Learning about Labour Rights: Evaluation of the Skills and Education Group Level 1 Award in Workers' Rights and Labour Exploitation

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## Introduction

This report presents early evaluation data relating to the pilot phase of a new Level 1 qualification in Workers' Rights and Labour Exploitation, launched in January 2021. The course was designed by the Skills and Education Group (SEG) and Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) to address a perceived gap in education and skills in relation to labour rights and exploitation. The qualification was initially targeted at learners studying in Further Education (FE) settings, which included colleges and work placements, among other providers.

The evaluation was carried out by the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, and funded by the GLAA using UK Home Office grant funding.

#### **Summary of findings**

The findings are based on questionnaires returned by 138 course participants, and three focus groups. 66 of these participants provided us with responses before and after the qualification course, allowing us to compare how the course changed their responses.

- A third of the total sample had personal or vicarious experience of long working hours, few or no breaks and bullying and harassment.
- When asked about reasons for not acting on problems, 60% indicated concern over losing their job. A significant 44% reported being unsure about their rights, and 42% indicated that they would not know how or where to raise issues.
- Paired survey responses suggested that the SEG Level 1 award appeared to make a significant impact on the levels of knowledge about rights, and confidence about completing key tasks to deal with problems. The award also seemed to increase trust in organisations that could assist.
- Whilst 15% of respondents indicated that they 'knew a lot' about recognising labour exploitation before completing the course, this increased to nearly half (47%) after completing the course.
- The percentage of respondents saying that they 'knew a lot' about who to contact about labour exploitation increased from 11% to 49% after completing the course.
- The qualification also increased confidence in contacting external parties, in particular the GLAA, ACAS, unions and charities. For example, before completing the course, 28% reported being at least reasonably confident in contacting the GLAA, with this increasing to 65% after completing the course.
- Focus groups with tutors and learners also showed that the course was viewed as interesting and engaging, filling an important gap, and applicable to a wide range of learners. Participants suggested that value of the course lay not only in the qualification, but also improving the wider working environment: 'It's good to have such vital information so that people like us or people who have attained this knowledge are able to help others' (Learner, FG1).

## **Background to the Pilot Scheme and Evaluation**

The project built on previous partnership initiatives between the GLAA and the Further Education sector, which aimed to raise awareness about risks of labour exploitation and promote worker rights<sup>1</sup>. Forerunning projects had suggested that a qualification covering basic employment law and the warning signs of exploitation could be of particular benefit to FE learners, many of whom are seeking careers in industries such as construction, beauty and social care, which carry known risks for labour abuse. FE settings also frequently include learners with lower levels of English language skills, and vulnerabilities such as learning disabilities, which can constitute further risk factors for exploitative work.

The qualification was designed in late 2020 and piloted in the early part of 2021. The course took the form of an online learning package requiring approximately 10 hours of learner engagement. A small proportion of learners also completed the award in classroom settings using printed workbooks, with guidance from tutors.

This evaluation draws upon data gained from pre and post-learning online surveys, which were embedded at the start and conclusion of the online training package, and therefore principally reflects experience of students accessing the online materials. It also includes qualitative insights gained from three online focus groups: one with learners and two including trainers and teachers from learning providers. Some of the trainers in these focus group sessions reflected on the experience of delivering the course in a classroom based setting using workbooks.

Evaluation surveys were open for completion from the launch of the course until June 30th 2021. It was made clear to learners that participation in the study was voluntary and there was no obligation on students to take part. Participation was not necessary for successful completion of their training. Because of severe disruption caused by Covid-19, including a national lockdown, there were some delays in learners beginning the course and working through the content, which resulted in a smaller sample of candidates participating in the pilot than originally hoped. The survey sample also over-represents white, younger, and female learners in full-time FE settings. These imbalances would need to be addressed in any future study.

In total we received 72 single survey responses from unique respondents and 66 paired before-and-after survey responses which are used as the basis of our analysis in this report. Although this data does not allow generalisations to the wider population of learners, it nonetheless provides useful insights on the level of knowledge and confidence amongst learners, and early indications of the potential benefits of the course promoting worker rights and preventing exploitation. We recommend that these issues are explored in greater depth as the course is rolled-out nationally, and will be working in partnership with the Skills and Education Group and GLAA to ensure that ongoing evaluation addresses these issues.

#### Theoretical framework for the survey

In designing the survey we drew upon the concept of 'Subjective Legal Empowerment', (Gramatikov and Porter 2010, Porter 2014<sup>2</sup>) which suggests that individuals' 'self-efficacy' in gaining solutions to legal problems will be influenced by four key areas:

- Enactive mastery: personal experience of attempting a task;
- Vicarious experience: seeing others attempting the task:
- Affective state: the emotional state induced by attempting to complete the task in the past;
- Verbal persuasion: the information given to an actor concerning their ability to complete the task.

Importantly, all four of these areas affect an individual's subjective sense of empowerment, meaning that addressing only a single area - for instance via information provision - is unlikely to increase empowerment by itself. Individuals must also believe they are likely to be successful based on their own and others experience, and feel confident about the emotional effort required to engage in the process of solving the problem.

Within our questionnaire we therefore sought to explore aspects of self-efficacy for FE learners in relation to labour rights by assessing:

- Learners' experience (both personal and vicarious) of problems in the workplace;
- Learners' subjective assessments of their own knowledge of UK employment rights;
- Their confidence in completing specific tasks to address problems in the workplace, such as gathering evidence, talking to their manager, or contacting a third party such as legal advisor or ACAS;
- The concerns and worries that could prevent them from acting if they encounter problems;
- Levels of trust in specific actors who are available to assist them.

These questions (as well as questions about background demographic data) were included both before and after the course. Our aim was not to create an overall measure of 'subjective legal empowerment' for this study but to understand the baseline levels of confidence and trust reported in the areas of interest identified above, and whether any changes were reported as a result of the qualification course.

#### Focus groups

Focus groups fulfilled two main purposes; to explore whether there were any aspects of participant feedback that had not been picked up by the survey. and to provide space for discussion and reflection in a group setting (rather than individually) on the qualification. There were three focus groups, all of which took place online. Recruitment was undertaken via a request for voluntary participation through the learning providers; respondents were not incentivised for their time. The first focus group included 8 learners as well as two tutors who were facilitating access for their learners to the group. The second group included 3 tutors representing 3 learning providers, including a mixture of FE colleges and workplace-settings. The third group included 4 tutors representing 2 providers, again a mixture of FE colleges and workplace-settings. At the first group detailed notes were taken with some verbatim comments recorded. The second and third groups were recorded and audio-transcribed. Notes and transcripts were reviewed to check alignment with themes emerging from the quantitative analysis and to identify additional insights.

This data provides useful insights on the level of knowledge and confidence amongst learners, and early indications of the potential benefits of the course.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See for example Evaluation of the labour exploitation, education and awareness project delivered by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and Boston College https://www.gla.gov.uk/media/4850/new-glaa-report-final.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Gramatikov, Martin and Porter, Robert Benjamin, Yes, I Can: Subjective Legal Empowerment (October 1, 2010). TISCO Working Paper Series on Civil Law and Conflict Resolution Systems No. 008/2010, Tilburg Law School Research Paper No. 023/2010, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1685839 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1685839 and Robert B. Porter (2014) Measurement of legal empowerment through the subjective perceptions of individuals, Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal, 32:3, 213-221, DOI: 10.1080/14615517.2014.927556

## **Survey findings**

#### Sample characteristics

In total 138 respondents returned questionnaires that we were able to use for the purpose of this research (either a single questionnaire or both before and after responses). 66 of those respondents provided us with 'before and after' information that allowed us to review changes in responses as a result of the course. The percentages given are calculated from those who provided answers to their respective question, so sample sizes vary slightly between each variable.

The wider sample includes those questionnaires submitted with only one set of ID information and the 'before' responses from paired data. Sometimes respondents did not indicate being over 16, or explicitly give consent for the use of their data. These responses have only been retained in cases where they have a paired response that confirms both elements.

The learning providers most frequently named by respondents included Boston College, Scarborough Tech, and College of West Anglia. Other named institutions include Skills and Education Group, Leeds City College, Double Impact, Rotherham College, RNN Group, Sheffield College, University of Winchester, North Notts College, and Workers Educational Association.

The main characteristics of the wider sample versus the paired sample are shown below. The sample currently over-represents white learners in the 16-20 age group and female learners, partially because many of the participants came from settings serving this age group, and courses where gender imbalances are common (e.g. hair and beauty).

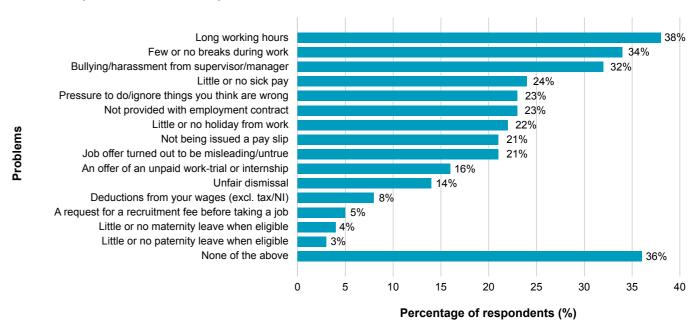
Characteristic	Category	Wider sample	Paired sample
Gender	Male	26%	23%
	Female	74%	77%
Ethnicity	White English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	76%	83%
	White Other	11%	8%
	Mixed / Multiple	4%	6%
	Asian / Asian British	2%	0%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	4%	2%
	Other	2%	2%
Disability	Disability	13%	8%
	No disability	82%	89%
	Prefer not to say	5%	3%
Age	16-20	69%	74%
	36-40	5%	3%
	51-55	8%	9%
	Other age groups made up <5% of the sample		
Highest level of education	University	17%	8%
	FE college / training provider	66%	71%
	Secondary school	17%	21%
Previously held a job		61%	56%

## **Contextual information**

#### Experience of problems in the workplace (wider sample)

Just over one third of respondents indicated neither they, nor anyone they knew, had experienced problems in the workplace. However, 38% reported either themselves or someone they knew working long hours, 34% reported few or no breaks during work hours, and just under one quarter of the sample reported little or no sick pay, not being provided with an employment contract, little or no holiday from work, or pressure to do or ignore things they felt were wrong.

#### Problems experienced in the workplace



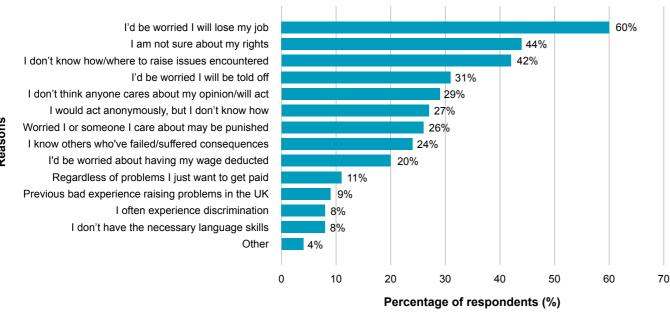
Problems in the workplace n = 135.



#### Concerns about acting on problems in the workplace (wider sample)

In the scenario that respondents encountered a problem in the workplace, 60% indicated that a reason for not acting would be worry over losing their job. 44% of respondents indicated that being unsure about their rights would be a reason for them not acting. This indicates that there is a clear need for awareness-raising about labour rights amongst those new to the world of work. 42% indicated not knowing where or how to raise issues encountered, whilst 27% indicated wanting to act anonymously but not knowing how – both of these also point to the value of increasing knowledge of what to do in the event of exploitation in the workplace.<sup>3</sup>

#### Reasons for not acting if there was a problem in the workplace



Reasons for not acting n=126.

44% of respondents indicated that being unsure of their rights would be a reason for them not acting.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> McNemar tests on each reason were carried out with the paired sample to assess whether there were any significant differences between pre- and post-completion of the course. 'I don't know how/where to raise the issues I encounter' was the only reason significant at p<0.05. This provides further evidence supporting the effectiveness of the course specifically in relation to improving knowledge of how to react to problems in the workplace.



# Changes in respondents' views as a result of taking the SEG qualification

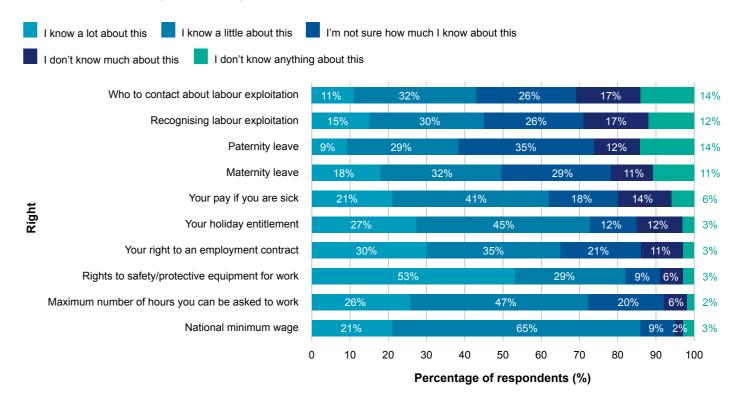
The following charts examine differences between before and after surveys, using the paired sample (total sample size = 66 although individual variables had slight differences).

#### Subjective assessment of knowledge about labour rights

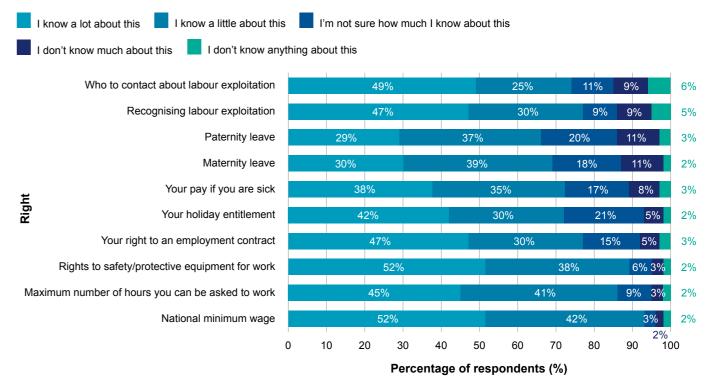
Descriptive statistics indicate that there seems to be a general improvement in knowledge about labour rights after completing the course. The largest improvements can be seen to be made in respondents' recognition of labour exploitation and who to contact in the case of labour exploitation. Whilst 15% of respondents indicated that they 'knew a lot' about recognising labour exploitation before completing the course, this increased to nearly half (47%) after completing the course. Additionally, the percentage of respondents saying that they 'knew a lot' about who to contact about labour exploitation increased from 11% to 49%. These two findings are especially relevant due to respondents indicating that being unsure of their rights and not knowing how or where to raise issues experienced in the workplace would be key reasons for not acting if they did experience problems at work.



#### **Pre-qualification ratings - Knowledge**



#### Post-qualification ratings - Knowledge



#### Sign tests examining knowledge

Sign tests can examine whether there are significant changes in values between paired samples, e.g. whether there are changes in ratings between pre- and post-responses. P-values indicate statistical significance: where the P value is less than 0.05, there is strong evidence that the course results in a change in responses.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1: Sign tests examining knowledge

Labour Right	Number of differences	Number of improvements	p-value
National minimum wage	30	27	<0.001***
Maximum number of hours you can be asked to work	36	27	0.004**
Rights to safety or protective equipment required for your job	29	17	0.458
Your right to an employment contract	43	30	0.014*
Your holiday entitlement	39	26	0.053
Your pay if you are sick	41	32	<0.001***
Maternity leave	40	30	0.002**
Paternity leave	40	35	<0.001***
Recognising labour exploitation	48	39	<0.001***
Who to contact about labour exploitation	45	39	<0.001***

<sup>\*</sup>p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

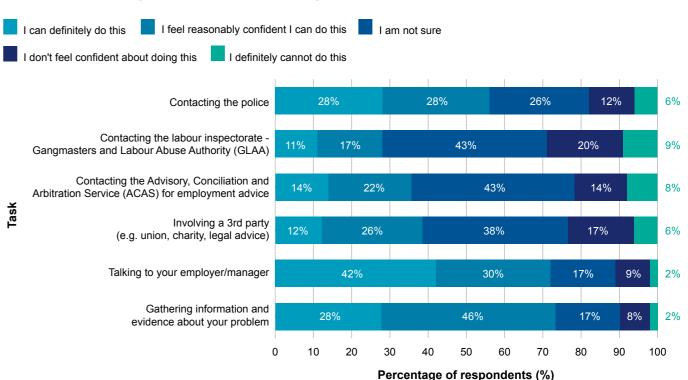
In regards to knowledge, sign tests suggest that there are significant differences between pre- and post-course responses for all content other than rights to safety equipment and holiday entitlement, although, as the bar charts show, over 50% of respondents had at least some knowledge of these rights before completing the course, indicating that these were not areas with a significant prior lack of knowledge.

#### Confidence in completing specific tasks

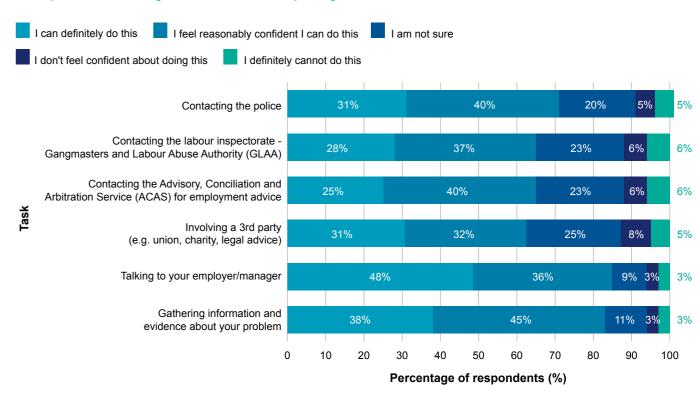
Results also seem to indicate the qualification is good at increasing confidence in contacting external parties, in particular the GLAA, ACAS, and involving third parties such as unions and charities. For example, before completing the course, 28% reported being at least reasonably confident in contacting the GLAA, with this increasing to 65% after completing the course. The percentage of respondents being at least reasonably confident in contacting ACAS for employment advice increased from 36% to 65%, and from 38% to 63% for involving a third party (e.g. union, charity, legal advice). The descriptive statistics indicate that more moderate improvements in confidence were found in gathering information/evidence about your problem, talking to your employer/manager, and contacting the police.

Respondents at least reasonably confident in contacting ACAS for employment advice increased from 36% to 65%.

#### Pre-qualification ratings - Confidence in completing tasks



#### Post-qualification ratings - confidence in completing tasks



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Due to the online delivery of the course and the aims and exploratory nature of the study, the sign test was deemed most appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Table 2: Sign tests examining confidence in completing tasks

Task	Number of differences	Number of improvements	p-value
Gathering information and evidence about your problem	30	20	0.099
Talking to your employer/manager	35	22	0.176
Involving a 3rd party (e.g. union, charity, legal advice)	40	32	<0.001***
Contacting ACAS for employment advice	42	32	<0.001***
Contacting the GLAA	49	38	<0.001***
Contacting the police	39	27	0.024*

<sup>\*</sup>p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

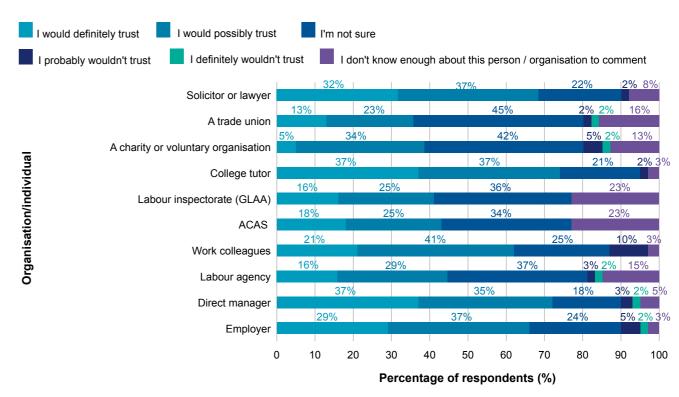
In regards to confidence in contacting individuals/organisations, significant differences in pre- and post- course ratings were indicated for involving a third party, contacting the GLAA, contacting ACAS for employment advice, and contacting the police. Whilst the course didn't seem to significantly affect confidence in speaking to your manager/employer or gathering information and evidence about a work problem, both of these items received generally positive responses in the 'pre' survey, with over 70% already reporting that they felt at least reasonably confident in doing these tasks.

#### Trust in organisations that can assist

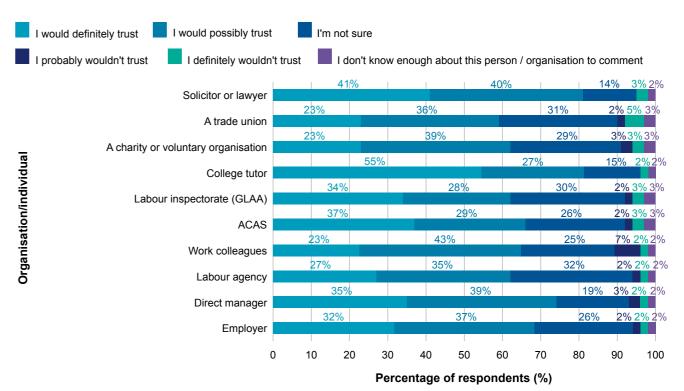
Improvements in trust were slightly less marked than improvements in knowledge and confidence. The percentage of respondents indicating that they would at least possibly trust trade unions increased from 36% to 59%, whilst in relation to charity/voluntary organisation it increased from 39% to 62%. 16% to just over one third of the sample (34%) reported that they would 'definitely trust' the GLAA. Similarly, the amount of respondents reporting that they would 'definitely trust' ACAS rose from 18% to 37%. Another interesting finding is that, whilst nearly one quarter of the sample indicated that they didn't know enough about the GLAA or ACAS to comment in the pre-course survey, this reduced to just 3% after completing the course, indicating that it effectively increases awareness of these organisations.

34% reported that they would 'definitely trust' the GLAA.

#### **Pre-qualification ratings - trust**



#### Post-qualification ratings - trust



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Table 3: Sign tests examining trust

Organisation/individual	Number of differences	Number of improvements	p-value
Employer	32	19	0.377
Direct manager	32	15	0.860
Labour agency	29	21	0.024*
Work colleagues	29	14	1
ACAS	27	19	0.052
Labour inspectorate (GLAA)	29	20	0.061
College tutor	34	23	0.058
A charity or voluntary organisation	34	28	<0.001***
A trade union	28	23	<0.001***
Solicitor or lawyer	27	20	0.019*

<sup>\*</sup>p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Statistically significant differences were established for trust, although seemingly fewer compared to knowledge and confidence. Using the sign test, charity/voluntary organisations, trade unions, labour agencies and solicitor/lawyers indicate significant differences in pre- and post- ratings. This lends some further support to the course improving respondents' willingness to contact external third parties, as also indicated in the findings for confidence.

## Focus group findings

Learners participating in the first focus group included a mix of those who had never worked and those who had had longer careers, in line with the overall survey sample. Regardless of their starting point, all learners agreed they had learnt more about their rights as a result of the course.

Interestingly, some learners also felt that the value of the course was not just to protect themselves but also so that they could protect other workers.

'It's good to have such vital information so that people like us or people who have attained this knowledge are able to help others' (Learner FG1).

Problems that focus group participants had experienced included bullying, racial abuse, failure to pay the minimum wage due to 'cash in hand' work, a lack of basic rights to sick pay and holiday pay, and human trafficking (witnessed by one participant working in a recruitment setting). Learners reported feeling more confident about what to do if a problem arose at work and which organisations they could contact for help. 'Now that the direction is a little bit clearer I think I would be able to take action somehow' (Learner FG1). However, tutors were also concerned that learners should not take the full responsibility for action on themselves, and the content should ensure this is clear 'It felt almost like that it was on you to sort the situation out' (Tutor FG2).

Many aspects of the package content were praised. For instance, tutors noted that it was easy to change the language (Tutor FG 2) and the content mix was effective, including short and long questions, videoclips, and activities (Tutors FG2, FG3).

The material on modern slavery and exploitation in particular was seen as new and valuable:

'I didn't realise that modern slavery was that bad. I thought it was just a few people, so I never took it seriously as such. But when we start doing this research on modern slavery then you realise how much of a problem it is' (Learner FG1).

Tutors felt that the course included unique content: to me this is filling a gap... there's no other qualification like it' (Tutor FG2). 'I hope that it's taken forward because I do think it's much needed and very useful, and we definitely would want to use it moving forward for next year' (Tutor FG2).

#### Technical issues

Both learners and tutors highlighted that there had been some early technical problems with course registration and access to the learning package. 'It was a bit of hard work – for someone doing it on their own it would have been difficult' (Tutor FG1) A learner reported struggling to log into the package via different browsers, and that she had initially needed help from a team member (Learner FG1). However another tutor commented that 'once the students were on the course it was it was very accessible and very easy to use' (Tutor FG2).

Other practical issues highlighted mainly by tutors included the need to give more guidance on how much is required in written answers (for instance through a word count) and ensuring that previous answers were not deleted if the student answered one or more sections wrongly (Tutor FG1, FG2). Colours and symbols were important to enable movement through the package and prevent learners getting 'stuck'. However they could also be off-putting: for example tutors did not want the suggestion "reject" to be highlighted in bright red.

It was suggested that it may be useful to make the package compatible with mobile phones (Tutor FG2). The same group also suggested that a demonstration would be useful to introduce new providers to the learning tool.

'a more in-depth demonstration, maybe even if it could even be done as like a supporting video, because then you could be playing and pausing the video and having a little practise on the portal at the same time' (Tutor FG2).

> "to me this is filling a gap... there's no other qualification like it"

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> 'I don't know enough about this organisation to comment' was classified as N/A for the sign tests on trust due to not fitting as a rank in the ordinal scale; this means that findings effectively only relate to those who had sufficient knowledge of the organisations/individuals concerned in both instances of the survey. This may further reduce the statistical power of the tests due to considering fewer observations.

#### **Further content suggestions**

One tutor suggested that the title of the package was 'academic', not representing the content of the course.

'It's such a good course and it's so relevant for everybody but when we recruited we didn't get huge amounts of interest (Tutor FG2).

Others also highlighted that the content on exploitation could potentially trigger distress, and that it was important to remind learners to seek assistance from their tutor if they found any of the content upsetting (Tutor FG2). There was an important difference here between college-based providers who had strong safeguarding systems in place, and adult learning providers who often had less support. For these providers more training or introduction for course tutors would be welcomed:

'you can't just open the office door and shout a question or whatever. You know you need to have that knowledge in front of you. So yeah... if there's something on the tutor portal that was some sort of real safeguarding or something like that, that would be really useful for organisations to signpost to' (Tutor FG2).

Learners were interested to understand what would happen if they did report potential abuses in the workplace, again so they could pass that information on:

'if I was to report someone it would be nice to tell them the next steps, because it's quite scary for someone in that situation, so I think that would be good, something about the 'after' side of it as well. Because it you were going to report it, you'd like to say that it's going be okay, rather than "I don't know, I'm just going to report it" (Learner FG1).

Another issue that was of interest was the role of 'middlemen' such as labour providers and gang masters, and learners indicated they would have liked more about this in the course material. They also suggested that it would be good to consolidate findings from the course with simple posters and notices in their workplace, reminding them of key points.

Finally, there also general enthusiasm amongst learners and tutors for a level 2 and potentially level 3 version of the qualification, to provide opportunities for more in-depth learning.

#### Alternative uses for the course

Both learners and tutors felt that the course content would be valuable for a wide range of contexts. This particularly included induction for new workers or people just entering the workplace:

'In my job, I teach about modern slavery in induction, so it was helpful as I can pass it over to colleagues. I think this course would be good for people coming into work, not too sure, dealing with contracts. I think it would be really good for someone new to the work world and not too sure what's going on, definitely' (Learner FG1).

The same participant felt it would be a particularly useful course for people starting work in the recruitment industry, 'as it teaches about CVs and how to spot the signs'. Other elements of the course content such as CV writing were also highlighted as useful information for this potential audience (Learner FG1).

Other tutors felt that the course had a broad applicability to all learners including younger children in secondary school, students and apprentices

'I certainly believe it would fit into a tutorial scheme for any learner at college. And that's you know, even if they're going on to university, they often have part time jobs and often in hospitality or in beauty, so they are, they can be at risk.'

They also highlighted the value of the course for people with special educational needs, and for older learners returning to work after a break. (Tutor FG2) Another suggestion involved blending the course with existing offerings such as counselling.

Different languages gave further flexibility: several tutors highlighted the application for ESOL learners, particularly if Romanian and Bulgarian versions of the package were added (Tutor FG2, FG3). One tutor noted that a group of migrant workers also enjoyed looking up vocabulary surrounding workers rights' (Tutor FG3) indicating educational benefits in terms of English proficiency as well as improving understanding of labour rights.

"I certainly believe it would fit into a tutorial scheme for any learner at college."

## **Conclusions**

Despite being a relatively small-scale study, with a limited sample of learners, this report demonstrates some important points in relation to the value of the new SEG Level 1 award in Workers' Rights and Labour Exploitation.

It is clear from both the survey and focus groups that many learners in FE settings have gaps in their knowledge about labour rights and how or where to raise issues that they encounter. This is particularly concerning as many are pursuing careers in industries with known risks of exploitation, and around a third of our respondents reported personal or vicarious experience of problems such as long working hours, few breaks and bullying or harassment.

Early indications from the survey suggest that the course is effective in significantly increasing learners' knowledge about labour rights, their confidence in completing key tasks to address problems in the workplace, and their trust in organisations that can assist. In particular, the course helped to raise awareness and confidence in how to engage with bodies such as the GLAA and ACAS. These results must be caveated, in that the findings represent the subjective assessment of individuals immediately after the course, rather than a long term impact.

The under-representation of non-white learners, older learners, and males also needs to be addressed in future studies. However, the analysis of available data represents consistent and promising early results which should be followed-up with a wider and longer-term evaluation as the course is rolled out.

The focus groups showed that despite minor technical issues with the package, FE providers found content to be unique and relevant, and they were able to apply the course to many different types of setting and learner. Learners were also enthusiastic about the content and particularly appreciated the information on modern slavery. However, revisions to content should consider providing additional safeguarding advice, particularly for delivery in workplace-based settings where fewer safeguarding structures may be in place.

In summary, the study indicates that the SEG Level 1 award in Workers' Rights and Labour Exploitation could play an important role in increasing self-efficacy of workers in respect to acting on labour rights. The longer-term potential gain from extending access to this course is that workers will not only feel more able to sustain their own rights, but those of others in their workplace, providing an important preventative future deterrent against labour abuse and exploitation.





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