



Management and Leadership  
Training in NI SMEs

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary (1)

The link between management skills and enhanced firm performance, including increased productivity, has been widely documented. The process is thought to operate through the adoption of good management practices by better trained managers leading to improved outcomes and more engaged employees.

In Northern Ireland (NI) managers are thought to be less well trained, and less likely to adopt good practices, compared to their UK peers. Around half of managers are qualified to degree level which is no different to the UK but a higher share of managers in NI have low level qualifications.

The adoption of good management practices is also lower in NI than the UK, with NI at the bottom of the UK regional league table on management practice scores.

Evidence from both the Employer Skills Survey and Small Business Survey show that management training is undertaken in a minority of firms, with just 33% of NI employees receiving management training in 2022, similar to the UK at 32%.

# Executive Summary (2)

This qualitative study, involving consultation with SMEs on the extent of management training, shows a more complex picture than the quantitative evidence suggests. There was confirmation of the use of formal management and leadership (M&L) training via public and private providers by some businesses. But those who were not formally engaging with external management training also typically had some method of training or upskilling via internal means and/or the use of external mentors and advisors.

Those who were doing 'nothing' in terms of upskilling were very much in the minority and this was due to lack of awareness of the need, and in terms of what was available, rather than any resistance to training.

There was also evidence of good management practices in place which weren't limited to only those engaging with formal M&L training.

Each business' approach to management training is unique, tailored to how they operate and undertaken based on their budget and time constraints. It is therefore difficult to make recommendations for improvements to specific M&L training as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Indeed, the region is well served by management training provision.

Building on the findings, the recommendations in this report are therefore based on wider improvements across the training support system which can support the broader uptake and utilisation of training and management practices in NI SMEs.

# Executive Summary (3)

**Recommendation 1:** The provision and promotion of a single M&L training information portal which also contains a diagnostic tool enabling managers to see where improvements could be made in their skillsets and practices, with signposting to relevant available courses.

**Recommendation 2:** The introduction of a tax credit for those engaging with M&L training (both internal and external) and perhaps with some requirement to implement practices or strategies as a result.

**Recommendation 3:** For smaller SMEs who are budget and/or time constrained and for whom either subsidised training or tax credits would not be desirable, the creation of a formal list of mentors that are available for access without the need to register for a training scheme.

**Recommendation 4:** A review of training offerings in terms of the language used when communicating the content of training programmes, and when promoting the benefits, to better relay need and relevance to SMEs. Inclusion of a tailored element within broader M&L courses to provide help for managers' specific challenges.

**Recommendation 5:** SMEs should review training internally afterwards to ensure that it meets expectations and needs and should aim to have a method by which the outcomes and impact can be measured.

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# Introduction and Background

# Introduction and Background (1)

## Defining management and leadership

As noted in UUEPC's 2022 report, [Engagement with and impact of Management and Leadership Training in NI SMEs](#), management and leadership, although distinct, are often considered one and the same. The difference, however, can be thought of in terms of their purpose.

**Management is a process orientated function** involving strategy, budgeting and evaluation. The Management Development Council in Ireland<sup>1</sup> refer to management as:

*“the organisation and co-ordination of the activities of an enterprise in accordance with certain policies and in the achievement of clearly defined objectives” (pg.6).*

Meanwhile **leadership is considered more people-focused** involving mentoring and building trust with a team. Prentice, in the Harvard Business Review<sup>2</sup>, defines leadership as:

*“...the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants - a human and social achievement that stems from the leader's understanding of his or her fellow workers and the relationship of their individual goals to the group's aim.”*

Despite the differences, **managers and leaders often require similar competencies** to add value to a business, particularly in smaller businesses where the manager and leader may be the same person. In larger businesses the roles may be distinct and performed by multiple people. Given the interplay between the two, and the focus on SMEs, for the purposes of this report we consider management and leadership as interchangeable.



# Introduction and Background (2)

Management and leadership (M&L) skills have been increasingly recognised as important for business performance, with studies linking strong management with a range of outcomes to include higher sales, profitability and survival<sup>3</sup>. More recently the link with productivity has been identified, although it is observed that management skills alone cannot drive productivity, it is only when they result in practical actions, strategy or practices<sup>4</sup> that productivity impacts result, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Conceptual model of skills, management practices and productivity**



Source: Peng, B., Mole, K. and Roper, S., (2019) Enterprise Research Centre

To this end, an examination of management practices in the British production and services industries showed a strong correlation with labour productivity with a 0.1 increase in management practice scores correlated with a 9.6% increase in productivity (GVA per worker)<sup>5</sup>.

# Introduction and Background (3)

In Northern Ireland (NI) a recent study<sup>6</sup> also showed a positive, but not statistically significant, relationship between management practice scores and productivity. Importantly, however, the report did state that

*“management practices are healthier in firms with better qualified managers and in firms where managers have taken leadership training” (pg. 22).*

These results highlight the importance of training and show that skills underpin the adoption of good practices which in turn drive performance. The productivity impact is particularly important in NI as it suffers from a longstanding productivity gap with the UK. Good practices can also help deliver on the Ministerial priorities for the economy of raising productivity and creating good jobs<sup>7</sup>.

Along with those already mentioned, there have been a number of studies analysing management practices<sup>8,9,10</sup>, this report therefore focuses instead on that underpinning skills aspect. The particular aim is understanding the extent to which managers in NI SMEs engage with M&L training and the associated benefits and challenges.

# Research Aim

- This study builds on the previous Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) report<sup>11</sup> which used the Employers Skills Survey (ESS) and Longitudinal Small Business Survey (LSBS) to understand more about the uptake of training amongst managers, and the impact of training on business performance outcomes.
- Among the key results it was previously found that 68% of NI's SME managers received some form of training in the previous 12 months but this was largely for technical, practical or job specific skills. Just 45% of those undertaking training received specific M&L training and this share halved for micro-firms.
- Given the relatively low uptake of M&L training, this follow-up qualitative study seeks to better understand the motivations for, and barriers to, accessing M&L training among NI SMEs.

# Research Objectives

The study has 2 key objectives:

1

For those that undertake M&L training, the project seeks to gain more in-depth knowledge about how it is used within the company including the motivations to engage in M&L training, the types of M&L training that are used and the perceived and actual benefits to both the individual and the firm.

2

Given that the previous findings suggested that M&L training is used by only a minority of firms, the project also aims to better understand those who do not undertake M&L training, including understanding any barriers, the perceptions of M&L training, and how businesses might be encouraged to engage.

# Approach (1)

The study took a qualitative approach, with semi-structured consultation interviews undertaken with managers/directors/HR managers across a range company sizes, ages and industries (including private sector and not-for-profit). The businesses encompassed both family and non-family owned and those selling locally and in export markets.

| Sector  | Age | Employment size |
|---|-----|-----------------|
| Accommodation and Food                            | 20  | 40              |
| Administrative and Support Service Activities     | 7   | 29              |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing                 | 4   | 2               |
| Arts, Entertainment and Recreation                | 140 | 200             |
| Arts, Entertainment and Recreation                | 136 | 100             |
| Construction                                      | 25  | 10              |
| Construction                                      | 5   | 10              |
| Construction                                      | 49  | 1               |
| Construction                                      | 5   | 82              |
| Construction                                      | 48  | 200             |
| Financial and Insurance Activities                | 25  | 50              |
| Human Health and Social Work Activities           | 36  | 9               |
| Manufacturing                                     | 16  | 70              |
| Manufacturing                                     | 84  | 250             |
| Other Services                                    | 150 | 90              |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities | 10  | 1               |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities | 6   | 7               |
| Real Estate Activities                            | 27  | 10              |
| Real Estate Activities                            | 31  | 4               |
| Wholesale and Retail                              | 3   | 5               |
| Wholesale and Retail                              | 70  | 15              |

# Approach (2)

The consultations covered the following topics:



*For those engaging with M&L training:*

- Types of M&L training
- Training needs
- Method(s) and providers of training
- Budget
- Impact and Evaluation
- Awareness of providers
- Training for managing remote workers



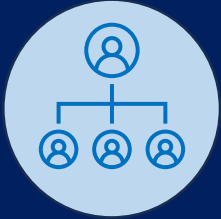
*For those not engaging with formal M&L training:*

- Reasons/barriers
- How management skills are improved
- Motivations to engage with M&L training
- Budget/Funding
- Potential impacts of engaging
- Awareness of providers
- Training for managing remote workers



**Why is Management and Leadership training important?**

# Management Training



M&L training has been described as a systemic and organised approach to developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for individuals to effectively lead and manage people and resources in various organisational settings<sup>12</sup>.



The type of competencies required of managers span a breadth of activities, including commercial, financial, strategic thinking, project and people management. The underlying skills needed have traditionally been classified along three broad dimensions, *technical*, *human* and *conceptual*<sup>13</sup>.



- *Technical* relate to the skills needed to manage specific tasks to meet organisational objectives;
- *Human* are the skills required to manage people; and
- *Conceptual* skills relate to managing the organisation itself and how it operates within its environment.

These have subsequently been augmented with a fourth category, *entrepreneurial* skills, which relate to identifying and developing opportunities and acquiring the necessary resources for growth<sup>4</sup>.

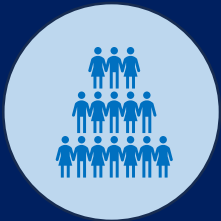


# Management Skills and Practices



Managers, and specifically their knowledge and skills, are thought to influence organisational outcomes through the *strategies and practices* they adopt and the workplace environment they cultivate. This is important as it is not only the managerial skills themselves, but how they are operationalised, that make the difference

***“Hence skills alone cannot drive productivity, only when skills drive practical actions, strategy or practices, they can drive performance”<sup>4</sup>(pg. 9).***



The type of practices or strategies identified as impacting performance include strategic management practices, operational management practices, and human resource management practices.

- *Strategic management* relates to those practices associated with strategic decision making such as centralised decision making, the formalisation of procedures and responsiveness to wider staff input<sup>4</sup>.
- *Operational practices* are those developed by Bloom and Van Reenan<sup>14</sup>, and measured by the World Management Survey, and focus on operational processes and behaviours; performance and target management; and talent management.
- *Human resource management* skills are those practices specifically associated with employee engagement, often referred to as high performance work practices. They include measures such as the use of performance indicators, incentive compensation, employee training and development, and flexible working, amongst others.

# Management Skills, Practices and Outcomes (1)

Research has confirmed the link between management skills and such practices, including amongst SMEs, “..with a greater variety of skills leading to more practices”<sup>4</sup>(pg. 19).

Consequently, such management practices have been shown to positively impact performance and productivity. For example, although focusing on manufacturing, in Europe **an increase in operational management practices has been associated with a 6% increase in productivity and a 2% increase in sales growth**<sup>15</sup>.

Human resource management practices, and strategic management practices, particularly strategy formalisation and responsiveness, have also been found to increase productivity, with each additional practice adding around 2% to productivity after 3 years. In smaller firms (<50 employees) the strongest effects were found to be from strategy formalisation practices, while in medium sized firms (50-249 employees) human resource practices had the strongest effects<sup>4</sup>.

# Management Skills, Practices and Outcomes (2)

The finding that strategic management is more important for improved outcomes for smaller firms is consistent with previous research that suggests that SMEs may be more focused on operational rather than strategic thinking and therefore benefit more from developing and implementing such skills<sup>16</sup>.

Where human resource practices are found to have more impact, particularly on productivity, could be linked with the notion of creating better workplace environments.

*“Competent and emotionally intelligent line managers – whether naturally gifted or trained – could be an essential part of any solution to the productivity puzzle by reducing employee stress and helping to create better work environments for everyone.”<sup>17</sup>*

The importance of management and leadership training is therefore not simply about managers developing their own skills but also developing the knowledge and know-how to implement such practices and strategies for a more engaged and productive workforce.



# What do we know already?

Key data findings

# Qualifications of managers- NI

Just over half of managers have degree level qualifications



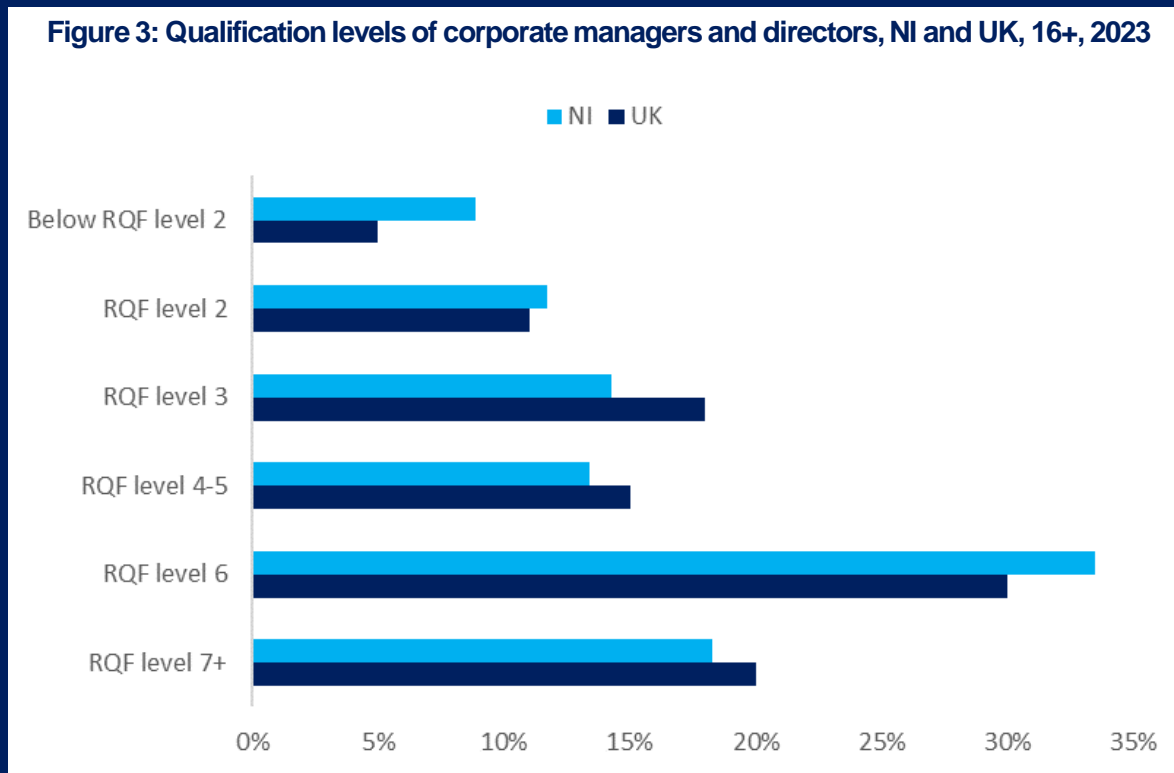
Source: LFS

In 2023 in NI, 33% of managers and directors had gained RQF L6 (Undergraduate degree/equivalent) whilst 18% had attained RQF Level 7+ (Masters/PhD), up from 32% and 16% in 2022, respectively.

But combined, those who had RQF Level 2 (1 GCSE A\*-C) and Below RQF Level 2 (Less than 1 GCSE A-C\*) accounted for 21% of managers in 2023. This is down slightly from 24% in 2022 as advances have been seen at the higher qualification levels.

# Qualifications of managers- NI and UK

Higher share of low-intermediate level qualified managers in NI



Source: LFS

In the UK in 2023, 30% of managers held RQF Level 6 qualifications (compared to 33% in NI), whilst 20% had RQF Level 7+ (16% in NI).

NI has a higher share of managers with lower level qualifications. Only 16% of managers and senior officials across the UK had RQF Level 2 and below compared to 21% in NI.

More managers across the UK have mid-level qualifications with 18% having RQF Level 3 (A-Level A\*-C/ equivalent) and 15% RQF Level 4-5 (Foundation degree/ HND/ HNC/ equivalent). In NI these figures are 14% and 13%, respectively.

# Skills Gaps

## Smaller firms more likely to have managerial skills gaps

Pre-Covid, the 2019 Employer Skill Survey (ESS) results suggested that in NI 10% of all establishments had an incidence of a skills gap (13% in UK), by 2022 this gap has risen to 11% (14% in UK). **Across occupations in 2022, of those reported to not be fully competent in their role 6% were managers (8% in UK).**

These managerial skills gaps were more acute for smaller businesses, in 2022 in NI 20% of those with 2-4 employees had managerial skills gaps compared to only 2% of businesses with 250 or more employees.

In 2019, managers, directors and senior officials were noted as the occupations most in need of new skills particularly in the Hotels and Restaurants, Financial Services and Transport and Storage sectors. By 2022 the need for new skills for managers continued to dominate particularly within Hotels and Restaurants where 67% of managers were identified as most in need for new skills (57% in 2019).

# Causes of Skills Gaps

Newness in the role and partial training were the main cause of skills gaps

As with previous findings, in 2022 50% of those identifying managerial skills gaps indicated that it was due to managers being new to the role, 49% suggested that their training was only partially completed. Combined this suggests lack of preparedness for those taking on managerial roles.



Source: Employers Skill Survey

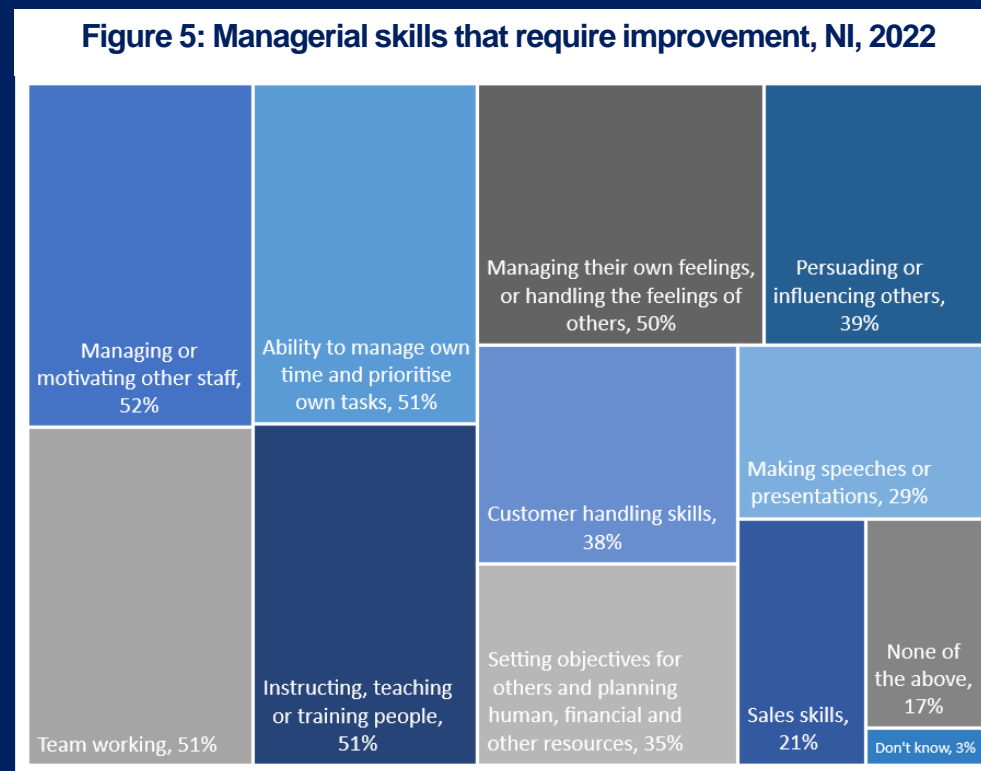


# Skills Requirements

## Specific managerial and soft skills require improvement

To overcome the managerial skills gap, 52% of managers in NI were said to require skills to manage or motivate other staff. A similar share (51%) required development of skills in team working; ability to manage own time and tasks; and instructing, teaching and training others.

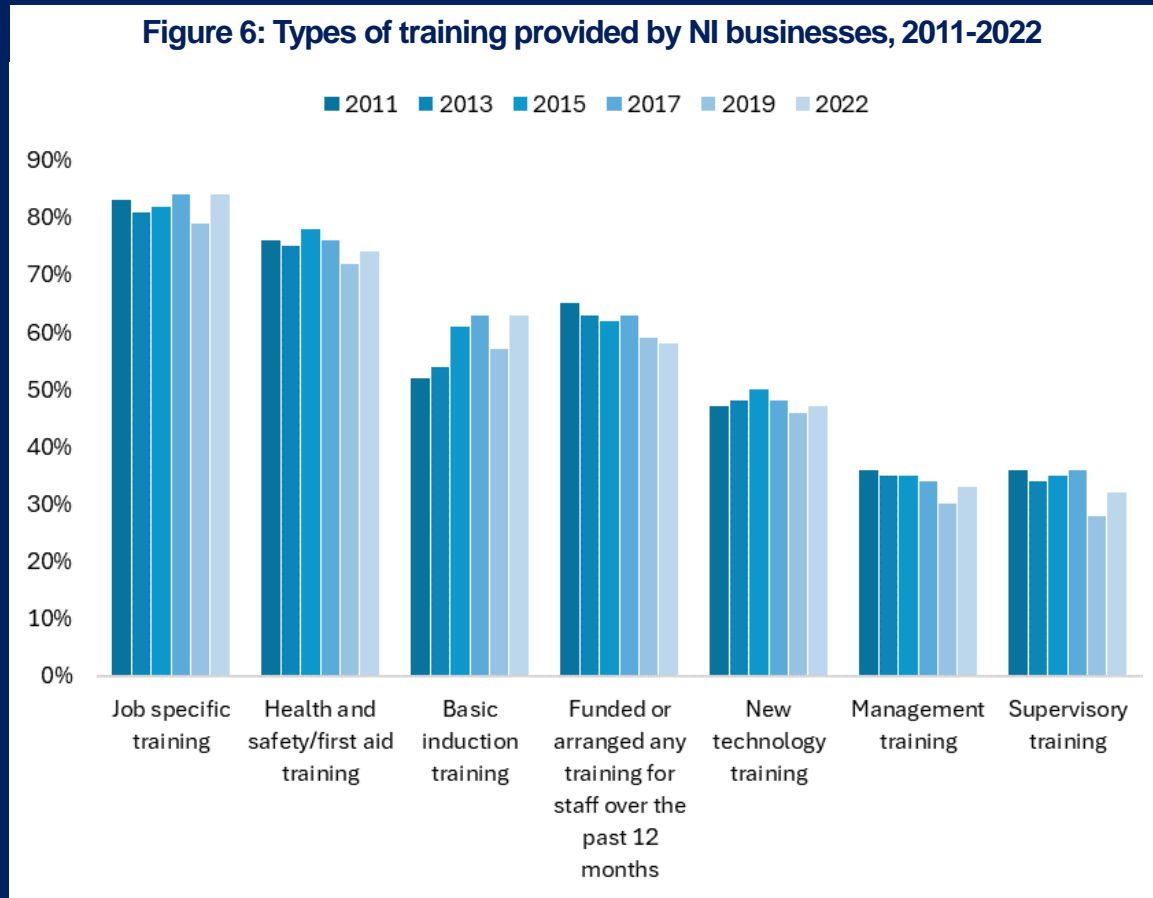
Overall, 71% of managers required development in management and leadership skills.



Source: Employers Skill Survey

# Type of training employees receive

Management and supervisory training declining and lower in importance



Source: Employers Skill Survey

More than four fifths of businesses in NI provided staff with job specific training in 2022, with three quarters providing health and safety/ first aid training - these typically mandatory across businesses.

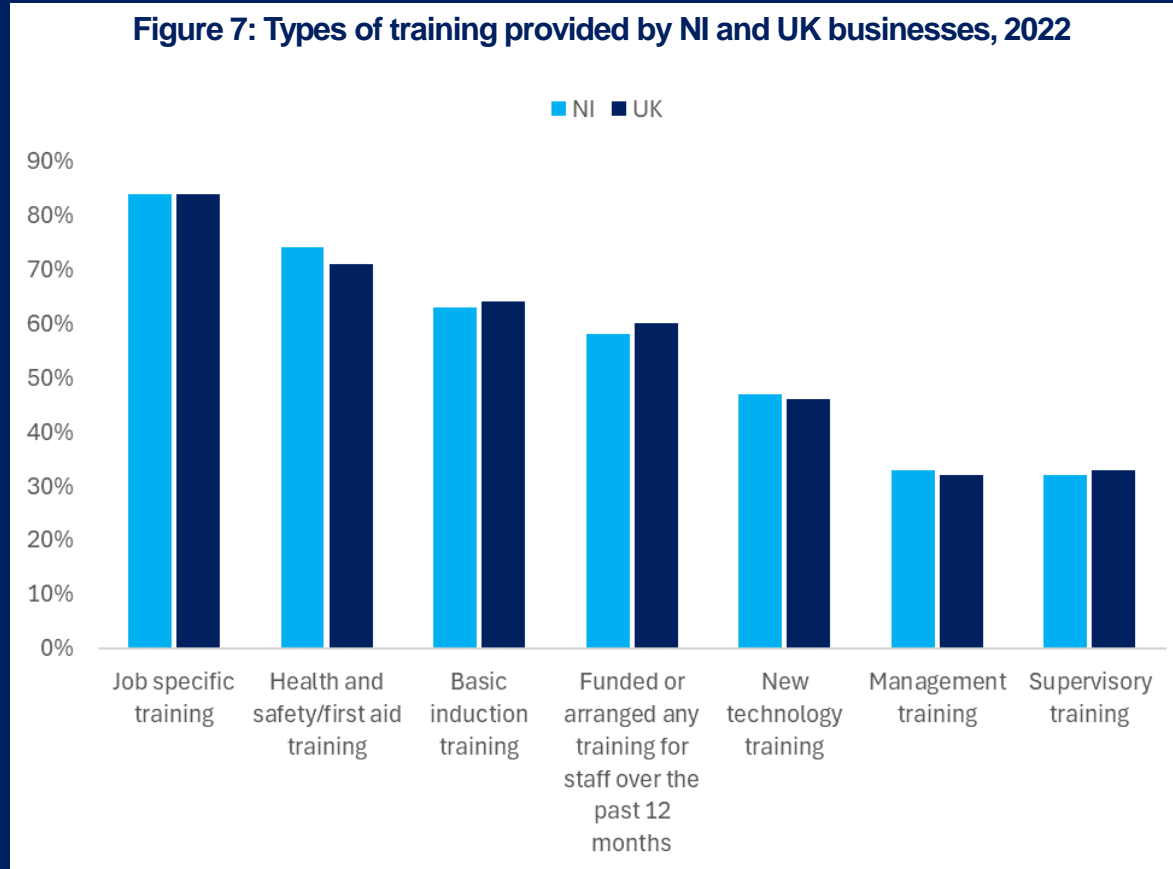
**Only 33% of businesses provided management training in 2022, down from 36% in 2011.**

Meanwhile, 32% of businesses provided supervisory training in 2022, also down from 36% in 2011.

Overall, 58% of NI business funded/arranged training in 2022, down from a high of 65% in 2011.

# Type of training employees receive- NI and UK

But picture in NI is similar to the UK



Source: Employers Skill Survey

In 2022, training provided to staff across the UK and NI was largely similar in all categories.

In the UK 60% of businesses funded/arranged any type of training in the past 12 months, whilst this was 58% in NI.

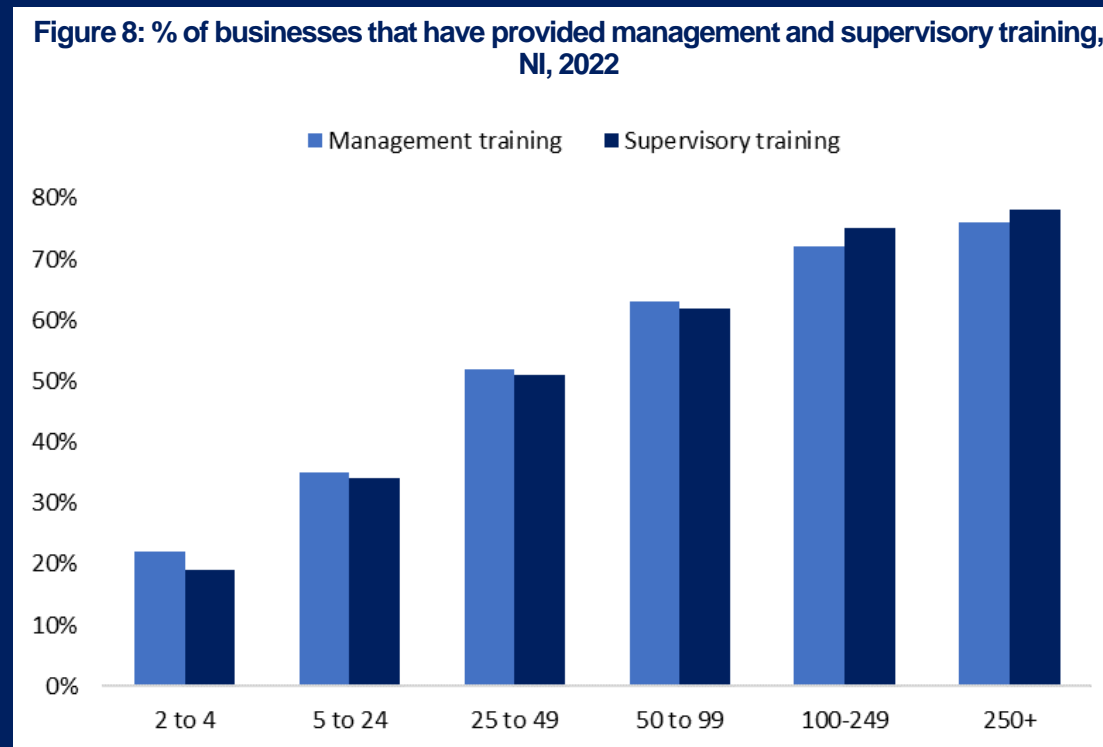
Management and supervisory training had the lowest uptake by businesses with just over 30% of businesses providing these types of training across NI and the UK.

# Management training by firm size

Greater delivery of management training in larger businesses

In 2022, 22% of businesses with 2-4 employees provided management training compared to 76% of businesses with 250+ employees.

There were similar trends for supervisory training as 19% of businesses with 2-4 employees provided such training compared to 78% with 250+ employees.



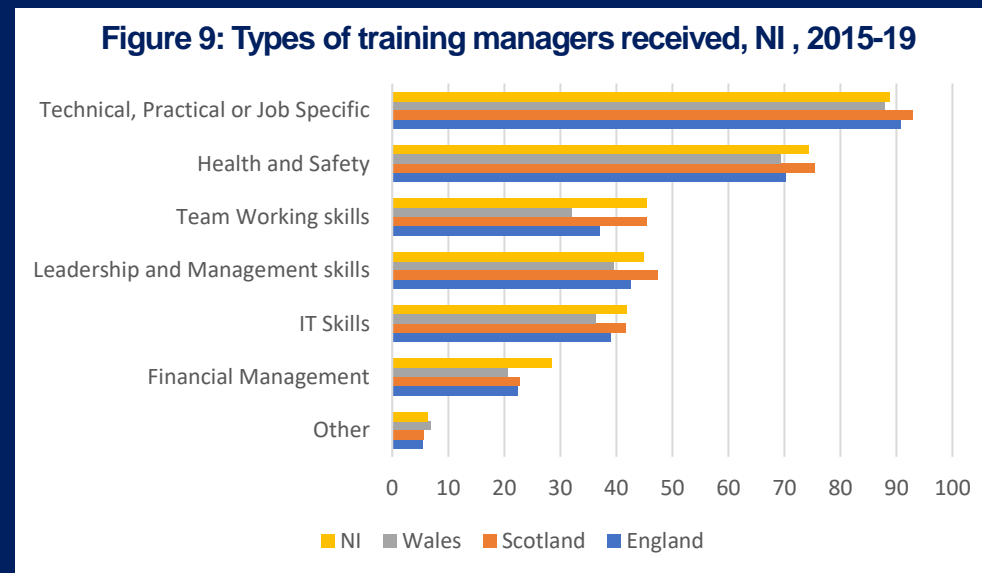
Source: Employers Skill Survey

# Type of management training

## On and off-the job training most common method

Specifically on training for managers, the Longitudinal Small Business Survey indicates that over 2015-19 the majority (68%) of SME managers in NI received some form of training in the previous 12 months. One third of those received both on- and off-the job training; one fifth received off-the-job training only and 15% informal on-the-job training.

Of those that received training, the main type of training was Technical, Practical or Job Specific. Just 45% of those that received training got specific training in Management and Leadership. Although that specific question was not asked in the 2022 survey, 42% of SMEs in NI in 2022 indicated they were planning to increase the leadership capability of their managers in the next three years, which was in line with the UK.



Source: UUEPC analysis of Longitudinal Small Business Survey

# Type of businesses undertaking training

Despite the identified need, micro-firms least likely to undertake M&L training

Pre-Covid along with micro-firms, family-owned firms were also less likely to undertake M&L training while woman-led businesses were more likely to engage in M&L training. By sector, the lowest uptake was in Transport and Production with service sector businesses more likely to engage.



Source: UUEPC analysis of Longitudinal Small Business Survey

Similarly, in 2022 just 38% of micro-firms in NI were planning to increase the leadership capability of managers over the next three years compared to over 60% of small and medium-sized firms. Likewise, 38% of family-owned firms intended to increase leadership capability compared to 54% of non-family-owned firms.

# Management training and wider strategic activities

## Those engaging with M&L training also more strategic

Pre-Covid, those businesses engaging with M&L training were also found to partake in wider strategic activities. Our previous study found that:

- **Those engaged in process or service innovation had a higher probability of engaging in M&L training than those not innovating, as did those planning to start exporting and those increasing their export levels.**
- Those with a business plan and those who sought external advice both had a higher probability of undertaking M&L training than those not engaging in those activities.

In 2022, findings from the Small Business Survey were similar, with higher shares of both goods and service exporters, and product and service innovators planning to increase leadership capability over the next three years compared to those not engaged in those activities.

These findings do not necessarily imply causation, it may be reflective of a proactive management who self-select into training and wider strategic activities for business growth.

# Management training and innovation and exporting

## M&L skills and training also linked to innovation and exporting activity

In line with our previous findings, wider research also shows that M&L training is linked to, and can influence, innovation and exporting behaviour.

- A 2018 study using Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey data assessed how human capital investment impacts innovation. It found that firms who train all their employees, regardless of their seniority, have a much higher probability of innovation, at 4.6 - 6.1 percentage points higher than a firm that does not engage with training<sup>18</sup>.
- A positive relationship between skilled management and innovation has also been found, with leadership identified as a key variable in determining innovation within firms. Developed managers can make decisions, create an appropriate environment, and engage with their teams in a way which motivates them and therefore boosts innovation<sup>19</sup>.
- Exports are a source of economic growth for SMEs as it allows them to gain entry to foreign markets. Managers play a significant role in exports as effective international trade requires experienced, motivated and skilled personnel<sup>20</sup>. Higher international managerial quality has been found to positively impact firms export value and profit rates and increase the quality of goods exported. Overall, improvements in managerial quality have been found to be around 5 times that of favourable external shocks in boosting firm's exports, cementing the managerial team and their skills as fundamental to improve firm's internationalisation performance<sup>21</sup>.

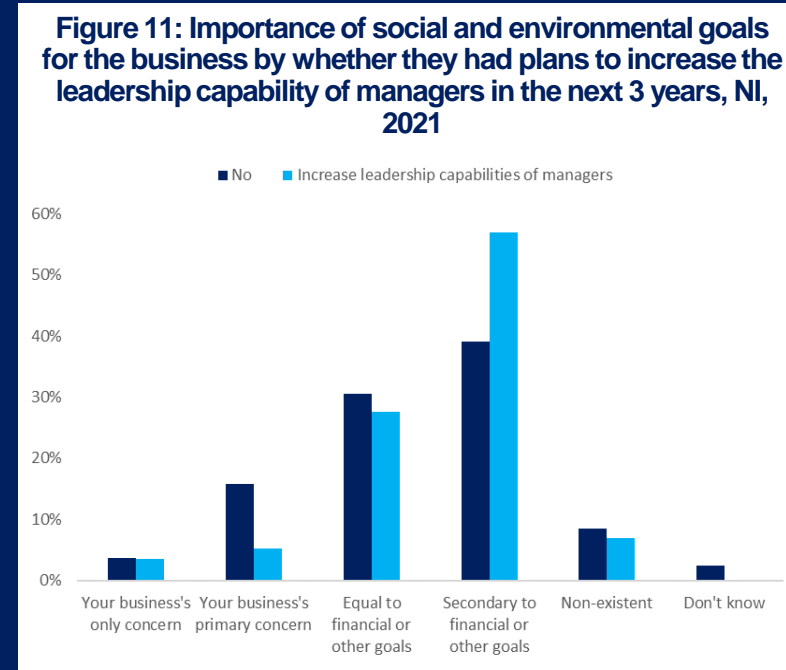


# Management training and decarbonisation

Businesses not engaged in M&L development have higher social and environmental concerns



Source: UUEPC analysis of Small Business Survey



Source: UUEPC analysis of Small Business Survey

The 2019 Small Business Survey shows that social and environmental goals were more of a concern to those businesses that didn't offer M&L training. Less than 10% of respondents who offered M&L training to managers said social and environmental goals was their business's only or primary concern (Figure 10) whilst the majority (52%) said they were a secondary concern to financial and other goals. Meanwhile for businesses who did not offer M&L training, 15% said social and environmental goals were their primary concern and 30% said they were equal to financial or other goals.

The 2021 results (Figure 11) follow the same pattern. Of those businesses that had plans to increase leadership capabilities over the next 3 years, 57% reported that social and environment goals were a secondary concern, with just 8% indicating it was their only or primary concern.

# Management practice scores

Scores improve as firm size increases



Source: Management Expectations Survey

**Note:** Management scores range from 0-1. 0 being that a firm does not respond to ongoing problems, base promotion decisions on factors other than merit, and do not track performance or set targets. A score of 1 reflects firms that need to continuously review their processes to minimise future challenges, carry out regular performance reviews, train employees, and base hiring and promotion decisions on merit.

Management practice scores are measured from 0-1 with a score closer to 1 indicating advanced management practices.

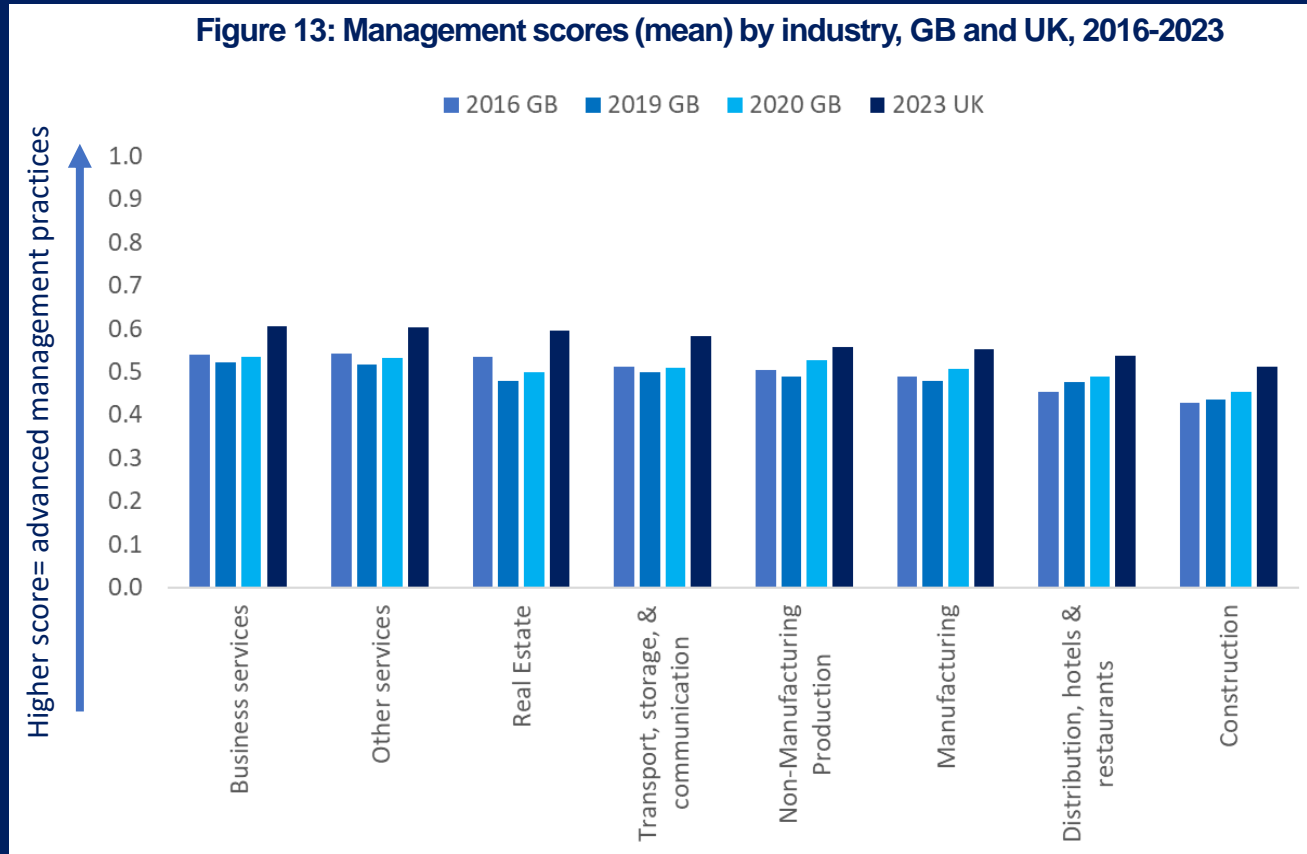
In the UK in 2023, larger firms employing 250+ individuals had an average management score of 0.68, the highest score across all size bands.

Despite having the lowest score, smaller firms (10-19 employees) experienced the largest improvement since 2016, improving their score by 0.1.

Across all years, management scores increased with firm size. This is important in an NI context as the region has a lower share of larger businesses than the UK: 0.8% of NI businesses have 100+ employees compared to 1% in the UK (Inter-Departmental Business Register). This lack of larger firms in NI may reduce the scope for the transfer of management knowledge and practices from larger to smaller firms.

# Management scores by industry

Higher scores in services



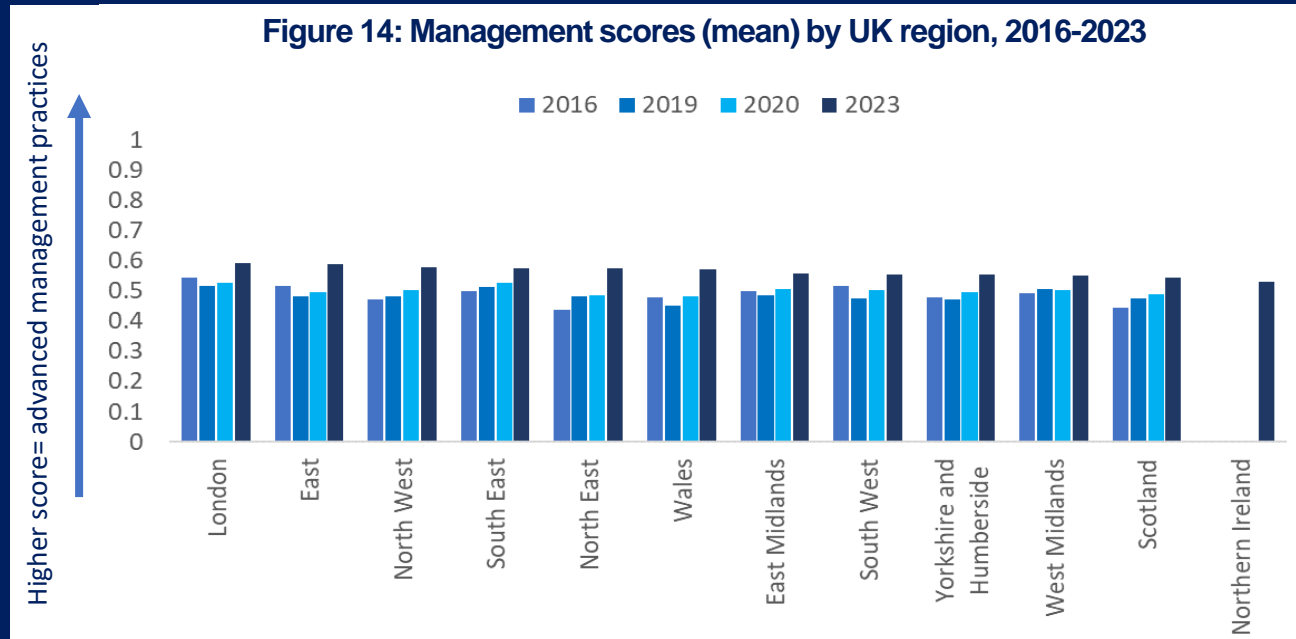
Source: Management Expectations Survey

Business Services had the highest management score with an average of 0.61 in 2023, improving from 0.54 in 2016. This is followed by Other Services and Real Estate which had average score of 0.6 equally.

Construction and Distribution, Hotels and Restaurants have both experienced the largest improvement in management score by 0.08 equally, to have average scores of 0.51 and 0.54 respectively in 2023.

# Management scores across the UK

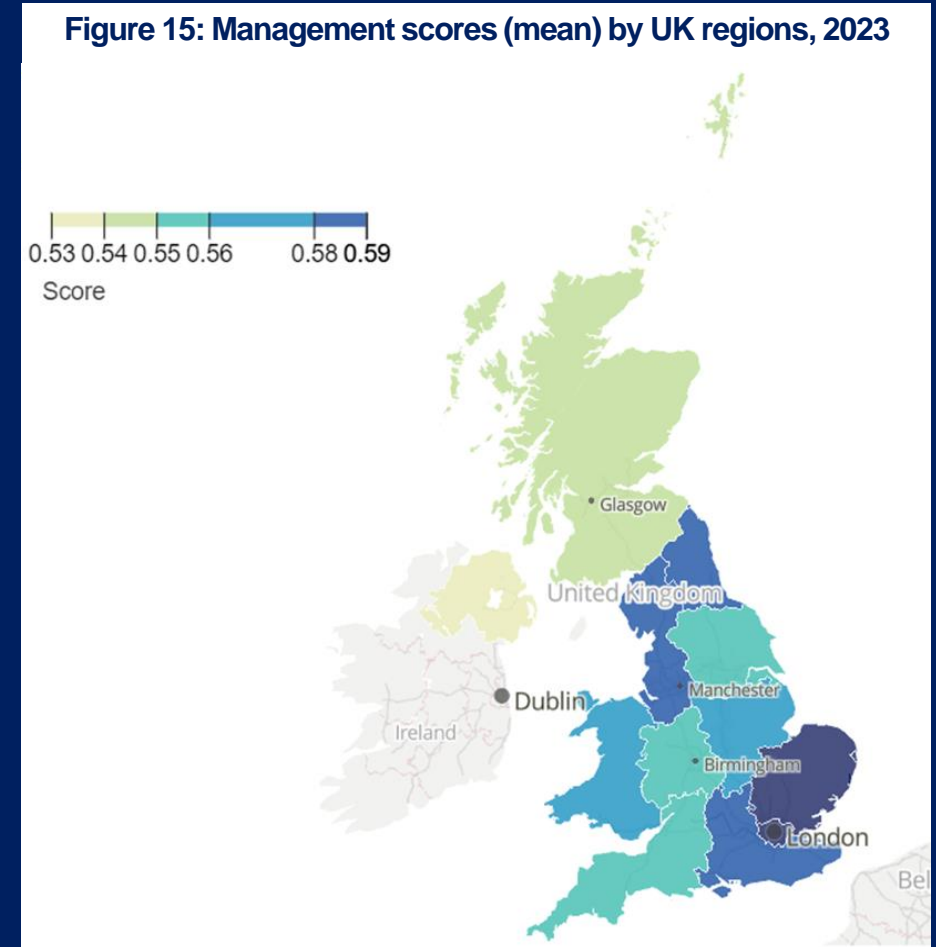
Improvements across the regions, but differences remain



Source: Management Expectations Survey

NI was included in the survey for the first time in 2023, generating an average score of 0.53, the lowest score out of the UK regions and just below Scotland at 0.54 who have improved their score from 0.46 in 2016.

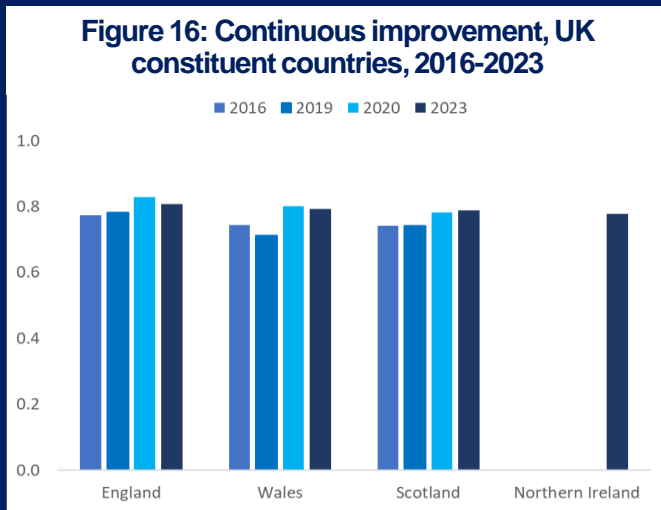
London and the East of England had the highest average scores at 0.59 equally, improving from 0.54 and 0.52 respectively in 2016.



Source: ONS, Management Expectations Survey

# Management practice categories

Differences in management quality important to capture due to their link to firm outputs such as productivity (ONS, 2024).

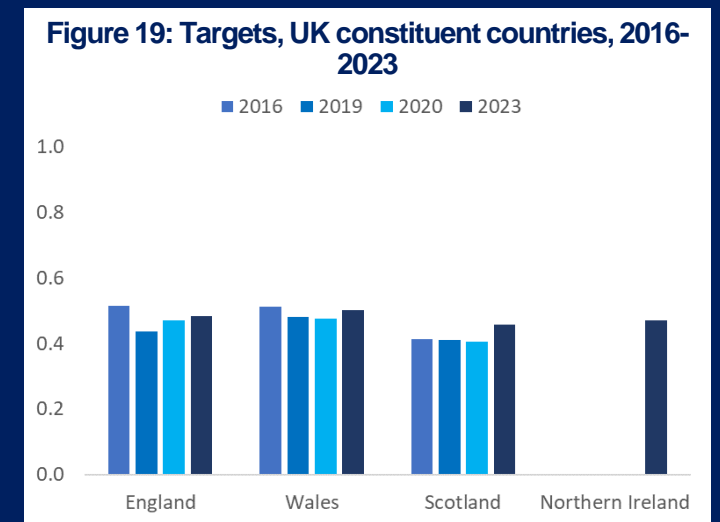
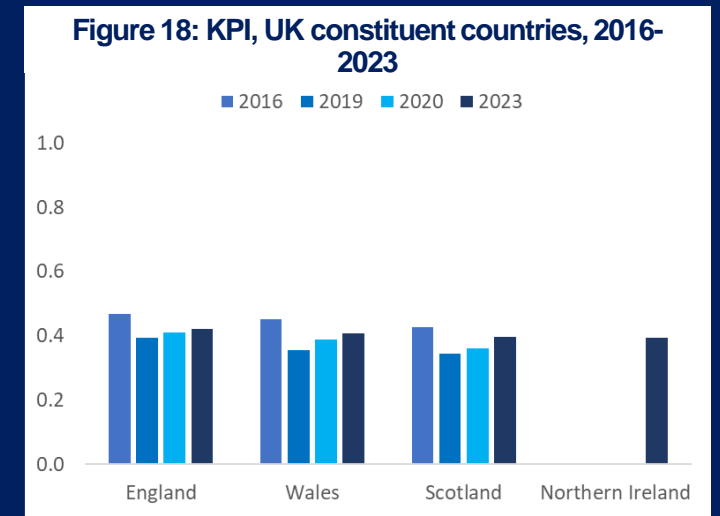
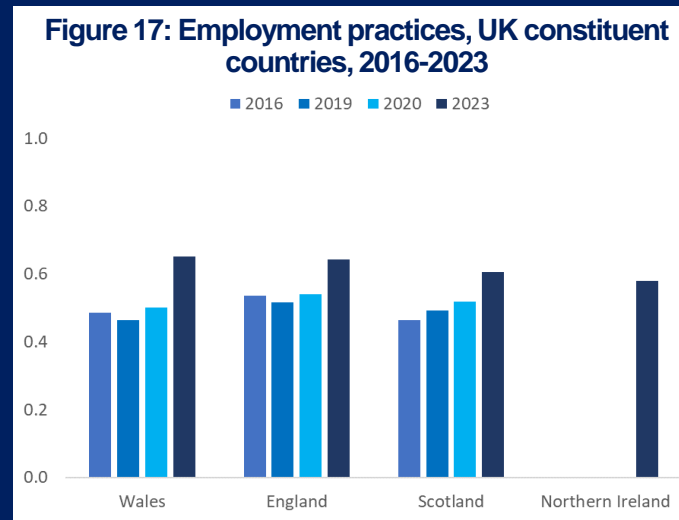


Source: Management Expectations Survey

Across the four categories of management scores, continuous improvement had the highest average score for NI at 0.78, but this remained the lowest out of the UK constituent countries with England having the highest average score at 0.81.

Employment practices in NI had an average score of 0.58, followed by a score of 0.47 for targets and 0.39 for use of KPIs.

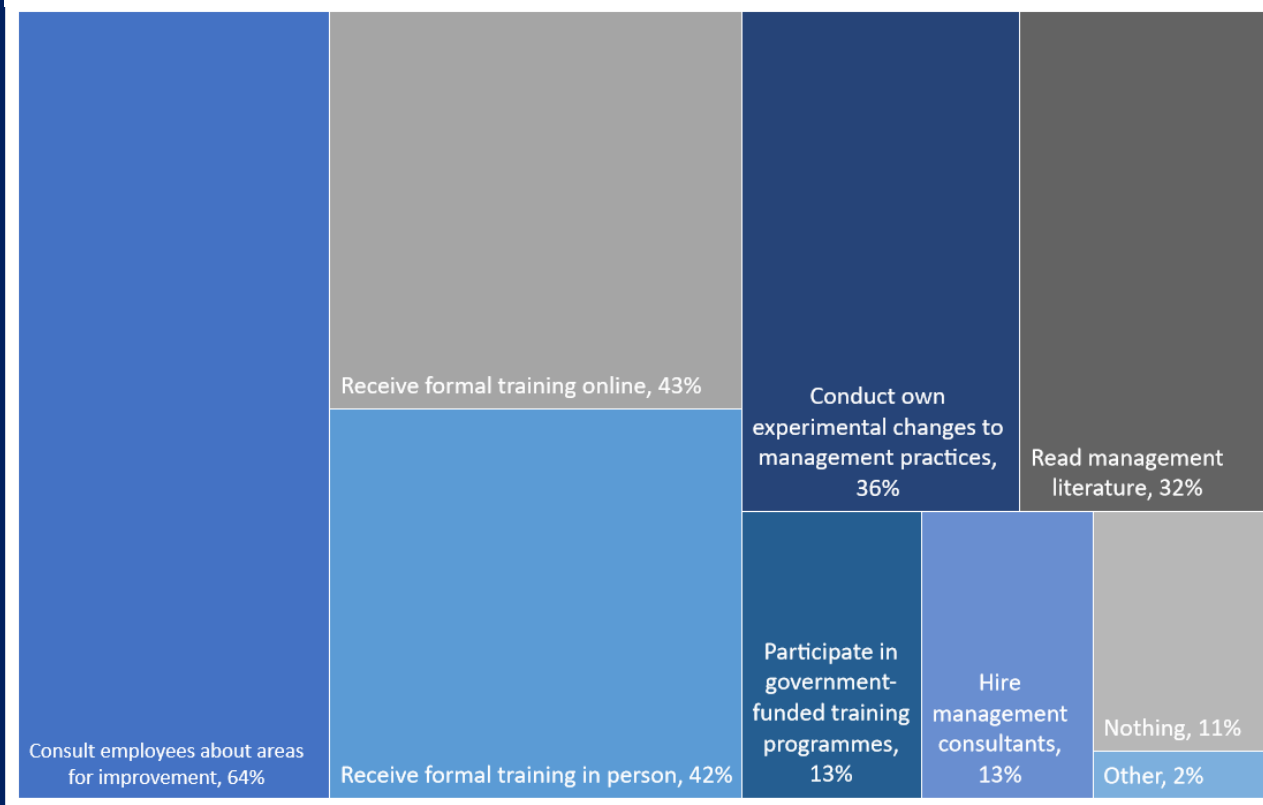
The other UK constituent countries experienced improvements since 2016, with the exception of KPIs where the average score had improved since 2019 but remained lower than the 2016 score.



# How are firms improving management practices?

'Management practices are a significant driver of productivity and firm resilience to economic shocks' (ONS, 2024).

Figure 20: "What do managers commonly do to improve the way this business is managed?", UK, 2023



Source: Management Expectations Survey

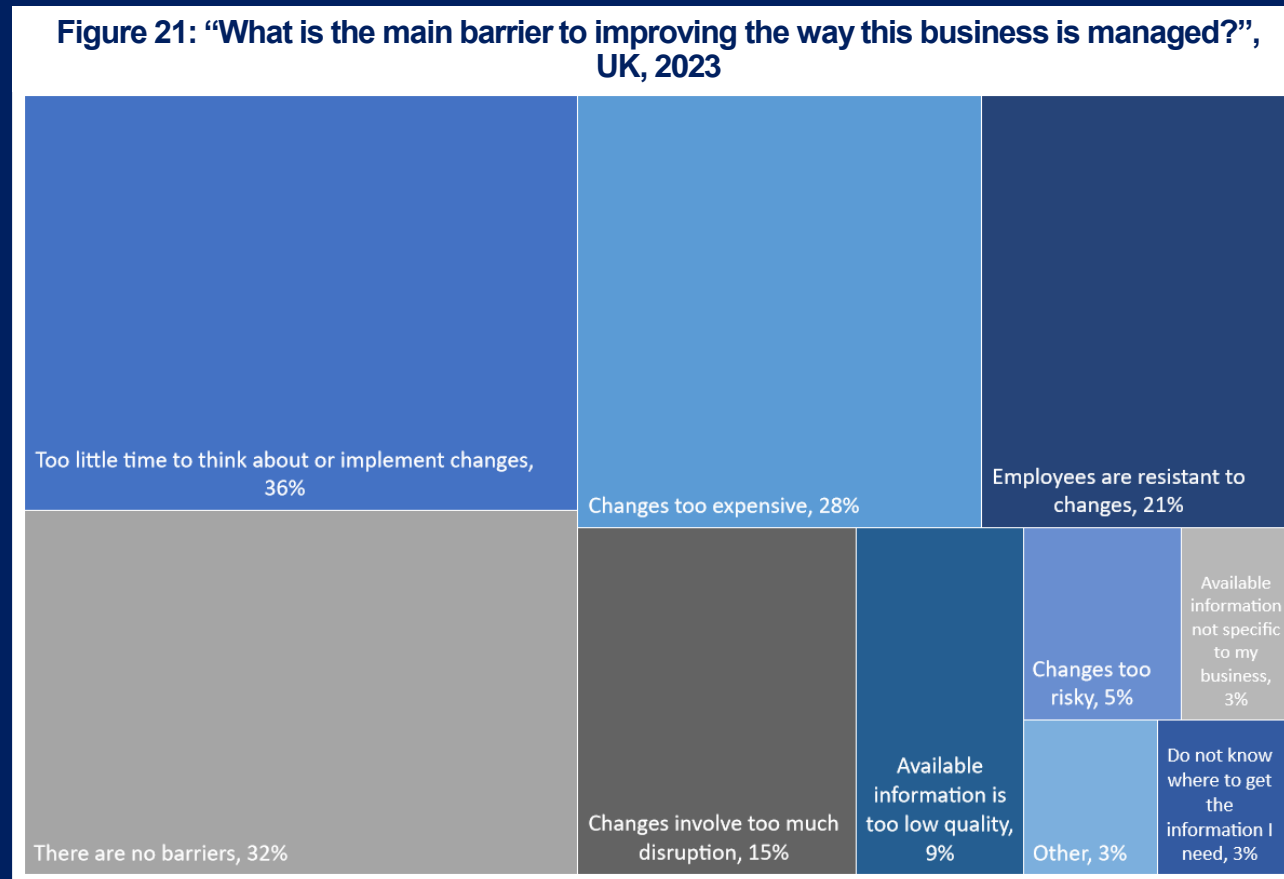
To improve management practices in the UK, 64% of business consult employees about what areas could be improved.

This is followed by 43% of firms completing online training and 42% completing training in person. Together, 85% of businesses conduct training to improve the way the business is managed.

Meanwhile, 11% of firms do nothing to improve the way their business is managed and only 13% participate in government funded training programmes.

# Barriers to improving management

Time is largest barrier to change



Around one third of managers said there were no barriers to improving how the business is managed.

Just over one third (36%) of respondents stated that time was the main barrier to improving the management of the business.

Meanwhile 28% said change was too expensive and 21% said employees were resistant to change.

Source: Management Expectations Survey



# Employer Consultations



# Extent of formal M&L training

As outlined previously, data from official sources suggests that M&L training is undertaken by a minority of businesses. Findings from our consultations, however, suggest a less clear-cut picture in terms of the extent of M&L training being undertaken.

For example, **even amongst those that said they did not undertake formal M&L training the majority were still upskilling themselves or the managerial team** via a mixture of learning activities to include:



Where M&L training wasn't formally offered by the company or organisation, there was also evidence of individuals investing in their own management training for continuing personal development (CPD) reasons.

There were slightly fewer businesses outside Belfast that were not doing any formal training than were, while in Belfast the share of businesses was equally spread amongst those that were and were not doing formal training. Only a very **small minority of businesses overall were not doing any form of M&L upskilling** but in these cases management had qualifications from elsewhere and/or were not aware of wider need.

# Formal management and leadership training



Where formal M&L training had been undertaken it was done through a variety of methods but predominantly through the use of local external training providers, both public and private. There was no standardised approach to this.

**The larger SMEs understandably had more structure, providing training at various levels,** for example using the ILM level 3 and above qualifications dependent on the managerial level. **There were also examples of a similar in-house frameworks being used, with training designed specifically for the different categories of line management,** ranging from supervisory to general manager.



Those working in sectors which have regulatory bodies, such as Construction and Accountancy, also benefitted from mandatory training.

The benefits of a more formalised approach were identified:

*“....difficult to learn M&L on the job, training helps them to learn the theory and provides a consistent standard across the company”.*

Despite the existence of a variety of formal M&L training methods being used there was a sense that it would be useful to have a defined “gold standard” or list of competencies and training that managers should have that businesses could work towards.

# Use of mentoring/coaching



The use of mentors or external individuals to provide advice and guidance was also prevalent. In some cases, the mentors were provided as part of a formal training programme, although it was noted that conditionality, for example to become an Invest NI client to access mentoring, was off putting or not a possibility for some.

Mentoring was also used by those who had not engaged in formal M&L training, with the mentors sourced from a range of professions including more senior family members, past colleagues, banks, others in the wider industry, and external consultants.

Some businesses also operated internal mentoring whereby senior managers mentored those new in the role.



A board of directors was also identified as a source of knowledge and advice

*“Does help to have professional bodies on the board...that can be back up”.*

The mentoring was seen to both benefit the individual and the business, being used as both a sounding board and helping to provide strategic and practical advice.

*“...helped me come to better decisions”.*

*“He has been able to give practical help as the company has to adapt”.*

Despite its widespread use, there was no sense that managers were in a position to mentor those in other SMEs due in part to time constraints but also not having considered it as an option.

# How training needs are identified (1)

The concept of the 'accidental manager' is highlighted in wider research<sup>22</sup> whereby individuals are promoted into management roles due to proficiency in their existing role, but without appropriate management training.

Indeed, data from the Employers Skills Survey showed the top two causes of skills gaps in managers were due to them being new in the role or that their training had only been partially completed. This lack of training for managers can have an impact on employee motivation, productivity and wider organisational culture.

When asked about how training needs are identified, again there was evidence of good practice across businesses.

Some of the larger SMEs had training portals or used skills gap analysis and a training needs matrix to identify need and keep records.

Use of appraisals and personal development plans were also highlighted along with more informal discussions to identify those with management potential.

In some cases, the onus was on the employee to propose training requirements which were then considered by the existing manager or management team.

In the more structured businesses, employees were trained in management once they had any line management role.

# How training needs are identified (2)

The practices, although not uniform across all business, were tailored specifically to how each business operated and were felt to work effectively as a result. There was also evidence of training for employees across the business so that transparency and knowledge of the wider operations beyond their own role was known, which was of benefit for efficient working as well as when employees progressed into more senior roles.

For those that didn't engage with formal M&L training there were informal practices to identify training needs including:

Informal discussions identifying need as issues crop up

Reflection and observation on areas that are not productive

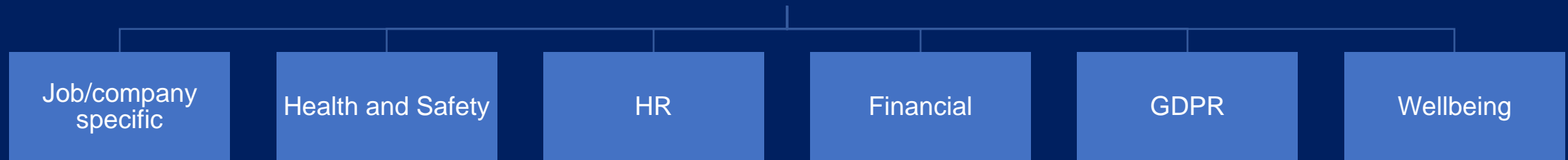
Self-reflection by the manager

Pre- and post-project reviews to assess what could be done better

# Wider M&L training

There was also extensive use of training for managers and employees beyond that targeted specifically at improving management skills. This was also the case for those who hadn't engaged in any formal M&L training.

The type of training widely undertaken included:



This was undertaken by a mix of in-house and external providers. Notably 'word of mouth' was viewed as the best way for sourcing external providers.

# Training for remote working (1)

As remote working has become more prevalent<sup>23</sup> consultees were asked about the extent of remote working and whether they had any received or conducted training for managing remote workers. The responses can generally be categorised into:

1

*Those who do not have anyone working remotely either due to: the nature of the business, they have had no demand for it, or they do not offer it.*

2

*Those who have remote working and had it pre-pandemic e.g. employees out on site or with clients.*

3

*Those who introduced remote working during pandemic and have retained it but have had no training.*

4

*Those who introduced remote working during pandemic and have retained it and have had training.*

Amongst those who have employees working remotely it is largely undertaken in a hybrid way, with part of the week spent in the office/site. There was a mixed response in terms of how challenging it had been managing remote workers. The main issues were around effective communication, ensuring the wellbeing of staff and also that employees were doing “what they are supposed to be doing”.

# Training for remote working (2)



For those who had experience of remote working pre-pandemic it was typically limited to certain teams or employees (such as sales). Therefore, although transitioning to remote working for all staff during the pandemic was done with relative ease in these businesses there were still challenges:

*“We were familiar with individual management for working from home but had to learn to work as a team remotely”.*



For those businesses and others who had introduced remote working due to the pandemic, the majority had not received or conducted any specific management training to deal with this. Some felt there was no need for training as they had devised their own ways of managing, either through the introduction of regular meetings to co-ordinate and mitigate issues, others through a mix of trial and error and the introduction of new practices such as time sheets. Trust featured highly on the reasons for not needing training, particularly in the smaller businesses, although challenges remained with new/younger staff.

*“No real challenges...however there are gaps in collaboration, particularly for younger staff ...learning is lost amongst staff”.*

*“It can be difficult to trust remote workers until you know them. You need to have a clear schedule of what you want them to do”.*



# Training for remote working (3)



For some there was a sense of a gap in terms of remote working policies and knowing what is the right thing to do. The need for training was also identified, although this was primarily noted in younger businesses:

*“On the need for training...possibly but we would need to understand our company to understand what we need”.*

Those who had undertaken training for remote working were very much in the minority but had seen the benefit of training which had tended to be bespoke.

*“It was new to us due to COVID, it was a learning curve...left to managers to manage their own people. Don’t think our managers even knew what to do with remote working...there was a lot of resistance, but training has changed this opinion for the majority”.*



Overall, there seemed to be little demand for training for remote working. Where remote working was offered, the benefits seemed to outweigh the challenges and the hybrid option appeared to address the wellbeing aspect.

*“...you need to see people and speak to them, check-in with them and see how motivated they are...interested in seeing the person face to face to do that properly”.*

# Preferred type of formal training

Businesses used a variety of providers for accessing M&L and wider training and used a mix of external, online and in-house provision.

Generally, the preference was for training to be undertaken face-to-face and there were a number of benefits identified including learning from peers, networking and easier facilitation of discussion. The networking aspect was also highlighted in the context that managing “can be a lonely place” and therefore provided access to peers in the same position.

*“Face-to-face training is better because you can tend to see if the person understands”.*

*“Face-to-face is best because you can interact easily, you get a lot more out of it”.*

*“It’s also more valuable when there are people from multiple organisations there. It leads to open discussions with people of mixed experience”.*

*“Its likely to be more expensive but may give the best yield”.*

Despite possibly requiring more time commitment, accessing training offsite from the business was also thought to enable a more neutral space and provide time away from thinking about the day-to-day workload and returning to their desk to check emails.

# Benefits of training – for the individual

The **benefits of formal** M&L training were seen to be at both the individual level and for the wider business.



At the individual level it was seen to improve confidence, increase awareness of the overall business and help with future planning.



Those who had used more **informal** M&L training, including coaching and on-the-job training, also highlighted the benefits.

*“They think in a future planning manner. It means they can anticipate problems and make improvements”.*



Better trained managers were also said to help with wider employee engagement and motivation.

*“It made me a better leader, than just a manager, and took a lot of pressure off”.*

*“...they think more about everything, rather than just themselves and their own department...think about how decisions can affect wider business...helps us to be more professional”.*

# Benefits of training – for the business



Better trained managers, and employees were also thought to help improve business productivity and add value in terms of financial performance, growth and in reputational terms.

*“Good for reputation...you want to make sure people can do what they’re meant to be doing. It impacts the bottom line, you get repeat clients”.*

*“If you want to grow and scale you need to be investing in people. It’s success planning, building for the future”.*



These sentiments were not just reserved for those undertaking formal M&L training, with more informal methods also seen to provide similar positive outcomes.

*“There is a better working environment and its more efficient. We have been able to employ fewer people and have more output”.*

*“It promotes loyalty of staff and happier staff, improves performance”.*

# Evaluation and impact of training (1)

As mentioned in the previous UUEPC report<sup>9</sup> post-training evaluation should be a core component in measuring its success. This would include self-reflection about the training, assessing the increased knowledge and resulting change in behaviour, and measuring the impact on the bottom line and return on investment.



There was a mixed picture in terms of the extent to which all these evaluation activities were undertaken. Largely, training was evaluated by the trainers themselves although there were cases in which feedback was also gathered by the business, often in an informal way, discussing its use and relevance:

*“Sometimes the training is the right programme but the wrong delivery partner. Sometimes it’s the wrong programme”.*



Measuring and quantifying impact was not necessarily done, even amongst SMEs engaging with highly structured M&L training:

*“We do see new practices and initiatives coming from training...Not so good at measuring the impact of training on the business, don’t have the data to back this up”.*

# Evaluation and impact of training (2)

As shown previously the impacts from M&L training on productivity is achieved when the training results in the implementation of practices. There were some examples of good practice in terms of reflecting on M&L training and implementing actions as a result although this was highlighted by only a small number of consultees. Largely, the benefits of upskilling were viewed largely through outcomes such as repeat clients, business growth, staff retention and increased confidence amongst staff.



One effective example was individuals being tasked with a project and utilising the learning from training to come up with new solutions or ideas and presenting the findings and the evidence base for change.

*“It leads to an innovative workplace, there are not always big changes sometimes these are smaller changes, but it helps motivate”.*



Those who did not engage with formal M&L training also had means of measuring and evaluating their own informal training or methods. The use of appraisals and bonuses based on improved performance were a means of doing so, although in the smallest businesses again time pressures were thought to hinder this.

*“It’s measured through various criteria and scored monthly to see if they have improved in areas that they have been weak in”.*

*“Only so many hours in the week, wouldn’t spend half the time measuring rather than doing”.*

# Need for certification? (1)

There were mixed findings from the consultations about the need for M&L training to be certified.



Where certification was preferred, it was thought to help with standardisation and also provided recognition of value for employees that had worked their way up through the company.

*“...a qualification is better because you are working towards a standard...people value it, they often come into this industry with no qualifications so its good for them to have that certificate. Its nice to recognise it. It helps with employee engagement, gives them skills, allows them to progress”.*



For others, accreditation enabled wider recognition of ability which was important for winning work.

*“People don’t view your M&L skills in the same way if you are from an SME as opposed to a larger firm or bank although managing an SME is actually more challenging as you have more hats to wear”.*

*“Certification can be like the emperor’s new clothes but if done properly it gives assurance and keeps us in business”.*

## Need for certification? (2)

For those **not engaged** with formal M&L training, the need for certification was understandably less important and dependent on the type of qualification or certification.



Generally, the practical skills and knowledge and the know-how gained was deemed to be more relevant although there was recognition that some accreditation may be required within the industry.

*“Don’t feel the need to have a qualification for the sake of it but rather the know how is more important”.*

*“Training does not have to be certified as long as it’s useful and I have learned something”.*

*“Supply chain/clients asking for training accreditation is justifiable, but that’s not economically viable for smaller companies”.*



Notably some were keen to have accreditation for their own personal development and for future career prospects.

*“Accreditation is useful if you are looking a job elsewhere. It needs to be formal for job hunting.”*



# Why is formal M&L training not undertaken?

Previous UUEPC research<sup>17</sup> highlighted a range of barriers to the uptake of formal M&L training to include:



The consultations confirmed many of these as a hindrance with financial and time resources being most frequently cited. As previously identified, however, businesses were upskilling through other methods as a way around the barriers.



## Firm size:

Small firm size was mentioned as a reason for not engaging with M&L training formally, with suggestions that the foundations are not in place for structured training or there was no need for highly formalised training due to the small size. Smallness could also be advantageous in that to mitigate against the lack of formal frameworks the use of regular team meetings were easily arranged and useful as a means of identifying changes, challenges and any wider or internal training that may be required.

*“The Friday management meetings work well; it suits our business”.*

# Financial barriers (1)



## Financial means/public funding:

Lack of budget and capital for training was one of the main reasons businesses had not engaged with formal M&L training, particularly given the preference for face-to-face training. Aside from the financial constraints, the concern was about achieving value and benefit if they were to spend on formal training, and there were differing opinions as to how much they would be prepared to spend.

*“Would depend on what it is, wouldn’t throw a lot of money at it”.*

*“If there is the justification there to add to quality then would invest in training. Having properly equipped people pays for itself in the long run”.*



When asked about whether they would be interested in fully or partially subsidised training, the consensus was that partially subsidised would be likely to have more value, with skepticism about anything that was seen to be “free”.

*“Subsidised training would be a massive help...makes that step much easier, however if it is free, it is not as valuable as anyone can just sign up”.*

*“If it’s fully subsidised, is it useful? ...If there is a fee, more likely that you can apply what you learn”.*

## Financial barriers (2)



For those who do engage with formal M&L and wider training there was a mix in terms of whether the businesses had a dedicated training budget or whether it was more ad-hoc. For those with a fixed budget, training was prioritised and the budget was in place year round.

*“If the budget was tight, we’d still do training”.*



For those with a more ad-hoc approach it was typically needs based and there was a split in terms of the extent to which business would, or could, maintain training if finances were squeezed.

*“...prioritise M&L training as it’s a key aspect for the company...tend not to cut budget from it, rather cut budget from marketing if needed”.*

*“Budgets are cut from training but there is a conscious effort to do training”.*

There was evidence that those with budgets had sought subsidised training or had been able to claim back money from undertaking training. Training budgets were largely relatively limited in financial terms and therefore any support for training was welcomed. Again, partially subsidised, rather than fully, was preferred due to the value perception. On the supply side there was evidence that firms, particularly smaller or micro-firms struggle with affordability and had welcomed the facility to pay for training in installments due to cashflow issues.

# Time restrictions

## Time resources:



The lack of time to enable managers or other employees out of the business to attend formal training was one of the main barriers to take-up and a reason for the use of internal training methods. It was noted that formal training is usually during work hours (despite this largely being preferred) and often runs over a number of weeks which can be a difficult proposition for some SMEs.

*“We run a very tight management system which is lean and efficient but means that its difficult to deal with people being away from their job. The time taken to let people go out to training kills us”.*



This was particularly the case for micro-firms for whom the resource implication is more punitive:

*“...it is hard to organise off-site training compared to a larger firm, feel like we would have to close the business to conduct training”.*

*“If we did do training it would take time away from work, being the owner I wouldn't have time”.*

# Lack of awareness

## Lack of awareness of benefits/culture of learning:



Although wider evidence<sup>24</sup> points to a lack of awareness of benefits as one of the reasons businesses don't undertake M&L training this was not widely evident from the consultations. In fact, even amongst those not undertaking formal M&L there was a recognition of the need for continuous learning and the wider benefits.

*“When you stop doing training there is only one way and that is back, you can't stand still”.*

*“Yes, any training has a benefit. The company would be better managed, it would help customers, supply chains and projects”.*



There was also recognition that it would benefit those managers/owners from more diverse subject backgrounds:

*“Training would be beneficial to the business, particularly for owners who don't come from a business background”.*

# Awareness of training provision



If there was a lack of awareness mentioned it was in regard to training provision. Even amongst those that were engaging with external providers **there was little knowledge of the breadth of training available, either publicly-funded or via private provision**, and in particular the provision from the universities for SMEs.

*“No communication from any university about what is available as a small business”.*

*“Not aware of any training providers, don’t see much on social media”.*

*“...have no clue about any Government training providers on management and leadership”.*



Where there was knowledge there were some issues identified with the perceived generalised nature of the training, and hence the value of such.

*“...feel that they would treat everyone the same regardless of size so would be of no use”.*



Language use was also identified as potentially off putting:

*“Language is a barrier, SMEs don’t want to talk about productivity. They want to know if they can be more successful and grow”.*

*“Some training can be too preachy”*

# Promotion of training

There was no one best way in which training programmes would be ideally promoted across the business base. There were varying responses even within similar business types e.g. family-owned, micro-businesses, and sectorally, in terms of how they could best be targeted.

Email and social media were frequently mentioned. although email was also seen to be easily missed as managers were often 'bombarded' with messages.

*"The best way to be reached would be via social media such as LinkedIn as this is where networking takes place".*

*"There are so many channels now, no one has the capacity to cover them all".*

There was limited awareness of nibusinessinfo while for Invest NI clients the client executive model was thought to be a useful mechanism.

In general, word-of-mouth was thought to be the most reliable particularly in terms of relaying how effective the training was.

*"Word of mouth from someone reliable...other people tried it and loved it or it worked for them...don't want to waste time".*

Personalisation of training, rather than a mass market approach was also seen to be preferable.

The creation of a single portal, which in itself, could be advertised was thought to be an effective approach.

*"It would be good to put this back in the hands of the business with a single portal through which you could browse the available courses and see what's relevant and have all the details"*



# Provider Consultations



# Management and Leadership Training Providers

A range of M&L courses and providers are available across NI. To understand provision this study also conducted consultation interviews with some of these providers including Invest NI, Centre for Learning, Help to Grow (Ulster University) and Belfast City Council.

These consultations covered the following topics :

- Programme format
- Objectives
- Target group and entry criteria
- Cost and funding support
- Motivation of participants
- Follow-up activity
- Impact and evaluation
- Promotional activities



# Programme format and cohort details

Programme formats and cohorts vary across providers and their target group needs.

- Mixture of online and in person training which is typically held during working hours.

- Face to face is typically favoured as it allows for networking.

- Majority of programmes are not accredited; however not all businesses are demanding this as often the training is '*...about bringing change to the business.*'

- Programmes require a time commitment from participants, ranging from one to multiple sessions over several weeks/months. However, the longer programmes can be '*intense*' with participants needing to attend weekly as well as their work continuing outside of the course.

- Participants range from across NI, however some providers have '*found it hard to engage businesses outside of Belfast.*'

- No set make up of course participants, they are typically 30+ in age with a fair split on gender, although some programmes are targeted at females.

# Programme details

Positively, there are a variety of programmes available in NI to suit a range of business needs and their financial capabilities.

Costs for participants/businesses range from £100-£10,000. For Invest NI programmes a percentage of the cost will be covered by Invest NI.

To help prevent cost being a barrier, some providers let businesses pay in instalments as cash flow can be an issue for instance, *'Small firms would find £750 a lot to give out at one time, whilst larger SMEs are typically happy to pay right away.'*

There is a mixture of entry criteria, contingent on the programme selected, however none require participants to have specific qualifications. Where there are criteria, these include that the participants/business be SMEs; female; economically inactive; seeking to upskill; focused on exporting; MD/CEO or for the leadership team. These are dependent on the programme and its aim.

For some of the Invest NI programmes turnover must exceed a certain amount and are only open to Invest NI clients.

# Mentoring and networking

Mentoring and networking, identified by SMEs as important ways of upskilling, are also provided through a number of programmes.

**Invest NI- The Leader Programme** allows companies to pick a mentor from a list of former MDs/CEOs, who provide 5.5 days of mentoring. There is support from Invest NI in helping participants find their mentor from a pool of male and female and international mentors.

*'Unique experience is getting to pick their mentor.'*

**Help to Grow** offers 10 hours of business mentoring, assigned during week 3. Mentors are outsourced to Enterprise Nation with businesses able to choose their own mentor.

Alumni events are held within these programmes, where participants can benefit from networking with others from different sectors. These are seen as beneficial as participants *'...are not in competition with one another, they have a safe space'*, businesses can share their experiences about how they have implemented growth and therefore helping to facilitate peer learning, continued development and developing a network. These events are also useful to help promote the courses via word-of-mouth.

Help to Grow also note positive links with UU students and businesses, with students helping businesses and vice versa.

# Motivations

Motivations vary across the programmes and business/individual needs, interestingly qualifications or accreditations were not a driving factor behind participation.

— *'Mindset change'* for older firms.

— *'Growing the business and taking it to the next stage'* for younger firms.

— Modules cover a variety of topics, some businesses don't know what they need/want initially. *'A lot of big companies have their own stuff...however this can provide an outside opinion.'*

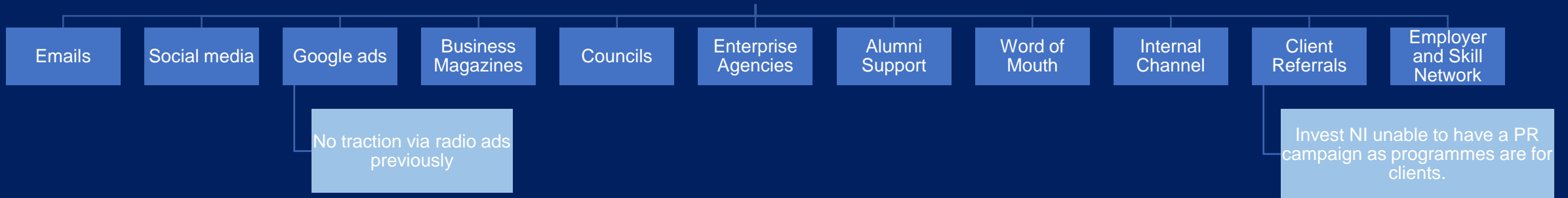
— Succession planning.

— Providers noted that training *'...not corrective training...there is a perception that it is, but it's about lifelong learning and support culture.'*

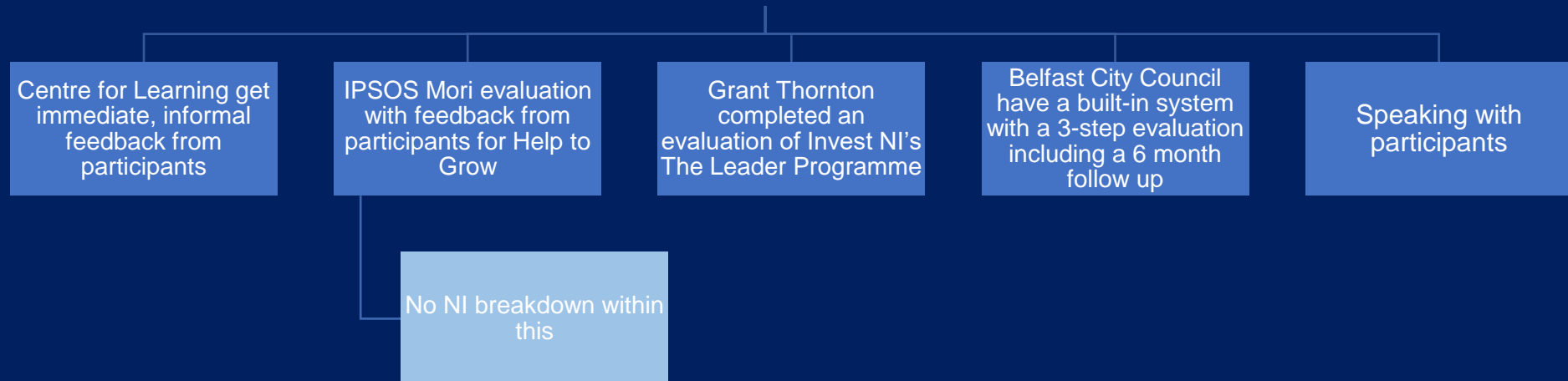
— For some participants they *'...want to get a better job, better income, better lifestyle.'*

# Promotion and feedback

## Providers used a variety of methods to attract participants



## There are a mixture of evaluation and feedback approaches





# Summary and Recommendations

# Overall Summary (1)

- The link between management skills and enhanced firm performance, including increased productivity, has been widely documented. The process is thought to operate through the adoption of good management practices by better trained managers leading to improved outcomes and more engaged employees.
- In NI managers are thought to be less well trained, and less likely to adopt good practices, compared to their UK peers. Around half of managers are qualified to degree level which is no different to the UK. Where NI differs is in the share of managers with low level qualifications with around one fifth having RQF Level 2 (GCSE A-C) and below qualifications compared to 16% in the UK.
- The adoption of good management practices is also lower in NI than the UK, with NI at the bottom of the UK regional league table on management practice scores.
- Evidence from both the Employer Skills Survey and Small Business Survey show that management training is undertaken in a minority of firms, with just 33% of NI employees receiving management training in 2022, similar to the UK at 32%.



# Overall Summary (2)

Despite quantitative evidence on the poor uptake of training, digging into the extent of M&L training via consultation with SMEs in NI shows a more complex picture.

There was confirmation of the use of formal M&L training via public and private providers. But those who were not formally engaging with external management training also typically had some method of training or upskilling via internal means and/or the use of external mentors and advisors. Those who were doing 'nothing' in terms of upskilling were very much in the minority and this was due to lack of awareness of the need, and in terms of what was available, rather than any resistance to training.

There was also evidence of good management practices in place which weren't limited to only those engaging with formal M&L training. The use of regular meetings by way of identifying areas for continuous improvement and the use of bonuses and targets was noted and these were not restricted to only the larger SMEs.

Given the divergence between the quantitative and qualitative findings, the picture may not be as bleak as first thought. Each business' approach to management training is unique, tailored to how they operate and undertaken based on their budget and time constraints.

It is therefore difficult to make recommendations for improvements to specific M&L training as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Indeed, the region is well served by management training provision. There are, however, findings which lend themselves to wider improvements across the training support system which can build upon previous recommendations<sup>25</sup> to support the uptake of training and management practices.

# Recommendations (1)

Although there was evidence of training and upskilling of managers and employees more generally, there was also an information gap across a number of aspects. Information on the need for training was required by a minority, with most aware of the benefits, but **there was a much larger knowledge gap on where to find information on management courses and practices**. Even amongst those with highly structured formal M&L training, there was an acknowledgement that there is no gold standard which sets out the competencies and knowledge that should be achieved at different levels of management. Given the use of internal informal methods of training and upskilling, and a higher share of lower qualified managers in NI, there is perhaps also a question on the quality of management skills rather than the quantity.

## Recommendation:

1

Combining aspects of the above there is merit in the **provision of a single M&L training information portal which also contains a diagnostic tool** <sup>[1]</sup> in which managers are able to see where improvements could be made in their skillsets and practices, and are signposted to information on the relevant available courses. This should set out detail on course outcomes, content, eligibility, cost, support available and duration. Given the weight attributed to word-of-mouth recommendations more generally, it would also benefit from testimonials from previous attendees on how it helped their business as this would also provide legitimacy on the value. **Promotion of this single portal across a number of channels** would also be an effective way of informing the wider business base of need and availability of relevant content rather than trying to promote individual courses. The NIbusinessinfo website may be a useful foundation for such a portal, building on existing provision, but a dedicated M&L portal distinct from general business support would add most value.

1. The recently published Productivity Institute report '[Investing in Management: How to improve management practices in your business](#)' (July 2024) includes a self-assessment element aimed to help businesses evaluate how close their management practices are to best practice. UUEPC's recommendation builds on this with the need for a more in-depth diagnostic tool to help identify the specific areas in which management and leadership skills could be improved, for example strategic planning, financial proficiency, negotiation, leading people etc. with the diagnostic providing signposting to the relevant courses and information.

# Recommendations (2)

Time constraints and limited or lack of budget for training were also highlighted as the reasoning for internally structured or informal methods of training. The time constraint one is difficult to remedy as some businesses were either too small or operated in such a lean way that any time out for training would have a negative impact or would be unfeasible.

It is also difficult to incentivise businesses to devote more budget to training and/or to maintain it when finances are squeezed and cashflow positions are tight. Subsidised training was of interest to business, with the option of paying in installments. Notably, there was lower preference for anything seen to be 'free' or with very low cost as it was perceived as low value and likely to be too generic to be of use.

## Recommendation:

2

Beyond subsidisation, there may also be merit in a form of **tax credit for those engaging with M&L training** and perhaps with some requirement to implement practices or strategies as a result. This, however, should not be restricted to those accessing external formal M&L training only but should also have provision for those who have developed or are developing internal training frameworks due to time constraints. A similar training tax allowance was used in Austria and available for both internal and external training<sup>26</sup>. If implemented effectively this should be an incentive to engage in training with the reduction in tax liability providing a cash boost.

As with the R&D tax credit a skills tax credit would likely be a UK-reserved rather than devolved matter. There have been wider calls for a skills tax credit to be introduced across the UK to incentivise employer investment in training for those with the lowest qualifications<sup>27</sup>. As part of the recent reform of skills<sup>28</sup> the case could further be made for such a skills tax credit to combat employer underinvestment in skills training. Due to the higher share of lower qualified managers in NI and lower management scores, justification could also be made to include M&L training within any skills tax credit particularly in regions such as NI where such skills are lagging.

# Recommendations (3)

Mentoring was used regularly across the consultees and viewed as an effective way to get advice on the business and was also a useful sounding board for managers themselves. As with the training approaches, there were a variety of ways used for accessing mentors, whether that was through a formal training programme or someone they knew through business or industry connection, part of a network, a more senior or past colleague. Given concerns about budget it was also seen as a cost-effective way to gain knowledge and know-how.

## Recommendation:

3

Although mentoring schemes and programmes exist, there may be merit in **the creation of a formal list of mentors that are available for access without the need to register for a training scheme.** This could be added to the portal, as identified in Recommendation 1, with information on the mentor showing their experience, areas of expertise and identifying how they could add value. This would likely be of most benefit to micro and smaller SMEs who are budget and/or time constrained and for whom either subsidised training or tax credits would not be desirable.

# Recommendations (4)

Although lack of awareness of need for training was noted in a minority of businesses during the consultations, they are likely to be representative of a larger cohort. Certainly, businesses that are already successful or that have been operating in the same way for a number of years may not feel the need to make changes or engage with training programmes but there will also be those who simply hadn't considered it or for whom the language used regarding training is off putting. Encouraging managers and owners to be open and amenable to training would help to embed it as good and regular practice and contribute to the concept of lifelong learning but it's important that they see the relevance and benefit to their business.

## Recommendation:

4

In conjunction with the previous recommendations, **a review of the language used when communicating the content of training programmes and when promoting the benefits** may help to better relay need and relevance. Use of familiar business terms to show the potential outcomes of training and how it can be put to use within a business would better help to inform. Elements of training courses will also be typically generic but **building in a tailored element specially for each participant would also incentivise uptake**. Although training is available across NI there is a concentration of provision in Belfast. There is a need to ensure such training is widely accessible so that those in more remote parts are not further penalized in terms of additional travel time. Accessibility combined with extensive promotion would also help with reach across the wider business base and support the aim of regional balance.

# Recommendations (5)

Good practice suggest that businesses engaging with training should not only evaluate the training in terms of whether it was useful, but they should also measure the impact on the business' bottom line. The consultations indicated that evaluation of training was done primarily by the trainers rather than also being formally done within the business too. Few of the businesses also formally measured the impact of management training on business outcomes.

## Recommendation:

5

Businesses engaging with M&L training should **review the training internally afterwards to ensure that it meets expectations and needs and should aim to have a method by which the impact can be measured**, whether that be through KPIs or the implementation of new practices or processes. By doing so, it is more likely that future training is more attuned to business need and, to ensure impact, it is more likely that there would be practical outcomes associated with, or implemented as a result of, training. This would help to ensure that training does not become a box-ticking exercise but a useful means of improving company performance.



# References and Appendix

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# Appendix- Training providers and M&L courses

| Training Providers   | M&L Courses  | Training Providers  | M&L Courses   | Training Providers   | M&L Courses  |   |                                     |                                   |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ulster University  | Executive MBA (Master of Business Administration)              | Belfast Met   | ILM 3, 5 & 7  | Open University  | ILM 5  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Leadership and Innovation in the Public Sector- MSc            |   | CIPD in People Management   |  | BA Business Management and Languages                   |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Strategic and Tactical Leadership                              |   | Leadership for Children's Care Learning and Development (Management)                          |  | Diploma of Higher Education in Business Management     |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Help to Grow   |   | Team Leading  |  | Certificate of Higher Education in Business Management |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Aurora   |   | Construction Management   |  | BA Business Management (Leadership Practice)           |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | The Engage Series  |   | Hair and Beauty Management  |  | Leadership in the digital world                        |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Leadership for Learning  |   | Hospitality Management  |  | ILM 4  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Strategic Digital Transformation                               |   | Hospitality Supervision and Leadership  |  | ENGAGE   |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Business in Technology- MSc                                    |   | Events Management   |  | EMPOWER  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Human Resource Management- BSc                                 |   | BA Professional Development in Leadership and Management                                      |  | ILM 3, 5 & 7   |   |                                     |                                   |
| Management- BSc  | Travel and Tourism Management                                  | Absence Management  |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| Management Practice- BSc   | Leadership and Management                                      | The Knowledge Academy   | ILM L 2-7   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| Queen's University Belfast   | Stepping up to Leadership & Management in General Practice     | Southern Regional College   | Strategic Management and Leadership   | Centre for Learning  | Empowering Women in Leadership                         |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Emerging Leaders programme                                     |   | People Management   |  | Institute of Directors                                 | Leadership for Directors  |                                     |                                   |
|  | Help to Grow   |   | Coaching and Mentoring  |  |  | Strategy for Directors  |                                     |                                   |
|  | Mini MBA Programme   |   | Leadership for Children's Care Learning and Development (Management)                          |  |  | Finance for non finance directors   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Leading Digital Innovation                                     |   | Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Adult Management)                             |  |  | Role of the Finance Director  |                                     |                                   |
|  | Data Analytics and decision making                             |   | Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management with Specialisms                                   |  |  | Role of the Chair   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Digital Transformation Toolbox                                 |   | Strategic People Management   |  |  | Aspiring Director   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Advanced Manufacturing Leadership Programme                    |   | Hair and Beauty Management  |  |  | ILM L 2,3,4,5   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Business Analytics Essentials                                  |   | Food and Beverage Supervision   |  |  | OCN NI L5 Diploma in Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care (Adult Management) |                                     |                                   |
|  | Finance For Non-Financial Managers                             |   | People Practice   |  |  | The Leader Programme for CEOs/MDs   |                                     |                                   |
| Leading Productivity   | Leadership and Management                                      | The Leadership Team: Ambition to Scale Programme                              |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| Leading Transformation Through Culture   | Effective Coaching   | Leading Within a Group Programme: For Site Leads                              |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| Scaling Up For Growth Programme  | Hair and Beauty Management                                     | International Sales Leadership Programme                                      |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| Stranmillis University College   | Strategic Change Leadership For Digital Transformation         | North West Regional College   | Hospitality and Tourism Management  | Invest NI  | Leadership for Growth                                  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Business Management BSc  |   | Leadership for children's care, learning and development                                      |  | Female Led Ambition to Grow                            |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Management MSc   |   | ILM 3 & 5   |  | Ambition to Scale                                      |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | The Post-Qualifying Leadership (PQL) programme                 |   | Hospitality and Tourism Management  |  | The Non-Executive Director Scheme                      |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Developing Resilience and Supporting Wellbeing As a Leader     |   | Business Management   |  | The Mentoring Scheme                                   |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Management Skills Training                                     |   | People Management   |  | ILM 4 & 5  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Leadership Values and Governance: Ethical and Moral Leadership |   | Principles of Leadership and Management for Adult Social Care                                 |  | Rutledge Recruitment                                   | ILM 4 & 5   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Ulster University Economic Policy Centre                       |   | Leadership for Health and Social Care Services  |  | Northern Regional College                              | Children's Care, Learning and Development (Leadership and Management Pathway)               | Revolution Learning and Development | Leadership Skills Training Course |
|  |  |   | BSc (Hons) Degree in Construction Engineering and Management                                  |  |  | Leadership for Health and Social Care Services  |                                     | Step up to leadership programme   |
|  |  |   | BSc (Hons) Degree in Transport and Supply Chain Management (Validated by The Open University) |  |  | ILM 3 & 5   |                                     | Managing team stress and conflict |
| NCFE Cache Leadership for Childrens Care, Learning and Development (Management)                |  | Hospitality and Tourism Management  | Essential people management skills  |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| Open University Foundation Degree in The Professional Practice and Management of Culinary Arts |  | Business Management   | Managing Hybrid Team  |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
| South West College   |  | People Management   | South West College  | Open University Foundation Degree in The Professional Practice and Management of Culinary Arts |  | Sureskills  |                                     | Different Leadership Skills       |
|  |  | Leadership and Management   |   | BSc (Hons) Degree in Construction Engineering and Management                                   |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  |  | Effective Coaching  |   | BSc (Hons) Degree in Transport and Supply Chain Management (Validated by The Open University)  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  |  | Hair and Beauty Management  |   | NCFE Cache Leadership for Childrens Care, Learning and Development (Management)                |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  |  | Hospitality and Tourism Management  |   | Open University Foundation Degree in The Professional Practice and Management of Culinary Arts |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Leadership for children's care, learning and development       | People Management   |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | ILM 3 & 5  | Principles of Leadership and Management for Adult Social Care                 |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Hospitality and Tourism Management                             | Children's Care, Learning and Development (Leadership and Management Pathway) |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | Business Management  | Leadership for Health and Social Care Services                                |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |
|  | People Management  | ILM 3 & 5   |   |  |  |   |                                     |                                   |

