

**CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS****Individual Training Accounts Evaluation - SQW****Main messages**

The Individual Training Account (ITA) programme is working well, with most participants and providers reporting satisfaction with the delivery experience and outcomes gained. Changes made to the previous Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme in 2017 appear to have had the desired effect, with most participants motivated to use ITAs to gain jobs, improve their employability or skillsets. This behaviour aligns to the policy intention behind the changes.

Most participants reported that they would not have undertaken training without ITA funding. This suggests the programme is encouraging additional training activity.

People are more likely to choose courses which are eligible for ITA funding, and almost half of people are more likely to choose courses which do not cost more than the £200 provided through an ITA. Training providers have recognised this price point and have not raised course costs to ensure price is not a barrier to participation. Half of ITA participants would have chosen a different course if more funding had been available.

Since 2017/18 Construction has accounted for the highest level of ITA courses booked, and this has been particularly driven by high numbers of people out of work, and young people. Younger people were more likely to book ITA courses, and slightly more likely to be out of work when doing so. Men were more likely than women to book an ITA course, while women were more likely to be in work while booking an ITA.

There was evidence that ITAs helped people to find new and better jobs. Over half of those surveyed agreed that their ITA had helped them find a new job. While two in five people who were working full time reported that their ITA had helped them find a better paying job.

While the evaluation does not highlight any areas requiring urgent change, the programme could be amended in various ways depending on resources and policy objectives by; increasing the value above £200; further prioritising labour market need through training courses; further prioritising specific customer groups; widening the careers information offer; and/or including online training subscriptions.

## **Introduction**

In 2022 the Scottish Government commissioned SQW and the Progressive Partnership to undertake an independent impact evaluation of the ITA programme. The aim of the evaluation was to explore how the ITA programme has been delivered since 2017 and gather evidence on the experiences of individuals and training providers in engaging with the programme, from application to course completion. It also aimed to find out what outcomes participants had experienced from the programme including to what extent ITAs had supported individuals to develop new skills, enter/re-enter the workforce, or gain new jobs. The findings are intended to inform options about the future development of the programme.

The ITA programme is managed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS). It provides up to 18,500 funded places annually. The aim of the ITA programme is to enhance the employment prospects of those in work or looking for work; equip people with the right skills to participate, and be successful in the labour market; and support employers by providing workers with opportunities to improve their work-related skills and qualifications. First introduced in 2004, the most recent ITA programme launched in 2017. The most recent changes made for the 2017 programme included narrowing the range of eligible courses to make it more focussed on getting people into, or progressing in work, and linking it to priorities around fair work and Scotland's Labour Market Strategy published in August 2016.

## **Methods and aims**

A mixed methods evaluation was designed to reach a large population of ITA participants, while also gaining detailed insight into participants' experiences. The evaluation was delivered between February and August 2022. The scoping stage involved an analysis of the programme monitoring information and a series of six 1-1, paired and group interviews with the Scottish Government, SDS and those with expertise on similar training programmes. A short literature review of key policy documents was also undertaken to inform understanding of the national/international context on individual training accounts.

An online survey received responses from over 2,000 ITA participants and survey respondents were recruited for a series of eight focus groups (43 participants in total). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 training providers. A workshop to discuss the findings and options for further developing the programme was held with the Scottish Government and SDS at the end of the evaluation.

## **ITA programme**

Since 2017/18 to February 2022 there were a total of 164,280 ITA applications, which resulted in 78,734 ITA courses booked and 59,778 claims made. Younger people were consistently more likely to book ITAs (around 25% aged 16-25; 31% aged 26-31 each year), and slightly more likely to be out of work when doing so. Men were more likely than women to book an ITA course (accounting for between 57% - 61% of ITAs each year), while women were more likely to be in work while booking an ITA course. Most people booking an ITA are white, although people

from other minority ethnic groups are increasingly getting involved (from 4% to 6% since 2017/18). A small number of people booking ITA courses disclose a disability. Almost a third of people lived in Glasgow City and the City of Edinburgh. Most people do not top up their course cost above the £200 funding limit and most use the programme only once.

Since 2017/18 Construction has accounted for the highest level of ITA courses booked, and this has been particularly driven by high numbers of people out of work, and young people. Fitness, Health and Beauty accounted for the second highest level, and people were more likely to be in work.

## **Marketing and Engagement**

People found out about the ITA programme from a range of promotional sources: job centres; the SDS website; training providers; and recommendations from friends, family and colleagues were identified as the main sources.

People applying for an ITA were most commonly motivated to do so to improve their job prospects. Help to get a job, progress in the same job, or gain a new job with another employer were the three top reasons given for applying.

Participants were more likely to choose a course that was eligible for ITA funding, with older people aged 45-54 more likely to report the availability of ITAs as a major or minor influence on their choice of course.

## **Delivery process**

Participants were very positive about their experience arranging their training and the quality of the training they received. Most participants (93%) rated the quality of training as 'very' (66%) or 'quite' good (27%). Training providers had similarly positive experiences when processing applications and reported positive engagement with the SDS customer service team when needed. The payment process was efficient and they were quickly remunerated.

Covid-19 was reported to have little impact on applications and a moderate impact on training delivery. Many courses were run online but some courses were delayed, cancelled, or the number of classes/students in each class was much-reduced. This impacted the timing of when people were able to complete the programme, and able to secure work.

## **Impact of ITAs**

There was evidence that ITAs helped people to find new and better jobs. Over half of those surveyed agreed that their ITA had helped them find a new job. For those participants still out of work after training, ITAs had helped them pursue their interests and improve their skills, confidence and self-esteem.

Over half of survey respondents did not want to see any changes to the ITA programme. While this positive picture does not highlight any areas requiring urgent change, there is the potential to develop the programme.



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