out to all learners who had completed or were in the process of completing their course. The purpose of the survey was to explore their experiences of the project and the impacts of engagement on job outcomes and skills development.

In total, 207 learners from 11 providers submitted their responses to the online survey. A list of the providers, from which we received learner surveys, is included in Annex One.

Review of performance management dashboard

All pilot training providers are required to submit monthly performance management returns to WMCA. This data includes:

| Programme level statistics on the number of students completing learning and the number reporting positive outcomes (employment or progression to a higher paid role). | Training courses delivered by providers | Enrolment numbers by different monitoring characteristics | The number of learners who have completed courses, or are in the process of doing so | Destination data for all learners, captured after 30, 60 and 90 days, where possible |
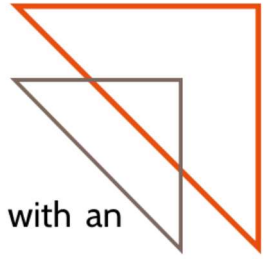
We have reviewed data for all of the above categories to provide WMCA with an overall assessment of provider and programme performance.

Report Structure

The remainder of this report has been organised into nine sections each examining a particular programme outcome or impact.

2 Programme attracts new training providers

> **WMCA and the Digital Skills Pilot have been successful in attracting a diverse profile of training providers, including non-profit organisations and charities, community organisations, representative bodies and ITPs.**

Of the 20 providers delivering courses in the Digital Skills Pilot, only five are colleges and universities. WMCA have placed emphasis on funding providers with industry experience, knowledge of digital technologies and skills requirements, and experience of engaging with particular learner target groups. As one provider stated:

'I was glad the opportunity was being offered to smaller companies like ourselves and not just the FE colleges, and that providers were being afforded greater flexibility to deliver more bespoke training'

Independent training provider

Education and training provision, whether it is aimed at pre-16, 16-19 or adult learners, has long been dominated by more 'traditional' institutions like schools, colleges, Further Education (FE) providers and universities. Independent training providers (ITPs) and other new entrants have struggled to compete and successfully access government funded programmes like the Digital Skills Pilot. Complex procurement processes, limited flexibility in how and what training courses can be delivered, and lack of delivery experience, often discourage smaller and potentially more innovative training providers from applying for funding.

Programme flexibility

It is the flexibility, afforded through the programme and WMCA's management of it, that prompted new and different types of providers to apply for funding.

Education and training provision is usually dictated by national priorities and funding availability, and restricts the type and level of courses delivered, how such courses are delivered and consequently, who can deliver them. However, WMCA had an expanded vision for the Digital Skills Programme and how it should be managed and delivered.

The scope and coverage of the Digital Skills Pilot, both in terms of the courses offered and the learners supported, was left intentionally broad and open to interpretation:

'In developing this specification, we have been deliberately open about how digital retraining programmes may be delivered and have defined what we are hoping to achieve rather than prescribing how this will be achieved'

'Invitation to Express Interest & Submit Proposals: Descriptive Document – Digital Skills Training Pilot' West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), May 2019

This led to different providers proposing courses in a variety of specialisms and targeting a diverse profile of learners. Courses ranged from computer repair and software development to cybersecurity and coding, while target groups included asylum seekers and refugees, individuals with autism, the long-term unemployed and people seeking a career change.

Different approaches to learner recruitment and course delivery were actively encouraged. This attracted providers who had been previously *'put off by an overemphasis on purely theoretical and classroom delivery'*. Examples of innovative delivery included using TV programme production to teach video editing, filming and digital design, and hackathons and controlled digital laboratory environments to develop skills in cybersecurity.

An iterative and supportive procurement process

The majority of providers were positive about the procurement process that WMCA implemented for the Digital Skills Pilot, viewing it as inclusive, fair and transparent. Tender documents were clearly written, concise and easy to understand, while submission requirements were not prohibitive to smaller and inexperienced organisations.

Procurement processes, particularly those associated with accessing public/government funding, can be complex, highly competitive and resource intensive. They purposely or unwittingly prevent many smaller and niche organisations from applying, organisations who may have little prior experience of procurement or a limited track record in delivering programmes with similar requirements.

'Our experience with other funding is that the application process is much tougher, the competition for course funding is much greater and engagement with the client is restricted'

Independent training provider

Several providers were complementary about the support, information, advice and guidance that the programme manager, for the Digital Skills pilot, gave them during the procurement process, and the willingness of other programme staff to respond to specific queries and issues. Related to this, WMCA were praised for the detailed and informative feedback they gave providers both during and after the process:

'The programme manager was very approachable and always willing to chat with us. They met with us to provide really detailed feedback on our first submission and where we had wrong, and clearly saw the potential of our bid and how we could make an impact. We were really encouraged by the process and keen to submit a proposal'

Community training organisation

Learning point: Be flexible in your programme management

The Digital Skills Pilot has clearly benefited from WMCA's open and flexible approach to programme management. Less prescription around programme requirements and greater communication and transparency with training providers, encouraged them to apply and propose more innovative approaches to delivery.

3 Delivering technical and higher level courses

> **WMCA have ensured that all courses are offered at Level 3 and above. Over 1,900 learners have enrolled on 31 different Level 3 courses, including Data Analytics, Cloud Operations & Engineering and Software Development.**

In response to their understanding of market demand, WMCA have been clear about the role of the pilot in increasing Level 3 digital provision, and a shift away from courses that focus on digital inclusion, digital literacy and general digital skills.

WMCA have focused attention on employer engagement (discussed later) and specifically, on understanding the skills, competencies and experience that businesses are looking for when they recruit.

This focus has been shared with training providers. Open dialogue with employers has identified a need for individuals who are proficient in using the latest software and programs and have the experience and competencies to fill middle management roles in the digital technologies sector. Across all of their education and skills funding streams, WMCA have recognised the increased demand for Level 3 and 4 qualifications and a need to fill an *obvious gap* in current provision.

A clear focus on Level 3 provision

WMCA have been open and transparent (in their Invitiation to Tender, and in discussions with providers) about the role of the Digital Skills Pilot in providing access to Level 3 courses.

These courses have a clear emphasis on developing the technical skills and competencies of learners.

'...against this picture of growing demand and skills requirements our publically funded training offer is falling short. There is a reasonable offer of digital inclusion and general digital skills courses but training at Level 3 is limited...What we find to be missing is a short, intensive, skills based, rather than qualification based set of programmes for adults to retrain'

'Invitation to Express Interest & Submit Proposals: Descriptive Document – Digital Skills Training Pilot' West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), May 2019

'The focus of this programme is different to the courses we have delivered before. I've done L1 and L2 and there is big gap between L2 and L3. This programme is about exploring and developing the skills and competences at Level 3, that are needed for people to thrive in one of the region's key growth sectors'

Independent training provider

Providers have responded to WMCA's brief and offered courses in technically demanding areas such as cybersecurity and data protection, data analysis, software and app development and coding. Individuals are learning how to use the latest versions of highly complex programs, software and data analysis tools:

'So yes, it's Python, pandas, NUM py, machine learning algorithms, big data, in the data analysis course. While in the software course, learners are using HTML and CSS software'

College provider

Aptitude tests used to allow access to higher level courses

Providers introduced aptitude tests and competence assessments, alongside interviews, to support learner recruitment, widening access to learners lacking formal qualifications.

While providers universally agreed with WMCA's focus on higher level and technical skills, several were initially concerned whether they would be able to attract and recruit enough learners onto Level 3 courses. To counter this, they introduced different assessment methods to their recruitment process to determine learner suitability:

'Our assessment is an analysis of their critical thinking and testing whether or not they know where to look to find answers. Essentially, it tests their capacity to learn and research and their awareness of general coding concepts.'

Independent training provider

'We did some technical tests and had some competency based questions in the application form and we committed to interviewing 70 people. They were basic coding tests in html, java script and css"

College Provider

Many were pleasantly surprised by the effectiveness of aptitude tests in determining suitability of learners and anecdotal evidence from several providers suggests they may have contributed to lower drop-out rates, although this link would need further exploration.

Use of industry specialists to deliver technical / higher level content

Several training providers employed tutors and careers advisers with experience of working in Digital Technologies, with some combining teaching with a full time job in relevant digital roles.

'We've got quite an experienced technical training team. So in terms of the actual technical aspects of it our trainers sort of, we've got a number of them that have sort of 15 years plus of being software developers and trainers, so we have quite a I guess senior experienced team'

Independent training provider

Input from industry specialists with up to date practical experience of the sector has ensured that the technical components of Level 3 qualifications have been covered accurately and that learners have benefited from useful insights into the requirements of employers.
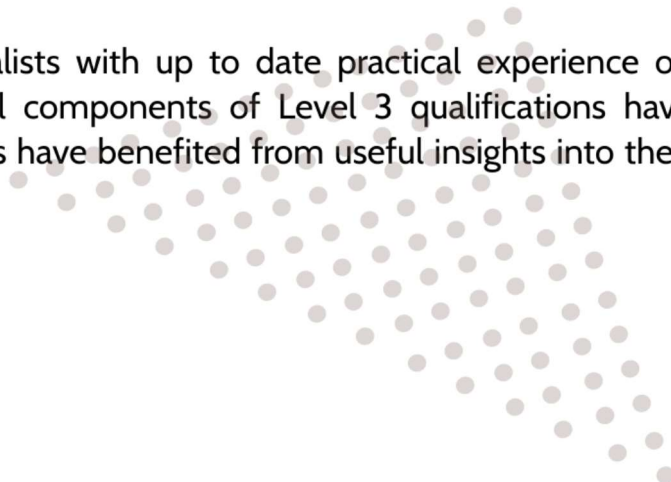
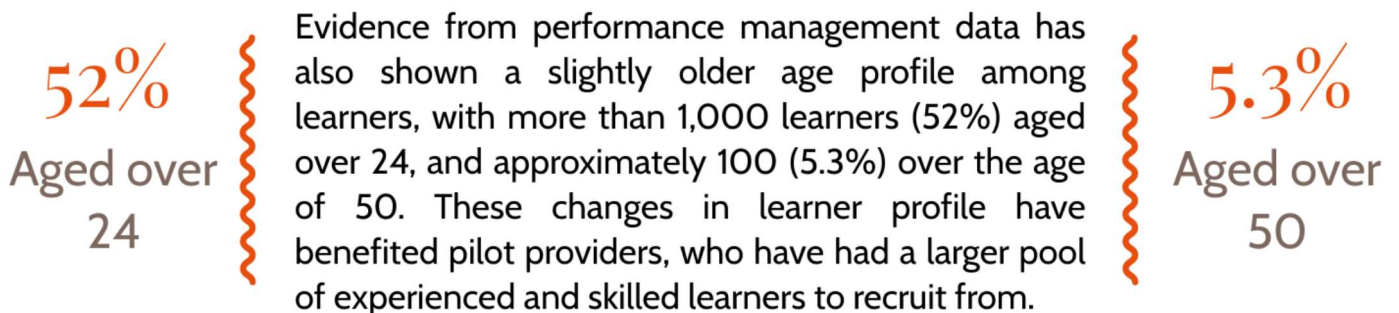# COVID has increased interest in technical and higher level skills

An unforeseen impact of COVID and, specifically, the Government's furlough scheme, has been an increase in the number of people enrolling on Level 3 and 4 courses. While furloughed, learners used the time to enrol on courses to upskill and to enhance their technical knowledge. There is also evidence, from the survey, of learners enrolling on digital courses to support a possible career change. Of the 72 learners who responded to the question *'why did you decide to do the course',* 37 stated their desire to change career:

'I am currently employed in the retail sector and, like millions of others, have been furloughed as a result of COVID. I am unsure whether I will have a job to go back to and viewed this course as an opportunity to develop skills in a new sector, which may open up job opportunities in the future'

Learner Survey respondent

52%
Aged over 24

Evidence from performance management data has also shown a slightly older age profile among learners, with more than 1,000 learners (52%) aged over 24, and approximately 100 (5.3%) over the age of 50. These changes in learner profile have benefited pilot providers, who have had a larger pool of experienced and skilled learners to recruit from.

5.3%
Aged over 50

'The Government have placed significant emphasis on digital technologies and digital skills as a route way to economic recovery post-COVID. This narrative has led to a higher proportion of employed and/or highly skilled learners enrolling on our courses, seeking a career change and job opportunities in a developing sector'

College Provider

Learning point: Development of progression pathways

There is agreement of the need for continued focus on higher level skills and the provision of Level 3 courses and qualifications, not just in Digital Technologies, but across all the growth sectors of the West Midlands. In Birmingham, only 4% of education and training provision is delivered at Level 3 and above, which serves to confirm the current focus is justified and appropriate.

However, while there is undeniably a raft of basic Digital Skills Training, several providers stated the need for more courses at Level 1 and Level 2, that offer clear progression routes allowing learners to identify courses that move from lower to higher level qualifications. These progression routes should also be linked to different careers or occupations:

'In digital skills, but also more generally, provision should be mapped so learners can clearly see how they can progress from a basic skills course through to Level 2, 3 and beyond. At present, there is a gap in provision at Level 1 and Level 2 and learners can't identify which courses to progress to. Learners would also benefit from seeing how qualifications impact on their career progression. If I have a Level 1 course, I can do this, If I have a Level 2 course, I can do that etc'

Independent training providert

4 Female learners participate in greater numbers

Nearly half of all learners (49%) who enrolled on pilot training courses were female, a level of participation not traditionally seen on 'work-related' training and certainly not seen in Digital Technologies.

Participation rates in adult learning do not vary significantly between men and women. However, there are notable differences associated with the type of learning.

'Men participate more in work-related learning and experience more job-related motives to participate'. Women take on different responsibilities, resulting in less employment in knowledge intensive jobs and fewer opportunities for work-related training"

Gender differences in formal, non-formal and informal adult learning' Studies in Continuing Education 33(3)

Lower levels of female employment in 'knowledge intensive jobs' is reflected in the Digital Technologies and IT sectors, where women are significantly under-represented. According to the 2018 TechNation report:

'Tech does not currently offer equal opportunities for all. There is a growing movement to promote diversity, with a number of initiatives aiming to address the gulf between men and women's employment in the sector'.

'Report 2018: Connection and collaboration: powering UK tech and driving the economy' Tech Nation
https://technation.io/insights/report-2018/

19%

Only 19% of the digital tech workforce is female, compared with 49% across all UK jobs.

49%

While several providers specifically targeted their courses at female learners, it was clear that other factors were driving these higher levels of female participation.

Flexible delivery: Fitting training around other responsibilities

Provision of short courses, like the bootcamps offered through the Digital Skills Pilot, are attractive to learners who cannot commit to full-time courses spanning one or more academic years, due to other commitments.

'So the full time Monday to Friday 9-5 may not work for some of the people we support who can't afford to take a career break. You know, for 12 weeks to do this, they still need to work a part time job, and they may have childcare responsibilities, which limits when during the day they can work"

College Provider

It is not just the duration of bootcamp courses that are attractive to female learners but, as the above quote suggests, it is also about having the flexibility to learn at more convenient times during the day. Several female learners, who responded to the learner survey, stated that delivery of classes in the evenings and on weekends had allowed them to engage on the course.

'I have benefited from the evening and weekend sessions. These have allowed me to more effectively juggle childcare and household responsibilities with learning. I have been able to put in the hours needed when the kids have gone to bed, or when they are doing other activities on the weekend'

Female Learner

'I work during the week, and have childcare responsibilities. I wouldn't be able to enrol for a full-time course. Part-time delivery and the offer of sessions during the evening have allowed me to access this opportunity'

Female Learner

COVID also prompted many providers to record their sessions and post them online, allowing learners to access course content when they could:

'School closures during COVID have meant my two children have been at home all day every day. Responsibilities round home schooling have made it difficult for me to attend 'live' Zoom sessions with the rest of the class. However, the tutor has recorded the sessions and sent links to me, so I can complete the work at a convenient time'

Female Learner

Holistic support to improve access to training

While not specific to female learners, provision of more holistic support has allowed a higher proportion to enrol and complete courses. This included providing learners with access to childcare, free or subsidised transport and even provision of free meals for those in lower paid roles. Through this additional support, training providers removed some of the common barriers associated with accessing education.

Additionally, and partly as a result of COVID and the enforced shift to online and remote learning, several providers have loaned laptops and other equipment, such as dongles, tablets and supportive software to learners. This included one provider who allowed their learners to keep the equipment after completing their course. Providers recognised the difficulties that people can have in accessing technologies and Internet connectivity and sought to remove this barrier for learners to improve access to digital training.

Learning point: Provision of additional support

In seeking to support learners, the majority of who are unemployed or employed in low paid occupations, education and training provision needs to actively remove the common barriers that prevent them from engaging. While loaning of equipment may be difficult for smaller providers, other incentives and holistic support has proven to be valuable for key target groups. These types of support should be considered in future rounds of the Digital Skills Pilot and maintained where feasible.
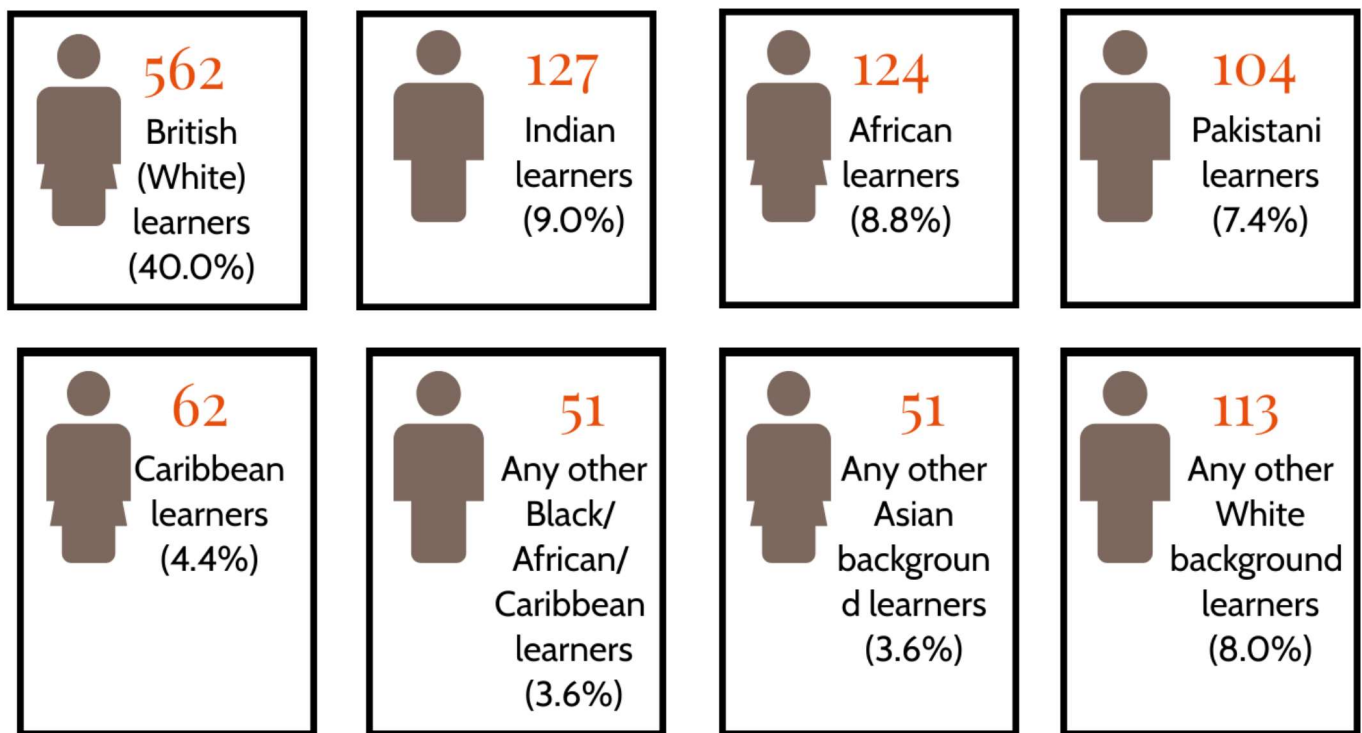
5 Programme supports ethnic diversity

> **Mirroring female participation on the Digital Skills Pilot, over half of learners were from non-white ethnic backgrounds, significantly higher than enrolment levels on other adult education and FE courses[2].**

The graphic below provides a breakdown of enrolment numbers by ethnicity.

562 British (White) learners (40.0%)	**127** Indian learners (9.0%)	**124** African learners (8.8%)	**104** Pakistani learners (7.4%)
62 Caribbean learners (4.4%)	**51** Any other Black/ African/ Caribbean learners (3.6%)	**51** Any other Asian background learners (3.6%)	**113** Any other White background learners (8.0%)

Learner profiling characteristics: Enrolment by ethnicity

This shows that while 40% of learners classified themselves as white British, 60% were from an ethnic minority background, with the highest learner numbers among people from Indian (9%), African (8.8%) and Pakistani (7.4%) backgrounds.

[2] According to latest FE and adult education participation data for the 2019/20 academic year, 23.8% of learners declared themselves as *'black, Asian, or other minority ethnic groups (BAME)'.* https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-and-skills/2019-20
[1]*'Report 2018: Connection and collaboration: powering UK tech and driving the economy'* Tech Nation https://technation.io/insights/report-2018/

15%

In digital technology

{

This is in stark contrast to ethnic minority representation in Digital Technologies employment, where only 15% of the workforce are from ethnic minority backgrounds, although this is actually slightly higher than the all industry average of 10%[3].

}

10%

Industry average

The earlier focus on female participation identified flexibility of delivery and the provision of holistic support as important factors behind more females enrolling. While these also represent important factors behind the increased engagement from ethnic minority residents, there is another, strength of the programme, that has influenced this performance.

Promoting inclusivity and diversity in digital technologies

The Digital Skills Pilot, albeit indirectly, has benefited from a greater focus on inclusivity and diversity among training providers.

WMCA has used the Digital Skills Pilot to take a different approach to procurement, one which gave greater opportunity and support for community organisations and less 'traditional' training providers to bid for funding. This resulted in WMCA selecting providers with significant female and ethnic minority representation among tutors, well-established links with representative bodies and better connections to digital technology companies that employ females and ethnic minorities in prominent and senior positions.

'We provide our learners with role models. I'd say we are probably an 80% female training team, so they have that positive role model and they see that there are others that can do the coding that they're sort of starting to try and learn as well'

Community training organisation

'We have made more of an effort to engage with female and BAME employees who work in senior digital roles within nationally and internationally recognised companies. Doing so allows our learners to relate more directly with employer contributors and to the sector as a whole'

Independent Training Provider
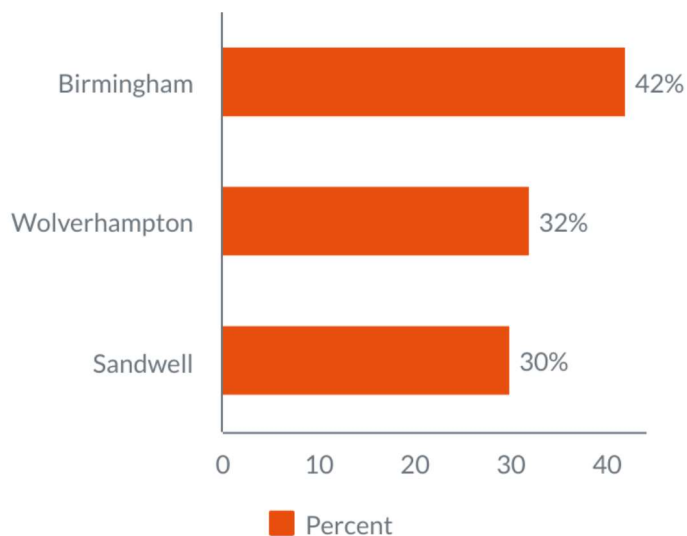
BAME representation

Given that 23% of the region's population is BAME, with particularly high levels in Birmingham (42%) Wolverhampton (32%) and Sandwell (30%), it is important that education and training provision is representative and reflective of the local population it serves, and that learners are encouraged by seeing people from similar backgrounds succeed in business.

Learning point: supporting diversity and reflecting communities

This pilot has shown that inclusivity, diversity and representativeness are critical to the success of education and training programmes in ethnically diverse populations. Learners have benefited from access to 'niche' providers that have a passion for supporting particular segments of their community or for addressing particular issues or barriers.

'The programme is all about getting black women who are unemployed (or earning under 26k) and over 18- into jobs earning over 26k'…My main reason is because I'm passionate about breaking the vicious cycle of poverty for black womem. I want to upskill them digitally to do different things. I have experienced poverty first hand and I have family members in abject poverty in Nigeria. We need to allow access to these types of training to black women and other underrepresented groups and this pilot has enabled me to play a small part in increasing access'

Independent training provider)

6 Programme shows early signs of delivering job outcomes

As of March 26th 2021, 30% of unemployed learners, who have completed their courses, have successfully secured employment, with the vast majority securing roles in digital technology businesses or roles requiring digital skills.

44% Roles progressed

In addition, 44% of employed learners have progressed into roles with greater responsibilities and / or higher pay.

783

Number of learners completed courses

67%

Proportion of enrolled learners completed courses (to date)

291

Overall positive outcomes – employment or job progression

410

Unemployed learners completed courses

30%

Proportion of unemployed learners who have completed courses and obtaining employment

44%

Proportion of employed learners who have completed courses and 'progressed'[4]

Positive learner outcomes — employment and job progression among learners who have completed courses

'[4] Progression' refers to learners who, taken on greater responsibilities in their existing role or moved into a role with a higher salary.

Reviewing job outcome data by individual provider has highlighted some notable variations in performance, with 85% of unemployed learners on Brit Asia TV courses and 77% of unemployed learners on School of Code courses, securing employment within 90 days of completing their course. 42% of unemployed learners on Tech Talent courses have also reported securing employment (higher than the average of 30%). Encouraging evidence collated through the provider interviews has shown that all providers have reported job outcomes for a proportion of their learners.

The overriding objective of the Digital Skills Pilot, and a key driver behind the decision to promote bootcamps as the principal mechanism/framework for delivery, was to move unemployed learners into sustained employment..

WMCA set an ambitious target for 70% of all unemployed learners to be in sustained employment within 90 days of completing their course.

Whilst, to date, overall programme performance is falling someway short of this target, the above data is showing clear evidence of positive outcomes for learners. It should also be noted that the data does not include the number of learners who have enrolled on additional education and training courses, an outcome that several providers identified during discussions.

Changing learner perceptions of digital technology occupations

In addition to the measurable impact on job outcomes, evidence from the learner survey showed that 47% of respondents are intending to seek a job in the Digital Technologies and IT sectors, with many crediting their courses for raising awareness of the array of different occupations and roles offered. These learners are hoping to secure employment in junior/entry level roles in specialisms ranging from web development and digital marketing to data analysis, software and application development and cybersecurity.

Learning point: Requirement for further collection of destination data

To adequately and accurately assess the impacts of the pilot on job outcomes, WMCA need further learner destination data, with analysis taking place at least 90 days after learners have completed their courses.

Firstly, almost 40% of enrolled learners have yet to complete their courses and obtain associated qualifications, with government restrictions imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19 the major contributor to this position. Secondly, WMCA expected providers to track learners and collect destination data after 30, 60 and 90 days from course completion, a time period that has yet to elapse for the majority of learners. Thirdly, programme performance must be viewed in the context of current economic conditions, which are characterised by high levels of unemployment and continued uncertainty surrounding the long-term viability of many businesses.

7 Employer engagement critical to job outcomes for learners

> **Providers selected through the Digital Skills Pilot successfully established links with local businesses, increasing the likelihood of learners securing a job after finishing their course.**

As discussed above, the expectation is that providers will move 70% of their learners into work. The bootcamp delivery approach, adopted for the Digital Skills Pilot, recognises the importance of employer engagement to achieving this target and specifically, the need to establish links with a 'critical mass' of employers who can offer a sufficient number and range of job opportunities.

There are several aspects of how the Digital Skills Pilot has been designed and delivered that have encouraged involvement from local and national employers.

Realistic expectations of employer contribution

Although there are several larger digital technology employers that have the capacity to support education and training programmes like the Digital Skills Pilot, the sector, like much of the UK economy, is dominated by smaller businesses. While recognising the role they should be playing in skills development and shaping education and training, many do not have the financial or staff resources to dedicate to supporting such programmes, a situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has made significantly worse.

'The way the sector is at the moment, there are a lot of businesses and individuals interested, but actually getting them to partner and support our objectives is more difficult.'

Independent training provider

However, several employers stated that the programme demands very little from them and provides the flexibility for their involvement to fluctuate depending on business requirements.

> 'These programmes are often burdensome for employers. You are expected to dedicate a lot of financial and staff resources to them and you don't always see the return on that investment. With this programme, there is no financial burden and it is lightweight in terms of what it demands from us. My colleague spends no more than a day a week on this and I spend about an hour'.

Small employer contributor

This has encouraged a larger number of businesses to become involved and to offer more significant resources and support. Evidence of this support has been seen in the delivery of course content, which has ranged from organising virtual tours of business premises and delivering presentations that raise awareness of different roles and occupations, to teaching modules and structuring learner assessments.

Engagement is changing perceptions of learners amongst employers

Engagement with the Digital Skills Pilot has challenged employer misconceptions and stereotypes of some types of learners. Several employers were open about their reticence to employ people from harder to reach socio-economic groups, people who might have previous criminal convictions, might be dealing with the challenges of addiction, or may simply be long-term unemployed.

However, through directly engaging with the programme, employers have seen, first-hand, the motivation behind these learners, their capacity to learn and apply theoretical concepts and their ability to solve problems and work collaboratively with other learners. This has prompted employers to offer jobs to people they may not have considered in the past, opening up roles, occupations and opportunities that may have previously been 'beyond the reach' of many learners.

> 'Without the programme, we probably wouldn't have considered employing many of the learners. We would have been unaware of the practical skills these individuals have and the benefits they could bring our business. We have recruited several learners from the programme, and they will no doubt contribute significantly to the productivity of the business'

Employer contributor
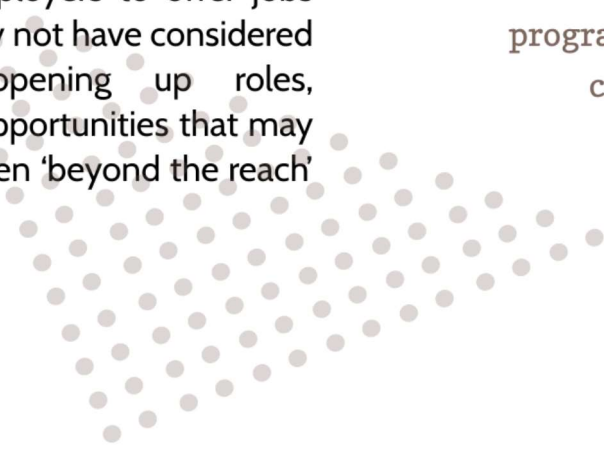
Learning point: Securing a 'critical mass' of employers

COVID-19 has created a challenging economic environment for all businesses, irrespective of sector and size, and has made it more difficult for providers to develop partnerships and relationships with local employers. The programme's bootcamp delivery approach has supported the establishment of such relationships, and has focused on the importance of securing support from a 'critical mass' of employers.

If there is insufficient engagement from local employers, learners have limited access to job vacancies and work experience and the programme becomes less attractive to them. WMCA need to continue to market and promote the programme to local employers, and support providers to establish relationships with prominent digital companies. This engagement will ensure continued access to job opportunities.

8 Employer engagement critical to job outcomes for learners

> **Employer engagement has ensured that course curricula and content are relevant to employer needs and the needs of the wider Digital Technologies sector.**

A common, albeit shortsighted, argument that employers, across all industry sectors, put forward, is that education and training provision fails to equip learners up to date skills and competencies that their industry needs. The risk of outdated course content is a particular problem for sectors like Digital Technologies, where continued innovation and technological development leads to regular software and equipment upgrades and associated changes in the skills and competencies required.

Delivery model facilitates responsive provision

Providers under the Digital Skills Pilot have been encouraged to adopt the bootcamp delivery model, where courses are completed in between 12 and 16 weeks and the curriculum is often divided into several shorter modules, covering specific topics or particular applications This short course delivery has allowed providers greater opportunity to review and update course content during the academic year, resulting in more up to date and responsive provision.

'We engage with 3 or four learner cohorts during the year. This allows ourselves and our employer partners to review course delivery at the end of each round and make amendments and improvements to delivery'

Independent training provider

Modules can be quickly amended, while changes or upgrades to equipment and software can be incorporated into later rounds of delivery.

Employers influence curriculum content

Almost all pilot providers have benefited from employing staff with significant and up to date industry knowledge and experience, experience that has allowed them to shape curriculum content to current industry needs. In addition, providers have sought information, advice and guidance from local employers about what skills and competencies should be developed and on what versions of software and equipment:

'Employers can be very particular about the skills they require from their learners and what software programs they need to be competent in using. We have found it much easier to engage employers directly and ask them to confirm what programs and tools learners should be using on our courses'

Independent training provider

Several providers took this a stage further and invited employers to design specific modules or elements of course content.This included examples of employers designing practical tasks or assessments based on actual projects and client requests:

'The provider has a laboratory facility that they can use to simulate cyber attacks on networks and business IT systems'. We spoke to them about simulating a data breach using a credential phishing email to exfiltrate personal information. This was something that happened to us and learners were able to use the lab to find approaches to minimise the impact of the breach'

Employer contributor

'We wanted to provide learners with a real life experience of working in the sector. We devised an assessment that mirrored a marketing campaign we had to design for an existing client. Learners had to establish a brand for the client and their product'

College providerr

Learning point: Taking advantage of employer insight and experience

While employer engagement can be difficult to obtain and even more difficult to sustain, the Digital Skills Pilot has highlighted several examples where employers can add real value to the design and delivery of training, particularly training in knowledge intensive and innovative sectors like Digital Technologies. WMCA should continue to establish links with regionally significant employers and promote the benefits they will gain from supporting the Digital Skills Pilot and other similar initiatives.

9 Programme gets learners 'employment ready'

> **Providers, businesses and learners agree that the pilot, and its bootcamp delivery model, prepares individuals for the world of work.**

While provision of higher level courses and the development of learners' theoretical knowledge and technical competencies, have been two of the main objectives of the pilot, considerable focus has also been given to ensuring that learners are 'employment ready' and are able to actively contribute to the productivity and success of their employer the moment they start work.

## Development of 'softer' and 'transferable' skills

An important facet of Digital Bootcamps and the Digital Skills Pilot, is to develop transferable skills alongside technical competencies.

All providers dedicated part of their course delivery to developing the transferable skills of their learners, with particular emphasis on improving communication and presentation skills, team working and problem solving.

'We ensure that our students learn to work collaboratively as part of a functioning team, that they can take responsibility for the delivery of particular tasks and that they respond well to instruction and also criticism. We make sure that their written and oral communication is clear and concise and that they are comfortable and confident to voice their opinions and engage with more senior individuals'

College training provider
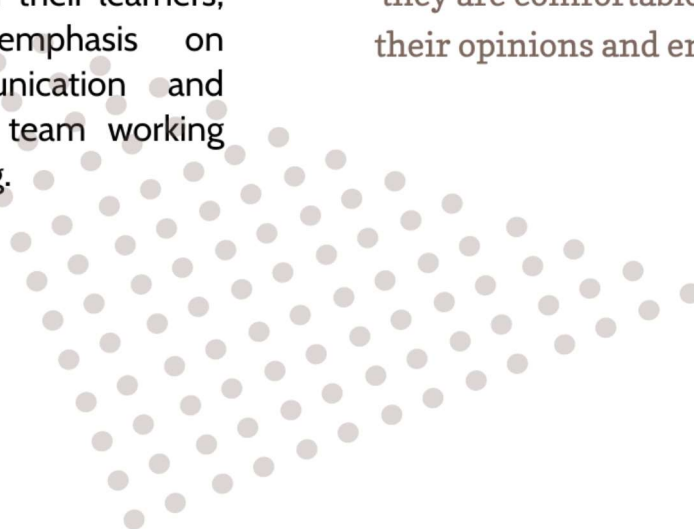
Learners benefit from careers advice and support with CVs

Evidence from our survey highlighted the significance that learners continue to place on careers advice; support with CVs and interview technique; and follow-up contact once they have completed their courses.

'I have worked in the same company for 15 years. I want a change and to do something related to my passion for computer and network maintenance. I would really benefit from, and value discussions, with a careers rep or someone who can help me find a job'

College training provider

Several learners felt that programmes like the Digital Skills Pilot engage intensively with them for a specified period of weeks and then *'quickly forget them when the course finishes'.*

The Digital Skills Pilot has been different in this respect. Providers have facilitated access to careers advisers, who have played a significant role in raising learners' awareness of the different occupations and roles that their newly learned skills afford them access to. These advisers have also taken the time to get to know the learners, their interests and their longer-term career and life aspirations, which has led to more tailored and relevant advice on job opportunities. Related to this, courses have supported learners with 'personal marketing' and have organised employer-led sessions that provide valuable insights into what businesses are looking for when they are recruiting and how learners can differentiate themselves from the competition.

'We had an employer come in and talk to us about personal marketing and branding and how we can use our CV to sell ourselves to businesses. They spoke about using the design skills we are learning to help us stand out from the crowd, do something different with our CV's and portfolios'

Learner survey respondent).

'I had no idea how quickly employers review and sift through CV's and applications. It highlighted to me the importance of tailoring my CV, keeping in short, relevant and succinct, and also structuring it differently to make it stand out to the employer"

Learner survey respondent).providerr

Learning point: Can short course delivery prepare people for work?

The Government is placing significant trust and investment in bootcamp delivery as a mechanism for supporting economic recovery and rapidly moving people back into employment, including people who are seeking job security through a change in career. However, several employers questioned the suitability of short course programmes for certain cohorts of learners, particularly individuals who are new to a sector.

'I think that there is still a significant jump from the sort of education you get on bootcamps, particularly with the technical programmes, and the expectations placed on individuals when they start working'

Employer contributor).

'It is hard for learners to come out of a few months programme ready to go into full time work in our organisation, in the same way that someone who has a computing degree and a couple of years of relevant experience would be able to. You just can't expect them to do that. However, neither can businesses lower the bar in relation to expectations'

Employer contributor).

While bootcamp delivery can move people into employment, the onus currently rests with the employer to offer further training and *'bring them up to speed'* with their expectations and skills requirements. Sustainability of employment relies on the level of resource companies can put into continued training and professional development of bootcamp learners. WMCA, and other proponents of this delivery approach, need to recognise the increased training demands these learners will place on businesses and consider offering further support to address this.

10 'Brand' and reputation important to providers

> **Providers benefit reputationally from their involvement with the Digital Skills Pilot and the partnership with WMCA. Reputation is critical in establishing links with sectorally significant and recognised employers.**

Having a strong brand and a good reputation is critical for training providers if they are to attract, recruit and retain learners. This is evidenced by the longstanding performance of providers like School of Code and Netcom. They are well known among digital technology businesses and their courses are highly sought after and often significantly oversubscribed. The Digital Skills Pilot has been successful in widening the profile of training providers delivering courses, however several of these new providers need time and support to promote their activities and build their reputation.

Attracting the right employers

This evaluation has stressed the importance of providers engaging with a 'critical mass' of employers to maximise their chances of securing the required level of employment outcomes. However, both providers and WMCA programme staff recognise the importance of receiving support from the 'right employers' and how association with recognised employers can play a key role in rapidly enhancing programme and individual provider reputations, and attracting learners.

'Microsoft are hoping to open up all their partner network and provide access to our learners for the companies that are part of this network, and support the trainees on training within AI and Azure fundamentals. Undoubtedly, a continued partnership with Microsoft will attract interest from other companies, further enhancing our reputation and widening our 'sphere of influence' in digital training'

Independent training provider

'Initially, we found it difficult to attract learners onto our course. We are a new provider and people don't know our name. As soon as we mentioned our partnership with Amazon in our promotional materials, we started seeing far more interest in our course. Having that business endorsement is really helpful to new providers looking to make a name for themselves'

Independent Training Provider

Reputational enhancement through WMCA

Several newer and less established training providers have benefited from their relationship with WMCA. They see WMCA as an endorsement of their activity, with the reputation of the Combined Authority almost serving as a 'quality mark' for their provision. WMCA have high expectations of their providers and monitor their performance. This relationship with WMCA has played an important role in attracting learners:

'I found out about the course online and noticed that the provider was being funded by WMCA. I googled WMCA and thought 'if they are supporting this provider, their course must be good'

Learner survey respondent

"I don't think we could have attracted enough learners without the relationship we have with WMCA. Having support from them shows learners and employers that are courses are of the right standard and quality. It is like having a Kite mark or being Corgi registered. People hold us in higher regard because of our links to WMCA'

Independent training provider

'I would say that that is probably a really key thing for us in terms of WMCA is very well recognized, very well respected, and being a partner and working with WMCA has definitely been beneficial in terms of our reputation, and within the area as well'

Independent Training Provider

Additionally, working in partnership with WMCA has resulted in more interest, leads and formal enrolments via providers' direct marketing and promotional activities.

"Publicising our relationship with the WMCA has shown prospective learners and employers that we have an understanding of the region and that we know what training and educational requirements they need. We are not simply another national training organisation that is seeking to port or transpose other programmes into the locality'

Independent training provider
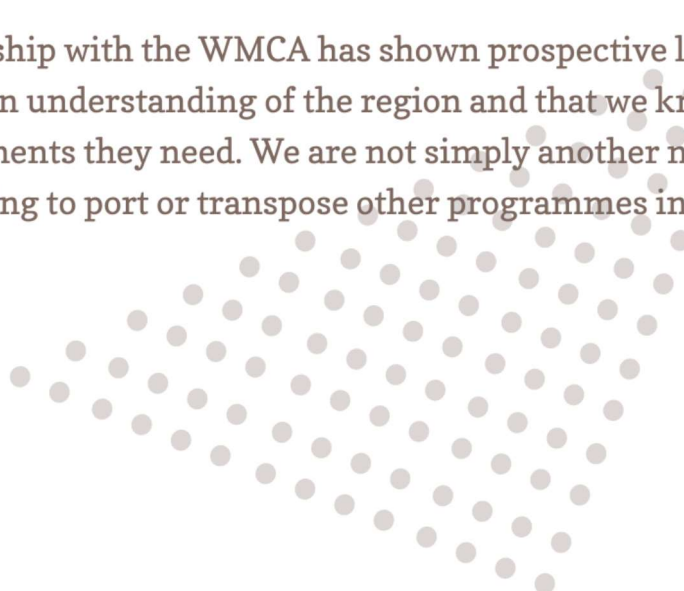
Longevity of the programme key to reputational enhancement

While reputations and markets can be destroyed overnight, via poor performance and damaging reviews, they can take considerable time to build up, particularly within education and training, where FE colleges and universities are more recognised. The significance of reputation has been illustrated via the performance of School of Code.

They have well established links with employers and have supported **77%** of their learners into employment, higher than the programme average of **30.4%**

They are not delivering anything that other providers cannot deliver, however, they have focused their provision on one area and 'perfected' their delivery over many years. The bootcamp delivery model that the Digital Skills Pilot has adopted is derived from the the School of Code's approach.

Other providers need to be given the time to develop similar reputations. Doing so may result in the programme delivering more significant and longer-term impacts for learners, employers and the wider economy.

Learning point: Taking advantage of employer insight and experience

This section has highlighted how working with WMCA can enhance the reputation and 'pulling power' of providers. WMCA could play a role in supporting providers to build their own brand but should stop short of directly marketing on the providers' behalf. In addition, WMCA and central Government need to 'hold firm' and support the programme through multiple delivery cycles to allow providers to grow and enhance their reputations.

11 'Brand' and reputation important to providers

The socio-economic landscape into which the Digital Skills Pilot was originally introduced has changed significantly as a result of COVID-19. Higher levels of redundancy and unemployment, across all sectors, but particularly in retail and hospitality, is driving a new set of more urgent central Government priorities. The development of digital skills and investment in the continued growth of the Digital Technologies sector, have now become central pillars of the current government's strategy for post-COVID economic recovery. The Prime Minister's speech of 29th September 2020 promised significant further investment in digital skills bootcamps, recognising them as an effective approach for rapidly re-skilling those recently made redundant and returning them to work.

In light of these investment and policy decisions, together with commitments made through the DfE's Lifelong Learning White Paper[1], WMCA's Digital Skills Pilot has become an even more important intervention to address economic recovery and support people back into higher level and more productive roles and occupations.

The purpose of this evaluation has been twofold:

To identify and evidence the main impacts of the programme, which can be used to justify Government's faith and continued financial investment.

To provide WMCA with a series of related learning points and recommendations that can be implemented over the next 6 to 12 months, to maximise the longer-term impacts of the programme on the region's residents, employers and wider economic performance.
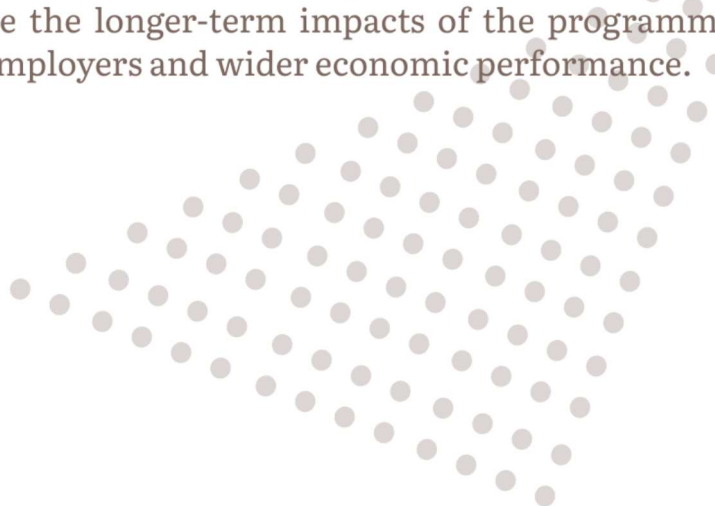
'[5] Using this White Paper, the Prime Minister has introduced a Lifetime Skills Guarantee to allow everyone to access the education and training they need throughout their lives. It is the DfEs *'mission to make sure that opportunity is there for everyone, wherever they live, to level up every inch of the country'*

These impacts and associated learning points are summarised in Table 3, below and can serve as an action plan for WMCA for the next year.

Programme Impact	Learning Point / Recommendation
Programme flexibility has attracted new types of training provider, including non-profit organisations and charities, community organisations and representative groups and Independent Training Providers (ITPs).	Less prescription around programme requirements and greater communication and transparency with providers, encouraged more providers to engage.
Programme delivery has focused entirely on Level 3 provision and development of higher-level skills, addressing a recognised gap in current digital training provision.	It is important that harder to reach individuals continue to receive support through this and similar programmes. WMCA should ensure clear progression routes for education and training and different occupations.
Programme has encouraged higher participation rates among women and BAME residents, in a sector where both groups are significantly under-represented	Many learners face significant barriers that prevent them from accessing education and training programmes. WMCA and the Digital Skills Pilot need to continue their offer of holistic support, examples of which include free meals, childcare support and access to equipment.

In addition, WMCA should continue to establish diversity and representativeness that have both become hallmarks of the pilot |

Programme Impact	Learning Point / Recommendation
Learners are progressing into full-time permanent employment that aligns with the training they have completed	To adequately and accurately assess the impacts of the pilot on job outcomes, WMCA need to conduct a more detailed review of learner destination data, with analysis taking place at least 90 days after learners have completed their courses. Further support may need to be given to providers to improve submission of destination data.
Providers are establishing successful partnerships with local employers, which is having positive impacts in terms of: • Job outcomes • Course content and quality • Employer readiness of learners	WMCA should continue to establish links with regionally significant employers and promote the benefits they will gain from supporting the Digital Skills Pilot and other similar initiatives. Is there further support that WMCA can offer employers who take on Digital Skills Pilot learners, in relation to training and CPD?
Programme and individual providers, will benefit from developing a positive reputation and brand creation.	WMCA need to 'hold firm' in their belief and support for the programme to ensure providers benefit from multiple rounds of delivery and time to further develop their offer and their reputation.

Annex 1

Stakeholder interview contributors

Stakeholder name	Organisation
Training Providers	
Nevinder Ram	Ashley Housing
Jane Foulkes	Tech Talent
Daniel Williams	Birmingham University
Tony Shergill	Brit Asia TV
Elizabeth Hoyos de Kent	TDM
Matthew Snelson	Elevate
Oyin Adibayo	Niyo
Pete Cripps	Digital Innovators
Zeshan Sattar	Comptia
Telvinder Singh	Lead
Claire Bickley	Code Your Future
Michael Conway	Fircroft College
Mohammed Zur	Netcom
Chris Meah	School of Code
Employers	
Tom Holliss	Zappi
Amrit Singh	Mettaminds
Sarah Caughey	CapGemini
Gurpreet Muctor	Bristan
Mike Brooman	Vanti

Learner Survey

- Ashley Housing (ACH)
- Birmingham University
- Code Your Future
- Comptia
- Elevate
- Fircroft College
- Lead
- Netcom
- Niyo
- School of Code
- TDM
- Tech Talent

Annex 2: Topic Guides
Stakeholder Interview Topic Guide

Recruitment of respondent

Introduction for Gatekeeper

Good morning/afternoon. My name is xxxxxx and I am calling from Winning Moves on behalf of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

Could I please speak to [named contact]

If more information is requested:

WMCA has asked us to carry out an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Digital Skills Pilot Programme, which provides training to employed and unemployed combined authority residents, with a particular focus on encouraging women into technology occupations. The objectives of this study are to:

- update the early stage Phase 1 evaluation with quantitative evidence of outcomes and impact against pilot objectives, particularly job outcomes for learners;

- evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of Phase 1 and Phase 2 delivery processes (at programme and individual project level);

- identify and evaluate the impacts of the Pilot programme on providers, stakeholders, learners and the wider economy, including a more detailed Value for Money (VfM) assessment.

We would like to speak with [named contact] to explore their experiences of the programme and discuss any possible improvements to how the programme has been managed, monitored and delivered.

Introduction for respondents

Good morning/afternoon. My name is xxxxxx and I am calling from Winning Moves, on behalf of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

WMCA has asked us to carry out an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Digital Skills Pilot Programme, which you/your organisation have been involved with.

As part of this study, we are talking to key stakeholders, including WMCA, training providers and referral organisations (e.g. Job Centre Plus and National Careers Service) . We anticipate that this conversation could take around 30-45 minutes, so would like to arrange a convenient time to do this with you?

- Confirm contact details provided by WMCA (if needed)
- Notify of call recording for training and quality purposes
- Request permission for responses to made attributable – note if respondent wishes to retain anonymity

Otherwise, arrange appointment and send email confirmation.

If appropriate and respondent consistently unavailable by telephone then send out introduction as email with an opportunity to book a suitable time for themselves into Winning Moves calendar.

Interview

Good morning/afternoon. My name is xxxxxx and I am calling from Winning Moves on behalf of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

We arranged that I would contact you this morning/afternoon to discuss your experiences of the Phase 2 of the Digital Skills Pilot programme. Is now still a good time for us to discuss this?

- Notify of call recording for training and quality purposes
- Request permission for responses to made attributable – note if respondent wishes to retain anonymity
- If required offer respondents a copy of our full privacy notice

Role and responsibility of respondent[11] (ask all)

1. Researcher to note stakeholder type

2. **To give me a little bit of background and context could you please tell me your current role and your key responsibilities, and how this relates to the Digital Skills Pilot Programme?**

   PROBE their involvement in the design, monitoring and delivery of programme or project level activities, where relevant.

Motivation for involvement in the scheme (ask all)

3. **Thinking now about the digital skills pilot programme, what were the main reasons for getting involved in the scheme?**

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[11] These headings will not be read out to respondents but are inserted here for ease of review

PROBE knowledge of Regional Skills Plan (RSP) and Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), knowledge of digital skills gap. If discussing with a provider, explore content of their delivery plan in more detail.

4. **What are your views on the competitive bidding process used to select providers?**

   PROBE to establish ease of process, time taken, any difficulties or barriers to overcome, perceptions of the delivery plan approach. Where possible identify any issues for their type of organisation (e.g. experience of completing similar bids)

Relationship with and value of WMCA (ask all)

5. **How do you work with WMCA – what type of contact do you have, how frequently, about what?**

   FOR PROVIDERS PROBE contact with Digital Skills Pilot lead, engagement with compliance officers/individuals involved in monitoring performance, perceptions of monitoring and reporting requirements

   FOR EMPLOYERS PROBE involvement in determining skills requirements, job opportunities

   FOR WIDER STAKEHOLDERS PROBE their overall engagement with WMCA

6. **In what ways does the relationship with WMCA benefit your organisation?**

7. **How has the nature of your relationship with WMCA changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?**

   PROBE any additional support offered and the nature of this support,

   IN ADDITION, FOR PROVIDERS PROBE re-profiling of targets, changes to frequency and content of meetings/conversations, flexibility round delivery and performance targets

Learners (only ask of training providers)

8. **What type of learners is your project delivery aiming to support? Why have you targeted these learners?**

   PROBE using content from Phase 2 delivery plans

9. **What approaches have you used to market and promote your project and its activities to learners?**

PROBE use of face-to-face engagement, community level engagement, support from other organisations

10. **How have these approaches changed as a result of COVID-19?**

11. **Before COVID-19, were you successful in identifying a sufficient number of learners for your course?**

    PROBE any barriers that providers faced in attracting learners and encouraging them to enrol on the course

12. **Since COVID-19, what challenges have you faced in recruiting learners onto your courses?**

    PROBE suspension of activities, accessing people without a computer or social media, use of face-to-face discussions, use of referral organisations (e.g. Job Centre Plus)

13. **What criteria did you establish for eligibility and did you implement any mechanisms for determining the ability and skills of learners before you accepted them onto the course?**

14. **Has the profile of your learners changed since COVID-19?**

Partnerships (only ask of training providers)

15. **What partnership/relationships have you had to establish in order to generate a source of learners?**

    PROBE links with Job Centre Plus (JCP), National Careers Service, community groups in delivery area, specialist organisations (depending on target group)

16. **What ongoing contact do you have with these organisations and what impact has COVID-19 had on your engagement with partner organisations?**

    PROBE to understand type of contact (e.g. Face to face meeting, email updates etc) and what is included in this, explore for different organisations they have relationships with

17. **What are the benefits of working together with these organisations?**

18. **What links have you established with local employers and how were those links established?**

PROBE whether these are as anticipated, already existing etc

19. **How have these employers been involved in the delivery of course activities?**

PROBE for presentations, setting of assignments, delivery of particular aspects of the course, development of softer skills, such as interview techniques, CV design etc.

20. **In what way has WMCA supported you in establishing either sources of learners or relationships with employers?**

Only ask of other stakeholders

21. **What do you think are the benefits of training providers forging links with organisations such as the Job Centre? [who are these benefits for]**

22. **What do you think are the benefits of training providers and employers working in partnership? [who are these benefits for]**

Delivery models and course content

23. **What approaches have you taken to delivering course provision?**

PROBE: use of bootcamp model and their take on this approach; use of classroom teaching; use of online programmes and remote learning; use of drop-in sessions for extra support;

24. **What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the way you deliver training to learners?**

PROBE changes to method of delivery; times of delivery etc

25. **Can you summarise the content of the training you have given to learners?**

PROBE content as outlined in the delivery plan/proposal submission

26. **Are you offering any content that isn't specifically digital skills?**

PROBE any focus on 'softer' transferable skills or employability skills

Where courses are targeted at both unemployed and at upskilling employed, explore how content for these cohorts varies outside of the digital skill element

27. **Are there aspects of the content that work particularly well? Any aspects that don't work so well?**

Outputs and impacts

28. **The scheme is still at a very early stage, however, have you seen any impacts to date?**

    PROBE types of skills learners have developed; destinations of learners after the course – additional training, volunteering, full/part-time employment; qualifications achieved

29. **What do you think are or will be the main benefits of your project and the Digital Skills Pilot more widely?**

    PROBE to understand perceived benefits to students, employers and training providers

30. **What have been and what do you think will be the impacts of COVID-19 on project performance and resulting outputs and outcomes?**

    PROBE how the projects have been performing pre and post-COVID and what the longer-term impacts on performance are likely to be. Also, discuss how WMCA have responded to any changes in performance

31. **What impacts are you expecting that 1) your project 2) the wider pilot programme will have on the combined authority area?**

32. **Do you think the scheme contributes to the availability of skilled employees? How?**

33. **What are the key aspects of the scheme that are contributing to these impacts do you think?**

Employer Interview Topic Guide

Recruitment of respondent

Introduction for Gatekeeper

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- identify and evaluate the impacts of the Pilot programme on providers, stakeholders, learners and the wider economy, including a more detailed Value for Money (VfM) assessment.

We would like to speak with [named contact] to explore their experiences of the programme and discuss any possible improvements to how the programme has been managed, monitored and delivered.

Introduction for respondents

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WMCA has asked us to carry out an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Digital Skills Pilot Programme, which you/your organisation have been involved with.

As part of this study, we are talking to key stakeholders, including WMCA, training providers and referral organisations (e.g. Job Centre Plus and National Careers Service) . We anticipate that this conversation could take around 30-45 minutes, so would like to arrange a convenient time to do this with you?

If respondent states that now would be a good time then:

- Confirm contact details provided by WMCA (if needed)
- Notify of call recording for training and quality purposes

- Request permission for responses to made attributable – note if respondent wishes to retain anonymity

Otherwise, arrange appointment and send email confirmation.

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Interview

Good morning/afternoon. My name is xxxxxx and I am calling from Winning Moves on behalf of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

We arranged that I would contact you this morning/afternoon to discuss your experiences of the Phase 2 of the Digital Skills Pilot programme. Is now still a good time for us to discuss this?

- Notify of call recording for training and quality purposes
- Request permission for responses to made attributable – note if respondent wishes to retain anonymity
- If required offer respondents a copy of our full privacy notice

Role and responsibility of respondent

1. **To give me a little bit of background and context could you please tell me your current role and your key responsibilities, and how this relates to the Digital Skills Pilot Programme?**

Motivation for involvement in the scheme

2. **Thinking now about the digital skills pilot programme, what were the main reasons for getting involved in the scheme?**

   PROBE: Influencing the skills of learners, tailoring of training to meet employer needs, addressing skills gaps that exist in digital training

3. **What are your views on the current skills gaps that employers like yours are struggling to fill?**

   PROBE: Technical and sector specific skills that their business struggles to recruit; and employability/softer skills that the employer considers to be important.

Partnerships and engagement with training providers

4. **What links have you established with training providers?**

   PROBE whether any of these links were pre-existing, how the link with [Insert provider name] was established, who else in the business has direct links with [Insert provider name]

5. **What motivated you to establish this link?**

6. **Were there any barriers or obstacles that you had to overcome in order to forge this link? [internal or external]**

7. **In what way has WMCA supported you in establishing relationships with training providers?**

   PROBE whether or not anyone from WMCA contact them to establish any links with the project

8. **What do you think are the benefits of training providers and employers working in partnership?**

   PROBE: employers shaping course content, supporting providers with delivery, working with learners which helps identify their skills, strengths and suitability for recruitment, reducing employer risk of employing students

Delivering course content

9. **Can you summarise your involvement in the delivery of any course provision?**

10. **What involvement have you had in supporting learner development of softer, employability skills?**

Outputs and impacts

11. **Have you interviewed any learners who have completed the course?**

12. Based on your engagement with the project, what are your perceptions of the learners?

12. Have you offered employment (part-time or full-time) to any learners following their completion of the project?

13. What are your perspectives on the bootcamp delivery model and how it benefits employers and learners?

Learner Survey Questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in this survey about your course with [training providers name]. Your answers are really important to us - to help us decide what is working well and how the training could be improved for other students.

All your answers will be anonymous. Winning Moves will keep any information that you share with us confidential and store it securely, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Motivations for doing the training course

Which of the following best describes you before you started the course?

   a. I was employed in the IT job
   b. I was employed in a role that requires particular IT skills
   c. I was unemployed

Why did you decide to do the course? (include an option for verbatim response)

   a. I thought it would help me find a job
   b. I wanted to change my career
   c. I wanted to progress in my career
   d. I simply wanted to improve my IT skills
   e. Other - what was this? [space for written response]

Student experience

How did you get involved in the training course? [Please tick one]

   a. I asked my college/training provider
   b. The college/training provider invited me
   c. I went to the Job Centre Plus
   d. My employer suggested it
   e. Another way – what was this? [space for written response]

Ask of those who went to Job Centre Plus) Move the marker to show much Job Centre Plus helped you to decide to do the course?

Not at all ———————————————————— A great deal

Before starting this course, which of the following had you already done training in?

- Active directory concepts
- Computer networking
- Cloud
- Cyber security
- DevOps
- IT infrastructure
- Mobile operating systems
- Quality assurance & testing
- Server administration
- Service management
- UI/UX design
- Web design
- Windows Operating System

- CompTIA A+
- Comp TIA Network+
- Comp TIA Security+
- Other IT qualification – what was this? [space for written response]

- CSS
- HTML
- JavaScript
- Python
- Other programming language – what was this? [space for written response]

- Linux Shell (BASH)
- Node.JS
- PowerShell
- React

- Other programming tools – what was this? [space for written response]

Thinking in general about the course so far, please rate the course out of 10, with 1 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest:

1		10

Please provide reasons for your rating:

Please rate the course tutors out of 10, with 1 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest:

1		10

Please provide reasons for your rating:

Using a rating between 1 and 5, with 1 being 'strongly agree' and 5 being 'strongly disagree, to what extent do you agree with the following statements about the course?

a. The course is the right length for the skills I will be learning

b. The course is teaching the right combination of skills for me

c. The delivery method of …….(complete depending on training provider) is an effective approach for learning the skills I need

d. I have received additional support with developing softer/transferable skills

e. There has been enough of a focus on supporting me to find a job (CV, Interview training etc)

If you could change one thing about the course what would it be?

a. The one thing I would change is …………………………[space for student response]

b. Don't know

What has been the best thing about the course so far?

c. The best thing about the course, so far, is …………………………[space for student response]

d. Don't know

Student outcomes

What skills will you have improved by attending the course?

- Active directory concepts
- Computer networking
- Cloud
- Cyber security
- DevOps
- IT infrastructure
- Mobile operating systems
- Quality assurance & testing
- Server administration
- Service management
- UI/UX design
- Web design
- Windows Operating System

- CompTIA A+
- Comp TIA Network+
- Comp TIA Security+
- Other IT qualification – what was this? [space for written response]

- CSS
- HTML
- JavaScript
- Python
- Other programming language – what was this? [space for written response]

- Linux Shell (BASH)
- Node.JS
- PowerShell

- React
- Other programming tools – what was this? [space for written response]

Could you have got these skills without this course?

a. No
b. Yes – how? [space for written response]
c. Don't know
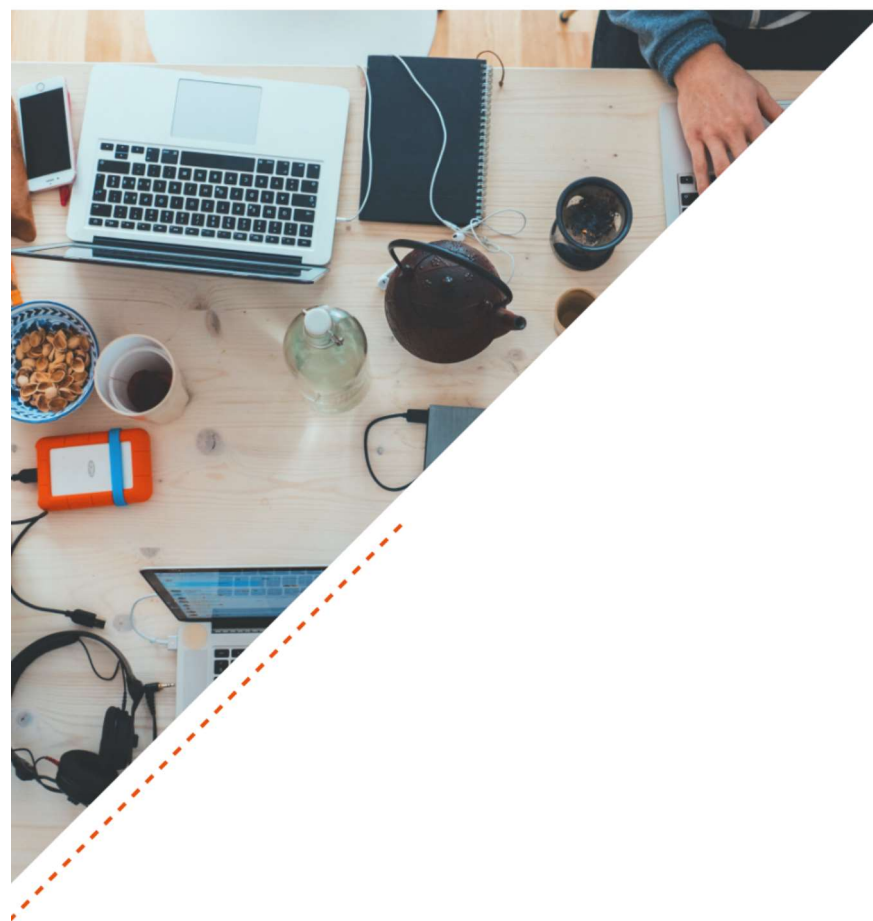
What types of occupations have you explored while on the course? Do you know how you would like to use your new skills in the future?

Close

Do you have anything else you would like to say about the course?

a. Yes ………..[space for written response]
b. No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey