

ENGLISH & MATHS FOR THE EMPLOYED



• CALDERDALE COLLEGE

• FINAL EVALUATION OF THE ENGLISH &
• MATHS FOR THE EMPLOYED PROJECT

• June 2016

This research has been
undertaken by:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- This is the final report from an independent evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) Maths and English Provision for the Employed (MEPE) contracts managed by Calderdale College. The evaluation was tasked with assessing the performance, effectiveness and impact of the project over its full lifetime (September 2014 to July 2015) in the two sub-regions where Calderdale College was responsible for delivery: the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber.
- The evaluation was based around a programme of primary research with employers, employees and skills providers, coupled with the analysis of end-of-project management information supplied by Calderdale College and accurate as at April 2016.
- The MEPE Project was funded through the ESF 2007-2013 Programme and co-financed by the Skills Funding Agency. Its main purpose was to provide a bespoke package of support and provision to enable learners to move into further in-work skills training activity. The combined values of the two sub-regional contracts for which Calderdale College was responsible was £3.1m.

Employer Perspective

- The MEPE Project has engaged an above average proportion of employers that were not already predisposed to providing structured training for their staff, i.e. providers have not simply targeted employers that were already heavily involved in training and paying full fee for it themselves.
- Overall, employers have been extremely satisfied with the training their staff have received through the MEPE Project. More than 90% provided positive feedback on its relevance and quality and the extent to which it was up to date with developments in their sector. Large majorities of employers also said the provision had been targeted at employees most in need of assistance with maths and/or English, that their staff had received better quality training than they would have done otherwise and that they had trained staff whom they had not trained before.
- Given the focus of the project on maths and English, it is encouraging that more than 90% of the employers in the evaluation survey said that participants' skills in these areas had improved. Most also said that company culture had improved, that employees were less likely to be made redundant and that they had become more self-confident. More than two thirds of employers said that the day-to-day running of the business had improved as a result of the MEPE Project.
- The project has not involved any challenges of note for the majority of the employers in the survey sample. However, a third of employers found it difficult to release some of their staff to take part in the training (a common finding on workforce development evaluations) and a third said the training wasn't pitched at the right

level for some of the participants (in most cases because the provision was too difficult). However, there was no discernible difference between the satisfaction levels of the employers that identified this as a challenge and those that did not, suggesting that even where it arose, it was not especially significant

- The administrative aspects of the project – namely the paperwork requirements, the timescales from initial engagement to the training starting, and the communications between providers and employers – were praised by employers. This reflects well on Calderdale College, who, on MEPE as on other external funding contracts, made efforts to promote regular dialogue between providers and employers and to make the employer experience straightforward.

Employee Perspective

- Satisfaction with the MEPE training amongst employees was very high: 96% said they were satisfied, a large proportion of which answered 'very satisfied'. The vast majority said there was nothing that could have improved their satisfaction levels further.
- Employees consistently reported having learnt a lot and found the tutors to be very knowledgeable. More than half said their motivation had improved and just under half cited improvements in promotion/career development prospects, job satisfaction and job security. Overall, the training appears to have exceeded employees' expectations.
- Three quarters of employees remembered having had an initial assessment and 58% remembered having an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Calderdale College's records show that, in practice, all of the employees actually had both and it therefore seems likely that some had forgotten or did not recognise the terminology used in the survey. Almost all of the employees who said they had an initial assessment and/or an ILP said they had been useful.
- Just over two fifths of employees said they were assigned a Personal Advancement Advisor (PAA), the vast majority of whom said that the PAA had been important in helping them achieve what they wanted through the MEPE Project. The employees drew on the PAAs mainly for general support and, to a lesser extent, progress reviews. Very few employees said that they received support or guidance from them on their options for progressing onto another course or qualification.
- Almost two thirds of the employees said the training had made them more confident in their own ability to learn and that they would look to start another training course or qualification within the next two years. The remainder tended to say that it would be difficult to find the time or that there was no need, as opposed to being against further learning per se.

Provider Perspective

- Five of the nine skills providers in the evaluation sample said that demand for the MEPE provision has been higher than anticipated and, had circumstances allowed, that they could have delivered to more learners. Three providers said that demand had been as expected and one said it had been lower.
- Satisfaction amongst providers with their decision to become involved in the MEPE Project is high: seven said they were very satisfied, one was quite satisfied and one (the provider for whom demand had been lower than expected) was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Across the sample, the project was reported to have either met (six) or exceeded (three) the providers' expectations.
- Seven of the nine providers said that their reputation amongst employers had been enhanced as a direct result of the project, whilst six had secured follow-on business with one or more of the organisations whose staff they had trained. Improved knowledge of local skills needs and training that is more tailored to employer need were also highlighted.
- Where challenges arose on the MEPE Project from a provider perspective, they most commonly related to employees not being able to attend or complete their training, gathering the evidence needed to make claims and employees struggling with the level of the training. However, it was rare for these issues to become, in the view of the providers in the sample, significant.
- Providers have generally felt well supported by Calderdale College during the project, citing the regular communications, helpful briefings and willingness to help address and resolve issues as particularly beneficial aspects of the approach. There was nothing in the feedback from providers which suggested any dissatisfaction with Calderdale College's management of the MEPE contracts.
- All nine of the providers said that they had put PAAs in place for the MEPE Project and that this role had been fulfilled by an existing member of staff from within their organisation.

Net Economic Impact

- The deadweight of the MEPE Project contracts managed by Calderdale College is estimated to be between 33.5% and 53.5%. In other words, between 33.5% and 53.5% of the training supported by the project is likely to have taken place over the same timeframe had the funding not been available.
- Government expects deadweight on workforce development schemes to be between 35% and 39%. It could therefore be that deadweight on the MEPE Project is well within Government guidelines, although it could of course be higher (the statistical margins of error in the survey results prevent greater precision).
- Recent Government research on the Net Present Value of qualifications at different levels provides the basis for estimating the economic contribution of the MEPE Project. The calculations give an estimated NPV of between £14.6m and £20.9m

against a contract value of £3.1m. It is however important to note that this is the estimated economic benefit that will accrue over the *full working life* of the learners that have been trained. It is not the benefit that has occurred at the time of writing.

- Based on the NPV calculations, the approximate return on investment of the MEPE Project is between 4.7:1 and 6.8:1, i.e. for every £1 of Government funding that was claimed, between £4.70 and £6.80 of economic contribution will be generated, again over the full working life of the learners supported.
- Government estimates that the average NPV per pound of funding invested in skills development programmes (nationally) is around £20. However, projects delivering that level of return on investment typically involve the delivery of qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 (and above) for which the NPVs are much higher than they are for Awards and Certificates in English and maths. It is therefore unfair to compare a project like MEPE with national averages when its very design dictates that it will not be able to match those levels of return on investment.

1 BACKGROUND

Introduction

1.1 In September 2015, Calderdale College commissioned an independent evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) Maths and English Provision for the Employed (MEPE) Project. The evaluation was tasked with assessing the performance, effectiveness and impact of the project over its lifetime (September 2014 to July 2015) in the two sub-regions for which Calderdale College was responsible for delivery. These were the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber.

1.2 Key lines of enquiry for the evaluation included:

- **Operational delivery and project management:** including relationship management with the supply chain, the efficiency of management and delivery processes and performance against profiled targets.
- **Outcomes and impacts:** including commercial and workforce impacts, in-work progression, net economic contribution and additionality.
- **Strategic added value:** including the appropriateness of the interventions supported and the influence of the project on employers' and employees' approaches to workforce development.
- **Lessons and good practice:** including key learning points that can be taken forward by the college and its partners on future workforce development interventions.

1.3 The evaluation has been based largely around a programme of primary research, summarised in Table 1.1 and explained in more detail in Appendix A. Calderdale College also supplied end-of-project management information which has been used as the basis for the performance review (Chapter 2) and to inform the assessment of net economic contribution (Chapter 6).

Table 1.1: Summary of Evaluation Approach

Activity	No.
Telephone survey of employers whose staff received training through the MEPE Project	84
Telephone survey of employees who received training through the MEPE Project ¹	235
Qualitative case study visits with employers and employees	3
Online survey of providers that delivered training through the MEPE Project	9

¹ The employer and employee telephone surveys were undertaken by Blueberry Marketing Solutions.

Acknowledgements

- 1.4 Thanks are owed to the employers, employees and providers that made their time available to participate in this evaluation.

Terminology

- **Providers or skills providers:** organisations – typically FE colleges and work-based learning providers – that delivered training through the MEPE Project.
- **Personal Advancement Advisors (PAAs):** employed by providers, PAAs were intended to support learners from the point of initial engagement, throughout their training and onto post-learning progression. This was to be achieved through regular progress reviews, tracking success and signposting learners to other appropriate avenues of support.
- **Initial Assessment:** prior to starting their training, each employee was to receive an initial assessment to identify their objectives and intended outcomes for the training, alongside any additional support needs.
- **Individual Learning Plan (ILP):** ILPs were intended to record objectives, targets and personal successes for each learner receiving support through the MEPE Project.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE MEPE PROJECT

Summary of Key Points

- The MEPE Project was funded by the European Social Fund 2007-2013 and co-financed by the Skills Funding Agency. Its main purpose was to provide a bespoke package of support and provision to enable learners to move into further in-work skills training activity.
- The project supported employees aged 19+ who were employed for a minimum of 8 hours per week and who had an identified English and/or maths need below Level 2.
- Calderdale College was responsible for the MEPE contracts in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. The combined contract values across these sub-regions was £3.1m.
- All of the original output targets were revised down over the life of the project. Some of the revisions, most notably for starts and achievements, were quite significant and suggest that the original targets were over-ambitious.
- Through the contracts managed by Calderdale College, 1,552 individuals, in 617 different employers and 24 different sectors, were supported with upskilling activity. The training was delivered by 19 different providers. More than 2,200 accredited learning aims were achieved at an overall achievement rate of 87%.
- Just over 450 employees progressed on to further accredited training (55% of the final target). Securing progression to apprenticeships – which represents a greater employer commitment – was more challenging (12 apprenticeship progressions were achieved against a final target of 242).

Introduction

- 2.1 The MEPE Project was funded by the European Social Fund 2007-2013 and co-financed by the Skills Funding Agency. Its main purpose was to provide a bespoke package of support and provision to enable learners to move into further in-work skills training activity.
- 2.2 Calderdale College, acting as the accountable body on behalf of the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges, was awarded the contracts to deliver the MEPE Project in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. The combined contract value across the two sub-regions was £3.1m.
- 2.3 To be eligible for support through the MEPE project, individuals needed to:
 - Be aged 19 or over;
 - Be employed for a minimum of 8 hours per week;

- Have an identified English and/or maths need below Level 2.

Delivery and Funding Model

- 2.4 In each sub-region, Calderdale College appointed a network of sub-contracted skills providers, local to the area, to deliver training through the MEPE Project (in Yorkshire and the Humber, Calderdale College was also one of the deliverers). Account Managers, employed by the college, were responsible for managing the sub-contracts with the providers – a role that included regular communications and progress reviews, ensuring that evidence was gathered in a timely and complete manner, and monitoring the performance of the sub-regional contracts against profile.
- 2.5 In addition to the delivery of English and maths qualifications, key features of the MEPE delivery model included:
- Robust initial and diagnostic assessment, leading to the production of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP);
 - Confidence building and the development of other soft skills, where needed;
 - Regular progress reviews;
 - Exit interviews and individual tracking;
 - Personal Advancement Advisors to support learners from the point of initial engagement, throughout their training and onto post-learning progression.
- 2.6 Provision was funded using a results-based payment model. The unit costs shown in Table 2.1 were those applied across the project nationally.

Table 2.1: National Funding Model

Output	Unit Cost
S2 Participant assessment, planning and support	£50
S33 Start on English or maths qualification	£0
AU1 Start on an Award level (6 credits or above) English or maths qualification	£250
AU2 Start on a Certificate level English or maths qualification	£500
A28 Achievement of English or maths qualification	£0
SU1 Achievement of an Award level (6 credits or above) English or maths qualification	£250
SU2 Achievement of a Certificate level English or maths qualification	£500
P15 In-work progression: Apprenticeship	£450
P16 In-work progression: further accredited training at a level higher than that supported through this activity	£225

Source: Skills Funding Agency

Performance Summary²

- 2.7 Through the MEPE Project contracts managed by Calderdale College, a total of 1,552 individuals, in 617 different employers and 24 different sectors, were supported with upskilling activity. The training was delivered by 19 different providers.
- 2.8 The collective performance of the college's MEPE Project contracts is shown in Table 2.2. Key points to note are that:
- **Revision of targets:** the original targets were set by the Skills Funding Agency. Over the life of the project, all of the original targets were revised to reflect delivery profiles achieved in practice and realistic delivery volumes going forwards. These reductions were triggered automatically by the Skills Funding Agency's monitoring system. Some of the revisions, most notably for starts and achievements, were also quite significant and suggest that the original targets were over-ambitious.
 - **Starts and achievements:** end-of-project management information shows that for starts and achievements, around two thirds of the final (i.e. reprofiled) targets were achieved. This resulted in 2,243 English and maths qualifications being achieved.
 - **Progression outcomes:** the 54.9% achieved against P16 (in-work progression to accredited training) is broadly in line with performance against the other targets in Table 2.2. Securing progression to apprenticeships – which represents a greater commitment from the employer than the other progression outcomes – has evidently been much more challenging and raises the question of what a realistic target for apprenticeship related outcomes should be on projects of this nature in the future.

Table 2.2: Performance Against Profile

Main Deliverables	Original targets	Final Profile targets	Actual	Actual as % of Final Profile Targets
S2 Participant Assessment Planning and Support	4,174	2,826	1,552	54.9%
S33 Start on non-defined accredited learning activity	6,073	3,810	2,572	67.5%
A28 Achievement of non-defined accredited learning activity	5,638	3,268	2,243	68.6%
P15 In work progression to an apprenticeship	453	242	12	5.0%
P16 In work progression to accredited training	1,325	822	451	54.9%

Source: Calderdale College

² All figures in this section of the report have been provided by Calderdale College and were accurate as at April 2016.

- 2.9 A sectoral profile of the employees trained through the project is shown in Table 2.3 (sectors accounting for less than 1% of employees are not shown). At 24.4%, Health and Education Services had the highest share of any sector, followed by Transportation and Storage and Hospitality, Accommodation and Food Service.

Table 2.3: Sectoral Profile of Employees Trained

Sector	No. Learners	% Learners
Health and Education Services	379	24.4%
Transport and Storage	292	18.8%
Hospitality, Accommodation and Food Service	159	10.2%
Food, Drink and Tobacco	148	9.6%
Retail	146	9.4%
Manufacturing	80	5.2%
Textiles and Clothing	57	3.7%
Health Care Technology	51	3.3%
Professional Services & Real Estate	45	2.9%
Administrative & Support Services	27	1.7%
Wholesale	27	1.7%
Ports & Logistics	21	1.4%
Travel & Tourism	18	1.2%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	15	1.0%

Source: Calderdale College

Sub-Regional Performance

- 2.10 The college's monitoring data suggests that it has been more difficult to engage employers in the project in Yorkshire and the Humber than in the North West. As shown in Table 2.4, against only 2 of the 11 output categories was the final output figure more than 70% of the (revised) target in Yorkshire and the Humber, and against none of the output categories was it more than 85%. In the North West, more than 70% of the output target was achieved in 7 of the 11 categories and more than 85% in 2 categories.

Table 2.4: Performance Against Profile

Sub-Region	No. output categories with >70% of final target achieved	No. output categories with >85% of final target achieved
Yorkshire and the Humber	2	0
North West	7	2

Source: Calderdale College

- 2.11 Table 2.5 shows the final recorded outputs in each of the 13 categories, split by sub-region. With the exception of P15 (in-work progression to an apprenticeship), both the absolute number and the proportion of target achieved is higher in the North West than in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Table 2.5: Output Summary by Sub-Region

Main Deliverables		Yorkshire & Humber (No.)	Yorkshire & Humber (% Target)	North West (No.)	North West (% Target)
S2	Participant Assessment Planning and Support	608	34.6%	944	88.5%
S33	Start on non-defined accredited learning activity	970	55.1%	1,602	78.1%
A28	Ach of non-defined accredited learning activity	836	55.9%	1,407	79.4%
P15	In-work progression - apprenticeship	12	9.8%	0	0.0%
P16	In-work progression - accredited training	139	37.7%	312	68.9%
AG7	Apprenticeships grant to Employers (AGE) at start	308	41.7%	505	57.6%
AG8	Apprenticeships grant to Employers (AGE) at completion	273	37.0%	454	51.8%
SU1	Start of training (Credit 5-12) uplift	73	13.5%	186	92.1%
SU2	Start of training (Credit 13-24) uplift	897	73.6%	1,416	77.1%
AU1	Achievement on SSA Group 2 uplift	69	15.0%	161	94.7%
AU2	Achievement on SSA Group 3 uplift	767	74.1%	1,246	77.7%

Source: Calderdale College

3 THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

Summary of Key Points

- The MEPE Project has engaged an above average proportion of employers that were not already predisposed to providing structured training for their staff, i.e. providers have not simply targeted employers that were already heavily involved in training and paying full fee for it themselves.
- Overall, employers have been extremely satisfied with the training provided through the MEPE Project. More than 90% provided positive feedback on its relevance and quality and the extent to which it was up to date with developments in their sector. Large majorities of employers also said the provision had been targeted at employees most in need of assistance with maths and/or English, that their staff had received better quality training than they would have done otherwise and that they had trained staff whom they had not trained before.
- Given the focus of the project on maths and English, it is encouraging that more than 90% of the employers in the evaluation survey said that participants' skills in these areas had improved. Most also said that company culture had improved, that employees were less likely to be made redundant and that they had become more self-confident. More than two thirds of employers said that the day-to-day running of the business had improved as a result of the MEPE Project.
- The MEPE Project has not involved any challenges of note for the majority of the employers in the survey sample. However, a third of employers found it difficult to release some of their staff to take part in the training (a common finding on workforce development evaluations) and a third said the training wasn't pitched at the right level for some of their staff that took part (in most cases because the provision was too difficult). However, there was no discernible difference between the satisfaction levels of the employers that identified this as a challenge and those that did not, suggesting that even where it arose, it was not especially significant
- The administrative aspects of the project – namely the paperwork requirements, the timescales from initial engagement to the training starting, and the communications between providers and employers – were praised by employers. This reflects well on Calderdale College, who, on MEPE as on other external funding contracts, made efforts to promote regular dialogue between providers and employers and to make the employer experience straightforward.

Introduction

- 3.1 A telephone survey of 84 employers that had trained staff through the MEPE Project was undertaken for the evaluation. The achieved sample of 84 came from a database of 320 unique employer records, which reduced to 282 after records with incomplete or inaccurate contact details were removed. No sampling criteria or

restrictions were applied on the survey as the aim was to complete as many consultations as possible from the 282 usable records in the database.

- 3.2 The achieved sample of 84 gives a reasonable but by no means complete level of statistical confidence in the results: +/- 10% with a confidence level of 95%. As an example, if 80% of the employers in the survey said that the impact of the training had been high, we could be 95% confident that the true figure, across the full population of employers supported by MEPE, was between 70% and 90% (i.e. ten percentages either way from 80%). The findings presented in this chapter need to be considered with this margin of error in mind.
- 3.3 The statistical robustness of the sub-regional results is much lower. Analysis of sub-regional similarities and differences is therefore not included here.
- 3.4 In addition to the telephone survey, qualitative case study visits were undertaken with three employers to explore their experiences of the MEPE Project in more detail.

Engaging the Harder to Reach

- 3.5 The survey findings suggest that the MEPE Project has engaged employers which, on average, are distinctly less likely to provide non-mandatory training for their staff than employers across the country as a whole. Fewer than two fifths (37%) of the surveyed employers had provided non-mandatory training for their staff prior to the project whereas the equivalent figure nationally, based on the 2013 UK Employer Skills Survey, was 66%. Even allowing for sampling error, the figure for the MEPE employers would be no higher than 47%.
- 3.6 The project has therefore engaged an above average proportion of employers that were not already predisposed to providing structured training for their staff. This is an important finding and one that links to the analysis of deadweight and additionality in Chapter 6.

Awareness and Appeal

- 3.7 By far the most common means through which employers found out about the MEPE Project was via a skills provider (Table 3.1). Being made aware by an employee or a colleague was the only other reason cited by more than 10% of the sample.

Table 3.1: How did you first find out about the MEPE Project?

	Frequency	Percentage
A skills provider contacted us	45	54%
From an employee or colleague	13	16%
From another business or a business network	4	5%
Friend	4	5%
Other advertising	4	5%
Local Council	3	4%
Website or web search	3	4%
Referral from Yorkshire Housing Association	1	1%
Union	1	1%
Previous involvement with the skills provider	1	1%
Don't know or can't remember	5	6%

Source: York Consulting. Base: 84.

- 3.8 The funding subsidy aside, issues relating to skills were the main reasons why employers chose to become involved with the MEPE Project. As shown in Table 3.2, almost three quarters of the sample took part because they wanted to improve maths and/or English skills levels within their business and almost half because they wanted to address skills gaps in these areas.
- 3.9 Just over one in ten of the employers in the sample said that they were attracted by the prospect of helping employees to progress on to other programmes of learning. Whilst this proportion is not especially surprising, it is of note that progression onto further in-work training activity should, in theory, be at the heart of the MEPE Project. It may also go some way towards explaining why the progression targets on the project proved difficult to achieve.

Table 3.2: Other than the funding, what attracted you to the MEPE Project?

Attraction	Frequency	Percentage
To improve maths and/or English skills levels within the business	62	74%
To address maths and/or English skills gaps in the business	47	56%
To improve the day-to-day running of the business	15	18%
To help employees progress onto other programmes of learning	10	12%
To improve staff retention	6	7%
The grant available to employers when learners start and complete their training	6	7%
To make existing jobs more secure	4	5%
To improve the commercial performance of the business (e.g. sales, profits, costs)	3	4%
Free review and analysis of business needs	2	2%
Good way of providing refresher training	2	2%
Help with identifying suitable courses and providers	1	1%
To help us expand into new market areas or new geographic areas	1	1%
To create new jobs	0	0%
Don't know	1	1%

Source: York Consulting. Base: 84. Respondents could select multiple answers.

Satisfaction

- 3.10 A clear message from the evaluation is that employers have been extremely satisfied with the training provided through the MEPE Project. Using a 5 point rating scale (where '5' was high), more than 90% of the sample rated the relevance and quality of the training as either 4 or 5, as they did the extent to which it was up to date with developments in their sector. Even allowing for sampling error, these figures would still exceed 80%.
- 3.11 Large majorities of employers also reported that:
- The provision had been targeted at employees in their organisation that were most in need of assistance with maths and/or English;
 - Their staff received better quality training than they would have done otherwise;
 - They had trained staff to a qualification level which they would not have attained otherwise;
 - They had trained staff whom they had not trained before.

"The tutors were great with the more nervous participants. Sometimes there can be a hesitation amongst staff who don't like English and maths or who don't see the need for those skills, but the tutors were flexible and patient in tailoring everything to the needs of the individual, which was great. Also, without the funding it would have been difficult for us to train any staff within the company so this has been incredibly beneficial to them."

Employer, Yorkshire and Humber

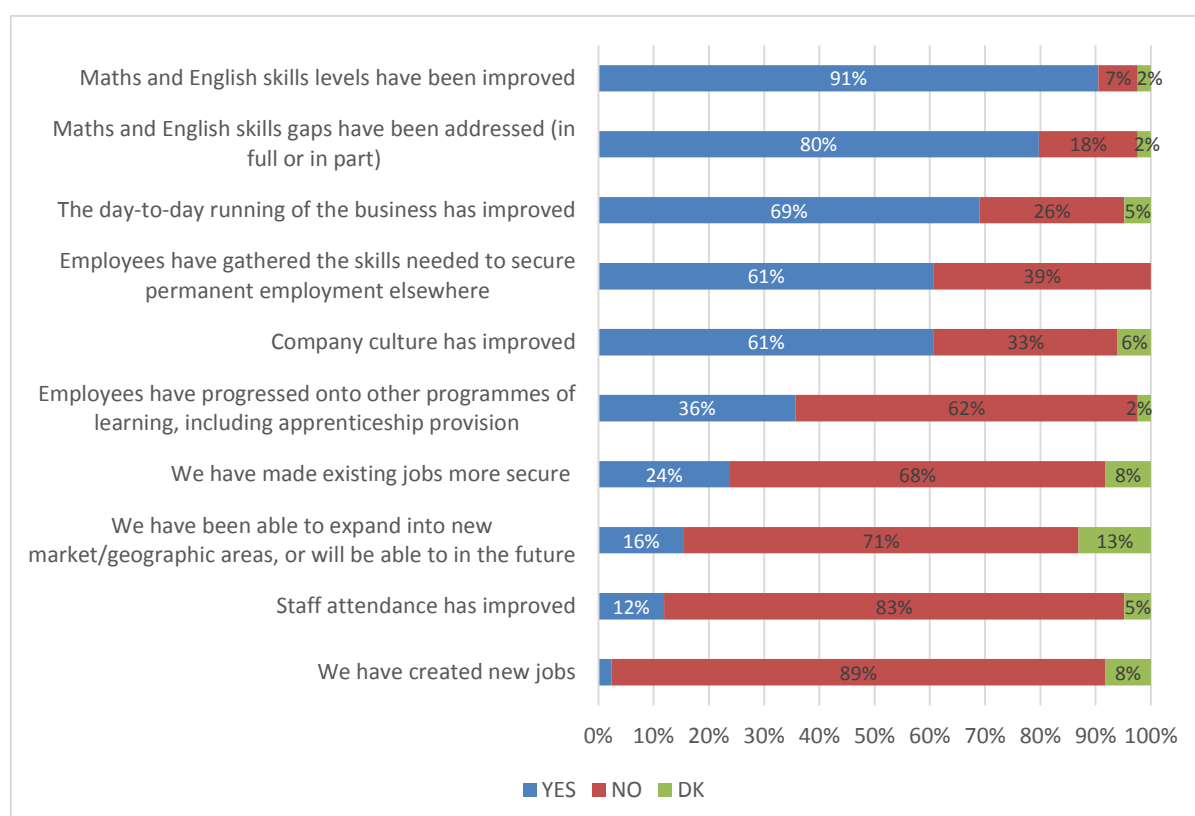
Impacts and Benefits

Workforce and Managerial Benefits

- 3.12 Given the focus of the project on maths and English, it is encouraging that more than 90% of the employers in the survey said that participants' skills in these areas had improved and, for 80% of employers, related skills gaps had been addressed (Figure 3.1).
- 3.13 More than two thirds of the employers reported improvements in the day-to-day running of their businesses, while three fifths cited improvements in company culture and said that employees had gathered the skills needed to secure

permanent employment elsewhere. A comparison between these outcomes and employers' expectations for the training is provided later in this chapter.

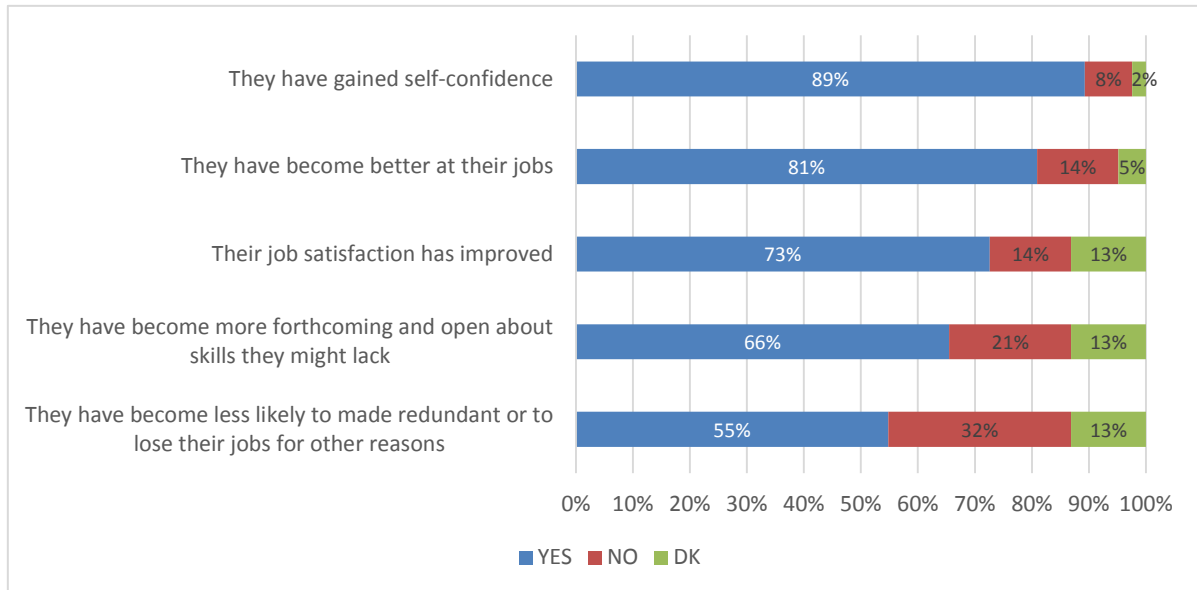
Figure 3.1: Which, if any, of the following benefits have arisen as a result of the MEPE Project?



Source: York Consulting. Base: 84.

3.14 The vast majority of employers also believe that employees trained through the MEPE Project have become more self-confident and better at their jobs (Figure 3.2). Almost three quarters have observed increases in job satisfaction while 66% say that employees are now more forthcoming and open about the skills they lack. Each of these findings reflects very well on the MEPE Project and the providers that have been involved in its delivery, especially given the relatively short timescales within which they were working.

Figure 3.2: In which of the following ways have staff benefited from the training they received through the MEPE Project?



Source: York Consulting. Base: 84.

A qualitative case study was undertaken with an industrial laundry business in the North West of England. The majority of the company's staff are of Eastern European origin and some lacked the skills in English that the company felt were needed to fully understand important health and safety documentation. The company therefore decided to take part in the MEPE Project.

Whilst, as expected, the training hasn't directly changed or improved how the staff carry out their jobs, it has had a number of positive effects. For example, it has reduced the risk of health and safety incidents occurring, has had a "huge impact" on the confidence of the staff and has made communications across the company easier. The staff also report feeling more valued.

Commercial Benefits

3.15 Workforce development activities of any kind have the potential to generate commercial benefits, although some are likely to do so to a greater extent, or more promptly, than others. Sales and marketing training, for example, is generally more geared towards generating commercial benefits in the months after it has been undertaken than training in English and maths.

3.16 It is therefore unsurprising that only a relatively small proportion of the sample (21%) said that they could attribute commercial benefits to the MEPE project,

although the true figure could be nearer to a third when accounting for sampling error.

3.17 The profile of commercial benefits was as follows (note that the percentages sum to more than 21% as some employers identified more than one commercial benefit):

- 8 employers (9% of the sample) had observed increases in revenue;
- 9 employers (11% of the sample) had observed increases in profits;
- 5 employers (6% of the sample) had observed reductions in costs.

3.18 None of the employers was able to attach a specific value to the commercial benefits that had arisen. As such, this part of the survey has not been used to calculate the net economic impact of the MEPE Project. Instead, and as explained in Chapter 6, the economic impact has been derived using the Net Present Value of the qualifications achieved as a result of the project.

Expectations vs. Outcomes

3.19 Many of the outcomes reported to this point are very encouraging. For example, levels of satisfaction with the training delivered through MEPE are almost unanimously high and many employers have observed improvements in the English and/or maths skills of their workforce.

3.20 In other categories, however, the survey findings, when taken at face value, are less conclusive. Making existing jobs more secure is a good example: 24% of the employers in the survey sample said that this outcome had occurred as a result of the training, but without some form of comparison it is difficult to judge whether that represents a good achievement or not.

3.21 That comparison can be made by looking at the reasons why employers became involved with the MEPE Project. This is the focus of Table 3.3, which shows the proportion of the sample that were attracted to the project for a given reason (the 'Appeal' column) and the proportion who subsequently reported a positive outcome of that kind (the 'Outcomes' column).

3.22 The key message from the table is that the project appears to have consistently over-delivered against appeal/expectation, and in some cases significantly so. For example, whilst less than a fifth of the sample were attracted to the project because they thought it could improve the day-to-day running of their business, more than two thirds reported that it had actually done so. Similarly, considerably more employers said that the training had enabled participants to progress on to other programmes of learning than expected to at the outset of the project. The earlier example – making jobs more secure – is another case in point, as only 5% of employers expected this to occur but 24% said that it had done so in practice. In fact, the same message applies to the majority of the categories in the table.

Table 3.3: Employer Expectations vs. Outcomes

Expectation/Outcome	Appeal (%)	Outcomes (%)	Difference (percentage points)
To improve the day-to-day running of the business	18%	69%	+51
To address maths and English skills gaps in the business	56%	80%	+24
To help employees progress onto other programmes of learning	12%	36%	+24
To make existing jobs more secure	5%	24%	+19
To improve the commercial performance of the business (e.g. sales, profits, costs)	4%	21%	+17
To improve maths and English skills levels within the business	74%	91%	+17
To help us expand into new market areas or new geographic areas	1%	16%	+15
To create new jobs	0%	2%	+2

Source: York Consulting. Base: 84.

Administration

3.23 The administrative aspects of the MEPE project – namely the paperwork requirements, the timescales from initial engagement to the training starting, and the communications between providers and employers – received considerable praise in the employer survey:

- 76% of employers rated the paperwork requirements as either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- 90% said that the elapsed time between their initial engagement with the project and the training starting was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’;
- 90% said that communications with their training provider had been ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

“The staff and trainers were incredibly helpful and flexible. They explained the paperwork in detail and helped me through it all.” Employer, North West

3.24 These messages reflect very well on Calderdale College, who, on MEPE as on other external funding contracts, made efforts to promote regular dialogue between providers and employers and sought to make the employer experience straightforward.

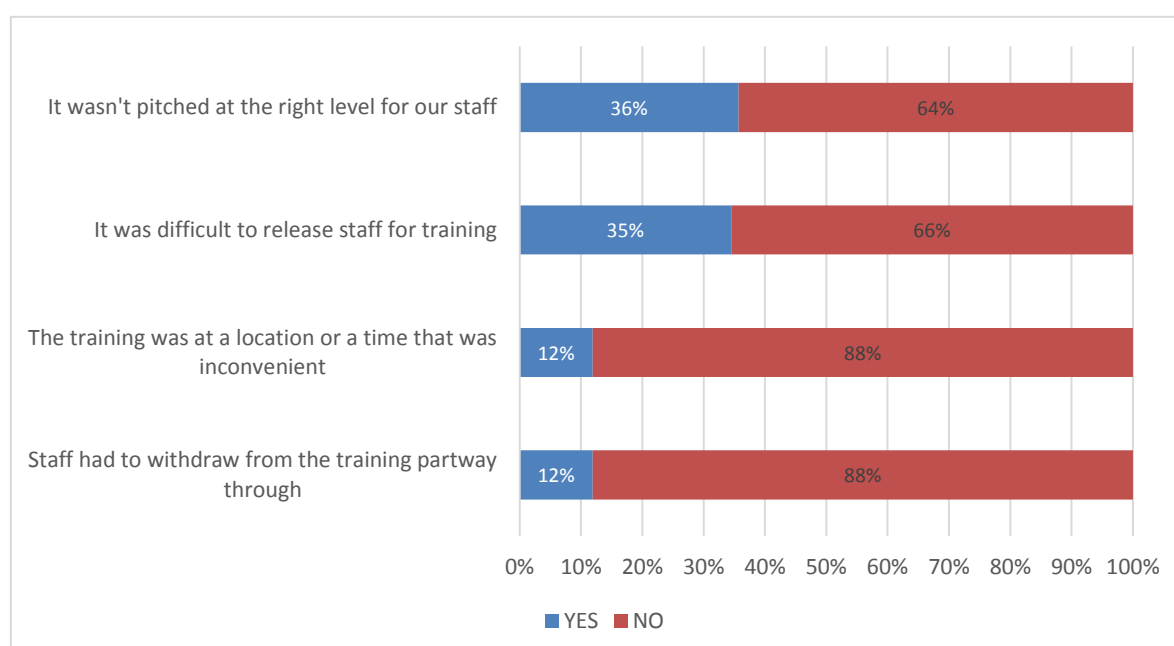
3.25 That is not to say that employer feedback on the administrative aspects of the fund were unanimously positive. Some employers did convey their frustrations about paperwork, changes in teaching staff partway through the training and (what they perceived to be) inconsistent communications from their provider, but these were very much exceptions when set against the main tone of the feedback.

Challenges

3.26 The main message under this heading is that the MEPE project has not involved any challenges of note for the majority of the employers in the survey sample. However, broadly equal proportions (in each case just over a third) did say that:

- They had found it difficult to release some of their staff to take part in the training. This is by no means an uncommon finding on workforce development evaluations. As a comparison, it was cited as a challenge by an equivalent proportion of employers that took part in the evaluation of Calderdale College's Workplace Learning Project contract.
- The training wasn't pitched at the right level for some of the staff that took part (the qualitative responses show that almost without exception, this occurred because learners found the provision too difficult). In the context of the added value of the training, this is more of a concern than the point above and may reflect the broad range of needs and abilities that existed within the beneficiary cohort. Importantly, however, there was no discernible difference between the satisfaction levels of the employers that identified this as a challenge and those that did not, suggesting that even where it arose, it was not especially significant.

Figure 3.3: Did any of the following challenges arise on the MEPE Project?

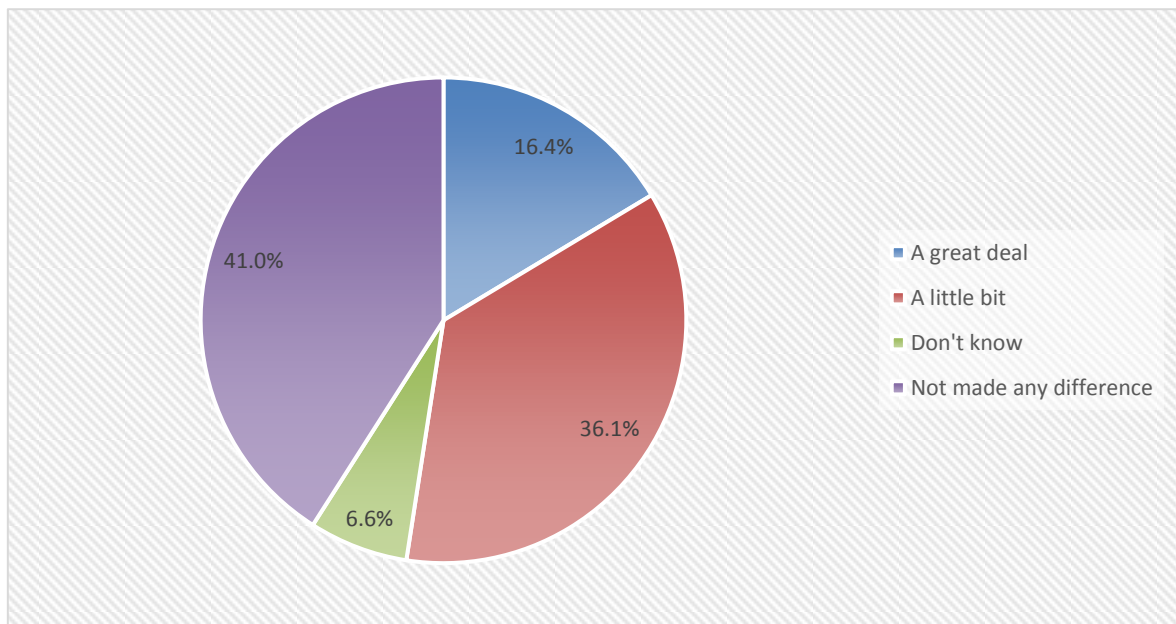


Source: York Consulting. Base: 84.

Looking Ahead

- 3.27 At the time that the survey was undertaken, most of the employers either expected their expenditure on staff training to stay the same (44%) or increase (29%) over the following two years. Only 4% expected their expenditure to decrease, while 24% were not sure. Two thirds of the employers (66%) that forecasted an increase said that they attributed this, at least in part, to the MEPE Project.
- 3.28 It is also of note that more than half of the employers in the sample said that their experience of the MEPE Project had increased the importance that they attach to staff training, either by a little (36%) or a great deal (16%) (Figure 3.4). While just over 40% of the businesses said it had not made any difference, these businesses were more likely than average to say that they had previously invested in the skills of their workforce. As such, it could be inferred (although it does not prove) that these business are more likely to already have training budgets that are commensurate with the development needs of their workforce.

Figure 3.4: To what extent would you say that your experience of the MEPE Project has increased the importance that you attach to staff training?



Source: York Consulting. Base: 84.

New owners had recently taken over a hotel in Yorkshire and undertook a training needs analysis across the full staff team. English and maths skills were amongst the needs identified (including maths skills for the owner herself) and following a discussion with a local training provider they decided to take part in the MEPE Project.

Alongside developing key skills for individual staff and the business as a whole, the training has had a significant effect on the management team's views towards workforce development. The owner now describes herself as something of a "training addict" and is committed to achieving Investors in People status.

"The training exceeded my expectations and has made me a total convert. I'm now constantly looking for ways that I can develop the team here, including myself." Employer

4 THE EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

Summary of Key Points

- Satisfaction with the MEPE training amongst employees was very high: 96% said they were satisfied, a large proportion of which answered 'very satisfied'. The vast majority said there was nothing that could have improved their satisfaction levels further.
- Employees consistently reported having learnt a lot and found the tutors to be very knowledgeable. More than half said their motivation had improved and just under half cited improvements in promotion/career development prospects, job satisfaction and job security. Overall, the training appears to have exceeded employees' expectations.
- Three quarters of employees remembered having had an initial assessment and 58% remembered having an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Calderdale College's records show that, in practice, all of the employees actually had both and it therefore seems likely that some had forgotten or did not recognise the terminology used in the survey. Almost all of the employees who said they had an initial assessment and/or an ILP said they had been useful.
- Just over two fifths of employees said they were assigned a Personal Advancement Advisor (PAA), the vast majority of whom said that the PAA had been important in helping them achieve what they wanted through the MEPE Project. The employees drew on the PAAs mainly for general support and, to a lesser extent, progress reviews. Very few employees said that they received support or guidance from them on their options for progressing onto another course or qualification.
- Almost two thirds of the employees said the training had made them more confident in their own ability to learn and that they would look to start another training course or qualification within the next two years. The remainder tended to say that it would be difficult to find the time or that there was no need, as opposed to being against further learning per se.

Introduction

- 4.1 A telephone survey was undertaken with 234 employees that had received training through the MEPE Project. Unless by coincidence, these employees did not work for the employers that were surveyed for the evaluation, i.e. there was no deliberate matching of employers and employees in the sampling.
- 4.2 The survey gives a high degree of statistical confidence in the results overall (+/- 5.9% with a confidence level of 95%). While the sample was stratified by sub-region to be representative of the project as a whole, analysis of sub-regional similarities

and differences has not been included here due to the large margins of error that would be present in any sub-regional results.

Expectations

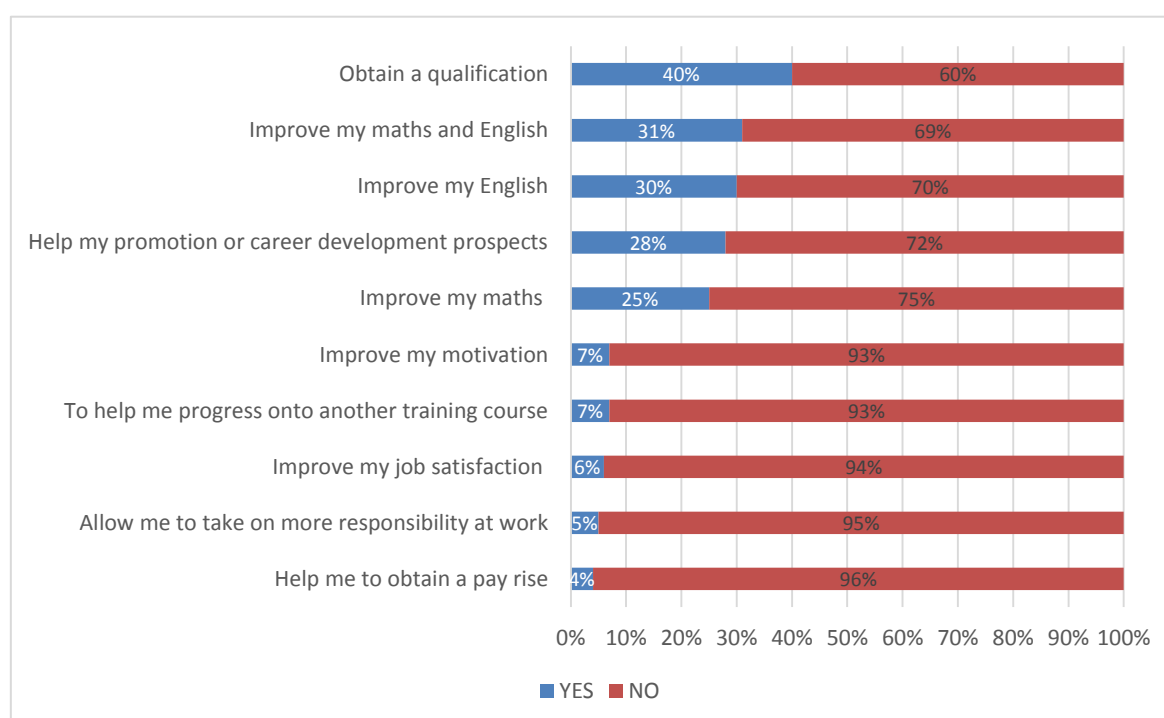
4.3 Employees' expectations for the MEPE training were clustered around five main themes, although none was cited by a majority of the sample. As shown in Figure 4.1, these were:

- To obtain a qualification (cited by 40% of the employer sample);
- To improve skills in maths and English (31%);
- To improve skills in English (30%);
- To improve skills in maths (25%);
- To help with promotion or career development prospects (28%).

4.4 Note that the above figures mask the fact that a high proportion of employees – 75% – said that they had expected to improve their maths *and/or* English skills through the training. It is no surprise that this proportion is high; if anything, it raises the question of why it's not higher given that maths and English skills are at the very core of the project. However, further analysis shows that the satisfaction levels and reported outcomes amongst employees that didn't cite English or maths skills development as an expectation are broadly in line with those that did.

4.5 Beyond those listed above, no other expectations were cited by more than 10% of the sample and only three others were cited by more than 5%.

Figure 4.1: What were your expectations for the training you received through the MEPE Project?



Source: York Consulting. Base: 234.

Satisfaction

- 4.6 Mirroring the feedback from employers, satisfaction amongst employees with the training received through the MEPE Project was very high:
- 67% of the employees that completed their training (which was 206 of the 234 employees in the sample) said that they were very satisfied with the provision;
 - 29% were quite satisfied;
 - Less than 4% of the employees said they were dissatisfied. Where they were, it was typically because they felt that the way in which the training was organised and communicated could have been better.
- 4.7 Employees consistently said that they had learnt a lot through the training and found the tutors to be very knowledgeable. Almost 90% also said there was nothing that would have improved their satisfaction levels further. Even allowing for the influence of the sample, this provides clear evidence that, for a large majority of employees, the training has been fit for purpose.

"It has helped me in my role and I've achieved my NVQ which looks good on my CV." Employee, North West

Assessment and Individual Learning Plans

- 4.8 Three quarters (75%) of the surveyed employees said that they had received an initial assessment before starting their training. Calderdale College's records show that, in practice, all of the employees actually had an assessment it therefore seems likely that some had forgotten or did not recognise the terminology used in the survey. Almost all (94%) of the employees that recalled the assessment said that it had been useful.
- 4.9 A lower proportion – 58% – recalled having an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for the MEPE Project, although almost all that did (93%) said it been useful. Once again, however, Calderdale College's records show that ILPs were in fact created for all employees.

"I completed an online assessment....I think this helped the trainers to pitch my course at the right level and to focus on where I needed to improve."
Employee, North West

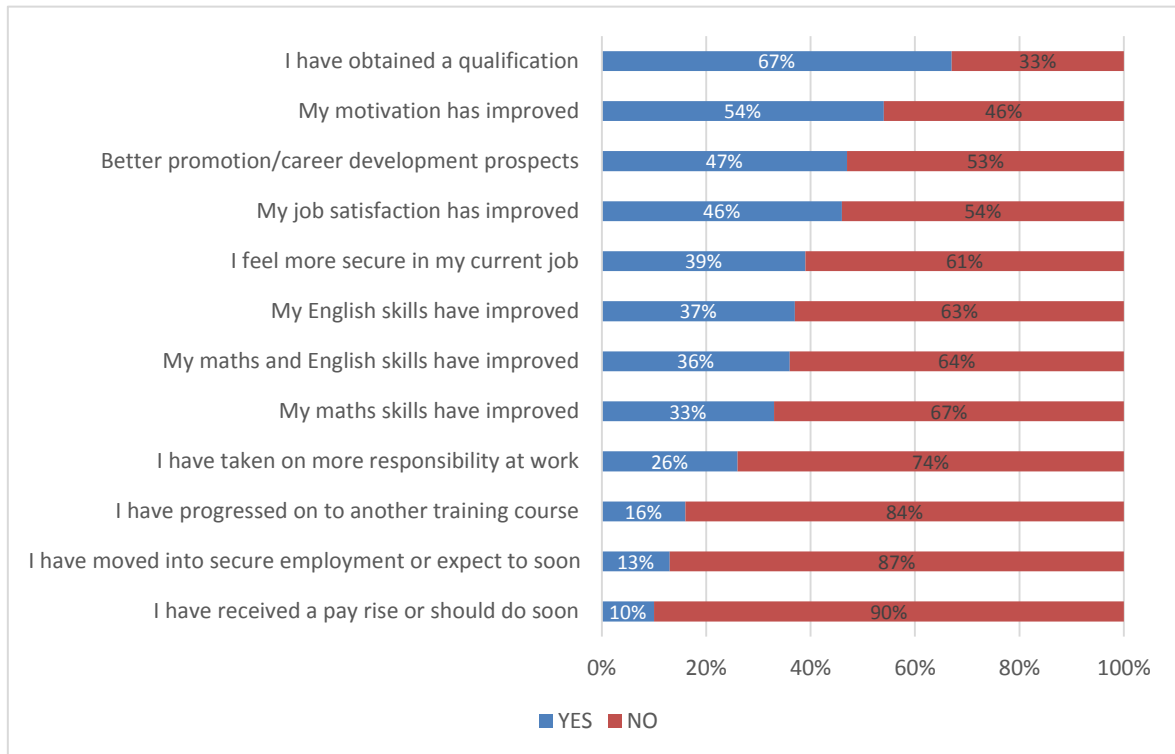
Personal Advancement Advisors (PAAs)

- 4.10 Just over two fifths (42%) of the employees in the sample recalled having been assigned a Personal Advancement Advisor. There are various reasons which may explain why this figure is relatively low:
- Some providers may have chosen not to put PAAs in place. All of the providers who took part in the MEPE evaluation said they had, although as explained in Chapter 5, the provider sample is not statistically robust.
 - Employees may have forgotten having been assigned a PAA. Whilst possible, this seems unlikely (on any scale at least) given that the training took place only a matter of months before the evaluation survey.
 - Terminology: the employee survey script used the term 'Personal Advancement Advisors' yet it became evident later in the evaluation that a number of providers were not using this specific term to describe the role.
- 4.11 Feedback from employees on PAAs was nonetheless very positive: the vast majority (93%) of employees who recalled having one said that the PAA had been important in helping them to achieve what they wanted through the MEPE Project. The employees drew on the PAAs mainly for general support and, to a lesser extent, progress reviews. However, very few of the employees said that they received support or guidance from the PAA on their options for progressing onto another course or qualification.

Outcomes and Impacts

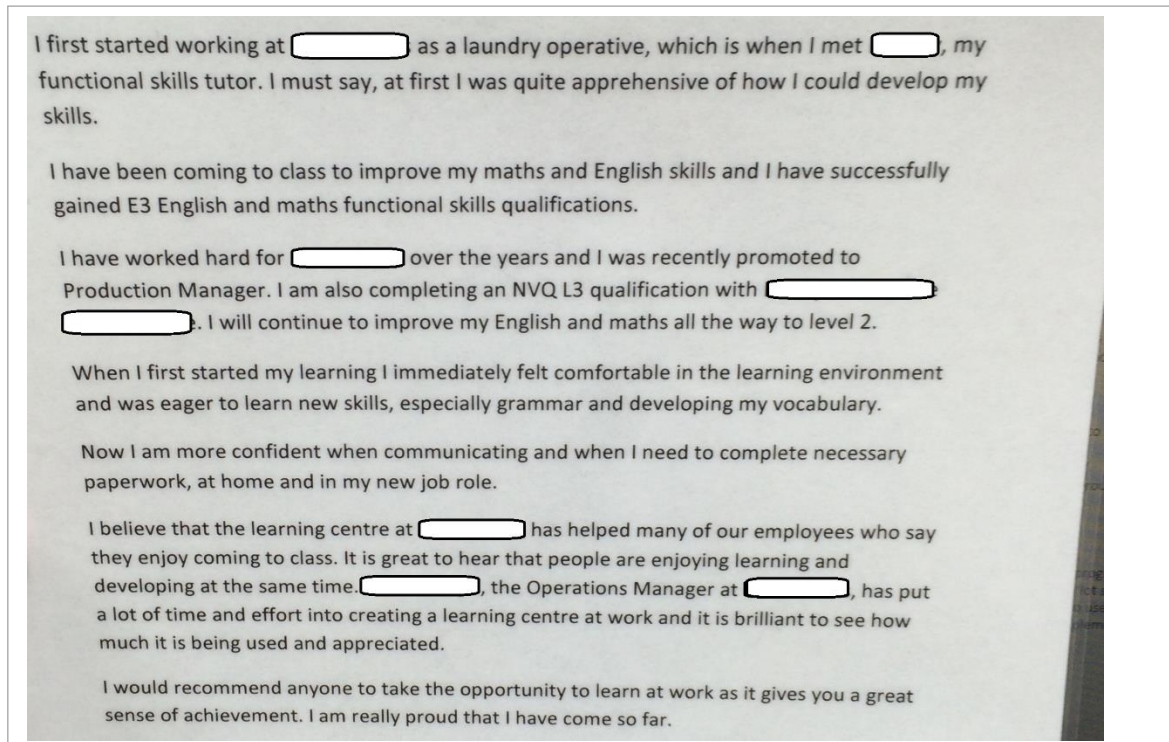
- 4.12 Figure 4.5 suggests that the most prevalent benefit of the MEPE Project for employees has been the achievement of a formal qualification. Alongside this, more than half of the sample said their motivation had improved as a result of the training, while only slightly smaller proportions cited improvements in promotion/career development prospects and job satisfaction. Job security was reported to have improved for almost two fifths of the sample.
- 4.13 In reality, however, it is the improvement of skills in English *and/or* maths that were cited most frequently by employees in the sample. In the survey these were split into separate categories (maths, English, maths and English) and at least one of these categories was selected by 82% of the sample.

Figure 4.5: Which of the following have occurred as a result of the training?



Source: York Consulting. Base: 234.

Figure 4.6: Written feedback from an employee trained through the MEPE Project?



Source: York Consulting.

Expectations vs. Outcomes

4.14 Comparing employees' feedback on the training with their initial expectations helps to set the outcomes reported through the survey in context. It also suggests that the MEPE Project has overachieved from an employee perspective, evidenced by the percentage point difference between the 'Expectations' and 'Outcomes' columns in Table 4.1, some of which are very large. Of particular note:

- 7% of employees expected their motivation to improve as a result of the training, yet 54% reported that it had done;
- 6% of employees cited improved their job satisfaction as a motivation, but in practice this occurred for 46%;
- 5% expected to be able to take on more responsibility at work following the training, yet in practice 26% had done so.

4.15 Aside from improving skills in maths and/or English, the expectation cited by employees with the most regularity was to obtain a qualification. It is therefore encouraging that this too was exceeded in practice, with more than two thirds (67%) saying that it had occurred.

Table 4.1: Employees Expectations vs. Outcomes

Expectation/Outcome	Expectations (%)	Outcomes (%)	Difference (PP)
Improve my motivation	7%	54%	47
Improve my job satisfaction	6%	46%	40
Obtain a qualification	40%	67%	27
Allow me to take on more responsibility at work	5%	26%	21
Help my promotion or career development prospects	28%	47%	19
To help me progress onto another training course, e.g. an Apprenticeship	7%	21%	14
Help me move into more secure employment (e.g. from part-time to full-time)	3%	13%	10
Improve my maths	25%	33%	13
Improve my English	30%	37%	7
Help me obtain a pay rise	4%	10%	6
Improve my maths and English	31%	36%	5

Source: York Consulting. Base: 234.

"My maths skills have improved which will help me in my job."
Employee, Yorkshire and Humber

"I can help my children with their school work much more than I could before."
Employee, North West

Attitudes towards Further Training

- 4.16 A strong message from the evaluation is that more than three fifths (62%) of employees in the survey sample felt that the training they had received through the MEPE Project had made them more confident in their own ability to learn.
- 4.17 In addition, 61% said it was likely that they would look to do another training course or qualification within the next two years. A further 16% had already started another course at the time of the survey. These included:
- NVQs in Health and Social Care at Levels 2 and 3;
 - Level 2 Certificate in Advocacy;
 - GCSEs in maths and English.
- 4.18 The remaining employees in the sample tended to either say that it would be difficult to find the time to participate in further training or that they didn't feel it was necessary. It was rare by comparison for them to state that they were not interested in further learning.

"I've set myself the goal of going to university. I wouldn't have thought that was possible in the past." Employee, Yorkshire and Humber

5 THE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

Summary of Key Points

- Five of the nine skills providers in the evaluation sample said that demand for the MEPE provision has been higher than anticipated and, had circumstances allowed, that they could have delivered to more learners. Three providers said that demand had been as expected and one said it had been lower.
- Satisfaction amongst providers with their decision to become involved in the MEPE Project is high: seven said they were very satisfied, one was quite satisfied and one (the provider for whom demand had been lower than expected) was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Across the sample, the project was reported to have either met (six) or exceeded (three) the providers' expectations.
- Seven of the nine providers said that their reputation amongst employers had been enhanced as a direct result of the project, whilst six had secured follow-on business with one or more of the organisations whose staff they had trained. Improved knowledge of local skills needs and training that is more tailored to employer need were also highlighted.
- Where challenges arose on the MEPE Project from a provider perspective, they most commonly related to employees not being able to attend or complete their training, gathering the evidence needed to make claims and employees struggling with the level of the training. However, it was rare for these issues to become, in the view of the providers in the sample, significant.
- Providers have generally felt well supported by Calderdale College during the project, citing the regular communications, helpful briefings and willingness to help address and resolve issues as particularly beneficial aspects of the approach. There was nothing in the feedback from providers which suggested any dissatisfaction with Calderdale College's management of the MEPE contracts.
- All nine of the providers said that they had put PAAs in place for the MEPE Project and that this role had been fulfilled by an existing member of staff from within their organisation.

Introduction

- 5.1 An online survey of skills providers that had delivered training through the MEPE Project generated 9 responses – a response rate of 39%. Whilst this is a reasonable return from the total sample of 23 providers, it means that the results lack a high degree of statistical reliability. As such it should not be assumed that the findings presented in this chapter are representative of the full cohort of providers that delivered training through the project.

Employer Engagement

- 5.2 Providers typically identified employers' training needs relevant to MEPE provision through a combination of their previous experience and knowledge, the use of formal diagnostic tools and less formal conversations with employers (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: How did you identify employers' training needs?

Approach	Frequency
Your existing knowledge of employers' skills needs	8
Your experience of previous delivery	8
Conversations with employers but not using a formal tool	7
Formal diagnostic or training needs analysis	5

Source: York Consulting. Base: 9.

- 5.3 Reflecting the above, seven of the nine providers had previous experience of working with at least some of the employers that they supported through the MEPE Project. Five of the providers also felt that demand for the MEPE provision had been higher than anticipated and, had circumstances allowed, that they could have delivered a larger volume of training. Three providers said that demand had been as expected and one said it had been lower (the reason being that the employers they approach tended not to prioritise English and maths training, even when it was offered free of charge).
- 5.4 Eight of the nine providers said that the payment available to employers on the MEPE project (£400 for a start and £400 for an achievement, up to a maximum of three learners) had either a significant or moderate positive impact on employers' participation in the project. Note that the offer was not made universally to employers. The decision was made by providers based on their assessment of which employers would have the greatest difficulty in releasing their staff for the training.

Outcomes

- 5.5 Satisfaction amongst providers with their decision to become involved in the MEPE Project is high: seven said they were very satisfied, one was quite satisfied and one (the provider for whom demand had been lower than expected) was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Across the sample, the project was reported to have either met (six) or exceeded (three) the providers' expectations.
- 5.6 Whilst generating provider benefits was not a stated objective of the MEPE Project, it is nonetheless encouraging that for the majority of those responding to the survey, benefits had occurred. As shown in Table 5.2, seven of the nine providers said that their reputation amongst employers had been enhanced as a direct result of the project, whilst six had secured follow-on business with one or more of the organisations whose staff they had trained. Improved knowledge of local skills needs and training that is more tailored to employer need were also highlighted.

Table 5.2: Outcomes of the MEPE Project for providers

Outcome	Frequency
Enhanced reputation	7
Follow-on business	6
Better knowledge of local skills priorities/needs	6
Training is more tailored to employer need (incl. offering it at different times/locations)	5

Source: York Consulting. Base: 9.

“Training materials have been updated to include sector-specific examples of the use of English and maths in the Workplace. Employers have referred additional candidates to the programme following feedback from previous learners on the quality of provision and rate of attainment.” Provider, North West

Challenges

- 5.7 Seven of the nine providers identified at least one minor issue or challenge that had arisen during the MEPE Project. As shown in Table 5.3, most commonly these issues related to employees not being able to attend or complete their training, gathering the evidence needed to make claims and employees struggling with the level of the training. This final point may link back to the finding from the employer survey where just over a third of employers said that the training had not been at the most appropriate level for some or all of their participants.

Table 5.3: Challenges faced by providers on the MEPE project

Challenge	Minor issue (no. providers)	Significant issue (no. providers)
Employers not releasing staff to attend training	6	0
Employers not completing their training for other reasons (e.g. sickness)	7	1
Gathering the evidence needed to make a claim	6	1
Employees struggling with the difficulty level of the training	5	1
Employees not being available for other reasons (e.g. redundancy)	5	0
Employers withdrawing their staff partway through the training	4	0

Source: York Consulting. Base: 9.

- 5.8 As shown in the previous table, no more than one provider said that any of the issues had become a significant problem for them.

“The main reason for withdrawals or incompleteness was learners struggling with the work required. This was largely down to language barriers where learners did not have English as their first language.” Provider, Yorkshire and Humber

Support from Calderdale College

5.9 Although the survey did not ask specifically about providers’ relationship with Calderdale College, their feedback suggests that the majority felt well supported as a result of the following:

- Regular communication, updates and news.
- An ongoing willingness to help address and resolve arising issues and challenges “as a team”.

“From a sub-contractor aspect the External Funding team were nothing short of fantastic with their approach to regular questions regarding eligibility, contract criteria, timescales and other ad hoc queries. Their knowledge of the provision was second to none. Though the timescales were tight, we managed to deliver a significant amount of training with the support of Calderdale.”
Provider, North West

“Fantastic contract, very well managed by Calderdale College.”
Provider, North West

5.10 There was nothing in the feedback from providers which suggested any dissatisfaction with Calderdale College’s management of the MEPE contracts.

Personal Advancement Advisors (PAAs)

5.11 All nine of the providers said that they had put a PAA in place for the MEPE Project and that this role had been fulfilled by an existing member of staff from within their organisation.

5.12 To some extent this sits at odds with the view from employees on this topic (only 42% of the surveyed employees remembered having a PAA). However, the comparison is not like for like, i.e. the employees surveyed were not necessarily trained by the providers that were surveyed, plus the provider sample lacks statistical robustness.

- 5.13 The providers that responded to the survey evidently attach some value to the PAA role: five of them rated it as being 'quite important' and three as 'very important' (the other provider was more ambivalent). This does tally with the feedback from employees, where almost all of those that had been assigned a PAA had found it beneficial.

CASE STUDY

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DC Training & Development Ltd

DC Training & Development Services offer a range of training solutions to aid businesses throughout the UK. Calderdale College have worked with DC Training for a number of years on various funded projects. .

DC Training used the English & maths for the employed funding to target micro businesses in rural communities that have traditionally found it difficult to access mainstream funded provision. Therefore targeted companies based in the Isle of Axholme. A total of 12 companies participated in the programme to improve maths and English in the workplace.

This culminated in a celebratory event held at the Carpenters Arms pub in Westwoodside, who had also participated in the training. Local MP Andrew Percy attended to present certificates to all the participating learners and the event was a great success. John Benson of JMB Decorating was very impressed with the project as he felt that it had helped to develop skills, which would help the business while minimising the impact on his bottom line.

Darren Calow, Managing Director at DC Training stated

"One of the big issues for micro businesses has been the difficulty of releasing staff to train "off the job". In many cases there is no replacement available and the business has to absorb the financial impact which is often out of the question. English and maths for the employed provided payments which helped to alleviate the financial impact and the response was great in the Isle of Axholme. We are delighted with the outcome we have achieved working with Calderdale College and the business community in this area."

Subscribe to our YouTube channel to watch the full case study video:

**Calderdale College
External Funding**



6 NET ECONOMIC IMPACT

Summary of Key Points

- The deadweight of the MEPE Project contracts managed by Calderdale College is estimated to be between 33.5% and 53.5%. In other words, between 33.5% and 53.5% of the training supported by the project is likely to have taken place over the same timeframe had the funding not been available.
- Government expects deadweight on workforce development schemes to be between 35% and 39%. It could therefore be that deadweight on the MEPE Project is well within Government guidelines, although it could be higher (the statistical margins of error in the survey results prevent greater precision).
- Recent Government research on the Net Present Value of qualifications at different levels provides the basis for estimating the economic contribution of the MEPE Project. The calculations give an estimated NPV of between £14.6m and £20.9m against a contract value of £3.1m. It is however important to note that this is the estimated economic benefit that will accrue over the *full working life* of the learners that have been trained. It is not the benefit that has occurred at the time of writing.
- Based on the NPV calculations, the approximate return on investment of the MEPE Project is between 4.7:1 and 6.8:1, i.e. for every £1 of Government funding that was claimed, between £4.70 and £6.80 of economic contribution will be generated, again over the full working life of the learners supported.
- Government estimates that the average NPV per pound of funding invested in skills development programmes (nationally) is around £20. However, projects delivering that level of return on investment typically involve the delivery of qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 (and above) for which the NPVs are much higher than they are for Awards and Certificates in English and maths. It is therefore unfair to compare a project like MEPE with national averages when its very design dictates that it will not be able to match those levels of return on investment.

Introduction

- 6.1 The evaluation findings presented to this point suggest that the MEPE Project has generated a wide array of positive outcomes. This is very encouraging, but it is nonetheless important to consider the extent to which the training would have taken place anyway, regardless of the funding, i.e. to estimate the level of deadweight associated with the project. The opposite of deadweight is additionality and refers to the activity – in this case training – that a project has generated that would not have happened in its absence.

6.2 Following the deadweight assessment, this chapter explores the economic contribution of the MEPE Project by estimating the Net Present Value of the qualifications it has funded.

Calculating Deadweight

6.3 The employer telephone survey undertaken for the evaluation provides some of the information needed to calculate deadweight. In summary:

- **Pure deadweight**, where employers would have provided the same training to the same number of people and over the same or quicker timeframe, is 28.6%.
- **Time deadweight**, where the training would have taken place in the absence of funding but over a longer timescale, is 21.4%.
- **Scale deadweight**, where the training would have taken place but with fewer people, is 8.3%.

Table 6.1: Additionality and deadweight based on employer telephone survey results

	No. Employers	Deadweight %	Additionality %
We would have done it over the same period or quicker and with the same number of people ('pure deadweight')	24	28.6%	71.4%
We would have done the training, but over a longer period ('time additionality/deadweight')	18	21.4%	78.6%
Some staff would have received the training, but not as many as through the MEPE Project ('scale additionality/deadweight')	7	8.3%	91.7%
We would not have done the training at all ('pure additionality')	42	50.0%	50.0%

Source: York Consulting.

6.4 The figures in Table 6.1 provide the basis for the calculation of total deadweight, i.e. the proportion of all the MEPE training that would have taken place even if the funding had not been available. However, to do this also requires some assumptions to be made. These are as follows:

- Where employers report that the training would have taken place but over a longer timescale, it is assumed that 50% of it would have taken place within the period covered by the MEPE Project³.
- Where employers report that the training would have taken place but involved fewer employees, it is also assumed that 50% of it would have taken place within the period covered by the MEPE project.

6.5 Based on these assumptions and the survey results, the estimated total deadweight for the MEPE Project is 43.5%. In other words, an estimated 43.5% of the training

³ In the absence of reliable primary evidence, this is a standard assumption in deadweight calculations (see, for example, the RDA Impact Evaluation Framework (IEF) and the subsequent IEF+).

supported by the project would have taken place over the same timeframe had the funding not been available. Table 6.2 shows how this is calculated.

Table 6.2: Deadweight Calculations

	Percentage	Calculation
We would have done the training, but over a longer period ('time deadweight')	21.4%	$21.4\% \times 0.5 = 10.7\%$
Some staff would have received the training, but not as many as through the MEPE Project ('scale deadweight')	8.3%	$8.3\% \times 0.5 = 4.15\%$
We would have done it over the same period or quicker AND the same number of people would have received training ('pure deadweight')	28.6%	28.6%
	Total	43.5%

Source: York Consulting.

- 6.6 Whilst deadweight per se is undesirable, the reality is that it is almost impossible to avoid on workforce development interventions. Government expects deadweight on schemes such as this to show deadweight of between 35% and 39%. On the MEPE project it would appear to be slightly higher than that.
- 6.7 However, it is important to bear in mind that the employer survey results upon which the calculations are based have a +/- 10% margin of error. It could therefore be the case that deadweight on the MEPE project is actually well within Government guidelines, although it could of course be higher and may exceed 50%. **In terms of the external communication of evaluation findings, it is advisable to say that estimated deadweight is between 33.5% and 53.5%.**
- 6.8 It is also worth noting the following points. These do not cause the deadweight figure to reduce, but they do highlight elements of additionality that are not explicitly conveyed in the quantified calculations:
- Over four-fifths of employers said that they had provided better quality training than they would have done in the absence of MEPE;
 - Three-quarters also said that they had trained staff to a higher skill level than they would have done otherwise;
 - More than two thirds trained staff whom they had not trained before.

Net Present Value

- 6.9 The profile of qualifications achieved through the MEPE Project is shown in Table 6.3. These figures provide the basis for an estimation of the Net Present Value (NPV) of the qualifications achieved through the project, and, from that, its return on investment.

Table 6.3: Qualifications Achieved

	Total
Awards	230
Certificates/Functional Skills	2,013
Total	2,243

Source: Calderdale College.

- 6.10 In its June 2015 paper, 'Measuring the Net Present Value of Further Education in England', the Department for Business Innovation and Skills provided estimates for the NPV of qualifications at different levels. This paper gives one composite average figure of £14,000 for qualifications in English and maths.
- 6.11 Multiplying the number of qualifications supported by the MEPE Project by the NPVs of those qualifications would give an overall NPV for the project as a whole. However, to present a more accurate assessment, it is also necessary to factor in deadweight, i.e. the proportion of the qualifications that would have been undertaken anyway, even if the funding had not been available. As reported earlier, deadweight for the project is estimated to be between 33.5% and 53.5%.
- 6.12 Table 6.4 factors in deadweight and results in an NPV for the project as a whole of between £14.6m and £20.9m. The multipliers of 66.5% and 46.5% represent additionality, i.e. achievements net of deadweight at 33.5% and 53.5% respectively.

Table 6.5: Estimated NPV of the MEPE Project

	Achievements	NPV with deadweight at 33.5%	NPV with deadweight at 53.5%
English and maths qualifications	2,243	$(2,243 * £14,000) * 66.5\%$	$(2,243 * £14,000) * 46.5\%$
		=£20,882,330	=£14,601,930

Source: York Consulting

- 6.13 It is therefore important to remember that these figures reflect the estimated economic benefit of the MEPE Project that will accrue over the *full working life of the learners* in question. They are not the benefits that have occurred at the time of writing.

Return on Investment

- 6.14 Dividing the estimated NPV of the MEPE Project by the total contract value gives an approximate return on investment figure of between 4.7:1 (with deadweight at 53.5%) and 6.8:1 (with deadweight at 33.5%). In other words, for every £1 claimed, an economic contribution of between £4.70 and £6.80 will be generated, again over the full working life of the learners concerned.
- 6.15 The question then becomes, to what extent does this return on investment represent good value for money? The answer is not necessarily straightforward:

- For training interventions per se, Government would typically expect a significantly higher return on investment. A figure of around 20:1 would not be unusual.
- However, projects delivering that kind of return on investment would, almost without exception, involve the delivery of qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 (and above) for which the NPVs are much higher than they are for Awards and Certificates in English and maths.
- It is therefore unfair to compare a project like MEPE with composite, national averages, when its very design dictates that it will not be able to match those levels of return on investment.
- There can also be inherent flaws in comparing the quantitative performance of different schemes given that they often vary significantly in terms of delivery model, target group, scale and objectives.

6.16 It is therefore most appropriate to say that even allowing for deadweight, the MEPE project is likely to generate an economic contribution which is at least four times the size of Government's investment in it. The evaluation has found nothing to suggest that this return on investment could have been demonstrably higher, especially given the time pressures under which the accountable body and their network of sub-contractors were operating.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

- 7.1 Through the MEPE contracts managed by Calderdale College, employees in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber have received training which has met identified skills needs and which has generated an array of positive outcomes. It has prompted the majority of the beneficiary employees to consider further learning opportunities and has been highly valued by employers.
- 7.2 Naturally there have been challenges and, on reflection, the initial targets for the project set by the Skills Funding Agency now seem very ambitious. Even so, only by exception did the issues and problems experienced during the delivery of the project become significant.
- 7.3 The sub-sections below present the conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation, organised under the main lines of enquiry that have been explored.

Delivery and Project Management

- 7.4 The feedback from employers, employees and skills providers paints a very positive picture of the way in which the MEPE Project has been managed by Calderdale College and delivered by its network of sub-contractors in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. The experience that the External Funding Team at the college had gathered through the Workplace Learning Project, the Skills Enhancement Fund and other contracts has enabled them to respond well on MEPE, despite the contracts being tendered at relatively short notice and running for less than a year.
- 7.5 Delivering the volumes of provision that were anticipated at the outset of the project has, however, proven challenging. Despite all of the targets being revised down (some significantly so), none of the final outputs exceeded 70% of the revised targets. It does seem, therefore, that the original targets were set far too high. As an example, more than 25 starts would have been required per day, on every working day that the MEPE Project was live, in order for the 'starts' target to be met.

Recommendation 1: on future workforce development schemes, the college and its partners (including the Skills Funding Agency) are advised to give careful consideration to setting realistic targets that can be achieved within the timeframes available.

- 7.6 Employers and employees rarely engaged with the MEPE Project with progression amongst their main expectations. This appears to be reflected in the achieved outputs, where just over half of the final target for in-work progression to accredited training was achieved. Even so, more than 450 individuals have progressed on to further learning as a result of the project.

- 7.7 Progression to apprenticeships has been far less common and was only recorded for 12 participants. It would seem that for an apprenticeship progression target to be relevant on future schemes of this kind, either providers need to target learners with the will, ability and employer support to progress to an apprenticeship, or the targets need to be set at a much lower level (or both).

Outcomes and Impact

- 7.8 Employers and employees consistently report that the MEPE Project has generated more and a more varied array of positive outcomes than they had originally anticipated. These include improvements in motivation, job satisfaction, promotion prospects and company culture, amongst others. The project therefore appears to have over-delivered against expectation, although it could also be the case that in fact its potential benefits were, unknowingly, undersold.

Recommendation 2: use the evidence from this evaluation to raise employers' and employees' awareness and expectations of the benefits that can be generated by engaging in structured programmes of workforce development. Future marketing messages could be bolder given what is now known about the achievements of this project.

- 7.9 The deadweight for MEPE (i.e. the extent to which public funding has paid for activities that would have taken place anyway) is estimated to be between 33.5% and 53.5%. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this, as the lower end of the range would put the MEPE Project well within Government guidelines for deadweight, but at the upper end it would be outside of these guidelines. A midpoint figure of 43.5% is slightly higher than Government would expect although not to the point that it would give significant cause for concern.
- 7.10 The MEPE project is expected to generate a positive return on investment, based on the Net Present Value of the accredited learning activities it has supported. Whilst the net economic contribution of MEPE per pound of public investment is below the national average for skills programmes as a whole, in reality this is an unfair comparison given MEPE's focus on delivery at lower qualification levels.

Strategic Added Value

- 7.11 The high proportion of employees who have improved their skills in English and/or maths, coupled with the large majority of employers who say that skills gaps in their organisation have been addressed, suggests that the MEPE Project has provided an appropriate range of activities. This is supported by the fact that most employers are confident that the training was targeted at employees in their organisation with the greatest upskilling needs.
- 7.12 The project hasn't generated the added value that was anticipated in terms of progression and may therefore not leave as strong a legacy as was first hoped. However, the extent to which the original progression outcomes of the project could ever realistically be achieved is open to argument and should not detract

from the fact that the project has stimulated a renewed appetite for learning amongst many of its participants.

Other Lessons

- 7.13 Employees tended to be positive about Personal Advancement Advisors where they had been put in place. However the survey results suggest that they weren't made available to all employees and that the 'advancement' element of the PAA role was less visible than the 'general support' element.

Recommendation 3: On future projects of this nature, it will be important to re-assess whether PAAs are needed and, if so, how best to ensure a closer alignment between the model proposed in the bid documentation and delivery in practice.

- 7.14 Overall, however, the MEPE Project has made a positive, demonstrable difference for the vast majority of the employers and employees that it has supported. Its delivery may not have taken place on the scale that was originally anticipated, but its quality and impact have both been impressive.

APPENDIX A: EVALUATION APPROACH

Telephone Employer Survey	
Achieved Sample	84
Survey Method	Telephone using structured script
Undertaken By	Blueberry
Source of Contact Details	Calderdale College database
Sampling Approach	Stratified random
Key Lines of Enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience - Impacts - Benefits - Challenges
Timing	October 2015

Telephone Employee Survey	
Achieved Sample	235
Survey Method	Telephone using structured script
Undertaken By	Blueberry
Source of Contact Details	Calderdale College database
Sampling Approach	Stratified random
Key Lines of Enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience - Impacts - Benefits - Challenges
Timing	October 2015

Case Study Visits with Employers and Employees	
Achieved Sample	Three (Organisations)
Survey Method	Face to face using Topic Guide (one for employers, one for employees)
Undertaken By	York Consulting
Source of Contact Details	Provided by Calderdale College
Sampling Approach	Employers were contacted up to five times via phone call to ask whether they would be happy to participate
Key Lines of Enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience - Impacts - Benefits - Challenges
Timing	October – December 2015

Online Provider Survey	
Achieved Sample	Nine
Survey Method	Online
Undertaken By	York Consulting
Source of Contact Details	Calderdale College database
Sampling Approach	Invitation to participate was sent to all those on database
Key Lines of Enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Experience- Impacts- Benefits- Challenges
Timing	October – November 2015

APPENDIX B: PERFORMANCE DATA

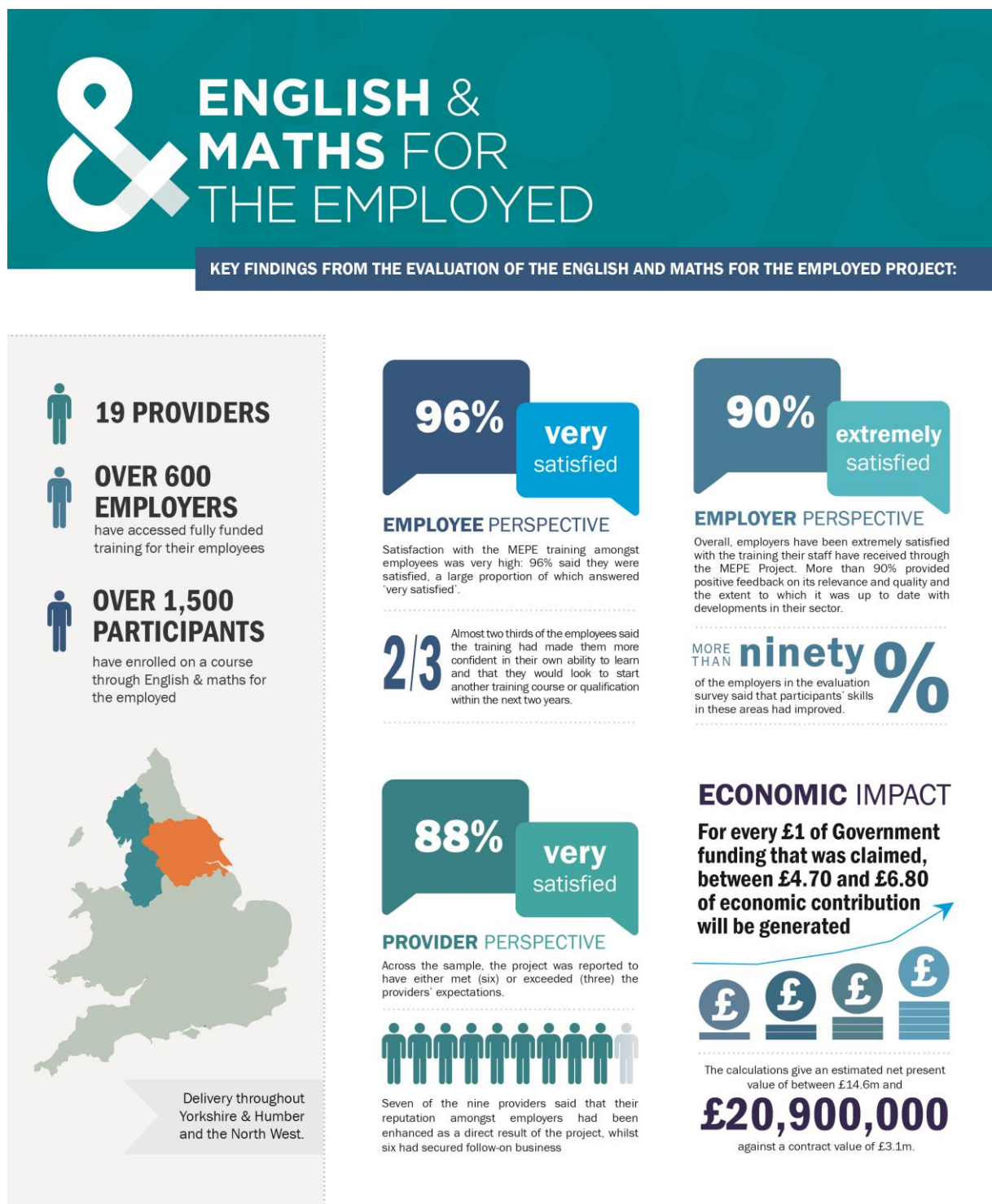
North West

Main Deliverables	Original targets	Final Profile targets	Actual	Actual as % of Final Profile Targets
S2 Participant Assessment Planning and Support	2,074	1,067	944	88.5%
S33 Start on non-defined accredited learning activity	3,965	2,051	1,602	78.1%
A28 Ach of non-defined accredited learning activity	3,848	1,773	1,407	79.4%
P15 In-work progression - apprenticeship	300	119	0	0.0%
P16 In-work progression - accredited training	888	453	312	68.9%
AG7 Apprenticeships grant to Employers (AGE) at start	1,682	877	505	57.6%
AG8 Apprenticeships grant to Employers (AGE) at completion	1,681	877	454	51.8%
SU1 Start of training (Credit 5-12) uplift	1,798	202	186	92.1%
SU2 Start of training (Credit 13-24) uplift	2,167	1,837	1,416	77.1%
AU1 Achievement on SSA Group 2 uplift	1,532	170	161	94.7%
AU2 Achievement on SSA Group 3 uplift	1,844	1,603	1,246	77.7%

Yorkshire and the Humber

Main Deliverables	Original targets	Final Profile targets	Actual	Actual as % of Final Profile Targets
S2 Participant Assessment Planning and Support	2,100	1,759	608	34.6%
S33 Start on non-defined accredited learning activity	2,108	1,759	970	55.1%
A28 Ach of non-defined accredited learning activity	1,790	1,495	836	55.9%
P15 In-work progression - apprenticeship	153	123	12	9.8%
P16 In-work progression - accredited training	437	369	139	37.7%
AG7 Apprenticeships grant to Employers (AGE) at start	648	738	308	41.7%
AG8 Apprenticeships grant to Employers (AGE) at completion	859	738	273	37.0%
SU1 Start of training (Credit 5-12) uplift	1,061	541	73	13.5%
SU2 Start of training (Credit 13-24) uplift	1,046	1,218	897	73.6%
AU1 Achievement on SSA Group 2 uplift	901	460	69	15.0%
AU2 Achievement on SSA Group 3 uplift	889	1,035	767	74.1%

APPENDIX C: INFOGRAPHIC



English & Maths for the Employed is funded by the European Social Fund, co-financed by the Skills Funding Agency. Calderdale College is the Accountable Body for the English and maths for the employed project on behalf of West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges.



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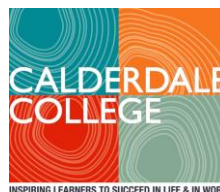
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