

Individual Training Accounts Evaluation



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Training Accounts Evaluation
SQW Report for the Scottish Government
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Contact:

Rhona Murray

Tel: 0131 243 0722

email: rmurray@sqw.co.uk

Approved by:

Graham Thom

Director

Date: 28/11/2022

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Executive Summary

Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) support eligible participants with up to £200 per year to access training to gain an industry recognised certificate. The aims of the programme are to: enhance the employment prospects of those in work or looking for work; equip people with the right skills to participate, and be successful within the labour market; and support employers by providing workers with opportunities to improve their work-related skills and qualifications.

First introduced as Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) 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, linking it to priorities around fair work and [Scotland's Labour Market Strategy](#) published in 2016. The programme is managed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and provides up to 18,500 funded places annually.

In 2022 the Scottish Government commissioned SQW and the Progressive Partnership to undertake an independent impact evaluation of the ITA programme since 2017. The evaluation was delivered between February and August 2022, and involved analysis of monitoring information, a short literature review, survey responses from over 2,000 ITA participants, a series of eight focus groups with participants and a series of 13 semi-structured interviews with training providers. A workshop to discuss the findings and options for further developing the programme was held with the Scottish Government and SDS in August 2022.

Key Findings

Overall, the evaluation findings from the ITA programme evaluation are positive. The evidence gathered showed that the programme is working well, with most participants and providers reporting satisfaction with the delivery experience and outcomes gained. Of those participants surveyed, 63% rated their overall experience as 'very good' and 27% 'quite good'.

The changes made from previous ILA/ITA programmes to the current one appear to have had the desired effect, i.e. most participants were motivated to use their ITAs to gain jobs, improving their employability and skillsets, which aligns to the policy intention behind the changes.

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 claims¹ made. As would be expected, applications, bookings and claims fell during the pandemic, however the data for 2021/22 suggests all are beginning to recover.

Younger people were more likely to book an ITA course (around 25% aged 16-25; 31% aged 26-31 each year), and slightly more likely to be out of work when doing so. Men are more likely than women to book a course (accounting for between 57%

¹ The number of claims made is as of February 2022.

- 61% of ITAs each year), while women are more likely to be in work when they book a course. Most people booking an ITA course are white, although bookings from other minority ethnic groups are increasing. A small number of people disclose a disability. Almost a third of ITA bookings were from people who live in Glasgow City and the City of Edinburgh, which may be expected given the large population sizes in these Scottish cities. Most people do not top up their course cost above the £200 funding limit and most book a course only once.

Since 2017/18 Construction has accounted for the highest level of ITA course bookings, 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. During the pandemic in 2020/21, there were fluctuations in course choices with Fitness, Health and Beauty accounting for relatively low levels of ITA bookings and ITAs for Social Care courses increasing.

People found out about the ITA programme from a range of promotional sources: jobcentres; the SDS website; training providers; and recommendations from friends, family and colleagues were identified as the main sources. Most people applying for an ITA did so online through My World of Work. Covid-19 was reported to have little impact on ITA applications. Training providers had similarly positive experiences when processing applications and reported an efficient payment process. However, drop out rates after people had booked a course with a training provider, resulting in a 'no show', was identified as an important issue for those delivering face to face courses as it resulted in loss of revenue and empty places.

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

ITA funding influenced people's course choice, with most people more likely to choose courses which are eligible for ITA funding, and where the ITA will cover full course costs. In the latter cases, ITA funding is also restricting people's course choices, with almost half of people more likely to choose courses which do not exceed the £200 limit. Training providers have recognised this restriction and have not raised course costs above £200 to ensure price was not a barrier to participation, despite rising delivery costs. More funding would likely have influenced people's course choice, with half of ITA participants reporting they would have chosen a different course if more funding had been available.

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 and over half of those unemployed before applying for their ITA were in work after training. Two in five people who were working full-time reported that their ITA had helped them find a better paying 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. Similarly, the evaluation does not highlight any areas requiring urgent change.

Introduction

Evaluation Brief

In January 2022 the Scottish Government commissioned SQW and the Progressive Partnership (Progressive) to undertake an impact evaluation of the Individual Training Accounts (ITA) programme. The purpose of the evaluation was to explore how the ITA programme has been delivered since 2017 and the outcomes achieved by participating individuals.

The evaluation sought to explore the experiences of individuals and training providers in engaging with the programme, from application to course completion. It also aimed to find out to what extent ITAs have supported individuals to develop new skills, enter/re-enter the workforce, progress in their jobs or gain new jobs. The evidence gathered about the delivery and impact of ITAs should then inform future discussions about the programme.

Individual Training Account (ITA) Programme

The ITA programme was launched in 2017, replacing the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme. This development reflected the Scottish Government's aim to: enhance the employment prospects of those in work or looking for work; equip people with the right skills to participate, and be successful within the labour market; and support employers by providing workers with opportunities to improve their work-related skills and qualifications. The programme offers eligible individuals up to £200 to access training and provides up to 18,500 funded places annually, at a cost of £3.5m per annum.

To be eligible for an ITA, an individual must be over 16 years old and either in receipt of (qualifying) benefits, or earning less than £22,000 per annum. Individuals can claim one ITA per year up to the value of £200. They must choose from a catalogue of training courses (which result in an industry recognised qualification / certificate) and which are aligned to the 2016 Labour Market Strategy and current Government priorities. ITAs cannot be used for any education or training which is a statutory requirement for an individual's employment. Employers cannot apply for an ITA on an individual's behalf. Where employers are also training providers, ITA funded training delivered by the employer cannot be delivered to their own employees.

The ITA programme is managed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) who oversee the application process, training course provision and finance. SDS host the online ITA application portal through the My World of Work (MyWoW) website, SDS'online career information and advice service. They manage all training providers, ensure agreements are signed, assess and approve the courses on offer, audit delivery, and hold regular provider meetings to discuss any issues. SDS also process the funding claims from training providers. The SDS Customer Service team handle any queries from individuals and training providers on the ITA programme.

The ITA application process is as follows: applicants search for an ITA eligible course through MWoW. Once individuals have chosen a course, they apply using a link on the MWoW course page. Once their application is submitted, the applicant confirms their eligibility with a training provider within four weeks. It is the responsibility of the training provider to confirm the applicant's eligibility for the course, and collect and process the relevant documents (e.g. proof of income). The applicant then has 12 months in which to complete their chosen course. After the participant has completed the course, the training provider claims the value of the course, up to a maximum of £200 from SDS on the participant's behalf. Where the course cost exceeds £200, the individual pays the outstanding balance to the training provider.

Report Outline

The report presents findings from the evaluation, and is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides an overview of the evaluation methodology
- **Chapter 3** outlines the development of ILA/ITA programmes in Scotland up to the current model
- **Chapter 4** presents the key issues from the literature review and provides international examples of similar programmes
- **Chapter 5** describes the ITA programme profile
- **Chapter 6** presents the findings on the marketing and motivations of participants to engage in the programme
- **Chapter 7** reports on the operational aspects of the programme delivery, including application, eligibility and payment processes
- **Chapter 8** discusses the impact of the ITA programme on participants' employability and wider skills
- **Chapter 9** considers the evidence for programme improvement
- **Chapter 10** concludes with the overall key findings from the evaluation
- **Annex A** – Analysis of the online survey
- **Annex B** – Analysis of the focus groups
- **Annex C** – References

Evaluation Methodology

Overview of the evaluation methods

The **mixed methods evaluation** was conducted between February and July 2022. The evaluation began with an inception meeting and scoping phase in February. The main data collection phase took place from March to early June. Analysis and reporting were undertaken throughout June and into early July 2022.

Inception and scoping

A scoping phase was undertaken to gain an understanding of the previous ILA programme, the changes made to transition into the ITA programme and wider use of training / learning accounts in other countries. Scoping activities were led by SQW and involved:

- **Semi-structured interviews** (1-1 and groups) with key stakeholders including Scottish Government, SDS, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Scotland, Scottish Training Federation (STF), and Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group (SLAED).
- **High level literature review** of seven key reports relating to individual learning or training accounts.
- **Review of programme monitoring information** from SDS covering 2017/18 to 2021/22.

Main data collection

ITA applicant and participant online survey

An online survey was set up to capture the views of people who had applied to / used the ITA programme in 2019/20 and 2021/22. All participants in those years were sent a link to the online survey. An incentive was offered to maximise the response rate and all who participated had the opportunity to be entered into a prize draw to win one of ten £50 vouchers.

- **The overall participant sample population was 21,956 contacts** (12,685 for 2019/20; and 9,271 for 2021/22). The participant survey was launched on 1 April 2022 and closed on 1 May 2022. There were **2,102 responses, a response rate of 9.6%** (with 1,160 for 2019/20 (9%); and 942 for 2021/22 (10%)). Participants were sent two reminders during April to complete the survey.
- **The overall applicant sample population was 1,757 contacts** for 2021/22. Due to the way SDS' system temporarily stored applicant data, the applicant survey was distributed on a rolling basis and closed on 8 May 2022. There were **151 applicant responses, a 9% response rate**. Applicants were sent one reminder during April to complete the survey.

The survey was developed by SQW and Progressive. Scottish Government officials commented and approved the draft in advance of the survey being launched. SDS

provided the sample population contact details to Progressive who distributed the survey. Further detail on the focus group methodology and standalone findings can be found in Annex A.

Online Focus Groups with ITA participants

A series of eight online focus groups were conducted by Progressive with ITA participants who were recruited through the online survey. In total, **43 participants** took part in the focus groups. Several groups were themed around sectors / occupations, with invitees selected accordingly. The topic guide was developed by SQW and Progressive. Scottish Government officials commented and approved the guide, and attended two sessions to observe. Further detail on the focus group methodology and standalone findings can be found in Annex B.

Interviews with Training Providers

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 13 training providers involved in delivering ITAs. They were selected on the basis of levels and types of activity, and location. The sample also covered general providers, providers new to delivering in 2021/22, providers that delivered at scale, and those whose delivery had increased / decreased over time. The topic guide was developed by SQW and approved by Scottish Government officials.

Analysis and reporting

SQW and Progressive worked together to analyse the strands of research. The **quantitative survey data** first underwent a computer edit of the data prior to analysis and where 'other' type questions were used, the responses were checked against the parent question for possible up-coding. A series of charts and tables summarising the headline findings from the survey were developed based on the themes of interest and further cross-tabs were created in Excel to query the data in different ways.

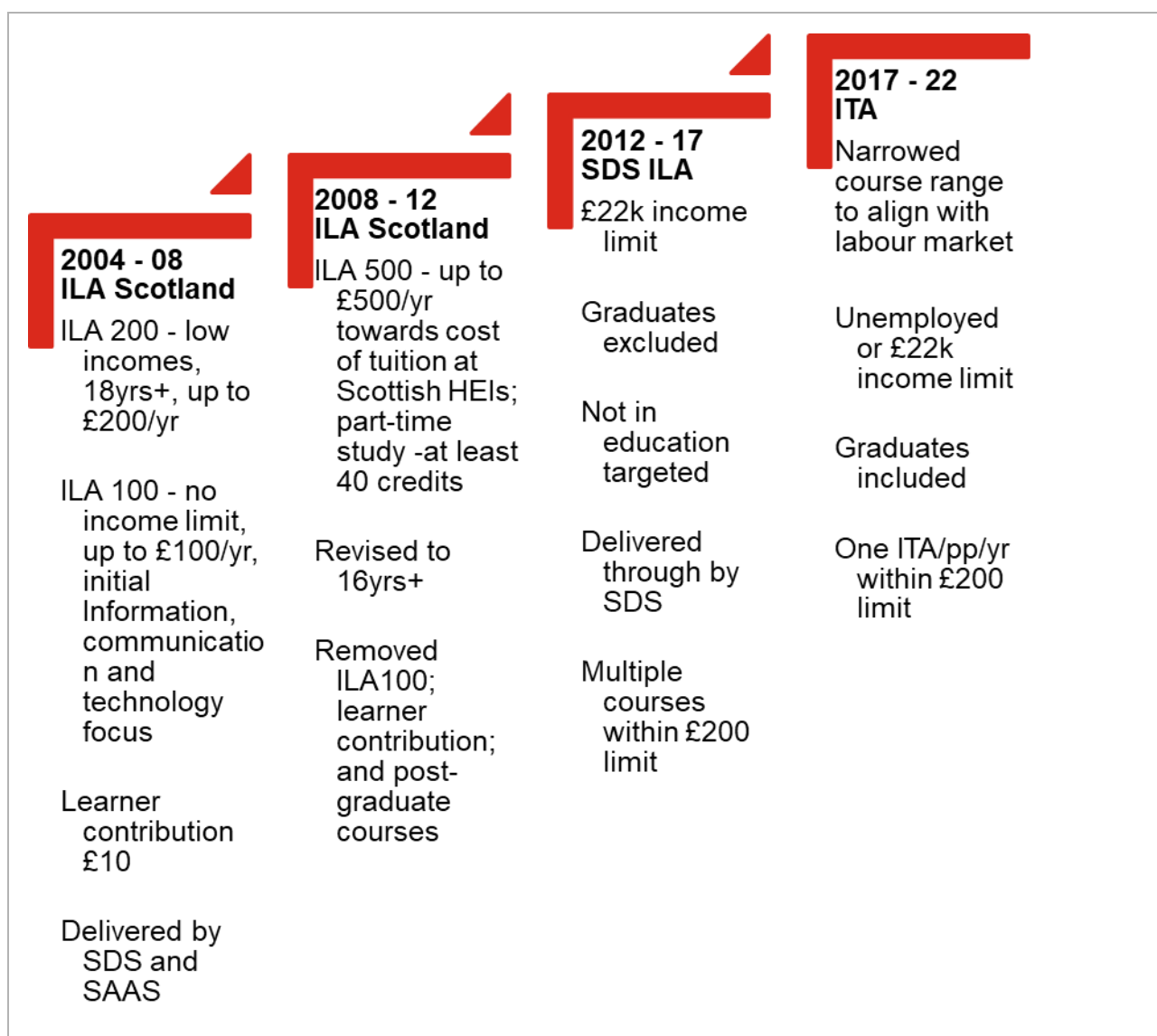
The **qualitative data analysis** used a consultative process that involved listening to the recordings and documenting the prevalence of themes by examining transcripts of recorded focus groups, noting the relative frequency with which different issues arose, as well as the intensity of their expression. A summary analysis document was produced in Word to organise the data and assess the prevalence of themes across the groups – a tally denoting how frequently each theme was discussed was appended to the data, enabling researchers to assess majority/minority experiences and views. The research team worked to fit the data together in a comprehensive and logical manner for the report writing stage.

A key findings and policy workshop was held with the Scottish Government and SDS in mid-July to discuss the overall findings and potential options for programme development in future.

Overview of ITAs in Scotland

Individual learning / training accounts (ILAs/ITAs) were first introduced by the Scottish Government in 2004. The current ITA programme is the latest model in the development of this programme. The previous models along with the key changes to eligibility and structure at each stage are presented below in Figure 1. The previous criteria in each column remains if a change is not noted.

Figure 1: Development of the ITA programme since 2004



Source: Scottish Government ILA Internal Review

There have been a series of internal evaluations and reviews conducted by the Scottish Government and SDS which have informed the changes made in the models above.

Following the review of the 2012 – 17 ILA programme there were some key changes which informed the current ITA model. These are outlined below.

Operational process

- The application process **moved to a fully online process** to improve simplicity and efficiency, and to shorten the time taken to process applications.
- Training **providers check applicant eligibility**, with support from SDS where required.
- Booking tokens/**vouchers no longer used** within the online system.

Programme positioning

- The **range of courses** for which an ITA could be used **was restricted** to make it more focussed on getting people into/ progressing in work, linking it to priorities around fair work, inclusive growth and Scotland's Labour Market Strategy.
- The emphasis was on providing **training to improve the employability / skills** of those who were unemployed or in low paid work.
- **Higher value training was encouraged** by limiting choice to one course per year, up to the £200 limit, rather than multiple courses of lower value.

Literature Review Findings

A short, focused literature review of seven key academic and policy documents (including one which was a review of a series of ITA type programmes in seven countries) which explore the available evidence on ITAs and/or similar approaches from other places was undertaken to inform the research. This chapter outlines the key findings from the literature review, focusing on: eligibility; scale; targeted beneficiaries; and lessons learned from wider provision.

Eligibility and target beneficiaries

From the **ten international programmes identified in the literature**, the extent to which eligibility was restricted varied (OECD, 2019a; UNESCO and ILO 2019). The broadest eligibility criteria had a restriction only by age (e.g. everyone aged 25+ is eligible for Skills Future Credit, Singapore) (CIPD, 2021), but it was more **common for programmes to have a combination of criteria** relating to age, income, education level, and employment status (e.g. Cheque Formação, Portugal) (OECD, 2019a). More restrictive criteria on some programmes also included reference to equality characteristics, most commonly focusing on gender, disability and parents/carers (e.g. Bildungskonto, Austria) (OECD, 2019a; CIPD, 2021).

There was evidence of **programmes being restricted to specific customer groups**: older ages, above 25 years and those in low paid work. Those in work aged under 25 years were excluded from programmes in Belgium and Canada (CIPD 2021), and all individuals under 25 years were excluded in Singapore (UNESCO and ILO, 2019). In Austria, those in low paid work, and over 50 years were targeted for inclusion (OECD, 2019a).

Some of the programmes either targeted employed or active individuals only, with a few also including those who were unemployed (OECD, 2019a). Self employed people were also less likely to be covered than employees (OECD, 2019a). In some cases, part-time employees can't benefit from training programmes based on hours worked, and can't attend training programmes requiring full time participation aimed at those who are unemployed. Evidence from the OECD suggests that low skilled workers participate less than higher skilled workers in training programmes which are not restricted to their employment status or income (OECD, 2019b).

This evidence may indicate why some programmes specify a restriction on employment status with an income threshold. This type of circumstance may lead to specific training programmes being developed as in Wales which has the Personal Learning Accounts for those in employment, and the ReACT scheme for those unemployed, seeking work.

Scale

There were examples of both solely state funded, and a combination of state and individual funded programmes. The size of the state contribution varies widely ranging from c.€125 (Belgium) to \$10,000 (Michigan, USA) (OECD, 2019a).

Almost all programmes cap the amount of funds provided to the individual (UNESCO and ILO, 2019).

The exception was Personal Learning Accounts in Wales which covers the full course cost (CIPD, 2021). However, this programme was focused on skills provision in 'priority sectors' facing skills shortages, such as engineering, construction and ICT, although in reality a wide range of courses are offered (CIPD, 2021). For example, one college offers over 50 courses ranging through: Foundation Certificate in Accounting; CMI Level 5 Award – Management and Leadership; Level 2 Award in MOT Testing; and Sport Massage L4. There was also a requirement to evidence how the training would improve future job prospects.

Most programmes provide a single payment per year, either as a set value or set percentage (ranging from 30% - 90%) of training costs (CIPD, 2021). Less commonly, some programmes allow individuals to accumulate training funds over multiple years, which is capped at a lifetime limit (e.g. Canada: \$250/yr, max. \$5k) (CIPD, 2021).

There were also examples where **state funded contributions varied** depending on employment status, education level or age (OECD, 2019a). In France, those with lower qualification levels can access more funding (€800/yr compared to €500), whereas in Portugal employees can access €175 for two years, which rises to €500 for jobseekers (UNESCO and ILO, 2019; OECD, 2019a).

It appears that **most programmes allow repeat use**, although it was not always clear whether this was multiple uses within a year, or repeat use in consecutive years (CIPD 2021). However, there was one instance where repeat use was restricted (e.g. Switzerland, three consecutive years use maximum) (OECD, 2019a).

Target training courses

All programmes restricted the range of training courses available to individuals funded through their programmes, with individuals required to choose from a list of approved courses (OECD, 2019a). Most of the course lists provided vocational training, including language and digital courses to support employability. It was common for driving license training to be excluded unless for professional use (OECD, 2019a).

The extent to which the approved training courses were explicitly aligned with labour market priorities and supporting individuals into employment varied (OECD, 2019a). Wales, Portugal and states in the USA explicitly linked their training provision to in-demand occupations or priority sectors, whereas in Singapore training funds could also be used for leisure courses (CIPD, 2021; OECD, 2019a).

Lessons learned

From the review, it was apparent that relatively little is known about the performance of individual learning account programmes, including the impact on individuals (OECD, 2019c). Evaluations of the impact of ILAs are also relatively

rare, and counterfactual impact evaluations establishing causal links even more so (OECD, 2019a).

The literature review highlighted some common broad guidelines with regards to the design and delivery of ILA/ITA programmes (OECD, 2019a; OECD, 2019c). Although the recommendations are derived from a limited number of sources, they help explain the evidence base and provide more confidence around the points made in this literature review. Stakeholders consulted as part of the European Commission's research on ILAs (OECD, 2019a) stated that:

- ILAs should be **designed in collaboration** with social partners.
- **Careers guidance** and information should be available.
- Sufficient attention should be devoted to the **engagement of particular groups** (groups who stand to make the largest benefits from learning opportunities, or who face particular barriers to engaging with the skills system).
- **Ease of access** for individuals should be prioritised.
- Complexity and bureaucracy should be avoided – **simplicity of use** is required to promote effective participation of individuals in individual learning schemes.

ITA Programme profile

Introduction

This chapter describes the numbers and characteristics of people who apply for, book a course with and use ITAs. It draws on management information gathered by SDS as part of the application and finance processes.

SDS provided data on the ITA programme for the period 2017/18 – 2021/22. Pre-made data tables were shared with SQW, which covered: applications, assignments, claims, total spend and training providers which were broken down by demographics, region, curriculum and work status. Further cross tabs were provided on request. This chapter provides the main headlines from the monitoring data.

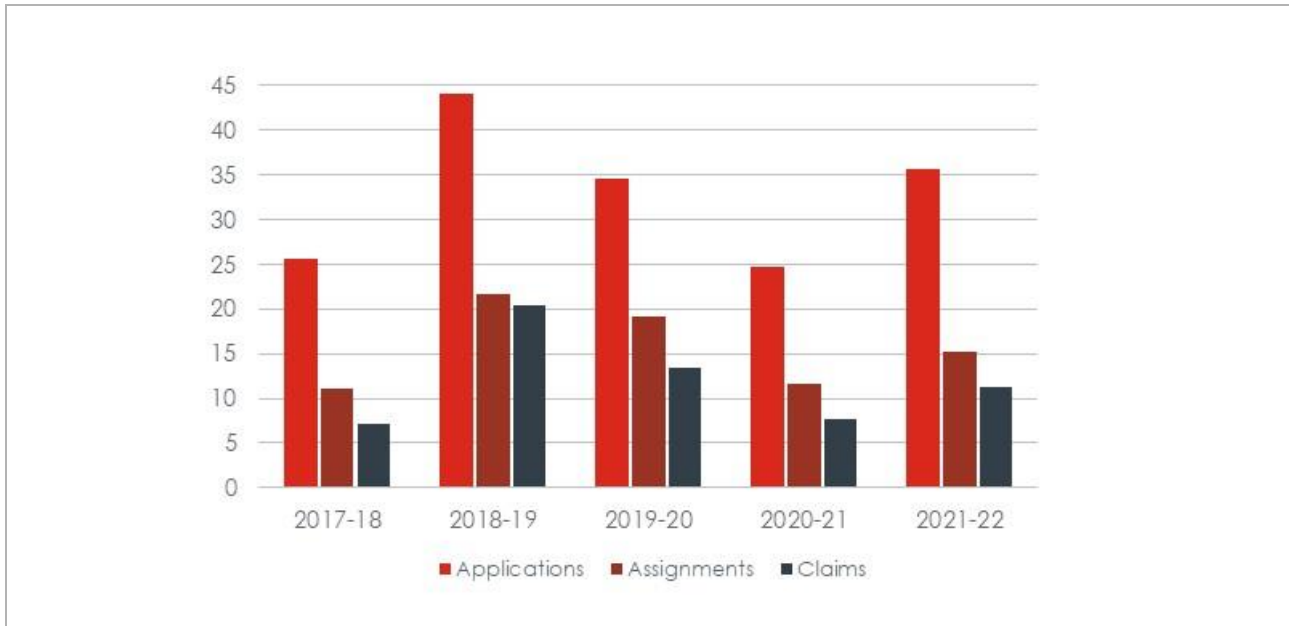
Applications, assignments and claims

Figure 2 shows how applications and ITA assignments have changed since the start of the programme. **Between 2017/18 – 2021/22**, there were a total of **164,280 ITA applications**, which resulted in **78,734 ITAs assigned (courses booked) and 59,778 claimed (used)**². Numbers of applications and ITAs booked and used peaked in 2018/19, and prior to Covid-19 were beginning to fall. While this may suggest declining interest in the programme, it may also reflect the introduction of new funding sources available to individuals such as the support through Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), No One Left Behind (NOLB) and the Employability Fund (EF).

As expected, applications and **ITAs booked and used fell during the pandemic**, however the data for 2021/22 suggests both are beginning to recover. Yet, in terms of conversion rates, pre pandemic (2019/20) 39% of applicants became ITA participants and attended a course, whereas in 2021/22 32% of applicants participated in a course suggesting the conversion rate **hasn't yet recovered** to the same level.

² The number of claims made is as of February 2022

Figure 2: Numbers of applications, assignments and claims by year (000s)



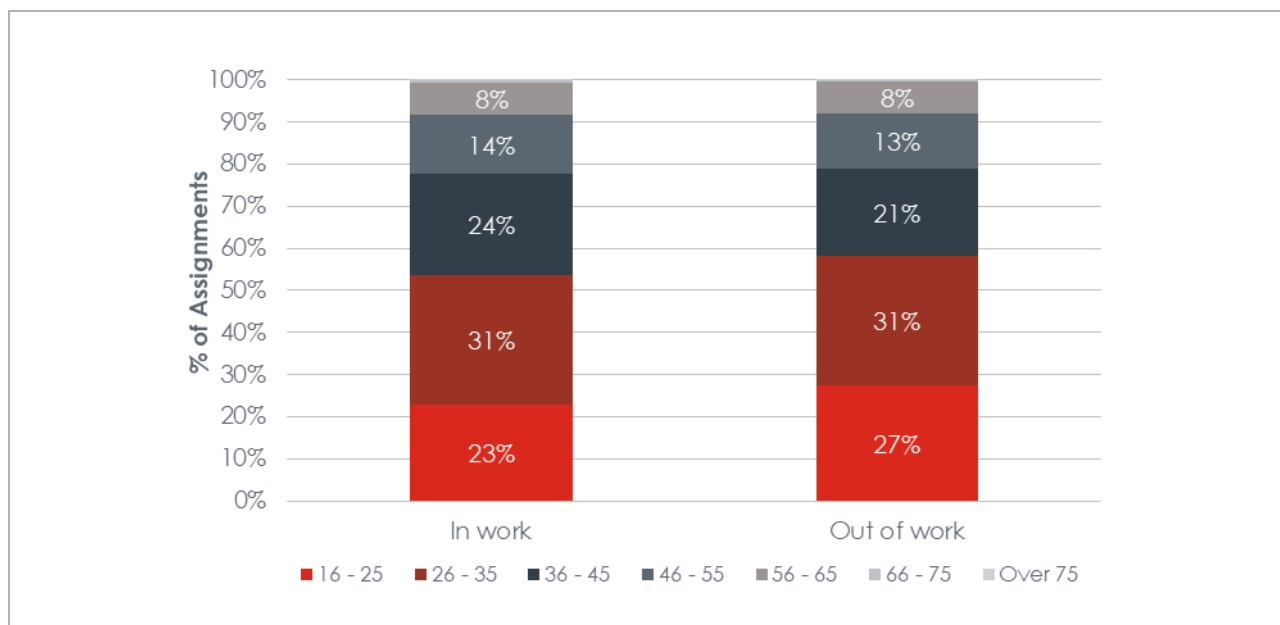
Source: SQW analysis of SDS monitoring information

Demographic Profile

Younger people were more likely to book an ITA course. Those aged 26-35 consistently accounted for almost one-third of all recipients (31%), with those aged 16 – 25 making up around 25% of recipients each year (with a peak in 2018/19 of 29%). People aged 46 and over were less likely to apply for and book an ITA, and this number has been steadily declining since 2017/18 (from 25% to 22%). These patterns were similarly reflected in the applications process.

Younger people booking ITAs were slightly more likely to be out of work. When looking at employment status in 2021/22, young people aged 16-25 made up a slightly larger proportion of those out of work, compared to those in work. On the flip side, those booking ITA aged 36-45 were slightly more likely to be in work (Figure 3).

Figure 3: ITAs booked by age and employment status (2021/22)



Source: SQW analysis of SDS monitoring information

Men are more likely than women to book ITAs. This gender split has generally been consistent since 2017/18, with men accounting for between 57% - 61% of ITAs booked each year. During the pandemic in 2020/21 this became more pronounced, with 68% of users being men. Men also appear to be more likely to apply for an ITA, however there is a substantial number of applications where a gender response is not provided so this should be treated with caution.

Women are more likely to be in work while booking an ITA. When looking at employment status in 2021/22, women account for 59% of ITAs booked by those in-work, compared to 25% of out of work. In contrast, men account for 72% of all out of work ITAs booked and 40% of those in-work.

It appears that **most ITAs are booked by people of white ethnicity, although bookings from other minority ethnic groups are increasing.** This data should be used with some caution as almost one third of those captured in the monitoring information preferred not to state their ethnicity. In 2017/18 71% of those booking an ITA identified as ethnically white, which decreased to 63% by 2021/22. ITA courses booked by those identifying as ethnically Asian, Asian British, Black, Black British/Caribbean or African, or mixed ethnicity grew from 4% to 6% over the same period. People of white ethnicity booking ITAs are slightly more likely to be unemployed, whereas people from other minority ethnic groups are slightly more likely to be in-work.

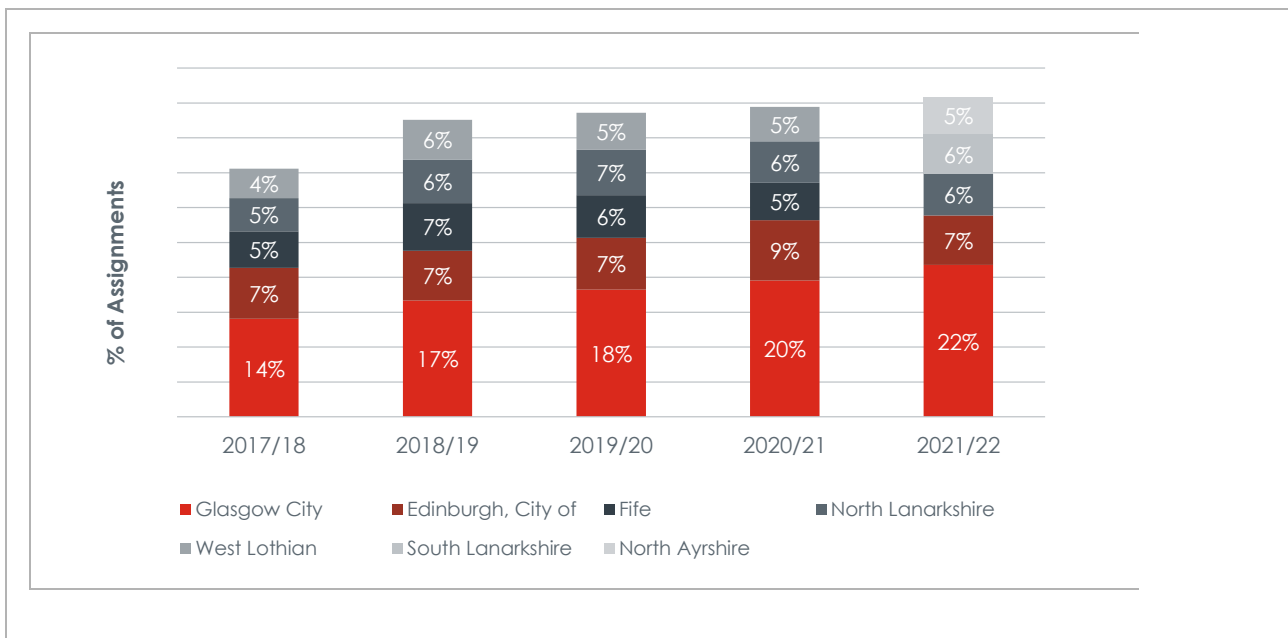
A small number of ITAs booked are by people who disclose a disability. In 2021/22 6% stated a disability, and this has remained generally consistent since 2017/18. This is also consistent with the level reported during the application process. Again, in applications and course bookings, around one third of people preferred not to answer the monitoring question on disability.

Geographic Profile

Almost a third of ITA courses booked were from people who lived in Glasgow City and the City of Edinburgh, which may be expected given the large population sizes in these two Scottish cities. Figure 4 shows the distribution of ITAs booked by their residential address. This proportion has been increasing each year, from 21% in 2017/2018 to 29% in 2021/22. Local authorities with the next highest levels of ITAs consistently between 2017/18 and 2020/21 include Fife, North Lanarkshire and West Lothian. In 2021/22 South Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire were within the top five local authorities for the first time.

At the application stage, and when training was chosen, there was little difference between local authorities in terms of the percentages of people who were in-work and out of work booking ITAs.

Figure 4: ITA users by local authority (2017/18 – 2021/22)

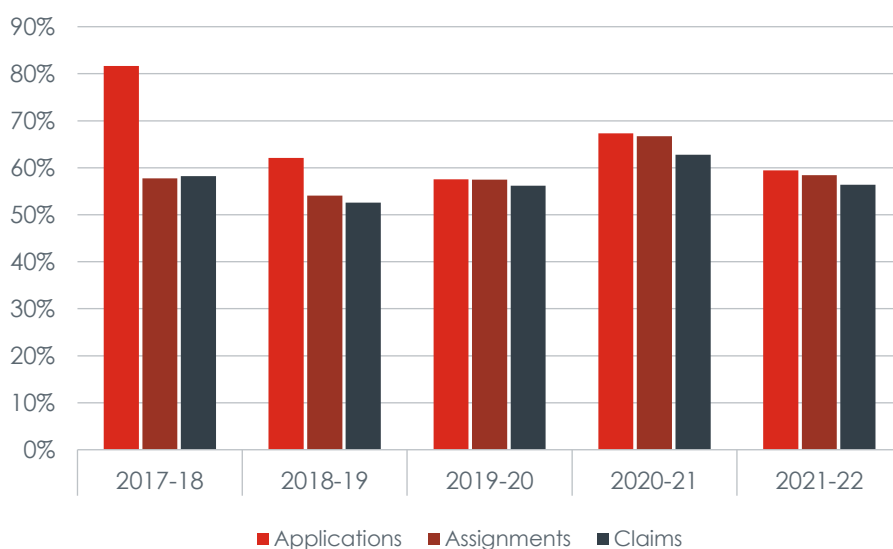


Source: SQW analysis of SDS monitoring information

Employment status

People out of work account for the majority of applications, bookings and claims. Of the 164,280 applications since 2017/18, 64% were made by people out of work. Unemployed people booked 58% of courses, and accounted for 56% of ITAs claimed. However, the gap between those in work and out of work applying and claiming an ITA has been narrowing from 2017/18 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of applications, assignments and claims made by those out of work



Source: SQW analysis of SDS monitoring information

Since 2018/19 the percentage of applications resulting in ITA claims made has been relatively flat for people both in and out of work. In 2018/19 47% of people in work and 53% of people out of work applied and claimed their ITA. By 2021/22 these proportions had remained stable at 44% and 56% respectively.

Training course choice

ITAs were **most often booked for Construction, and Fitness, Health and Beauty courses**. This follows the same trend in the numbers of applications. There were 4,524 ITAs booked in Construction and 2,294 in Fitness, Health and Beauty in 2021/22, which represented 30% and of 15% respectively of all ITAs that year.

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. Over a third of Construction ITA courses booked in 2021/22 (36%) were also young people aged 16 – 25.

Over the same period (except 2020/21), Fitness, Health and Beauty accounted for the second highest level of ITAs and people on these courses were more likely to be work and more likely to be aged 26 - 35 (Table 1).

Table 1: Course choice by work status (2019/20 – 2021/22)

	2019/20	2019/20	2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	2021/22
	In Work	Out of Work	In Work	Out of Work	In Work	Out of Work
Construction	7%	45%	11%	54%	8%	45%
Fitness, Health and Beauty	27%	9%	12%	4%	20%	11%
Security	7%	12%	4%	6%	6%	9%
Health and Safety	4%	8%	7%	12%	6%	11%
Hospitality	10%	7%	2%	1%	6%	4%
Transport	13%	6%	19%	8%	18%	8%
Social Care	7%	2%	16%	4%	15%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: SQW analysis of SDS monitoring information

During the pandemic in 2020/21, there were **fluctuations in course choices**.

Fitness, Health and Beauty accounted for relatively low levels of ITAs due to health and beauty being removed as a curriculum temporarily for health and safety reasons. Construction accounted for 40% of all ITA bookings that year (yet, absolute numbers declined from 5,589 in 2019/20 to 4,667 in 2020/21), while Transport became the second most popular curriculum with 12% (1,400) of ITA bookings. People booking ITAs for Social Care courses increased from 736 to 883 in 2020/21, and further increased to 1,126 in 2021/22.

In 2021/22 **women were the majority of ITAs bookings in Fitness, Health and Beauty** (97%), and Early Years and Childcare (92%), whereas men were the majority ITA bookings in Construction (94%), Transport (93%) and Security (83%). It is worth noting that in IT, women were the largest group of ITA bookings, accounting for 70% in this curriculum, which probably reflects the type of IT activity being provided given the opposite gender pattern in the IT sector. In addition, people booking ITA courses and reporting a disability were more likely to choose training in IT (13%) and Business (10%).

People booking an ITA and identifying as ethnically Asian or Asian British were more likely to train in Transport, making up almost a fifth (19%) of all bookings. Smaller proportions of ITAs booked were more likely in Language (7%) and Security training (6%). Similarly, Black, Black British / Caribbean or African people were more likely to book ITAs for Security training.

Course top up funding

Most people booking ITAs do not top up their course cost above the £200 funding limit. Around three-quarters of people do not top up their course cost. However, the percentage of those choosing to top up has been increasing since 2017/18 from 20% up to 27% in 2021/22, even although the percentage of people booking ITAs while in work has remained stable.

In 2021/22 younger people were slightly more likely to top up. People aged 26 – 35 were the most likely to top up regardless of whether they were in-work or out of work. Surprisingly, young people aged 26 – 35 who were out of work were slightly more likely to top up (32% of those out of work topping up) compared to those of the same age in-work (29%).

In terms of gender, **women make up over half of those who choose to top up** (52%), perhaps to be expected given they are more likely to book an ITA while in work. Men are much more likely not to top up, making up 63% of those staying within the limit. Linked to this, given the demography which suggests men are more likely to be unemployed when booking ITAs this may be expected if finances are limited.

Asian or Asian British people booking ITAs were also more likely to top up, accounting for 10% of people who topped up in 2021/22. They were the only ethnicity more likely than not to top up.

Repeat users

Most people only book one ITA through the programme. Around 7% of ITA bookings are from people returning to use the programme in two or more years. These numbers may rise as people who have booked a course on the programme once in the last year or two may return at a later point. Indeed, most participants in the focus groups indicated that they would apply for a course using ITAs again.

The focus groups revealed different types of repeat users: refresher courses (renewing / updating qualifications already achieved); related courses (building on the previous course, widening skills base) and unrelated courses (different course to the previous one). Almost all participants appreciated the opportunity to use the ITA programme multiple times.

Training providers also recognised repeat ITA use, mostly for refresher and related courses. Popular courses in which ITAs were used multiple times included CSCS training, beauty therapy, and English as a second language. However, it was also noted by college providers that repeat use wasn't always the most appropriate funding option for some related courses. As people progressed in their chosen area, they would gain access to bursaries and funding through the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) which would offer more support. This observation shows how ITAs are also being used as a stepping stone in funding options to support people into a place where they are accessing training which is eligible for further funding support.

Marketing and Engagement

Introduction

This chapter looks at the marketing of the ITA programme, which sources participants heard about it from and how this varied between different customer groups. It also looks at the reasons people were motivated people to apply for an ITA and engage in training, and to what extent the availability of funding influenced their choice of training course.

Taxonomy of participants

A taxonomy was developed to explain the types of people that apply to the ITA programme as present in the focus groups. These groups, and their defining characteristics, are described below:

- **Work-dependents:** people in this group have applied for ITA funding with an immediate career-related goal in mind. They need proof of course attendance either as a pre-requisite for their current role, to re-enter the job market in their chosen field, or to secure a pay rise.
- **Aspirants:** people in this group have applied for ITA funding with a future career goal in mind. Aspirations may be short or long-term. Some in this group may have a desire to retrain for a different career, others may be starting their career and need a qualification for a university course, or they may be thinking about setting up their own business. They may be in or out of work at the time of application.
- **Curious learners:** people in this group have applied for ITA funding without a specific career goal in mind. They might be wanting to learn a new skill, or 'go back to school', often for reasons of personal interest and self-development. They may be in or out of work at the time of application.

Promotion and awareness

People found out about the ITA programme from **a range of sources, rather than one main source**. The top four sources identified in the survey from which people heard about ITAs were: Jobcentre Plus work coaches (23%); training providers (20%); SDS (19%) and friends, family or colleagues (19%).

Jobcentre Plus, unsurprisingly, engaged work dependent people, those who were unemployed, looking to re-enter the workplace. Half (49%) of unemployed survey respondents found out about ITAs through Jobcentre Plus. Focus group participants identified work coaches as recommending ITAs as a means of gaining work-related skills that would increase their employability. Most participants were content with the course recommended, however there was evidence that a minority did not think the course was appropriate. This issue is explored further in Chapter seven.

“[The] jobcentre informed me so they could apply in my name for [an] ITA to do a forklift ticket. I agreed to that, [so it was a] recommendation... from the jobcentre.”

Male, Transport

Training providers varied in their marketing of the ITA programme. Promotional methods included advertising on websites, posting on social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), and disseminating information through google ads, emails and flyers, although often references to ITAs were alongside wider financial support offers and course information. More proactive marketing included specifically mentioning ITAs during 1-1 course enquiry calls and trainers promoting ITAs as part of their offer when delivering commercial training activities.

People who topped up the ITA funding to pay for their course (29% of all who topped up as reported in the survey) and those who were working part-time (24%) were most likely to hear about the programme from a training provider. Women using ITAs (23%) also identified training providers as one of their main information sources (alongside friends, family and colleagues). In the focus groups, some participants heard about the programme whilst on a course with the training provider, and applied for ITA funding retrospectively.

“[I heard about it through] the people that were running the course for the CSCS card. I can’t remember what they were called. I think it was Forth Valley...”

Male, Transport

The SDS website was the main source of information on ITAs for **younger people aged 16 – 24** (perhaps due to them being a key target group for wider careers, information, advice and guidance activities) **and minority ethnic participants** (26% of respondents from both groups). SDS marketing was most likely to reach curious learners in the focus groups who searched for training online, with an interest but perhaps not a specific career goal or course in mind.

Recommendations from friends, family and colleagues to engage in ITAs were **a key source for younger people** aged 25 – 34 (24%) and **women** (23%). Evidence from the focus groups suggests that colleagues, by proxy employers, are a key source of information for work dependent people seeking immediate access to training.

These findings indicate that the programme is using a variety of sources to reach the target groups with different sources engaging different customer groups which could help inform future ITA marketing and customer engagement.

Motivations for applying to ITA

The most common motivations for people applying for an ITA was to improve job prospects (Table 2). Help to get a job (36%), progress in the same job (17%) or gain a new job with another employer (15%) were the three top reasons given by survey respondents as their reasons for applying. People did not see ITAs as a way to upskill and gain a new role in with their current employer at that time.

Table 2: What was the main reason that you applied for an ITA?

	No. of responses	% of responses
Training to help get a job as not in work at the time	804	36%
Training to help progress in the job you were in at that time	378	17%
Training to get a new job with a different employer	342	15%
Training for general interest	326	14%
Training to get a certificate needed to stay in a job	241	11%
Other reason (please specify)	82	4%
Training to get a new job with current employer at the time	45	2%
Unsure / can't remember	35	2%

Source: SQW analysis of survey (N=2253)

NB. Respondents could select more than one answer

People aged 45+ and minority ethnic applicants were more likely to say they were motivated to use an ITA to help get a job as they were not in work at the time. Over half (52%) of men also identified this motivation, rising to 66% for men intending to use ITAs to gain a job more generally (either with their current or new employer). Women were less motivated to use ITAs to gain a job more generally than men (42%). They were more likely than men to be motivated to use training to help progress in the job they were in at that time (23%) and to use training for their general interest (20%).

“Yeah. It was just purely... I was struggling to get work. I just thought, maybe, try one of the courses and see if I can get a job kind of relating to it.”

Male, Out of work

Focus group participants also spoke about a desire to use their ITA to progress from minimum wage employment or from a temporary to permanent contract. These are positive motivations for using an ITA and align well with the policy rationale.

“I've always been working, but I've always been kind of like minimum wage. So, it's always been to try and upskill me and get away from that kind of minimum wage gap.”

Male, Construction

Ability to contribute to costs

Given that most participants saw the ITA as a tool to improve their job prospects, it is not surprising that those who were able to top up to access their preferred course, chose to do so. As mentioned in Chapter five, **most ITA users do not top**

up their course costs. The reasons for this may vary: the ITA value covers full course cost or the participant is unable to financially contribute.

The degree to which participants chose to top up by curriculum varied. Three quarters of participants studying **language courses** and three fifths of people doing **Transport had topped up**, whereas for Hospitality the number of participants topping up was much lower. In terms of how much participants were topping up, one-third of those topping up Transport courses did so by over £200, whereas language courses had an even spread of those topping up between £50 - £200. Social Care and Early Years and Childcare were the only courses where over half of those topping up did so by over £200. Having said this, the sample sizes are low, so results should be taken with some caution.

Delivery of ITAs

Introduction

The evaluation explored the operational aspects of the ITA programme, which is delivered through SDS. The application, training and payment processes lie between SDS and the training providers. This chapter describes participants' experiences of the administration processes and their training, along with training provider reflections.

The application experience

Most people applying for an ITA were positive about their experience.

Applying online through My World of Work was the most commonly used pathway, however there were examples of jobcentres, employers and training providers supporting individuals with their applications. The types of support given were: help with digital skills to apply online; help to understand what documents were required; and help to understand and complete the application form. Of those surveyed, 90% of respondents rated their overall experience as 'good', 63% 'very good' and 27% 'quite good'.

"My college was really helpful. We just did it backwards and forwards between us. We were sending emails over the course of two hours, scanning things and they said 'do this, do that, they just sorted it out for me'."

Female, Out of work

In terms of arranging their training, 90% respondents rated their experience as **either 'very' (63%) or 'quite' (27%) good**. This positive feedback was also reflected in the evidence collected from focus group participants. People appreciated the simplicity and speed of the process, and reported short waiting times for training courses.

Where a minority of people reported issues with the application process, they cited the following reasons:

- Dissatisfaction with their course recommendation from a jobcentre
- Difficulties providing documentation to prove eligibility.

"I had my CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] card, but they were trying to push me to do my SIA [Security Industry Authority]. It was just like as a kind of solution to... obviously, they just want you back out the system, so they just want to throw like an SIA at you to get you back out the system."

Male, Transport

Covid-19 was reported to have **little impact on ITA applications**. Three quarters of survey respondents reported no impact from the pandemic. Where an impact was reported, this resulted in people choosing to delay their application.

Processing applications and checking eligibility

Training providers had similarly positive experiences when processing applications and checking eligibility. There was a general consensus that the SDS customer service team were very responsive and helpful with any enquiries providers had, and the monthly provider calls offered a regular opportunity to discuss issues if they arose.

Where training providers experienced challenges, these were due to applicants' low level of digital skills and difficulties providing the necessary documents in a legible format. While these were not insurmountable issues, they did require additional resource from the training provider to support the applicant through the process. Training providers reported that the easing of the requirement for signed eligibility forms during Covid was appreciated.

Aborted applications

Not everyone who applied for an ITA went on to complete a training course. The most common stage for people to drop out, as reported in the survey, was after they had booked a course with a training provider, resulting in a 'no show' (24%). Over a third (37%) of people who did not proceed with their application cited a change in circumstances which meant they could not continue with the training. People who reached the 'booked' stage but did not attend training and those who did not proceed due to their circumstances were more likely to be over 45 years old and women.

When asked what support could be in place to encourage people to complete their training, the top two issues selected were extending the ITA to be valid for a longer period of time and providing more funding towards training.

Table 3: Additional factors that would have encouraged applicants to complete the training

Additional factors	No. of responses	% of responses
Unsure	46	31%
ITA being valid for a longer period	33	22%
ITAs providing more funding towards training	33	22%
Better range of eligible courses	26	18%
A simpler / easier process to training via an ITA	25	17%
Other	20	14%
More support from my employer	9	6%

Source: SQW analysis of survey data. Note: respondents could select more than one option.

The training experience

Quality of training

Most participants (93%) rated the **quality of training as ‘very’ (66%) or ‘quite’ good (27%)**. Focus group participants commented positively on the quality of training materials, the trainer/tutor role, the professionalism in delivery and the timeliness of gaining their qualification on completion. Participants were more likely to report a positive training experience where they thought the course was relevant to their career goals or interests (as opposed to being recommended by a jobcentre or employer).

“We had a lot of support from the lecturers, and they organised support sessions, emails and things like that with the recognition that it was an evening class, and we didn’t really have time during the week.”

Female, In work

Where training experiences were less positive, participants spoke about not liking the delivery style of an individual trainer/tutor and the use of inaccessible language (e.g. subject terminology) when teaching. Course duration was also critiqued with refresher courses considered to be longer than necessary, whereas specific industry skills training were thought to be too rushed.

The impact of Covid-19 was reported to be relatively limited from focus group participants, as many courses were run online and did not need a face-to-face element. While most preferred face-to-face delivery, they did not mind online courses due to restrictions (although there is a possibility that online delivery put people off who did not apply, but this could not be tested through the research). A minority of people were negatively impacted, as some courses were delayed, cancelled, or the number of classes/students in each class was much-reduced. This

impacted when people were able to complete the programme, and hence able to secure work.

Claiming payment

Most training providers reported that the **payment process was efficient** and they were quickly remunerated, usually weekly, for all ITA participants who completed their training. Some training providers observed that the SDS system FIPS could operate more efficiently by providing additional details on participant records to make it easier for training providers to find the correct participant to claim for, as well as allowing uploaded documents to be deleted and reuploaded when an error was made.

Impact of ITAs

Introduction

Having explored the programme profile, promotion and delivery, this chapter outlines the evidence collected on the impact ITAs have had on participants. Participants were asked through the survey and focus groups about the employment and wider skills outcomes that they had gained from participating in the programme.

Access to training

Most participants (83%) said that they would not have undertaken training without the ITA funding. This suggests that the programme is helping to generate additional training activity. Of those surveyed, 53% reported that they would 'definitely' not have done the training, with a further 30% saying 'probably' not, a finding that was also echoed in the focus groups. Those aged between 25 – 54 were more likely to respond this way, as were women and minority ethnic participants. Unsurprisingly, almost all those who were unemployed had this view, but those who were working part-time were also more likely to depend on ITAs.

Training providers had a similar view, reporting that without the funding they thought most of their ITA participants would not have been able to access the training. This was especially the case for providers who supported people who were unemployed or had criminal convictions.

Participants were **more likely to choose a course that was eligible for ITA funding**, with 71% of participants surveyed reporting that the availability of an ITA influenced their choice. There was a greater influence on older people's choice of course with 75% of those aged 45-54 citing ITAs as a major or minor influence, compared to 60% of 16-24 year olds.

The level of ITA funding was reported to influence course choice through restricting many learners to those courses where the ITA would cover the full cost. Almost half of participants (46%) found that their course had been restricted by the £200 funding limit, with 12% saying it was very restrictive.

If more funding had been available via the ITAs then half of the respondents said they would have chosen a different course or training. This view was particularly common among minority ethnic participants (70%) and those aged 25-44 years (57%). Estimates of how much additional funding would be required varied, with almost a third of participants (29%) stating they would have needed £301-£500 more for the course of their choice. The median band was also £301-£500 for 326 respondents.

"I had kind of five or six courses that I was looking at doing. Then I was like, I narrowed... two of them were really expensive, two of them I could have topped it up. Then there was like one or two that obviously that was quite easy to get through the ITA. I obviously ended up going through the ITA, because it was just easier. But

there was still like more that I would have liked to have done if it had been available. There was obviously really trade specific courses. There was like carpet fitting courses and stuff that I would have liked to have gone on. All the kind of courses I looked at were about £500-£600. In that region that would have really helped me, obviously. But I kind of had to go for just common courses that are less niche for people.”

Male, Construction

Employability outcomes

There was evidence that **ITAs helped people to find new and better jobs**. Table 4 shows the employment outcomes that they experienced due to their ITA funded training.

Table 4: ITA outcomes by employment status at the time of application

Employment status at the time of ITA application	Find a new job	Find a better paying job	Find a job that suited my skills	Find a job that better suited my interests	Progress my career with my existing employer	Stay in the job I had	Pursue my interests and improve my skills
Unemployed	61%	39%	58%	53%	22%	16%	72%
Working FT	44%	42%	50%	49%	44%	44%	81%
Working PT	45%	40%	52%	53%	44%	38%	82%
Inactive	44%	26%	49%	50%	13%	10%	89%
Total: Agree	51%	39%	54%	52%	33%	28%	78%

Source: SQW analysis of survey data.

Respondents could select more than one option.

Over half of those surveyed (51%) agreed that their ITA had helped them find a new job. Over half (61%) of those unemployed before applying for their ITA were in work after training. Linked to this, almost as many people who were unemployed thought that the job they had gained suited their skillset (58%). This suggests that the type of training was linked and related to their job outcome.

ITA participants who were already in work were more likely to report that their ITA had helped them find a job that suited their skillset, than to find a new job. That said, the difference was quite small with around half saying they found a job that better suited their skills or interests, compared to 45% who said that it helped them find a new job. Similarly, 44% of those in work reported that they had progressed with their existing employer. It appears that **ITAs help people in work to both find new jobs but also find jobs where they can apply their skills** and experience.

The focus groups provided more mixed, nuanced feedback. The outcomes of the programme were generally more mixed – some had experienced very profound

changes in their career, others were still out of work or had not used the skills they'd gained on their programme – but most people were able to point to at least some positive outcomes.

“You can go and do that course for three days and you'll get a four pound extra an hour. You're like that, wow.”

Male, Construction

Wider outcomes

Many, however, conceded that their course was not necessarily going to 'open doors', and that the **ITA programme was much better suited in terms of upskilling** people looking to progress in their careers than starting 'from scratch' in a new career. In this sense, people felt the programme might help build momentum, or 'boost' a career, but that its limitations lie in helping people transform their career. This, they felt, could be solved by offering people multiple courses each year or allowing people to apply for funding for more advanced courses.

In that context, it was important that **ITAs had helped participants pursue their interests and improve their skills**. From the survey, 78% agreed with this statement, particularly people aged under 44, women and minority ethnic participants. This was particularly important for people who felt their current work was precarious and felt they needed skills in multiple sectors/areas to withstand the pressures of a volatile job market. These people completed ITA training to have a 'back up' qualification in another area in case they needed it.

“They've [ITAs] not helped me get a better job, but they've helped me to always stay employed.”

Male, Social Care

Focus group participants also spoke about how the training helped them to **improve their confidence and self-esteem**, especially where they had previously been made redundant or had work limiting health issues.

“I think it's [ITA] a game changer. I'm looking forward to doing my next course now. It had woken something up in my brain and being given that bit of money at the right time, it's just given me a bit of confidence.”

Female, In work

Programme Improvements

Overall the evaluation findings are broadly positive about the programme set up, application process, delivery and impacts. Over half of survey respondents (53%) did not want to see any changes to the ITA programme. Having said that, 20% of survey respondents did wish to see some changes, and participants and training providers did have suggestions on how the programme could be improved based on their experiences. This chapter presents the suggested improvements.

Suggested improvements

Increasing the ITA value above £200

The **value of an ITA was set at £200** in 2004 and **has remained at the same level** since then. In the survey, 73% of the respondents who agreed with any changes, supported an increase in the £200 cap on funding for training. Respondents who had used an ITA more than once were more likely to want to see this change, with 52% of responses from multiple users (compared to 42% of one time users). Similarly, respondents who had previously not topped up their course cost themselves were more in favour of increasing the £200 cap (60% compared to 40%), although given this group were already topping up the additional value for money of any increase may be questionable.

Training providers reported that increasing the value **would provide more support** to participants who wanted to upskill and retrain by using an ITA. One provider said that they were increasingly having to refer participants onto repayment plans as they were unable to pay their course value outright; and the provider anticipated this would become more common with the rising cost of living.

It was also reported that increasing the value of the ITA **would more accurately cover the course costs for providers**. Many providers capped the costs of their courses which are eligible for ITA use at the £200 limit, despite increasing delivery costs. This has been done by some providers, in part because of they were aware that their ITA client group did not have the additional resources to contribute to the course cost. However, by holding prices firm the market risks becoming less attractive to providers, even more so at a time of high inflation.

Remove the restriction on one ITA use per year

The **ability to apply for more than one ITA course per year** was the second most commonly supported change in the survey, with 45% of respondents in favour of this change. Unsurprisingly, over half (56%) of these respondents were multiple ITA users. Perhaps those respondents thought they could have progressed in their training more quickly had they been able to access multiple ITAs each year.

Linked to this, training providers also thought removing this restriction **would give participants more opportunities** to upskill and retrain each year. This was considered to be particularly useful in instances where participants had to complete two or more courses to gain further qualifications.

Those who did not top up their course cost were more likely to be in favour of removing this restriction (61%).

Training providers highlighted that if participants could only undertake one course per year and their course cost was less than £200, that was lost value for the participant, compared to when the ILA course allowed participants to take multiple courses and benefit from the whole £200 allowance.

It is worth noting however, that the ability to benefit from multiple ITAs per year is **dependent on course duration**. Those using an ITA as part of a college course which is likely to last an academic year are likely not to benefit from a multiple use approach. Whereas those who use ITAs to cover shorter, one or multi-day courses, may be able to benefit from being able to apply soon after their course completion.

Further improvements suggested

There were additional improvements suggested through the focus groups and training provider interviews which are noted below.

Wider promotion and marketing of ITAs

Through the focus groups, most commonly, people felt that the ITA programme **could be better promoted**. Participants thought that awareness of the programme was low among members of the public, and more could be done to publicise opportunities available. Depending on how demand for ITAs recovers from the impact of Covid, stimulating more demand through wider marketing may or may not be required depending on take up compared to the number of places available. However, it may be that a consistent marketing approach could be introduced.

“Maybe [ITAs should] be publicised a bit more widely. I’m not really a social media person so maybe it is advertised widely, and I just don’t see it, but I sort of stumbled across it and was a bit annoyed because I thought, ‘oh no, I could have been doing these in the background even while I was working full-time if I had known’.”

Female, In work

Linked to this, there is scope to understand and tackling the perception (and experience) of people being ‘pushed’ into training opportunities that might not fit their career goals, interests or skills. This may involve **improving awareness in organisations connected to the programme** (e.g. jobcentres, training providers) about their aims of the programme.

Adopt an element of means testing

If it was not possible to make either of the suggested changes above, training providers said that modifications to the programme should be made that are **proportional to need**. For example participants on the lowest income should receive **increased funding** or be entitled to use the ITA **more than once per year**. However, to note if considering means testing further, only a minority of survey respondents (17%) and focus group participants were in favour of increasing the income eligibility threshold above £22k.

“That tight.... I reckon it’s something that should be open to everyone more or less. Why should it be that only people who are not making a certain amount should get it? If it’s only an amount of £200, that should be available to anyone as long as it’s set on a proper course that justified doing that.”

Male, Social Care

Changes to course choice

Most training providers were happy with the range of courses covered by the ITA, however two highlighted that **reintroducing first aid in the workplace** would be beneficial. While employers are mandated to provide first aid training to some people in their workforce to meet their health and safety obligations, training providers thought that it was often unemployed participants that would undertake this course and, by doing so, it would help improve their confidence, build their skills and show a willingness to train and learn. While these skills may not in themselves directly ensure a participant would gain a job, completing such courses would enhance their CV for their job search.

Adapting processes to account for training ‘no shows’

The extent to which training providers were affected by participants not attending training once booked varied. For colleges or those delivery mostly online training this was not an issue. However, training providers delivering face to face sessions which are affected by this issue would like **to reduce some of the financial costs incurred**. It was suggested that once a participant had been verified on the system, training providers could be entitled to claim for a percentage of the course costs, in case of a no show.

Linking into wider CIAG provision

Within the focus groups, participants thought that wrap-around support for people (in terms of careers advice and employment opportunities post-qualification) would be beneficial. Given **careers services** are available through SDS, there could be a **greater move to link this into the ITA offer** and more signposting of careers advice could be made available. This could help ensure all participants are connected to a training opportunity that will make a genuine difference to their career (based on their current situation, current skills, and where they want to be in the future). Engagement may also help improve self-confidence and self-esteem among participants as they access support to progress in their employment journey.

“I would like to see more of a link between the jobcentre, ITA, Business Gateway, to have more comprehensive support. I think there are so many people in jobs they are unhappy with.”

Female, Fitness, Health and Beauty

Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter sets out our conclusions about the programme. It is structured around the key question areas included in the Invitation and Tender.

Overview

Overall, the evaluation findings from the ITA programme evaluation are positive. The evidence shows that the programme is working well, with most participants and providers reporting satisfaction with the delivery experience and outcomes gained.

Programme focus

- **The programme changes made appear to have had the desired effect,** i.e. most participants are motivated to use their ITAs to gain jobs, improving their employability and skillsets. This aligns to the policy intention behind the changes in the transition from the ILA programme to the current ITA model.
- **The scale of the programme has not changed** in response to economic or labour market changes. The £200 cap remains in place and is the main factor which restricts people's course choice.

Programme participants

- 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 ITA claims made**. Numbers of applications and ITAs used peaked in 2018/19, and prior to Covid-19 were beginning to fall.
- **Younger people are more likely to use ITAs**, with a third aged 26 – 34, and a further 25% aged 16-24. Younger people are also more likely to use ITAs while out of work, whereas older participants are more likely to be in work.
- **Men are more likely than women to use ITAs**, and were even more likely to do this during the pandemic (2020/21). Men are more likely to use ITAs while out of work, whereas women using ITAs are more likely to be in work.
- Since 2017/18 **Construction has accounted for the highest level of ITA usage**, and this has been particularly driven by high numbers of people out of work using ITAs. Over the same period (except 2020/21), Fitness, Health and Beauty accounted for the second highest level of ITAs and users on these courses were more likely to be training while in work and more likely to be aged 26 – 35.
- **ITA users from other minority ethnic groups are increasing**, and these participants are more likely to be in-work. ITA users identifying as ethnically Asian or Asian British were more likely to train in Transport.
- **A small number of participants disclose a disability** and this has remained consistent since the start of the programme.

- **Most participants (90%) have used the ITA programme once** suggesting there is little use of the programme to continue to progress learning.
- **Most ITA users do not top up their course cost** above the £200 funding limit, yet the percentage of those choosing to top up has been increasing since 2017/18.

Programme operations

- People found out about the ITA programme from a **range of promotional sources, rather than one main source**. The top most commonly reported were: Jobcentre Plus work coaches; training providers; SDS; and friends, family or colleagues.
- **Programme participants appreciated the simplicity** and speed of the application process and arranging training, and reported short waiting times for training courses. Most respondents (90%) rated their experience as either 'very' (63%) or 'quite' (27%) good.
- **Training providers had similarly positive experiences** when processing applications and checking eligibility. They reported the SDS customer service team were very responsive and appreciated the monthly provider calls to discuss issues. The **payment process was reported to be efficient** and providers were quickly remunerated for all ITA participants who completed their training.
- **Training providers and jobcentres are providing support** to people who want to apply for an ITA who may need additional support e.g. due to low digital skills or difficulties providing the documents required.
- Training providers who deliver training face to face reported **challenges with participants booking and not attending training**, meaning the provider incurred costs without being able to claim the training fee. The scale of this issue across the programme is not known.

Programme impact

- **Most people reported that they would not have done the training without an ITA** (83% of people surveyed). This suggests a high level of additionality from the programme.
- **ITA funding influences people's course choice**, with 71% of people more likely to choose courses which are eligible for ITA funding. However, this occurs in large part because **ITA funding also restricts people's course choice**, with almost half of people more likely to choose courses which do not exceed the £200 limit.
- **Training providers recognised this restriction** and had not raised course costs above £200 to ensure price was not a barrier to participation, despite rising delivery costs.
- **More funding would have influenced people's course choice**, with half of ITA participants reporting they would have chosen a different course if more funding had been available.

- **ITAs support people to find new jobs** whether they are in work or out of work. Over half (61%) of those unemployed before applying for their ITA were in work after training. Linked to this, almost as many people who were unemployed thought that the job they had gained suited their skillset (58%). This suggests that the type of training was linked and related to their job outcome.
- ITA participants who were already **in work were more likely to report** that their ITA had helped them find **a job that suited their skillset**, than other outcomes. That said, the difference was quite small with around half saying they found a job that better suited their skills or interests, compared to 45% who said that it helped them find a new job.
- **ITAs helped participants pursue their interests and improve their skills** (78% agreed with this statement). This outcome was particularly important for people who felt their current work was precarious and felt they needed skills in multiple sectors/areas to withstand the pressures of a volatile job market.
- ITAs support people to access training which **improves their confidence and self-esteem**. Accessing funded training was particularly appreciated by people who had previously been made redundant or had work limiting health issues and lacked confidence to re-engage in the labour market. Through their training experience participants reported increased confidence and self-esteem.

Annex A: Analysis of the online survey

ITA applicants and recipients were surveyed to gain further understanding of the ITA users and how they use the programme.

The overall participant sample population was 21,956 contacts (12,685 for 2019/20; and 9,271 for 2021/22). The participant survey was launched on 1 April 2022 and closed on 1 May 2022, with **2,102 respondents overall (9.6% response rate)** (1,160 for 2019/20 (9%); and 942 for 2021/22 (10%)). Participants were sent two reminders during April to complete the survey.

The overall applicant sample population was 1,757 contacts for 2021/22. Due to the way SDS' system temporarily stored applicant data, the applicant survey was distributed on a rolling basis and closed on 8 May 2022. There were **151 applicant responses, a 9% response rate**. Applicants were sent one reminder during April to complete the survey.

Questions in the survey covered application journey, motivations for using the programme, reasons for not completing training (if relevant), outcomes and demographic classifications. Progressive then provided SQW with the results for each question in their raw format, and also broken down by demographics, use of ITA and by applicant or recipient status.

The data were cleaned. This included:

- Checking those who had answered the survey in under three minutes to check if they had consistently answered 'Don't know', 'Unsure' or 'Neither/nor'.
- Removing anyone found to be 'flatlining', i.e. providing the same answer to a range of questions or statement banks across the survey.
- Removing those who said they had never applied for an ITA.
- Excluding excessive outliers on numeric questions that were considerably deviated from average values.
- Upcoding was undertaken on responses where a respondent chose to provide their course name by open text rather than choosing one of the curriculum name options.

The final points worth noting are **how the survey sample compares to the programme population** as a whole. Contrasting the profile of those in the programme monitoring information to that of the survey we find there is under representation of ITA recipients aged 16-25 and 26-35, and overrepresentation of those aged 36 and older. This holds true for applicants as well as recipients. There is also overrepresentation of female recipients and under representative of male recipients – this also holds true for applicants but to a lesser degree.

For recipients and applicants more likely to disclose their ethnicity, there is slight minor underrepresentation of White and Asian / Asian British recipients, once adjusting for those who stated they preferred not to say. Finally, those reporting a

disability are over represented in the survey and those out of work are vastly under represented – unemployed people account for 16% of survey respondents but 58% of the programme profile.

Survey profile

Of those who answered the survey, there were more women than men, half of respondents were aged between 25-44, 8% were minority ethnic and one in eight identified as disabled. Around two-thirds were in work – with half of respondents were working when they applied for an ITA, with an even split between full-time and one third had topped up their ITA above its £200 allowance. Just over half had received their ITA in 2019/20 and 42% in 2021/22; a further 7% listed as applicants were excluded from calculating totals relating to questions specifically about recipients.

Comparing the survey profile against that of the ITA population profile from the Management Information, which covers all people who booked courses, we conclude the survey profile:

- Under represents people aged 16-25 and 26-35, over represents people aged 36+. Same holds true for applicants.
- Over represents females and is under representative of male recipients. The same holds true for applicants but to a lesser degree.
- Slightly under represents White and Asian / Asian British people (after adjusting for prefer not to say) (although survey respondents were more likely to disclose their ethnicity than in the management information).
- Over represents those reporting a disability.
- Under represents those out of work. Those unemployed account for 16% of survey respondents, yet 58% of people who booked courses.

Most of these differences are not too large, although the low response from those who were unemployed is noticeable. In reporting results in the body of the report, we have therefore drawn on the management information where appropriate and in using the survey have sought to report differences within sub-groups, rather than across them, e.g. the unemployed group were.

Table A-1: Comparison of survey and ITA population profiles

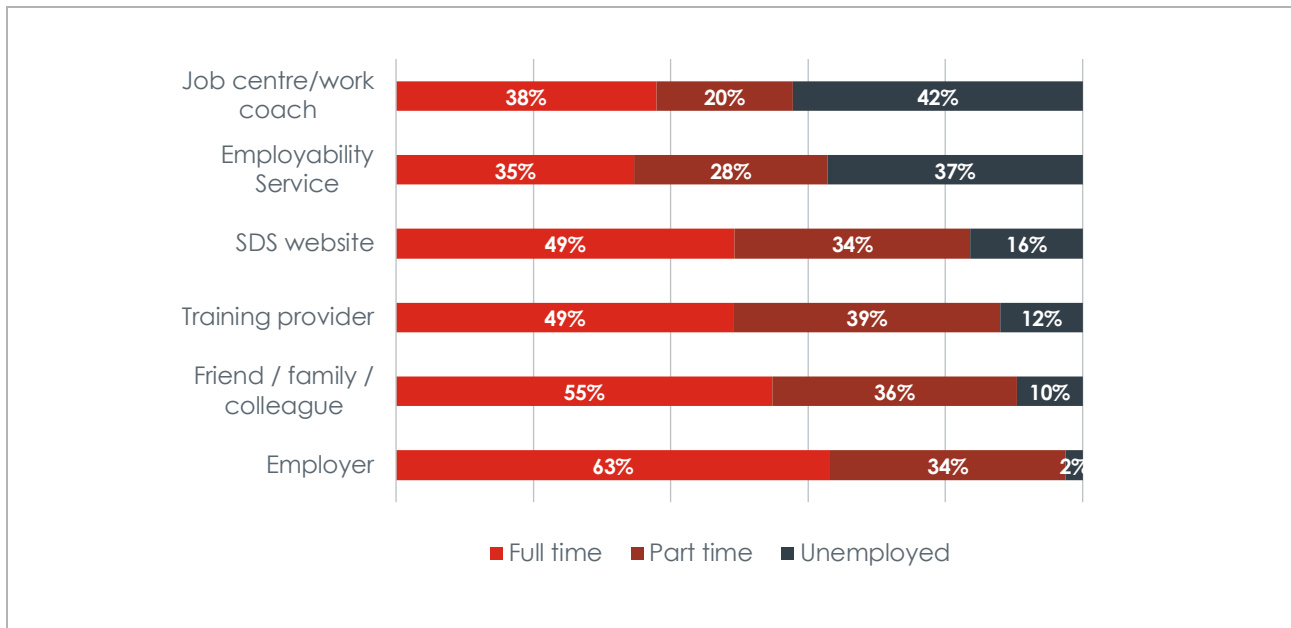
	Survey Profile	ITA Population
Male	44%	57%
Female	53%	43%
16-35*	31%	57%
36-55*	48%	35%
56+*	20%	8%
Minority ethnic	8%	7%**
Disabled	12%	5%
Currently employed	65%	42%
Unemployed	16%	58%
Topped up their ITA	34%	24%

Source: SQW analysis of survey and SDS data. ITA population is across all years of people who booked courses.*Age brackets of survey and ITA programme data differed by one year – brackets from the programme data are used. **Total does not include those answered ‘Prefer not to say’.

How people found out about ITAs

The **most common ways for a person to hear about ITAs** was through the jobcentre / work coach (23%), through a training provider (20%), the SDS website or through family, friends or colleague (both 19%). Amongst those who topped up their ITA, hearing first from a training provider rose to 29%, while the jobcentre was more important for those who did not top up, 28%. These findings follow the logic that those who are employed are less likely to go to a jobcentre and are more able to top up.

Figure A-1: How did you first hear about ITAs? By employment status

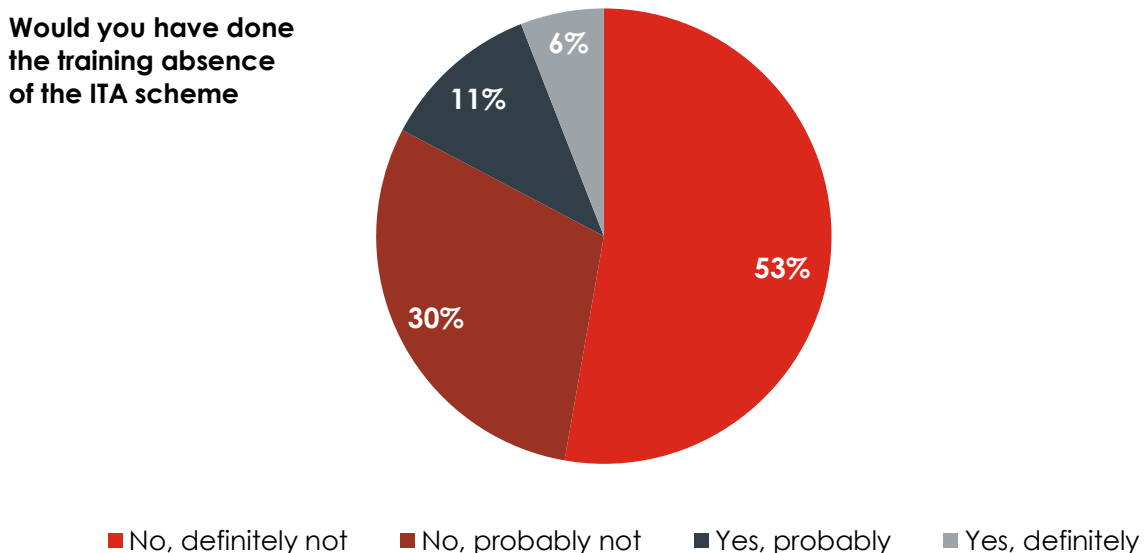


Source: SQW analysis of survey data. Note: respondents could select more than one option. Options with fewer than one hundred responses excluded.

Choosing a course

The ITA funding can be seen to have **a good level of additionality**, with 83% of respondents saying they definitely or probably would not have done the training without it. This figure is very consistent across all groups of age, gender and ethnicity, with the only exception being for 16-24 year olds where it drops to 74%, although this is still very high.

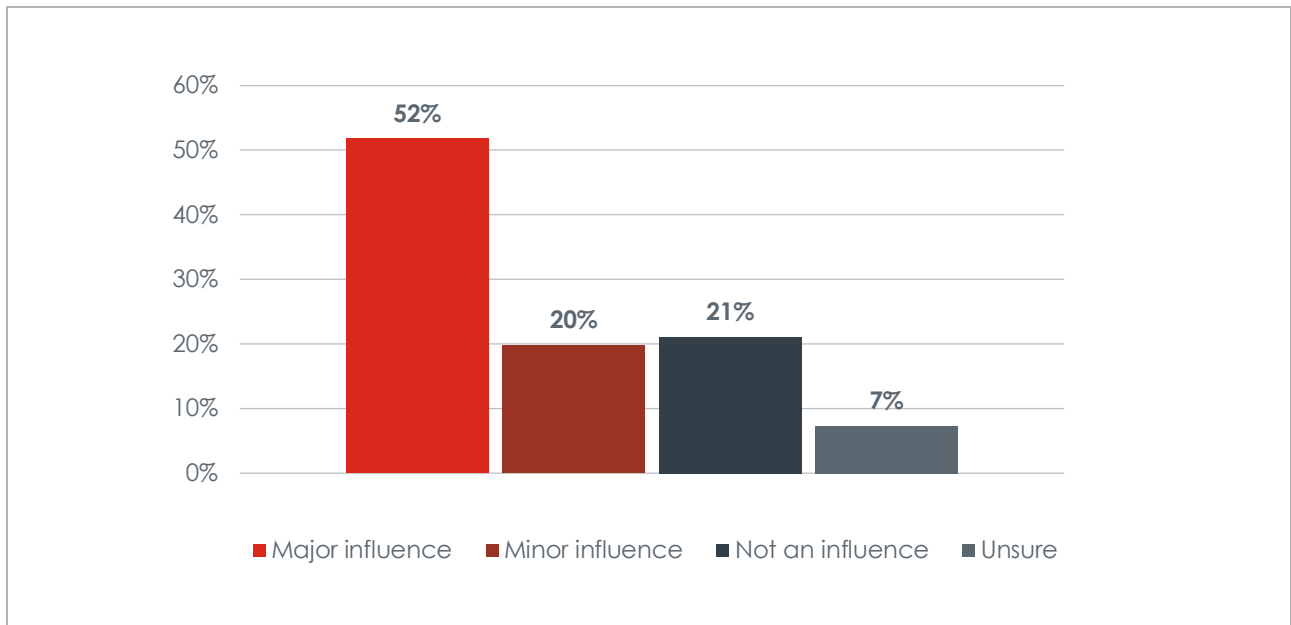
Figure A-2: Would you have done the training in the absence of the ITA scheme?



Source: SQW analysis of survey (n=2007)

ITAs also had a **strong influence of which course a person chose**. This is evidenced by 72% of people stating the funding had an influence, with over half of those surveyed saying it had had a major influence.

Figure A-3: To what extent did the availability of the ITA influence what course you chose?



Source: SQW analysis of survey data (n=2102)

However, almost half (46%) found that their course had been restricted by the £200 funding limit, with around one in eight people saying it was very restrictive. Furthermore, **if more funding had been available** via the ITAs then over half of the respondents said **they would have chosen a different course** or training.

Of those who said they would have chosen a different course if more funding was available, 80% said the funding had provided less than half the cost of their preferred course. This would suggest a desire for people to use the ITA funding to help subsidise courses that may be more intensive or specialised.

Figure A-4: How much extra funding would be needed to do the course you wanted?

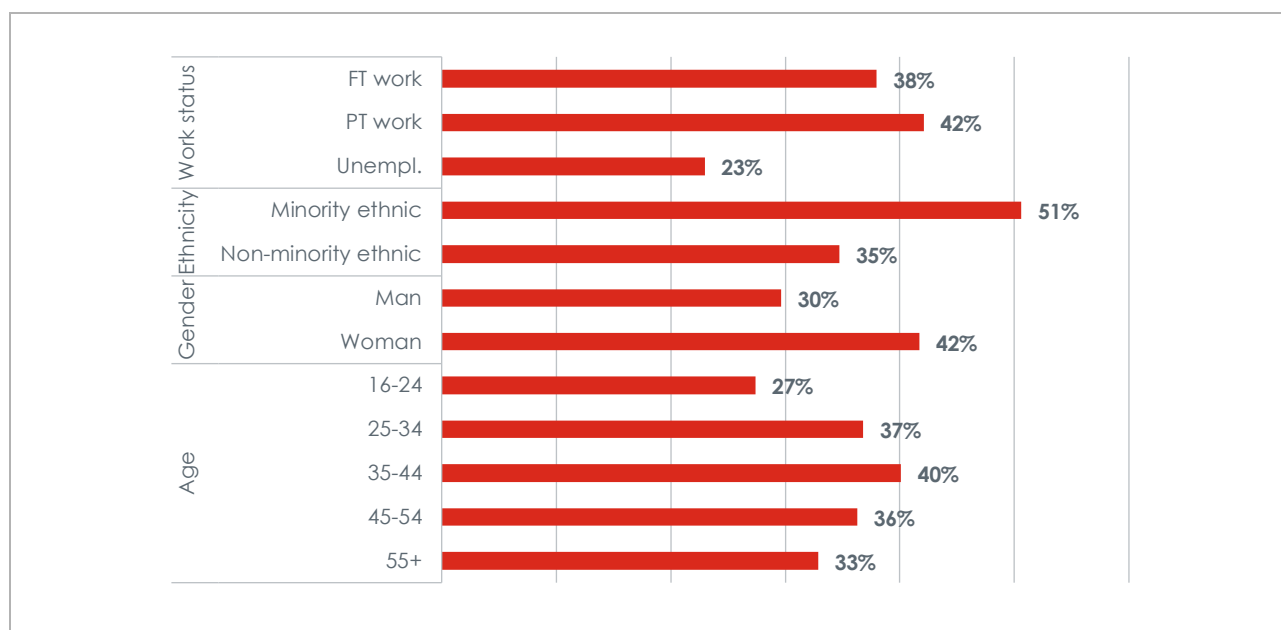


Source: SQW analysis of survey data (n=298)

Topping up funding

Over a third of survey respondents had topped up the funding (36%). The youngest and oldest cohorts were less likely to top up (27% and 33% respectively). Women were more likely to top up than men (42% vs. 30%) and ethnic minorities were more likely to top up compared to non-minority ethnics (51% compared to 35%).

Figure A-5: Proportion of people who topped up their ITA, by demographics and work status

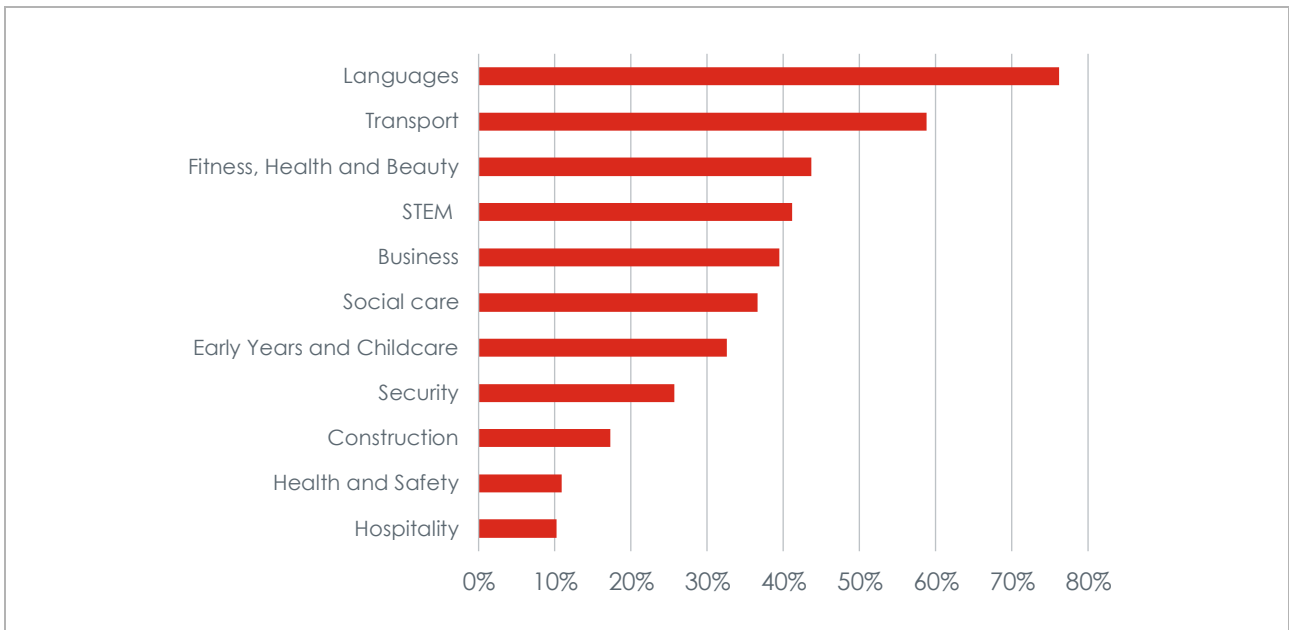


Source: SQW analysis of survey data (n=2105)

There was a mixture in the proportion of people topping up by course. Three quarters of people doing **language courses** and three fifths of people doing **Transport had topped up their ITA**, whereas for Hospitality and Health and Safety training this figure was only one-in-ten. When looking at how much was being topped up by course, one-third of those topping up Transport courses did so by over £200, whereas language courses had an even spread of those topping up between £50 - £200. Social Care and Early Years and Childcare were the only courses where over half of those topping up did so by over £200 – however the sample sizes at this level are low, so results should be taken with some caution.

Courses where people were more likely to top up by over £200 were more likely to say the ITA funding limit was not restrictive, with the opposite being true for those taking courses that were less likely to top up at all. This would suggest ITAs are being used to subsidise training costs of the more expensive courses and that the demand for training in cheaper courses is more responsive to how much funding is offered. In other words, courses have differing levels of price elasticity of demand, so varying levels of ITA funding cap will have more effects on some courses than others.

Figure A-6: Proportion of people topping up, by curriculum



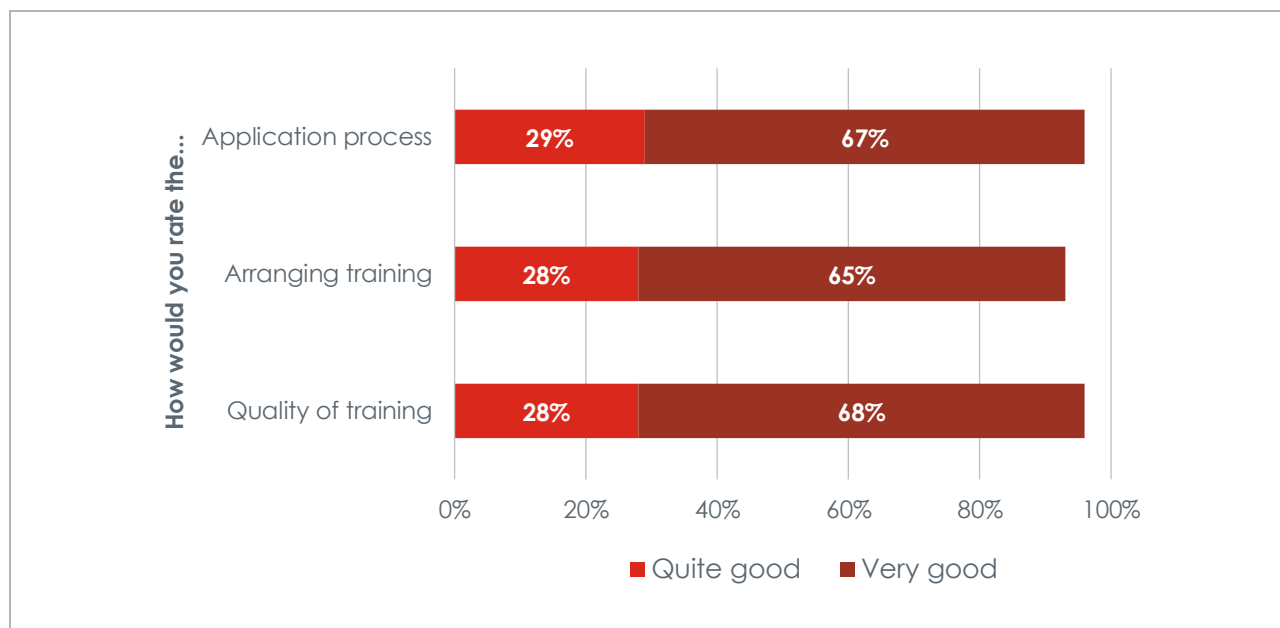
Source: SQW analysis of survey data (n=2007)

The ITA experience

The majority of **people had a positive experience** throughout the programme journey from application to training. As shown in Figure A-7 below, over nine in ten people rated each part of the ITA process as quite good or very good, with all of the stages having a consistent distribution of ratings across all curriculum areas. For courses that had over 100 survey respondents giving feedback on the process, the lowest rating was for Languages (ESOL), which had 79% of people say the quality of the course was good, which is still remarkably high.

There is also a notable increase in the number of people answering 'very good' between 2019/20 and 2021/22. This increased by eight percentage points for the application experience, ten percentage points for arranging training and up one percentage point for the quality of the training.

Figure A-7: Respondents ratings to the quality of the ITA journey



Source: SQW analysis of survey data

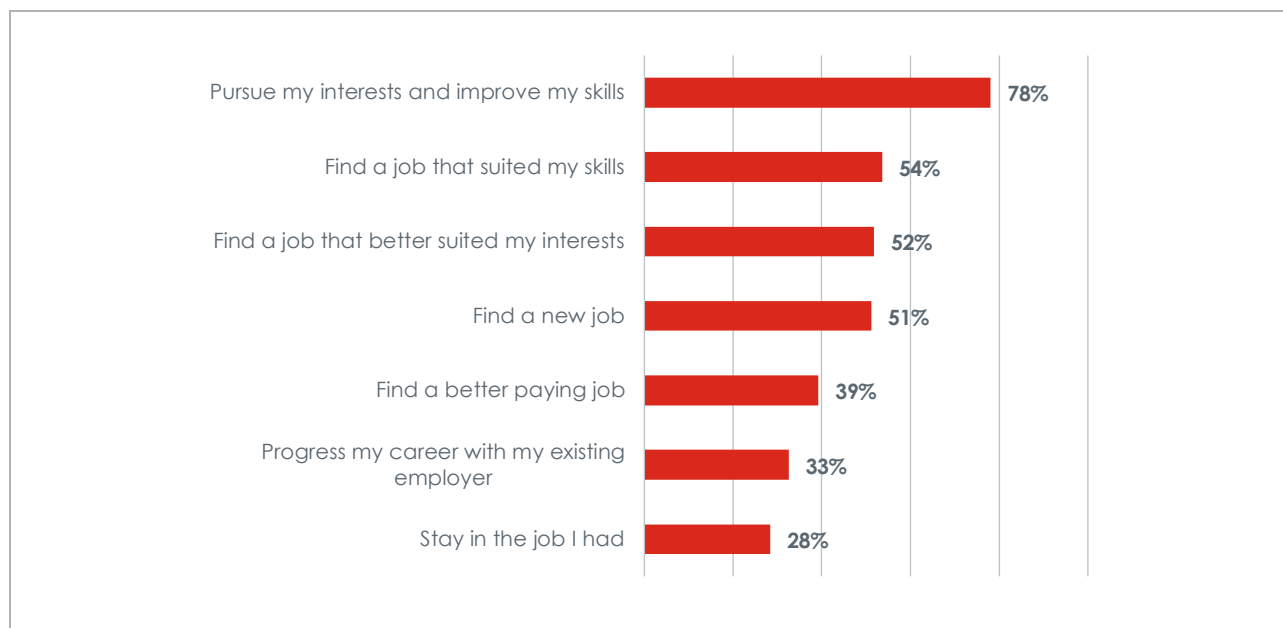
Outcomes

Nine out of ten people surveyed reported receiving at least one beneficial outcome as a result of the ITA programme. Benefits around **improving skills and finding work that suited skills were most often cited**, whilst outcomes relating to current employment were least mentioned.

Evidence suggests that ITAs had a relatively **strong impact on helping unemployed** people find new work and find work better suited to their skills. Indeed, of those who were unemployed at the time of applying for an ITA, three out of five said the programme had helped them achieve these outcomes. Survey respondents who were economically inactive were more likely to find the scheme had helped them pursue their interest and improve their skills than those in work or those unemployed (89% compared to 82% and 72% respectively).

The time of receiving an ITA had little effect on beneficial outcomes. Those receiving their ITAs in 2019/20 had very minor differences in outcomes compared to those receiving in 2021/22. The largest difference in outcomes between the two cohorts was a four percentage points increase in the 2021/22 group in saying the ITAs had helped them progress their career with their existing employer, and a three percentage point decrease in those saying it had helped them find a new job. Both of these outcomes are expected given the economic climate at the time.

Figure A-8: Outcomes from the ITA



Source: SQW analysis of survey data (n=1060). Respondents could select more than one option.

By demographics

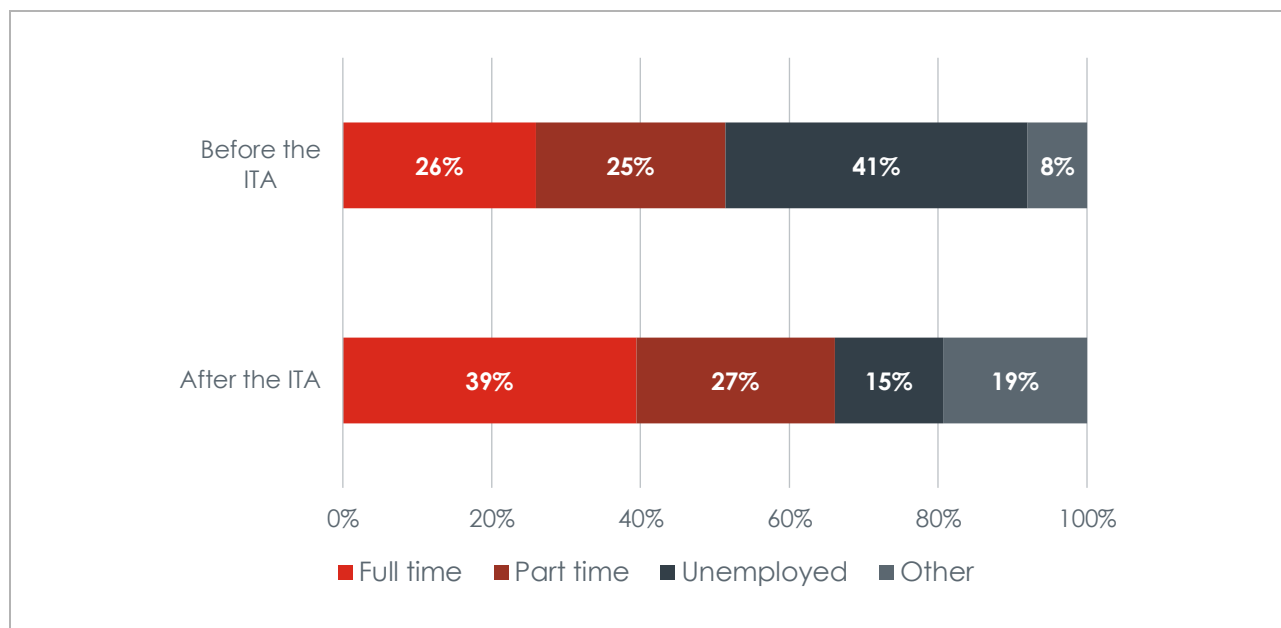
Women were more likely to progress their career with same employer (34% compared to 31% for men) and pursue their interests and improve skills (84% compared to 71% for men); meanwhile ITAs were more likely to help the following groups find a job with a different employer:

- Young people (60% for 16-24 year olds compared to 39% of 55+)
- Men (62% compared to 43% for women)
- Minority Ethnic Groups (62% compared to 51% for non-minority ethnic groups).

Meanwhile, almost one quarter of those who were unemployed at the time of their application reported that they were working full-time at the time of the survey and 17% were working part-time. Half of survey respondents agreed that their ITA had helped them find a new job, with younger people, men and ethnic minorities more likely to agree. The discrepancy between men and women stating the ITA had helped that find a new job was large, with 62% of men agreeing but only 43% of women. Young people, men and ethnic minorities were also more likely to agree that their ITA had helped them find a better paying job, to find a job that suited their skills, and find a job that better suited their interests.

There is some evidence to suggest **ITAs are contributing to help people find work**. The proportion of people in work rose from when they applied for an ITA to when they completed the survey from a half to two-thirds, whilst the number of people unemployed reduced by almost a third of its previous level. Of those reporting being unemployed when applying, almost half (47%) were in work after using their ITA, with three-quarters stating their main reason for applying to the programme was to find work.

Figure A-9: Employment status of ITA recipients before and after the training



Source: SQW analysis of survey data (n=2102)

Further development of ITAs

Over half of respondents did not wish to see any changes to the ITA scheme, indicating a good level of satisfaction from its users. This figure was consistent across demographics, recipient cohort and even top up status.

Areas for improvement

Of those who did want to see change three-quarters of people wanted to see an **increase to the funding cap** (equating to 15% of people overall). Interestingly, people who had topped up their ITA did not seem to see this as more of an issue than those who did not. On the other hand, men and ethnic minorities were more likely to want to see an increase to the funding limit than average.

The second most commonly supported area of improvement was to **allow multiple applications for an ITA course per year**, where just under one-in-ten people overall said this would improve the scheme. This was consistent across different groups of people.

How the scheme can help people complete their training

There was no definitive reason for why people did not complete their training following applying for an ITA. The most common reason given for not proceeding with the training was changes in circumstances (37%), with older age groups and women more likely to suggest this.

One-fifth of people who did not complete their training stated **more funding** would have encouraged them to do training, with the same proportion saying the ITA being **valid for a longer period of time** would have helped too.

Annex B: Analysis of the Focus Groups

Method

To complement the quantitative survey of programme applicants and participants, **eight qualitative focus group discussions** took place in mid-June 2022. These groups followed the quantitative work, enabling recruitment based on survey findings to identify specific groups of interest. The groups were defined by a range of factors, including whether people were in or out of work at the time of their application and the sector in which they chose to study their ITA, alongside other factors (including whether they topped up their ITA for their course, and whether their course had helped them to find a job).

The focus groups were designed to provide a more detailed understanding of the participant journey through the programme – looking at motivations for applying, the application process, experience of the programme, and outcomes following the programme. The group environment stimulates lively discussion – moments of consensus and disagreement – which allows researchers to appreciate the full breadth of opinion on a topic area, as well as which opinions are most and least prevalent.

Table B-1 below shows the specification for each focus group, and the date on which they took place. Group definitions were dictated by areas of interest and availability of sample.

Table B-1: Participant focus group specification

Group	Date	Work status at time of application	Sector	Other
Group 1	11 th May	Out of work	Construction	Mix of topped up / not topped up
Group 2	11 th May	In work	Fitness, Health and Beauty	Mix of topped up / not topped up
Group 3	12 th May	In work	Social Care	Mix of topped up / not topped up
Group 4	12 th May	In and out of work	Transport	Mix of topped up / not topped up
Group 5	18 th May	In and out of work	Any sector other than those above	Anyone who topped up ITA
Group 6	18 th May	Out of work	Any	Those who said the ITA had helped them find a job
Group 7	19 th May	In and out of work	Any	Those who used an ITA more than once and those who said they'd like to be able to do more than one ITA a year
Group 8	19 th May	In work	Any	-

The groups also consisted of a mix of people based on their personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, location) and other ITA-related factors (e.g., how recently they applied, how many times they had used ITAs). This ensured that different voices were heard in the feedback, and the groups represented the full spectrum of people who apply to the programme.

The **recruitment process** was managed by one of Progressive's Senior Operations Managers. Eligible participants in each group of interest (i.e. those that agreed to participate in further research, provided contact information, and were available during the fieldwork period) were contacted by email, introducing the purpose of the qualitative research, the date/time of the focus group and asking participants to confirm interest/attendance. Subsequent emails were sent to re-confirm sample information and where incentives for participation should be sent.

Six people were due to attend each group, but groups were deliberately overrecruited to account for dropouts. Between 3 and 7 people attended each group. In total, **43 participants took part** in the focus groups. Groups took place online, over Zoom video-conferencing platform. All participants were given £40 as a thank you for participating.

All groups were recorded and transcribed to ensure all viewpoints were fully captured. Transcriptions and recordings were revisited throughout the analysis phase to cross-reference group findings and build a comprehensive narrative on the findings. All members of the project team were involved in the review, interpretation and discussion of the results.

The findings are set out as follows:

- Taxonomy of programme participants
- Motivations for applying to the programme, including:
 - Programme awareness
 - Knowledge of programme entry requirements
- Experiences of applying, including:
 - Whether considered other courses
 - Decisions around topping up ITA funding
- Experience of the training
- Outcomes following the programme
- Impact of Covid-19
- Improvements to the programme

Taxonomy of participants

Analysis of the data suggests there are **broadly three types of people that apply** to the ITA programme. This taxonomy goes some way to explaining people's motivation for applying, their experience of the programme, and the outcomes of

participation – it will be referenced throughout this annex. These groups, and their defining characteristics, are described below:

- **Work-dependents:** people in this group have applied for ITA funding with an immediate career-related goal in mind. They need proof of course attendance either as a pre-requisite for their current role, to re-enter the job market in their chosen field, or to secure a pay rise.
- **Aspirants:** people in this group have applied for ITA funding with a future career goal in mind. Aspirations may be short or long-term. Some in this group may have a desire to retrain for a different career, others may be starting their career and need a qualification for a university course, or they may be thinking about setting up their own business. They may be in or out of work at the time of application.
- **Curious learners:** people in this group have applied for ITA funding without a specific career goal in mind. They might be wanting to learn a new skill, or 'go back to school', often for reasons of personal interest and self-development. They may be in or out of work at the time of application.

Work-dependents

For this group, ITAs are viewed as 'a means to an end'. They provide evidence of a skill that is a pre-requisite to remain in work, or secure entry-level work in a specific field. Participants in certain sectors such as Construction and Transport, where continuous proof of job competency is required from a health and safety perspective, were particularly likely to fall into this category.

As these people **need proof of skills as a pre-requisite for work**, they were generally more willing to pay for their course using their own money, but courses of this nature (CSCS, SIA, forklift training) tend to be fully covered by ITA funding. These people typically have positive outcomes as a result of participating on the programme – they frequently reported that they were still in work or had a job to go to following completion of the course.

"It's helped me stay in employment because I've always worked in construction, so it's helped me."

Male, Construction

Despite these positive outcomes, it is worth noting the generally lower level of engagement people in this group had with the programme. Many had done the same ITA multiple times and were therefore not being necessarily 'upskilled' through participation in the programme, with a view to career development.

"Also, if you're already in [a job] and need that badge, you're going to keep the job. But it's not really something that kind of necessarily opens doors with folk."

Male, Construction

Aspirants

For this group, ITAs are viewed as **an investment with an uncertain outcome**. People in this group have a genuine desire to upskill, pursuing long-term career goals. The programme gives them an opportunity to gain job-related skills in an area of interest, with many planning additional training or in the process of making job applications for their chosen career.

“I knew I wanted to find a job that I really wanted. I wanted help finding a career.”

Female, Fitness, Health and Beauty

Many of these individuals were young, having just left school or university, and were looking to supplement their education and skills with a specific career goal in mind, or secure better-quality work.

“It wasn’t actually until I was in university, and I was looking to gain employment that I started looking into these courses to see if I could stand out from everyone else. So, I did a course back then, but also did the leadership and management one as well. With the job that I am in at the moment, [the courses have] helped me progress.”

Female, Out of work (at the time of application)

Despite positive engagement with the programme, using it to achieve key objectives like upskilling and career progression, these people generally want more from the programme – more funding for advanced courses; and scope to undertake more than one course per year.

Curious learners

This group view the programme as **an opportunity to pursue an interest**, or develop a skill, but not with a career goal in mind. They are attracted to the idea of lifelong learning, keeping their minds active, and are highly invested in their courses (unlike some in the Work-dependent category).

People in this group are at various stages of life – some are waiting to start a university course, some are working part-time, some are at the end of their working life – but they all have spare time for studying and actively seek out learning opportunities as a means of personal enrichment and development. Some go further, driven by philanthropy, using the skills from their course in a voluntary capacity, or to support their family/friends.

As they do not have a specific career goal in mind, they are often choosing between multiple courses, and were most likely to be considering non-ITA courses. They are also risk averse, not wanting to commit large sums of money to training programmes.

“I did look at other counselling courses just to see. I didn’t blindly do the course that my colleague said. I looked to see what would be most suitable and location and

the timing of the course to fit in because it's every week. I wanted to pick one that would have a day where I could actually go consistently."

Female, Social Care

"I do not want to, say, do a college course. It is very expensive; it can cost thousands. And it is a big commitment. When you are not sure, the ITA courses are very attractive."

Female, Fitness, Health and Beauty

Motivations for applying to the programme

How participants heard about the programme?

People heard about ITAs **through a range of channels**, the most common being the jobcentre and other employability organisations such as Remploy Scotland. Many spoke of **jobcentre work coaches** recommending the programme as a means of gaining work-related skills that would increase their employability. People in a variety of situations (long-term unemployed, recent redundancy, Covid-related redundancy) were introduced to the programme through this channel. While most were recommended courses related to their previous employment (in Construction and Transport), others were introduced to new sectors where they did not have any experience. This gives some positive indication that the programme is reaching people seeking employment and improving access to work – one of the key objectives of the programme.

"[The] jobcentre informed me so they could apply in my name for [an] ITA to do a forklift ticket. I agreed to that, [so it was a] recommendation... from the jobcentre."

Male, Transport

"Yeah. It was just purely... I was struggling to get work. I just thought, maybe, try one of the courses and see if I can get a job kind of relating to it."

Male, Out of work

Other people became **aware of the programme through work** – either they were encouraged to do a course by their employer, or they were told about a course by a colleague. Work-dependent participants were most likely to have been told about ITAs via this channel, although Curious learners also heard about the programme this way.

Less common means of hearing about the programme included through SDS careers advisors, via schools – i.e., young people looking for direction with their career – and via people's social networks (e.g., friends, family, neighbours).

There were incidences of **people actively seeking out training opportunities** and discovering the ITA programme through online research (e.g., via the My World of Work website). Curious learners were most likely to fall into this category.

“I’m sort of curious anyway but there’s always stuff on the computer and I’m sitting and looking. There’s a thing called The Skills Network that’s where you can do college work. I’ve done some of them... and I was looking for something that would be interesting and most of it is just like... I don’t know, I wouldn’t want to do them personally. But the one that I picked was the Thai hand massage and it was really fascinating.”

Female, Out of work

A few people also heard about the programme **through a training provider** whilst on a course, and they applied for ITA funding retrospectively. These people were primarily in the Work-dependent category; having agreed to enrol on a course for their job, they were introduced to the programme as a form of support.

“[I heard about it through] the people that were running the course for the CSCS card. I can’t remember what they were called. I think it was Forth Valley...”

Male, Transport

Knowledge of ITAs

Almost all were **aware of the basic principles** of the programme – loan-free funding available to people that meet certain criteria (either unemployed or earning less than £22,000 per annum). The limitations on the funding (£200 limit) and the number of applications (one per year) were also well understood, with many sharing grievances about these aspects of the programme – see Programme Improvements section for further detail.

There were generally **lower levels of awareness regarding the programme subject areas**, and the perception that courses are strictly vocational (i.e., not academic) was relatively commonplace. Knowledge of this was tied to people’s motivations and the taxonomy of participants. People that had a specific course in mind (Work-dependents, and Aspirants) or were recommended the course through the jobcentre were unlikely to know about the range of subject areas available. Those researching courses and training as a matter of personal interest or development (Curious learners) were more likely to be aware of this. Additionally, people with knowledge of ILAs were likely to know more about the range of subject areas – they were aware that the programme had moved from leisure courses to more certified, vocational courses.

“I was familiar with the original ILA scheme maybe about 10 or 15 years ago, maybe even more than that. When I was doing my Masters at college, it was mentioned as a kind of thing you could use for even leisure courses at the time. I have to say, I was a bit of a serial user of the ILAs. I did a lot of mini leisure courses. In more recent years when it became the ITA, I used it for vocational courses.”

Female, Fitness, Health and Beauty

What motivated participants to apply?

Motivations for applying to the programme were varied. People were in a range of situations prior to enrolling on their course; alongside those employed and looking to move/progress/stay in their job role, some people had recently been made redundant, others were recovering from health (physical and mental) conditions, and others were entering the world of work following full-time education. This highlights the scope of the ITA programme and who it supports – all of whom require support with employability and upskilling. These situations often dictated people’s motivations to apply and their expectations of the programme.

“It was the first time I have been unemployed since I left school, and I thought, you know what, I fancy retraining, but I haven’t got any money because I’m unemployed and I thought hang on, maybe I could get a grant or something and get the course paid for because I kept seeing things online.”

Female, Out of work

Positively, from a programme design perspective, people were most commonly motivated by a **genuine desire to upskill and improve their job prospects**. They regularly spoke of the desire to progress from minimum wage employment or to move from a temporary to permanent contract with their employer. These situations highlight a desire to move towards skilled employment, and concerns around being ‘stuck’ in low-wage, low-skilled work persist. Aspirants generally fell into this group, although so did Work-dependents who needed proof of skills to secure entry-level employment in their chosen field.

“I’ve always been working, but I’ve always been kind of like minimum wage. So, it’s always been to try and upskill me and get away from that kind of minimum wage gap.”

Male, Construction

As discussed in the taxonomy of participants section, another key motivation for people was **needing a specific qualification** to stay in work. These individuals were less interested in the goals of upskilling and self-development, and simply needed a refresher course to e.g., renew a license for their job.

Significant numbers were also attracted to the programme because it allowed them **to undertake ‘free’ training**, considering it low-risk compared to other forms of training. For this group, the availability of funding was a primary driver for them enrolling on a course; they would have been unlikely to do so without funding.

“[I looked at other courses] but some of them were maybe going to cost two grand and I thought, no, I would rather try something much cheaper and dip my toe in first before I committed the time and the money.”

Female, Out of work

“It’s great. It is government funded training, isn’t it? You’re getting a chance to improve your skills and it’s not costing you anything. It’s a no brainer really, isn’t it?”

Male, Construction

Connected to this, **an attitude of ‘why not?’** was held by a minority. These people took part in the programme with a more speculative mindset; without a firm objective for the outcome of their training, they viewed ITAs as an opportunity to be productive with their spare time, without an expectation of added career benefits.

“For me, it’s just like to kind of take any help you can get. Especially if you want to change career or start something new. Like if there’s something there available and you’re eligible then yeah, go for it. Why not?”

Female, Out of work

“We were working four days on, four days off. I had a lot of spare time to be honest and I thought you know what? Why not learn something new? Why not try and get a wee qualification?”

Male, Social Care

In summary, motivations can be split into two broad categories – job-related and non-job related, both of which have more and less positive associations in terms of the ITA programme and its objectives (from an upskilling and employability perspective). Encouraging people motivated by job/career-related goals of upskilling and employability will be important for the future of the programme.

Experiences of applying to the programme

Views on the application process

The vast majority of programme participants applied to the programme through the **My World of Work website** via the conventional mechanism – obtaining funding through the website, approaching a training provider, being accepted onto/attending the next available course.

However, **a minority went through a training provider first** and obtained funding retrospectively, having secured a place on the course; and some people had experience of their employer or the jobcentre undertaking their application on their behalf. All these individuals in the latter group were asked to do was provide personal information (e.g., name, address, contact information) and proof of earnings.

“My college was really helpful. We just did it backwards and forwards between us. We were sending emails over the course of two hours, scanning things and they said ‘do this, do that, they just sorted it out for me’.”

Female, Out of work

“When the guy from Remploy told me to apply for the training, he told me what provider to look for straight away. I just [went] on to the ITA website, found the provider, and applied through it. That was it. It was easy that way.”

Male, Construction

Positively, from a programme implementation perspective, the **majority of people found the application process very easy** – particularly those who were supported by their jobcentre coach or employer during the process. Indeed, there was evidence of at least one employer (in the Social Care sector) providing an instruction manual to support staff through their application process.

People desired **simplicity and straightforwardness**, and the programme application process delivered in this respect. They spoke positively about how streamlined the process was, and the length of time the overall application process took – a matter of days for most people.

Most people were in training quickly, too – particularly on popular courses used across multiple industries (e.g., Health and Safety Training, First Aid). While there was some concern about the lack of lead-in time between applying and the course starting (in terms of ensuring the funding was settled), this was not a problem for most people.

Despite these positive findings, a minority of people experienced **issues with the programme application process**, although none were widespread.

There was some evidence of people being put through unsuitable courses by jobcentres. Although this experience was helpful in some ways – improving job prospects, skills development – some felt their **course was not appropriate for them** (both in terms of helping them secure work at all, particularly in sectors they perceived to be oversubscribed, and in terms of being relevant to their sector of interest). This experience was reinforced by others who felt that jobcentres might ‘push’ people into training that they are not interested in to encourage them into work. In this respect, it will be important to reflect on how the programme might better connect people with a skills development opportunity that is aligned to their career goals.

“The jobcentre actually put me through the CSCS course, which is not really my area of expertise... they basically had me on the course for that, so I just did it just to kind of make them happy, so to speak.”

Male, Construction

“I had my CSCS card, but they were trying to push me to do my SIA. It was just like as a kind of solution to... obviously, they just want you back out the system, so they just want to throw like an SIA at you to get you back out the system.”

Male, Transport

“For me personally, I didn’t have any ITAs offered or suggested to me, but I do feel that there’s a general vibe that perhaps it’s really just being pushed at certain people in order to tick the correct boxes.”

Female, Out of work (at time of application)

As well as this main point of feedback, a minority had issues **collecting ID forms, or proving their earnings**, as well as arranging the funding. This was either a result of employers failing to provide payslips in a timely fashion, or training providers being uncooperative in terms of accepting the funding – suggesting these were not issues with the programme application mechanism itself. However, one individual was asked to provide proof of their ID, address and earnings separately, which led to some frustration.

“I think there was four different forms I had to fill in. They came through one at time. You do one and then they come through and say, there’s another form you got to fill in. Then there’s another form you got to fill in. And then there was a zero income form I had to fill in as well.”

Male, Transport

There were also some unique situations that presented challenges for people. One person, whose course ran over one year, was unsure about whether they could apply for two ITAs in consecutive years for the same course; and a few said that training providers were unaware that the course they offered was eligible for ITA funding.

“I would say from my experience, when I went to the college and asked, they didn’t really know what it was, and they weren’t really sure. Maybe it was my college, but they didn’t understand what it was.”

Male, Transport

Additionally, the minority of people who applied to the course before applying for ITA funding encountered some issues with **sequencing the funding with the start of the course**, suggesting the application process could be better explained to some. This often reflected people’s introduction to the course – they become aware of it through their provider, who were not clear about the process.

“What I have always done is I’ve applied for the course with the college, then I have to wait and see if I’m accepted onto the course, then I have applied for the ITA and by that time I have already had an email from the college asking me to pay for the course...then I’m waiting for my ITA to come through.”

Female, In work

In the main, then, **the application process works well**, but there are minor issues which stem mainly from organisations involved in the programme implementation process. These issues include jobcentres that may recommend unsuitable courses to unemployed people and training providers that may lack knowledge of the programme. As such, educating these organisations on their role as part of the programme implementation ‘network’ – i.e., training providers, jobcentres, employers – will be important for ensuring the future success of the programme.

Choosing a course – other courses considered, topping-up, and taking courses without an ITA

As discussed at the outset of the report, **in reality, many did not ‘choose’ their ITA course**, rather they needed it for their job, were instructed to apply for it by their employer/the jobcentre, or were limited by what course they could choose (in their area of interest). However, those who did choose their course considered factors such as personal interest, job prospects as a result, proximity of the training provider to their home and the overall cost of the course – often, the cost of the course was the overriding factor.

“I had kind of five or six courses that I was looking at doing. Then I was like, I narrowed... two of them were really expensive, two of them I could have topped it up. Then there was like one or two that obviously that was quite easy to get through the ITA. I obviously ended up going through the ITA, because it was just easier. But there was still like more that I would have liked to have done if it had been available. There was obviously really trade specific courses. There was like carpet fitting courses and stuff that I would have liked to have gone on. All the kind of courses I looked at were about £500-£600. In that region that would have really helped me, obviously. But I kind of had to go for just common courses that are less niche for people.”

Male, Construction

For some, the **breadth of courses available was too limited** in some industries. Participants wanted courses for people looking to go into the trades (electrician/bricklaying courses etc.), others wanted more science-related courses to complement academic qualifications they were expecting to move onto, and others would have liked more non-vocational, leisure courses to be reintroduced to the programme (as had been the case during the time of ILA funding). This, however, might reflect the lack of awareness some people have of the courses available to them (and the ability to top up their course) – particularly if they had been instructed to do a course by the jobcentre or their employer. This again points to greater education of organisations involved in the wider programme awareness/implementation process.

Some people discussed the role of supply and demand within the wider labour market and what this might mean in terms of the cost/availability of ITA training. They felt it was important to make sure that the availability of training reflected the needs of different industries – ensuring that the programme is reactive to the needs of the wider economy. There was a perception that **some common, general courses are not necessarily needed** in the current market – and that these are promoted to the detriment of more advanced, sector-specific courses.

“[I would like to see] courses like plumbing, bricklaying, sparkies – that kind of stuff. Areas where they actually need people, rather than areas where they've got that many of them that they're just that cheap because of that reason.”

Male, Construction

While **most participants did not consider another course** at the time of their application for the reasons explored above, Curious learners were more likely to have undertaken research to ensure they were doing a course that would suit them. They did this primarily through online searches, either specifically on the My World of Work website, or elsewhere. Additionally, many younger people were considering university courses and full-time vocational courses – for this group, the ITA-funded course was used as a steppingstone, or to complement these studies (which they were intending to do in future).

Without ITA funding, most people would not have done their course. This likely reflects who is eligible for ITAs – low-income and unemployed people. However, a significant minority said they would have paid for the course anyway, particularly Work-dependents who had a guaranteed use and application of their ITA-funded training. For these individuals, taking the training would be low-risk, even if they had paid for it. Some Aspirants were also willing to pay for training (up to the funding threshold of £200). This gives some indication that although the programme is targeting the right people from a job retention/progression perspective, it may be able to support even more people unable to afford training (if those willing to pay for a course would do so in future).

“I was prepared to pay the £200 because this was the course that I wanted.”

Female, Construction

“I would probably have done it mate [without ITA funding]. It got me extra money, know what I mean. It’s beneficial... I would probably have done it myself anyway.”

Male, Transport

While **most did not top up their ITA funding**, the minority that did tended to do so by a small amount; only a couple of people topped up by significantly more. As well as the overall desire to upskill, decision-making around topping up was dependent on whether the course was needed for people’s job (Work-dependents) and how interested they were in the course (Curious learners). There was, however, little evidence of employers offering to top up courses, although some participants were providing a case to their employer, persuading them to do so.

Despite only a minority of people either topping up their course or saying that would have paid for their course regardless of ITA funding, **there was some support for participants contributing at least a small amount** to all courses on the programme. This, some participants felt, would encourage greater engagement with and commitment to the course/learning.

“I signed up for this other [non-ITA] course which was free, and it had really tight deadlines on the assessment, and I actually realised that it was too much for me. And I withdrew from it. Now would I have withdrawn so easily if I had paid some money towards it? I don’t know. So maybe it’s that there needs to be some sort of personal investment in it to commit [to it].”

Female, Social Care

Experiences of the training

As with the programme application process, **most people were very positive about the experience of their course**. People from all groups – Work-dependents, Aspirants and Curious learners – were positive about many aspects of their course, from the role of course tutor/convener and the quality of the lessons/materials provided, to the professional feel of their course and the timeliness of the certification of the course. People were also positive about the progression routes available in some subject areas, including Fitness, Health and Beauty.

“My last experience in education was almost five decades ago, so to come back in and be able to tackle Nat 5 level maths...because when I was in high school, I left high school without any maths at all...loved the subject...which is why I revisited it now. I was absolutely terrible at it at high school. To have spent almost a year in evening class doing Nat 5, it was just such an unbelievable experience compared to my last experience in education back in high school in those days.”

Male, Out of work

“We had a lot of support from the lecturers, and they organised support sessions, emails and things like that with the recognition that it was an evening class, and we didn’t really have time during the week.”

Female, In work

“There was a lot of progression routes as well. Like I say, it was SVQ level 5, so pretty decent. But when we were there, the lecturer would also talk about the different progression routes, and I know that at least one person in the course had signed up for the next slots.”

Female, Fitness, Health and Beauty

The **relevance of the course was a key influence** on people’s experiences. Despite the possibility of greater expectations (in terms of course quality and career benefits), those who felt the course was relevant to their immediate or future career goals generally had a better experience than people who did not feel connected to their course from an interest or career perspective. This latter group consisted mainly of people who had been instructed to do their course by the jobcentre.

Additionally, although some general courses that cut across sectors (e.g., first aid, food hygiene, health & safety) were perceived negatively from a direct-impact-on-career perspective, they were felt to be broadly positive for people’s working lives insofar as they are useful for many frontline service sector jobs.

“I’ve worked at a hospital as well, so a lot of it was what every person working in a hospital needs to do. Entry-level stuff like hygiene and contamination and things like that. It’s a very basic knowledge that every single person no matter what they do in a hospital would have to do that course.”

Male, Social Care

“I’m not saying I was clever, but I passed it. It was just a refresher, but it was enjoyable. It brings back a lot of things that you forget.”

Male, Transport

“There’s definitely parts of it [the course] that you would use in your everyday life now, especially since Covid come along. So especially like the hygiene things and contamination and so on. That’s something that you would use forever, and some people need to learn that. It’s something that they really could use, that skill.”

Male, Social Care

Despite these positive findings, a significant minority highlighted various drawbacks of their course. The **most common issue people raised was around the length of the course** – some people felt the course was rushed; others felt it could have been shorter. This affected people in specific industries (e.g., people trained in a practical role who would have benefited from more in-depth one-to-one training) and those on refresher courses, chiefly.

“[The course was] just rushed. Like it was just... You’re learning a skill, you know, you’re dealing with people’s eyes... And it was like, ‘that’s you qualified now. You can go out to the world, and you can do it.’ And people were asking about what we can charge people. And the trainer said... yeah. And I just thought, that’s crazy. Like I said, I came home, and I was able to obviously practice on friends and family. I did that for ages. And I watched loads of videos. And had to learn things from that.”

Female, Out of Work

“Yeah, the training was a little bit long winded, but it covered everything... It’s all health and safety, common sense, that sort of stuff. You can use... When you can use 20 words instead of one, that’s what she [the course convener] did. It could have been a lot shorter. It didn’t need to be a whole day. Could have been done in like three or four hours at the most.”

Male, Transport

Relatedly, **a few people were less positive** about the way their course was delivered – some felt their course would have benefited from a practical face-to-face element (e.g., Forklift training, massage), and while face-to-face learning was generally considered better from a learning perspective, people felt that elements of their course could be delivered online. Although course delivery was affected by Covid-19 to some extent, a review of ITA-eligible courses should be considered to ensure all are delivered in a way that reflects course content/goals.

“The leadership one, I think it was 8 weeks as well. It was online and I find that a bit more difficult because you basically have to self-motivate to go and learn. It wasn’t the best quality of online learning. The structure was a bit complicated and the way

it was written sometimes, it was a bit hard to figure out on your own. I think you'd have to have maybe somebody all presentations or something explaining first. It was just all written and that was really hard to firstly, motivate yourself to go and look at, and secondly to understand and complete the course."

Female, In work

There were also a few instances of people **being unable to evidence previous knowledge/competency**; this affected their experience, as typically meant they had to cover old ground. It is worth noting for future iterations of the programme the importance of keeping a record previous study, or a central location for all education certificates that an applicant might hold.

"Mine was just a refresher as well but so... But I didn't have proof of my previous certificate, so they had to do the theory part and all that again. It's a pain in the arse a wee bit."

Male, Transport

For most people, though, their **course delivered value for money**. This was linked to three main factors, 1) whether they enjoyed the course, 2) whether they felt it was good-quality, and 3) if they had used the skills they've gained on the course in their work. Even those repeating a course felt it had been value for money, highlighting the far-reaching benefits of the course.

"It broadens your horizons. It gives you more scope for jobs you can apply for and stuff like that. Because you're qualified as opposed to not being qualified."

Male, Transport

"I would say it probably is [value for money]. If you put it down to what I am paying per hour, that is quite a lot but you kind of getting some pseudo-counselling in it because you're doing lessons to each other. You also have to keep your own journal, which nobody reads. It's for your benefit. As well as learning all the background of counselling and techniques and things like that, you're learning about yourself as well."

Female, Social Care

Evidencing the quality of the experience, **most people said they would apply for a course again**. Many of the reasons for doing so have been discussed already, with lifelong learning, future job intentions and the ability to increase salary being primary drivers. The Curious learners and Aspirants were most likely to fall into this group.

Outcomes from the programme

The outcomes of the programme were **generally more mixed** – some had experienced very profound changes in their career, others were still out of work or had not used the skills they had gained on their programme – but most people were able to point to at least some positive outcomes.

“My course was really well delivered and included in our course was a sort of starter kit so you could go out and start working on clients straight away. I had enough in my starter kit to do practice on close friends and family... I think I spent another £150 on a bed. I was doing mobile because of the pandemic. By the time I had bought all my other equipment and then paid for my beauty guild membership so that I was fully insured, I maybe spent another £200 on top of that, and I was good to go out and start offering my services to clients.”

Female, Social Care

“They’ve [ITAs] not helped me get a better job, but they’ve helped me to always stay employed.”

Male, Social Care

“The job I was supposed to be getting [at the end of my ITA], got filled. Just applying for other jobs now. See if anything turns up, know what I mean. I’m going through my CSCS card. The course is tomorrow.”

Male, Transport

People who were positive about the outcomes of the programme pointed to a range of things, from **remaining in their job and increasing their salary**, to providing ‘direction’ in their life and increasing confidence/self-esteem. The range of things mentioned highlights the **far-reaching benefits of the programme**. As we saw with programme motivations, this often reflects the situation people are in prior to enrolling on the course; some people find themselves at a low point in their lives (following redundancy, health issues), but the programme equipped them with new skills, helping them feel more employable and able to overcome challenges.

“You can go and do that course for three days and you’ll get a four pound extra an hour. You’re like that, wow.”

Male, Construction

“I think it’s [ITA] a game changer. I’m looking forward to doing my next course now. It had woken something up in my brain and being given that bit of money at the right time, it’s just given me a bit of confidence.”

Female, In work

“Before I did the ITA funded training, a lot of my friends had just graduated uni and I thought it was too late for me etc. and then when I went into the higher English [ITA] class, the group that I sat with were all minimum late thirties, most of them were early forties and I think had I not had that ITA, I would not have realised that I am actually one of the younger students at college, there are plenty of people 20 or 30 years older than me who do not think they are too old.”

Female, In work

There was also a general appreciation that even if the course was not used for immediate or long-term career related goals, it would **provide a safety net for people** if they were to lose their current job. Indeed, there is evidence that some people in precarious work situations use ITAs qualifications as a 'backup' – they feel they need skills in multiple sectors/areas to withstand the pressures of a volatile job market.

“Well, the [reason for doing the ITA course] was keeping my taxi license. And to do that I had to do this course. But now I've got a job in a factory, so I don't need to worry about taking it next year. I shall keep it [taxi-driving qualification obtained through ITA funding] as a standby.”

Male, Transport

“But if anything should arise in my current job, I've got that under my belt. Do you know what I mean?”

Female, Construction

Many, however, conceded that their course was not necessarily going to 'open doors', and that the ITA **programme was much better suited in terms of upskilling** people looking to progress in their careers than starting 'from scratch' in a new career. In this sense, people felt the programme might help build momentum, or 'boost' a career, but that its limitations lie in helping people transform their career. This, they felt, could be solved by offering people multiple courses each year or allowing people to apply for funding for more advanced courses.

“Maybe there is a small course here that £200 will make the change for them, but for me and for others, to be honest, it doesn't make the change. My message to the government: do you prefer that people stay on Universal Credit for two years, or just increase the amount [of funding] to £500, where it really make the change and people say, bye bye, Universal Credit. It's just only a little bit, and guess what, many of us don't have extra cash. If we get more help, it will be really fantastic and it will make the desired change, but that's me.”

Male, Out of work

“Not to talk for too long, but basically, I could not get enough clients because I did not have a big enough menu of services to offer. So, I ended up going back to university, a student nurse.”

Female, Out of work

Regarding multiple uses of ITAs, there were **three types of repeat user:**

- People doing refreshers of same course (almost exclusively Work-dependents);
- People doing related courses (e.g., different types of massage that they could use in their career – widening their skills base) (typically Aspirants);

- People doing unrelated courses (typically Curious learners).

Virtually all these people were in favour of doing more than one course per year. Some felt you should be able to ‘fast-track’, meaning if you saw a job advert that required further training, you would be able to apply for additional ITA funding with a view to securing work. Evidencing future use was felt to be important in terms of justifying multiple ITAs each year.

There was, however, overall **preference for the ability to rollover funding over multiple years** – to save up to afford a more expensive course – rather than doing multiple courses each year. It was felt that this would have more of substantive impact on people’s long-term careers, and while the perception from some was that some sectors (e.g., Construction) require multiple low-cost training certificates (e.g., forklift, rough terrain forklift, fire marshal, reach course, CSCS, scaffolding) other sectors (Fitness, Health and Beauty & Social Care) require more advanced training. Future work on the ITA programme might approach this question from a sector-specific angle, looking at what qualifications requirements are by sector and adapting ITA funding as appropriate.

Impact of Covid-19

Around half of programme participants had taken their course during Covid-19 in 2020-21. The **impact of Covid-19 was relatively limited**, as many courses were run online and did not need a face-to-face element. For many, the preference was for face-to-face courses, but they were unfazed by courses needing to be run online.

“Preferably it would have been face to face but with Covid, that wasn’t an option. Next best option would have been to do it live but again the way my sessions fell, I couldn’t really ask for time off.”

Male, In Work

However, the impact of Covid-19 was felt by a minority, as some courses were delayed, cancelled, or the number of classes/students in each class was much-reduced. This impacted when people were able to complete the programme, and hence able to secure work.

“We were delayed a couple of times due to Covid and that.”

Male, Out of Work

“As I said, Covid put me off one of the times. I could have had mine [Forklift certificate] in December, and I didn’t get it until February. Because... If you add it up, every course, [I lost] three months... Because it was December to February. If you add that up it affected me... At least £100 pound a week nearly.”

Male, Transport

Additionally, Covid-19 **impacted people’s career plans outside of the course**, with many having started work just before the pandemic, or were made redundant

during the pandemic or were put on furlough. This impacted their decision on when to take their course.

Programme improvements

Many programme improvements have been covered elsewhere in this report, including:

- **Understanding and tackling the perception** (and experience) of people being ‘pushed’ into training opportunities that might not fit their career goals, interests or skills.
- **Ensuring all programme participants are connected to a training opportunity** that will make a genuine difference to their career (based on where they are at in their life, what skills they have, and where they want to be in the future).
- **Ensuring that more people fall into the Aspirants category** – i.e., they plan to use the skills they gain on their course for more significant career goals (upskilling, career progression, employability reasons), rather than to simply retain work (Work-dependents) or because of a general interest in a subject area (Curious learners).
- **Educating other organisations** involved in the implementation of the programme (jobcentres, training providers) to ensure they are aware of best practice in relation to the programme application process.

In addition, some other specific programme improvements were raised during the course of the groups. Most commonly, people felt that the **programme could be better promoted**; the perception was that awareness of the programme was low among members of the public, and more could be done to publicise opportunities available and hence improve the calibre of applicants.

“Maybe [ITAs should] be publicised a bit more widely. I’m not really a social media person so maybe it is advertised widely, and I just don’t see it, but I sort of stumbled across it and was a bit annoyed because I thought, ‘oh no, I could have been doing these in the background even while I was working full-time if I had known’.”

Female, In work

Others felt that wrap-around support for people (in terms of careers advice, employment opportunities post-qualification) would be beneficial, although it is worth noting that this sort of support is available elsewhere (e.g., the SDS Careers Services), and a greater understanding of the capacity in which the ITA programme could provide this is needed. However, if people’s introduction to careers and skills is through ITAs, perhaps **more signposting of careers advice** could be made available.

“I would like to see more of a link between the jobcentre, ITA, Business Gateway, to have more comprehensive support. I think there are so many people in jobs they are unhappy with.”

Female, Fitness, Health and Beauty

A minority also felt that the **threshold for programme eligibility could be lifted**, with no wage restrictions on eligibility to take part.

“That tight... I reckon it’s something that should be open to everyone more or less. Why should it be that only people who are not making a certain amount should get it? If it’s only an amount of £200, that should be available to anyone as long as it’s set on a proper course that justified doing that.”

Male, Social Care

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