



National Safeguarding Office

Learning to Safeguard

A report into two studies on HSE adult safeguarding training programmes

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2022

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Breakdown of Report

Acknowledgements

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Part A An examination of adult safeguarding officers' readiness for online learning and their perceptions of a blended learning approach employed in an adult safeguarding training programme. This study presented here in Part A is a condensed account of a thesis undertaken by Bridget McDaid, National Safeguarding Office, as part of an Master of Arts in Adult Learning & Development (University of Galway, 2022).

Part B An examination of staff learners perceptions of the *Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme*.

Part C Summary of recommendations for both programmes.

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report comprises of three parts:

Part A- An examination of adult safeguarding designated officers' readiness for online learning and their perceptions of the blended learning approach employed in the designated officer training programme

Part B- An examination of staff learners' perceptions of the Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme

Part C- A summary of recommendations arising for both programmes

Part A: Designated Officer training programme

Designated officer training was reconfigured from face-to-face training to a blended format during 2020. This study has sought to establish their readiness for online learning and their perception of the blended approach.

The survey employed a quantitative design. Modified versions of two previously validated survey tools were used as well as data from an existing post-training programme evaluation questionnaire, with response rates of 49% and 37% respectively.

Designated officers regarded the specified competencies as important to very important with highest importance placed in time management. Designated officers expressed they were confident

to very confident in their ability to accomplish all competencies in online learning. The highest confidence was in the technical competencies. Designated officers are demonstrating high readiness for online learning.

Designated officers reported positively on online contributions and on blended learning workload. The scores indicate positive perceptions of the blended learning experience. The perceptions of blended learning have also been positively expressed within the post training programme evaluation questionnaire. Responses to open-ended questions in both surveys were largely positive with some suggestions for improvement made.

Findings will help inform planning and development of HSE adult safeguarding training for designated officers or others in a comparable role.

Part B: Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme

The HSE Safeguarding Adults at risk of abuse eLearning programme was launched in 2020.

HSeLanD evaluation surveys relating to this programme since its commenced in late 2020 to February 2022 were examined to ascertain learners perceptions of this programme, its content, pedagogy and delivery mode. Survey responses yielded a response rate of 12% for this time period.

Learners demonstrated a very high level of satisfaction with programme content and reported that the programme was relevant and applicable to their role. A high rate of intention to put their learning into practice was also reported.

Discursive commentary was provided in response to two opened ended questions. This data was overwhelmingly affirmative and further elucidated the positive perceptions of the programme. The themes that emerged in the commentary provide useful additional information and suggestions for improvement that can be considered at the time of programme review.

Part C: Recommendations

A summary of recommendations for both programmes is presented. It is recommended that the blended approach be continued for the designated officer programme with the additional option of in person interactive workshops for the final stage to be added. The provision of eLearning should continue as the minimum required training for staff. There should be efforts within services to extend safeguarding learning on an ongoing basis after the minimum training has been completed.

Part A: Study of Designated Officer Training

An examination of adult safeguarding designated officers' readiness for online learning and their perceptions of the blended learning approach employed in the designated officer training programme

Part A: Study of Designated Officer Training

1. Introduction

“Safeguarding relies on people and services working together to ensure that people using services are treated with dignity and respect and that they are empowered to make decisions about their lives health and social care services have a responsibility to do everything possible to prevent harm as a result of abuse, neglect or exploitation”

(HIQA and Mental Health Commission, 2019, p.8)

1.1 Background

The last twenty years have seen significant advances in the provision of adult safeguarding services in Ireland. The first national report highlighting the issue was published by O’Loughlin and Duggan in 1998. Thereafter, the Department of Health and Children published a report from a working group on elder abuse (Department of Health and Children, 2002). This report set out a planned infrastructure for services for elder abuse, which was adopted by government. Soon after the Leas Cross report was published (O’Neill, 2006), the Health Service Executive (HSE) elder abuse service was introduced in 2007 (HSE, 2009). An expansion of this elder abuse service to include abuse of adults with disabilities occurred in 2014.

With the introduction of a HSE adult safeguarding policy in 2014 the role of designated officers was established (HSE, 2014b). Designated officers’ role includes receiving concerns of abuse and responding to concerns and complaints of abuse of vulnerable adults within HSE and HSE funded services. With the

introduction of this new adult safeguarding role, training was developed specifically for designated officers to support them in their role. There have been over 2,224 attendances at designated officer face-to-face classroom training since 2015 (HSE, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021b).

Designated officers have a key role within services. They receive abuse concerns, put in place immediate protective measures, and respond to concerns raised. The profile of designated officers across the country is ever evolving. With staff turnover there is an ongoing requirement to make available training to support staff nominated to this role. The importance of adult safeguarding training for staff working in services with adults at risk of abuse is highlighted in a recent Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) report (HIQA, 2022).

With the pandemic, there was an abrupt halt to designated officer training in March 2020. The emerging COVID-19 crisis in residential settings made the vulnerable even more so and with visitor restrictions in place (Department of Health, 2020) the onus on staff and designated officers to recognise and respond to abuse concerns was even greater. There was an urgent need to make training available in an alternative forum in order to ensure protection of vulnerable service users. The reconfiguration of safeguarding designated officer training from 6.5-hour classroom programme to blended learning was accomplished in 2020.

With the ongoing need for infection prevention and control measures against COVID-19, particularly in residential health care settings (HSE (HPSC), 2022),

the blended approach for adult safeguarding training will continue into the future. It is now timely to consider the readiness of designated officers for online training, and their perceptions of the blended designated officer training. This will provide opportunity to consider if further supports should be provided to designated officers to support their online learning and if modifications should be made to improve the programme going forward.

1.2 Rationale & significance of the research

The importance of understanding readiness for online learning and the implications of this for effective learning are presented in section 2. In addition, the literature review considers the rationale for measuring perceptions of blended learning and explores the suggestion of association between positive perceptions and achievement of learning.

The OECD (2021) indicate the importance of blended learning and see it continuing to be of significance post-pandemic. An earlier report (OECD, 2020) had highlighted there is a need to consider the digital skills of adult learners.

Designated officers are a diverse group of staff who come from varied health professional and managerial backgrounds. They work within services of varying sizes from small local service provision to large national organisations caring for thousands of vulnerable adults. Information on their experiences of blended learning to date is not known.

The provision of online and blended

learning within the HSE saw a significant increase in 2020 with the launch of 65 new e-learning programmes for staff and a resulting increase in programme completions (HSE, 2021a). Despite this increase, there has been no prior examination of staff readiness for online learning. With the abrupt halt of face-to-face training in 2020 including the designated officer programme and the transition to blended learning for this programme, such an examination is now warranted.

1.3 Scope

As the study is focusing on the blended format of designated officer training since COVID-19, it is only designated officers that completed designated officer training since this blended format that fall within the scope of the study. Therefore, the timeframe involved is those who completed the blended training since its commencement in November 2020 up to 8th March 2022 when the survey was distributed.

Most designated officers from this sample were employed in services for older persons or for persons with disabilities. These designated officers are working in HSE and HSE funded services with a smaller proportion in private sector service provision organisations.

It is noted that this sample is not generalisable to wider workforces in these services or to the wider group of designated officers. The findings in this study provides a confidence level of 90%, with a confidence interval of 6% (Qualtrics.com, 2022).

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The scale of abuse of vulnerable adults in Ireland is widely accepted to be underreported (Clancy et al., 2011; Naughton et al., 2012; HSE, 2021c). Traynor's (2014) RTE primetime investigative programme showed evidence of physical abuse and neglect and highlighted deficits in culture. The issue of staff training, while not the only contributing factor, was highlighted in the subsequent review undertaken by McCoy et al. (2016). Similar reviews in the UK (Aylett, 2008; Flynn, 2013) have highlighted the importance of staff training in preventing such abusive circumstances and instances of mistreatment and neglect arising.

This literature review provides some background to adult safeguarding training and chiefly explores readiness for online learning and perceptions of blended learning.

2.2 Adult safeguarding training

Adult safeguarding is about having measures in place to promote and protect people's human rights, their health and wellbeing and empowering people to protect themselves (HIQA and MHC, 2019). The Health Service Executive (HSE) adult safeguarding policy (HSE, 2014b) and the adult safeguarding service drive a series of measures to support the welfare and safety of adults who may be vulnerable and at risk of abuse (HSE, 2021c). The HSE's National Safeguarding Office coordinate the development and delivery of a number of adult safeguarding training programmes for staff (ibid).

The former National Centre for the Protection of Older People in UCD conducted an evaluation of a HSE adult safeguarding (specifically elder abuse) training programme. This research (Fealy et al., 2014) focused on the suitability of training materials used, the perceptions of the facilitators and the effectiveness of the programme in respect of improving staffs' knowledge and ability to identify abuse. The programme materials were considered to be good quality and suitable for use. Learner outcomes revealed statistical improvement in awareness pre and post intervention. Nevertheless, it was considered there was insufficient understanding of next steps in handling concerns of abuse that come to light. While this study is approaching ten years, the findings are still pertinent to HSE adult safeguarding as the only comprehensive evaluation of HSE safeguarding training in Ireland. Adult safeguarding training now includes a programme focusing on subsequent level of action following abuse concerns becoming known and addressing the next steps of responding after concerns are reported.

In England, Ochieng and Ward (2018) report positive findings in an evaluation of staff training in safeguarding of vulnerable adults where learners reported increased confidence and self-assurance in dealing with adult safeguarding issues at work. Details on the delivery methods of the programme are not specified, but it likely relates to face-to-face training.

Pike et al. (2010) reported on efforts to tackle training gaps arising from a number of UK serious care reviews. Introductory training which had been classroom based

was developed into an e-learning programme to increase accessibility. Their next tier of training continued in a face-to-face multi-agency mode and was expanded to address the interwoven issues of mental capacity and equality and diversity. Specific consideration was given to learning transfer. They note the need for a culture shift from viewing safeguarding training as an activity/event to viewing it as a process. They also make a valid point about the need to address organisational barriers to whistleblowing.

The importance of serious case review findings becoming embedded into training is highlighted by Aylett (2008) who reviewed a number of serious case reviews. It was found that despite the aim of a serious case review – to learn from and prevent further adverse events, there often was no strategic approach to 1. disseminate findings of serious case reviews and 2. compile data on serious case reviews so that lessons can be learned and failures not repeated.

The Royal College of Nursing (UK) (2018) have produced a guidance document outlining skills, knowledge and competency requirements for multi-professionals in safeguarding adults from abuse. The guidance sets out minimum training requirement across different staff and responsibility levels (Glasper, 2018). The document recommends that for certain higher complexity training levels there should be a greater than 50% of training time employing a participatory nature (distinguished from e-learning). While opportunities to reflect and to share good practice are advocated, the guidance does not speak to the pedagogy or design of training.

2.3 Online learning

2.3.1 Background

It is apparent from the literature review that there are distinctions and overlaps between definitions of online and blended learning. Within the sections of this literature review, an attempt has been made to separate out the online and blended learning terms to accurately reflect the literature reviewed, while also recognising that the adult safeguarding programme that is the subject of this research is suitably described as either and both online or blended, relative to definitions considered.

2.3.2 Definitions and characteristics

It is apparent that defining online learning has been problematic. Terms such as e-learning, online learning and distance learning have been used interchangeably without much distinction in meaning (Moore et al., 2011; OECD, 2020). Similarly, e-learning is not a distinctly understood term. Whether the defining attributes are based on their methodological design or focused more on the technology employed varies in the literature (Moore et al., 2011). The OECD (2020) has described online learning as learning taking place via digital means, not in a classroom context, but acknowledge that there is a unclear distinction between this and what can also be professed to be blended learning.

Singh and Thurman (2019) following a systematic review make an interesting point that much of what is meant by online learning, which is used ubiquitously, in fact refers to delivery mechanisms better represented by 'online education'.

The learning is identified as a missing element in the definitions. They propose a number of definitions that incorporate the features they identified from the literature and also address the learning component. The broadest of the three proposed definitions is:

Online education is defined as education being delivered in an online environment through the use of the internet for teaching and learning. This includes online learning on the part of the students that is not dependent on their physical or virtual co-location. The teaching content is delivered online and the instructors develop teaching modules that enhance learning and interactivity in the synchronous or asynchronous environment.

(Singh and Thurman, 2019, p.302).

2.4 Blended learning

2.4.1 Blended learning definitions

As with online learning, the evolution of blended learning has made it problematic to define. What had its origins in distance learning with mail correspondence (Ubell, 2017), expanded to learning where there was some collaboration but no online activity, has progressed significantly to technologically enhanced learning (Hubackova, 2015; Ubell, 2017). It was in the early 2000s that the term blended learning came to prominence (Hewett et al., 2019).

It has been highlighted earlier the inconsistencies in definitions for online learning. This seems equally applicable to the term blended learning as many have reported (Moore et al., 2011; Boelens et

al., 2015; Mubayrik, 2018; Nortvig, 2018; Çırak Kurt and Yıldırım, 2018; Singh and Thurman, 2019; Cronje, 2020; OECD, 2020). Flipped learning is another approach which is seen as a form of blended learning (Isecke, 2016; Fisher et al., 2021).

Cronje (2020, p.120) in recognition of gaps, which omitted attention on pedagogical approaches, has developed a definition of blended learning - "The appropriate use of a mix of theories, methods and technologies to optimise learning in a given context". This is justified by the realisation that mode of delivery is not the defining factor in learning performance and so the focus should be on theoretical underpinnings of teaching and learning instead. The focus is on the blend of pedagogical strategies instead of on modes of delivery. It is this definition of blended learning that aligns with the adult safeguarding training under consideration in this study.

2.4.2 Blended learning characteristics

Many definitions of blended learning have referred to the very specific combination of face-to-face in person classroom instruction with elements of online/ e-learning blended in (Graham, 2012; Halverson et al., 2014; Kintu et al., 2017; Wentworth, 2018). This does not seem to fit with the wider more inclusive context of blended learning that many have been experiencing since the pandemic began. Since March 2020, much face-to-face training has pivoted away from the classroom as a result of the pandemic (OECD, 2020). Wentworth (2018) makes the case that blended learning has evolved into a much wider classification of blended learning with increased

communication, collaboration and interaction.

Li, Cheung et al. (2021) identify blended learning as a positive approach to teaching and learning. They see it as combining traditional learning with innovative approaches to generate a new learning environment for effective learning. This is in correlation with the broad definition of online education proposed in Singh and Thurman (2019, p.302) as referred to earlier.

2.5 Benefits and effectiveness of online and blended learning

2.5.1 Benefits of online and blended Learning

There are many benefits to online and blended learning. Many of them relate to the convenience factors such as accessibility, flexibility, time management and cost (Martin et al., 2018) and the potential to reach far greater numbers is of a huge value (Hewett et al., 2019; Singh and Thurman, 2019). The reduced travel time and ease of access has been reported by participants of online and blended learning programmes (Martin et al., 2018). Considering benefits within the context of a global pandemic puts a heavy emphasis on the enormous convenience factor, which enables uptake of educational opportunities from within the confines of home and from great distances

Other benefits relate to the enrichment online learning brings to the learning itself (Miller, 2019; Koksai, 2020). The online component can bring added benefit of allowing for deeper reflection (Hewett et al., 2019). Collaboration, critical thinking, technical skills and a global perspective

can all be improved and expanded on with online learning (Miller, 2019).

The ultimate consideration of benefit has to be effectiveness. The conveniences and accessibility factors highlighted should not overshadow the measure of effectiveness of online learning. There have been a number of meta-analysis reviews supporting online learning as being more effective than traditional classroom programmes (see 2.5.2).

Means et al. (2013) found learning achieved in online programmes to be more favourable to face-to-face classroom programmes. An earlier meta analytical study by Zhao et al. (2005) looked to identify factors that affect effectiveness of distance education. While they reported on many comparative studies concluding no significant difference between distance and traditional classroom learning, they explored these studies further to gain a greater understanding. They found evidence supporting significant difference in distance learning with certain features. Namely, higher instructor involvement, media involvement and live human interactions.

2.5.2 Effectiveness of online and blended Learning

In line with this research project, the literature reviewed on the effectiveness of blended learning has focused on blended learning to a greater degree than online. This is owing to the fact that online learning is frequently depicted as wholly online with no synchronous contact.

The challenge posed by the heterogeneity of definition becomes apparent. Many studies evaluating blended learning have aligned with assorted definitions so it becomes debatable whether what is observed with beneficial effect in one study could be comparable to another differing context of blended learning. Notwithstanding this, there is evidence for equal (Martin et al., 2018) and greater (Bernard et al., 2014; Vo et al., 2017; Wandera, 2017; Malissa, 2018; Çırak Kurt and Yıldırım, 2018; Kazu and Yalcin, 2022) learning outcomes compared with more traditional approaches. Different studies produce evidence for particular aspects of blended programmes and pedagogical features.

Martin et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal study comparing differences in learning outcomes for healthcare professionals training across four different modes of delivery. These were face-to-face, online, and blended and videoconferencing. A mixed method approach was undertaken collecting quantitative and qualitative data pre-training, immediately post and again at three months post-training. Knowledge and confidence was seen to increase across all four modes of training and was sustained at the three-month point. There was emphasis placed on the design element of training to achieve positive outcomes and the role of the instructors in the training was emphasised as an important aspect. Both benefits and risks of online and blended learning were reported. There was acceptance of the convenience and access factors with online and blended learning. Overall, there was no statistical difference noted between the outcomes

across the modes. All modes of delivery can achieve similar learning outcomes. These favourable findings are of particular interest as the study was undertaken within a healthcare workplace context, with post-registration workers across a range of disciplines. This is not unlike the participants of adult safeguarding training in the HSE. Course duration and breakdown between modes in this study are also similar.

In a 2014 meta-analysis, blended learning has been found to produce results that are more favourable over traditional classroom instruction. The kind of technological support involved (cognitive as opposed to content) and greater levels of interactions were found to result in greater academic achievement for learners (Bernard et al., 2014).

A more recent meta-analysis study on the effectiveness of hybrid learning found statistically higher learner academic achievement with hybrid learning (Kazu and Yalcin, 2022). The description of hybrid learning adhered to in the study aligns with blended learning and 'blended learning' was included as a keyword term in the meta-analysis. Nonetheless, there was clear emphasis on face-to-face, in-classroom presence for inclusion in the study. This meta-analysis focused on hybrid learning studies published between 2010-2020. The technology-supported element included various web based tools and applications from learning management systems, blogs and discussion boards. The findings confirmed strong significant effects of hybrid learning for academic achievement. The authors determined

that hybrid learning combines the best of both approaches – face-to-face and online. With the effect size of hybrid learning at a high level the authors proposed the following suggestions: that the use of hybrid learning in educational environments should be encouraged and facilitated, and as the effect was higher in certain disciplines (science and biology) hybrid learning should be particularly encouraged in those disciplines. An earlier meta-analysis (Vo, Zhu and Diep, 2017) had similarly reported a greater learning performance in STEM compared to non-STEM disciplines. Kazu and Yalcin (2022) deliver a strong endorsement for blended learning and it is of note that the final year of the study inclusion criteria was the pandemic year of 2020.

With the varying definitions for blended learning and online learning there must be caution in interpreting evidence of effectiveness. In addition to this consideration, it is also necessary to consider the context of each study as to type of course, pedagogical designs, subject under study and other variables.

2.5.2.1 What makes blended and online learning effective?

In online courses, technology enables learner interactions between teacher and students and among students. It also facilitates communications, discussions, assessments, and feedback and practice opportunities. This happens through the technology and the programme design and not just because of the technology (Nilson and Goodson, 2018).

Learners factors related to positive blended learning outcomes are previous

academic achievement and self-regulation (Vo et al., 2017). The impact formative assessment can have on self-regulation of learning is also noted (ibid). Kintu et al. (2017) established learner characteristics associated with satisfaction with blended learning were learners' attitudes and their self regulation. Learner engagement including behavioural and cognitive engagement is positively affected by human interaction in blended learning (Hewett et al., 2019).

The role of the trainer / facilitator is also important (Çırak Kurt and Yıldırım, 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Siah et al., 2021). Rangel et al. (2015) reported on the benefits for learning when facilitators have an expressive and stimulating presentation style. While this study was not specific to blended learning, it does speak to learning generally and what can impact on learning transfer for students.

Kintu et al. (2017) identified design features associated with learner satisfaction with blended learning. The design features included the quality of technology used, online tools and face-to-face support.

Siah et al. (2021) identifies how blended learning can adopt a constructivism theory and using a community of enquiry framework apply the three presences of social, cognitive and teaching. In a study with student nurses the authors reported significant knowledge increase. There was evidence of discomfort with online social presence, which was thought to relate to the students lack of familiarity with the online platform.

Tutor involvement was seen to enhance cognitive presence. Teaching presence received the highest score of the three presences indicating the pivotal role of tutors in blended learning.

2.6 Online learning readiness

The Law of Readiness presented by Thorndike in 1913 (cited in (Olson and Hergenbahn, 2016, p.56) can be considered to have some bearing as a possible foreshadower of online learning readiness. Learners who doubt their ability in online learning may choose not to enrol or may not complete a programme they have enrolled in (Zimmerman and Kulikowich, 2016).

Learners are not homogenous. They come to learning with varying attitudes, attributes and behaviours (Premlatha et al., 2016). Online learners can differ in ability and motivation to manage learning (Milligan and Littlejohn, 2016). The profile of online learners has likely altered as the provision of online learning changed in recent years. Where online learning was previously seen more so in higher academic achievers and motivated learners with time management (Barbour and Reeves, 2009) and digital skills (OECD, 2020), its presence is now pervasive (Kim and Ketenci, 2019; OECD, 2020) leading to a shifting profile of online learners (Nesbitt, 2020). As pointed out by Heo et al. (2021) the COVID-19 pandemic meant learners had to engage in online learning regardless of readiness.

Factors applicable to readiness for online learning can be broadly categorised as student, practical (time and access), social/communication and technical

(access and competence). Studies have used varying classifications and some overlaps in categories were observed. Factors that align to the context of adult safeguarding and the resulting areas of interest in this study are considered.

Student attributes:

Bovermann et al. (2018) determined high motivation to be a key student factor in online learning readiness and success. Low readiness levels were associated with a-motivation. Self-efficacy (Zimmerman and Kulikowich, 2016; Heo et al., 2021) and self-regulated learning strategies (Broadbent, 2017; Cheon et al., 2021) play an important role in performance in online and blended learning success. Interestingly Tsai (2018) considers self-directed learning as a potential outcome of online learning rather than a pre-requirement to it.

The following categories (time management, communication, social and technical competencies) though presented individually are not entirely suited to separation from student attributes and linkages exist between them.

Time management:

Authors have identified time management as a factor in readiness for online learning both in terms of time management skills and efficacy (Heo et al, 2021) and awareness of time demands and time expectations (Cheon, et al., 2021).

Communication:

Communication factors can relate to general communication self-efficacy (Yu, 2018) and online communication self-efficacy which can be aligned with technical competence (Heo et al, 2021).

Social:

Social readiness looks to how well learners socially interact with peers and instructors and has been found to be positively associated with learning outcomes and learner satisfaction (Hung et al., 2010; Yu, 2018).

Technical:

High self-reported technical competence is associated with enhanced online learning performance (Yu, 2018; Heo et al, 2021) as well as high intrinsic motivation (Bovermann et al., 2018).

In order for online learning to be effective it is necessary to understand participants' online learning readiness (Hung et al., 2010; Yu, 2018) and their perspective and attitude toward online learning (Tsai, 2018). Abe (2020) looks at the issue of whether online learning may suit some individuals over others based on their personal characteristics. Their study looked at personality measures (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience) and linguistic styles (word count and analytic thinking measures) along with performance measures in online learning. Successful online learning was associated with conscientiousness, analytical thinking and openness to experience. It was also acknowledged that the characteristics predictive of positive outcomes in online learning are also associated with positive academic outcomes in classroom-based programmes. The most robust predictor of positive academic achievement online was found to be the student's word count in online contributions e.g. on discussion boards and quizzes. This has implications for programme design to purposely build

a Community of Inquiry model thereby facilitating online social discourse.

Yilmaz (2017) explored e-learning readiness of students and delved into how it affects student motivation and satisfaction in a flipped classroom context, as it is assumed that motivation and satisfaction are impacted by student's e-learning readiness. E-Learning readiness was confirmed to be a significant predictor of satisfaction and motivation in flipped classroom learning. The implication of this is that to affect students' satisfaction and motivation, readiness for e-learning must be established and gaps addressed where necessary. Gaps may relate to tutors' skills relevant to the flipped classroom context as well as students' skills. In addition it may be necessary to consider the technology tools used regarding suitability, ease of use and effect on self-efficacy for students, as these factors were found to influence motivation. This study was carried out with students of a computing class so they may not be comparable with other cohorts. However, it voices importance to understanding e-learning/online learning readiness of students, as it is found to influence motivation and satisfaction.

It is evident from the literature that there are various tools to determine readiness for online learning (Tang et al., 2021). Martin et al. (2020) developed a survey instrument, which assessed the importance placed on online learning from the students' perspective and their confidence in their own ability.

Four types of competencies; student attributes, time management, communication and technical were included. An adapted form of this instrument was employed for this study to measure adult safeguarding designated officers' readiness for online learning.

Çınar et al. (2021) put forward that merely transitioning to online because of a requirement or convenience is not good enough if there is no consideration as to learner readiness for e-learning. The reasoning for determining safeguarding designated officers' readiness for online learning must be kept to the fore so that ultimately programme design and accessibility can be improved. There is potential benefit of such tools to inform strategies to boost online readiness (Cheon et al., 2021). Even if a partial return to classroom were to happen for this safeguarding programme, an online element will likely remain. It is important then to determine if there are gaps in readiness for online learning among this group and if recommendations or changes can be made to address any such gaps. It is evident that online learning readiness and learners achievement are positively linked (Yu, 2018).

The issue of online readiness for safeguarding practitioners has been raised in the aftermath of COVID-19 (Anka et al., 2020). More so in terms of readiness to undertake virtual safeguarding assessments rather than training, nonetheless the need for training enabling practitioners to use digital tools is connected.

2.7 Perceptions of blended learning

Learner satisfaction provides important information regarding how well students are coping with a programme of study and can be associated with persistence. Bovermann et al. (2018) reported that high satisfaction increases the perseverance of learners in achieving their intended learning outcomes. Kintu et al. (2017) established a positive relationship between perceptions of programme design, some learner characteristics and learning outcomes. Understanding student perceptions of blended learning is important as satisfaction affects engagement and therefore has a role in achieving effective blended learning (Bhagat et al., 2015).

Recent research determined that flipped and blended learning positively influence perceptions of student engagement, performance and satisfaction (Fisher et al., 2021). In looking at what influences this they found a well-flipped class is engaging and can improve performance resulting in satisfaction. It is the learner engagement that is key. The active learning environment in a well-designed flipped classroom facilitates this engagement.

A review of 71 articles on flipped classroom learning (Akçayır and Akçayır, 2018) found that more than half of the studies reported improved learner performance, with active learning strategies thought to be a key element in this finding. In addition to performance, student satisfaction, engagement, motivation and increased confidence was also reported. Some challenges were also identified and those that related to student perceptions related to time and

workload factors, personal preference, access to technology and to a lesser extent anxiety and resistance to new approaches.

Bhagat et al. (2021) reported on gaps in existing tools to measure students' perceptions of blended learning. The tool they developed consider perceptions relating to three factors, namely course design, learning experience and personal factors. They, and Dang et al. (2020), recommend including demographic factors in similar research as it may add further information to the understanding. From the viewpoint of this study exploring perceptions of adult safeguarding training, it is considered of value to analyse responses across demographic factors (age group, employment sector whether directly HSE or voluntary service (HSE funded) employed and education level) to determine any difference of significance.

A positive association is noted between blended learning outcomes (perceptions and academic achievements) with perceptions of good integration between environments, online and face-to-face (Ellis et al., 2016). They (ibid) also found that for students where there was not a perception of good integration between environments, there was less favourable academic outcomes. This is important learning for course designers so that efforts can be made to ensure students understand the learning environments and how they are designed to integrate with each other so as to aid their preparation, execution and reflection on course work.

Han and Ellis (2020) developed and validated a tool to assess blended learning. This tool looked at perceptions

relating to integrations between face-to-face and online learning, online contributions and online workload. Their tool was designed to measure at course level as opposed to degree level. As the designated officer is a workplace programme, this instrument is deemed suitable, albeit with some adaptations, for this study. The adaptations will take account of evaluation data already existing from the HSE learning management system HSELand for the designated officer programme.

2.8 Contextual subthemes

2.8.1 Problem Based Learning

The complex and complicated nature of adult safeguarding concerns has inevitably led to training being designed and provided using a problem based learning approach. This allows for consideration between the dynamics of risk versus protection, consent, capacity and human rights. Fictional case scenarios allow for authentic real-life issues and dilemmas for staff to be engaged with and discussed.

Problem based learning (PBL) evolved from medical education in the 1960s as an endeavour to help students apply their knowledge to practice (Khoiriyah et al., 2015) and it soon spread to other disciplines (Lu et al., 2006). Problem based learning is grounded in constructivist theory and adult learning principles of self-directed learning (Lu et al., 2006; Henderson, 2016; Salinitri et al., 2016). Keeping true to the design pedagogy is an important issue raised by Khoiriyah et al. (2015).

PBL design as the name suggests centres on a problem. Students are presented with information – usually an ill-structured problem and are required to engage in collaborative enquiry to gain a better understanding of the issue and to come up with learning issues or solve the real world problem (Lu et al., 2006).

PBL has evolved and been adapted over the years (Henderson, 2016) and there are varying definitions (Savery, 2006). PBL as described within Mohamed et al. (2011) supports pedagogical values.

Problem-based learning is a methodology that engages students in the active pursuit of data to accurately solve a simulated real-life problem. In a PBL environment, distinct topics are not the focus of learning as typically occurs in a lecture setting. Instead, students are responsible for critical analysis of real-life clinical problems. The instructor abandons the traditional didactic model in which he/she assumes the role of content expert and distributor of information and instead becomes a facilitator of student learning.

(Mohamed *et al.*, 2011, p516.)

Ill-structured problems and dilemmas are characteristic of the nature of safeguarding scenarios used in training. As Lu et al (2006) tells us, ill structured problems are multi-dimensional and do not often lend themselves to a neat straightforward solution. This complexity adds to the learning opportunity as it can mimic real life safeguarding issues. Learners gain practice in assessing and reasoning in a safe environment.

PBL has been described as a way of finding solutions for wicked societal problems (Jørgensen et al., 2012; Thomassen and Jørgensen, 2021), which for adult safeguarding considerations could not be more apt. Embedding complexity, uncertainty, contradictions and value conflict into PBL makes it practical and relative to the real world.

It is unquestionably not the problem alone that makes up problem based learning. Key components are learner involvement, collaborative working, reflective thinking maintained by self-directed learning and scaffolding (Lu et al., 2006).

2.8.2 Workplace Blended and Online Learning

Halverson et al. (2014) in their analysis of the most cited literature on blended learning between 2000 and 2011 determined that less than 5% percent of it addressed blended learning within a professional development context. It must be acknowledged that this analysis confined itself to the more restricted definition of blended learning as combining face-to-face with a form of electronic instruction. Similarly, Hewett et al. (2019) and identify research in blended learning in workplace contexts is lacking. This dearth of evaluation research from online and blended training is particularly lacking in relation to post-registration healthcare workers compared to pre-registration healthcare students (Martin *et al.*, 2018).

A systematic review undertaken to explore blended learning in workplace settings over decades (1990-2018) reported positively in the main over more traditional training (Mubayrik, 2018). But as with

Martin et al. (2018), challenges were identified. Ilott et al. (2014) found workplace blended learning to be cost effective and acceptable for hospital based clinical knowledge and skills training. Their study measured learning effect post training and again at six months. They also note some challenges including time, space and technology access constraints.

Schaefer et al. (2020) brings attention to the pedagogical strategies in workplace online learning, making the point that merely offering slides and tutorials are not adequate but there is a growing appreciation of the need for social components of learning to be addressed in line with social constructivist approaches to learning. Research findings point to the importance of human interaction for engagement in blended learning (Hewett et al., 2019). This focus on pedagogical design for workplace online learning is also addressed by Tsai (2018) and by Adánez-Martínez et al.(2022) in their evaluation of active learning methodologies as referred to earlier (see 2.3).

2.8.3 Implications of COVID 19

Since March 2020, much face-to-face training transitioned online as a result of the pandemic (Ali, 2021; Cohen, 2021; HSE, 2021c). Although this brought significant change the OECD (2021) view this as an accelerator of existing trends rather than a solo catalyst for change. The abrupt shift to online learning was not without difficulty. Broadband and equipment deficits as well as financial and social implications had repercussions (Ó Caollaí, 2021).

The OECD (2020) reported in July that year on early learning from the pandemic. They looked at online (and blended) learning and explored potential in increase adult learning opportunities online. Ireland is ranked at the lower end of OECD countries for both incidence of online learning (7th lowest of 32) and online learning by problem solving skills (7th lowest of 30) (OECD, 2012 (cited in OECD, 2020)). While it is recognised that access had increased for some groups, they highlighted the requirement to further develop digital skills. They affirm that online learning is set to continue to increase but issues to be addressed are highlighted. This report outlines pertinent information regarding online learning and presents key lessons from the pandemic experience. An awareness of these issues are important so that they can be addressed in so far as possible at planning stages.

Cohen (2021) question if the rushed escalation of online learning provision in response to the pandemic has been at the cost of quality pedagogical design. The case advocating for specific online pedagogical approach rather than merely applying classroom based theory to an online environment is evident (Tsai, 2018; Shearer et al., 2020; Cohen, 2021). The paper by Cohen (2021) makes it clear there can be many benefits to online learning design over a traditional classroom approach where cognitive psychology of learning principles can be weighted in favour of students having greater control over their learning.

The OECD (2021) suggest that even among pre pandemic adopters of online training, that in-person face-to-face training will continue to be important in to the future. They report that for some companies the combination between face-to-face and blended formats could bring the best of both worlds, facilitate greater flexibility with online and retain the benefits of in-person contact.

2.9 Challenges

Lomer and Palmer's (2021) study identified among blended learning students a consumerist narrative, which is not altogether surprising given the increased marketization of new learning technologies (Burke and Larmar, 2021). Lomer and Palmer (2021) reported students expressed a perception of getting less value for money with online learning and indicating that face-to-face learning was 'where learning happened'. There was also some opposition expressed where online components were perceived as relieving pressure on educators while placing extra burden on students. This was even more so where these online components were not assessed or graded. This tallies with the need identified by Ellis et al. (2016) to ensure there is good integration between blended learning components and that students understand the means by which this integration is to support learning.

Effective blended or online learning requires competence and confidence in computer skills (Kintu et al., 2017; Siah et al., 2021). Understanding learners' needs in this regard is an important consideration in proposing and designing blended learning programmes. A lacking in competence or confidence does not

preclude a blended learning approach but knowledge of it ensures that appropriate support and technological orientation sessions could be provided as needed.

Online learning can potentially impact on students' connections and could contribute to isolation and disempowerment (Rose, 2017; Burke and Larmar, 2021). This raises moral and ethical considerations. The extent to which this might be a concern within a workplace setting could be less but with the topic of adult safeguarding, which can be very emotive it is a reminder to ensure social support considerations are included at design stages and perhaps for designated officers more generally in their work.

2.10 Literature review conclusion

Why be concerned with perceptions of blended learning? Halverson et al. (2014) found that over a third of research on blended learning (2000-2011) concerns itself with perceptions, attitudes, preferences and expectations. A number of reasons for this pervasive focus on outlooks are put forward. The ease of collecting such data may be a factor. The need for further research evaluating blended, online learning versus traditional face-to-face training is recognised and a particular case is made for doing this in healthcare settings (ibid) and for focus on health care professionals in practice (Martin et al., 2018).

There is a tendency for those championing blended learning to concern themselves with whether blended learning is being perceived as losing something from the displaced face-to-face time (Halverson et al., 2014). It is noted that that potential loss of identity and some

concerns as to facilitators potential displacement as knowledge experts has previously been raised from academic facilitators of training (Hanson, 2009) long before COVID-19 accelerated the ubiquitous-ness of online learning.

Ubell (2017) makes a curious observation about online learning. The idea of online learning attracts plenty of critique and question yet the infiltration of online technology into all other aspects of our lives (communication, social, commercial, travel) has not attracted the same degree of discussion or debate and has been accepted seemingly much more readily.

The impact of the digital age on education has resulted in a paradigm shift (Bates, 2014) which shifted further with COVID-19 (Ali, 2021). In a post pandemic world, it is clear that the value of online learning has been cemented. Koksall (2020, p.3.) goes further with his prediction that "online learning is the future and will undoubtedly replace land-based learning in the future".

Means et al. (2014) cited in Nilson and Goodson (2018) say of online learning that is not about what has always been done, only faster, better and more efficiently, but is about providing learning experiences that would otherwise be impossible without technology.

Tang et al. (2021) have identified, notwithstanding students' readiness for online learning, there may be a requirement to motivate teachers to change their approach or style for successful online teaching practices.

The literature referred to herein promotes the approach of online blended learning

as being effective in achieving its aim and as being well received by learners. If this approach is to be continued it is timely and appropriate to assess readiness for online learning with this cohort and to assess their perceptions of the programme so that it can be improved.

3. Study design

3.1 Research methods

3.1.1 Overview

A descriptive study was employed to survey staff who have completed the adult safeguarding designated officer programme since it moved to an online format in late 2020. This study sought to examine their readiness for online learning and their perceptions of a blended training approach, which was introduced to the education programme in autumn 2020 (since the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed face-to-face classroom training delivery).

It was decided to use a self-administered online survey for this study of this population and this choice was influenced by many factors. It allows easy distribution among a geographically dispersed group and respondents can complete in their own time.

3.1.2 Quantitative survey

Two survey instrument were used in this study (see section 3.3.3) and both were quantitative in design.

The questionnaire design used closed questions with discrete variable options for responses.

Likert scales are used for the majority of questions, allowing a measure of intensity of feelings around certain themes (Bryman, 2016).

While three open ended questions were included across the two quantitative instruments, it is not considered as having altered the methodology to mixed-method, but is as Gilles et al. (2017) suggests, a measure to compliment a quantitative survey.

3.1.3 Survey instruments

Data is collated and analysed from two separate sources using three distinct survey tools and each of these are outlined below.

- 1) A self-administered online questionnaire focusing on readiness for online learning and perceptions of blended learning was used. The questionnaire combines two previously validated tools; Student Readiness for Online Learning Tool (Martin et al., 2020) and the Perceptions of the Blended Learning Environment Questionnaire (Han and Ellis, 2020). Minor modifications were made to account for local circumstance and language. Demographic questions relevant to the survey population were added.

Student Readiness for Online Learning questionnaire

The Student Readiness for Online Learning Tool (SROL) tool developed by Martin et al. (2020) looks at readiness by ascertaining the importance placed on online learning by the students and ascertaining their confidence in

their own ability. The tool combines four subsets of competencies; student attributes, time management, communication and technical and asks students about these four areas as they relate to their importance for online learning and as they perceive their own confidence in these areas. The tool was modified slightly to account for context and language to ensure applicability to the programme of study and population in question. Permission of author was obtained.

Perceptions of the Blended Learning Environment questionnaire

The Perceptions of the Blended Learning Environment Questionnaire (PBLEQ) developed by (Han and Ellis, 2020) looked at perceptions relating to three areas: integrations between face-to-face and online learning, online contributions and online workload. The authors (ibid) developed and validated the test. They report it as having potential to ascertain and explore students' perceptions of blended learning across varied disciplines and this is one of the reasons it was attractive for this study. In addition to this, another benefit is that it is designed to measure at course level as opposed to degree level. As the programme in question is a course level programme this married with this study. The tool was modified for use. Permission of author was obtained.

- 2) Results of a pre-existing evaluation questionnaire on the HSE's learning management system HSeLanD was accessed and analysed. This questionnaire is sent to all staff who complete designated officer training via this blended approach and it is completed anonymously. At the time of this study, of the 233-population sample, 87 had completed this evaluation questionnaire.

HSeLanD post completion evaluation questionnaire

While this is a pre-existing tool with responses already collated, it is not considered secondary analysis as described in Bryman (2016). This data is specific to the training programme and is a post programme evaluation, the results of which had not previously been analysed.

This is a 12 item questionnaire and includes questions on perceptions relating to the programme, applicability to role, mix of text images and interactive-ness, preference for online versus classroom, achievement of learning outcomes as well as two open ended questions.

There was no pre notification issued for this survey as evidence does not support its benefits for enhancing response rates (Harrison et al., 2019). It was hoped that designated officers who have completed the HSE training and have linked with the National Safeguarding Office to complete their training might feel somewhat invested to support the study.

3.1.4 Sampling

The population of interest is all staff who have completed designated officer training since it moved online in autumn 2020. These staff are employed in HSE and HSE funded services across disability services and services for older persons. They are from various professional healthcare backgrounds. As the population in question is a small diverse group (n=233) it was decided to survey all members.

3.1.5 Survey pilot

The survey instrument was piloted with a small number of designated officers (seven) after which amendments were made. The pilot highlighted some questions considered ambiguous and revisions were made.

As the HSeLanD post-programme questionnaire is already in use and its data available, it was not included in the pilot.

3.2 Data analysis

3.2.1 Analysis

The Microsoft Forms software package was used to collate responses in this study. This software allowed data to be downloaded in an excel file. After numerical coding, the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS was used.

The open-ended questions in both sets of responses were analysed and categories identified, these were then numerically coded to allow for quantitative analysis. In addition to this, responses were considered from a qualitative perspective, grouped and presented and considered thematically.

3.3 Limitations of the research

The findings from this study are not generalisable to other cohorts of online or blended learning, owing to the small scale of the study and the specific nature of the programme under investigation.

It is recognised that there can be inherent disadvantages with online surveys and these can include technical differences for potential responders such as device access and network connections as well as poorer online skills for some responders (Evans and Mathur, 2005; Bryman, 2016). It must be acknowledged that the use of an online survey to measure readiness for online learning is open to bias, as those with less online/digital skills may not complete the survey. This was considered at survey design stage. As the designated officers are somewhat senior in their services, use email and have completed the blended programme it was deemed that this potential bias was minimal and it was appropriate to continue with an online survey.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Permission has been sought and granted from the HSE to undertake this study of adult safeguarding designated officers in HSE and HSE funded services. The survey sample were assured that participation was voluntary and anonymous.

An online survey tool (Microsoft Forms) which includes encryption was used for data collection (Microsoft, no date b). Downloaded data was all anonymous (no participant names or services' names are collated) and stored securely on an encrypted device in line with HSE policy

(HSE, 2014a) to which only the researcher had access. Data has not and will not be shared with any third parties.

All responses to the open-ended questions in the survey have been considered for any confidentiality concerns prior to inclusion in final with this report.

4. Findings (designated officers survey)

4.1 Introduction

This section looks at the findings from this study, which is comprised of two distinct tools. In addition, findings of the HSeLanD post programme evaluation survey are presented and this supplements the data collated on perceptions of the blended programme.

4.1.1 Response rate

The online survey was disseminated to the study sample (n=233) by email on 8th March 2022 and closed on 16th March. The sample was adjusted to 216 to take account of designated officers that had either left their designated officer positions or were out of the office for the duration of the survey and could not have responded. Reminders were sent on 11th and 15th March and 106 responses were received achieving a response rate of 49%. This response rate provides a confidence levels of 90%, with a confidence interval of 6% (Qualtrics.com, 2022).

4.2 Demographics

4.2.1 Gender and age

The majority of respondents were female as depicted in Figure 1. For the 17% males, the majority (89%) worked in disability services. The majority of respondents were aged 36-55 years, while 21% were age 18-35 and 17% were aged 56 years or over

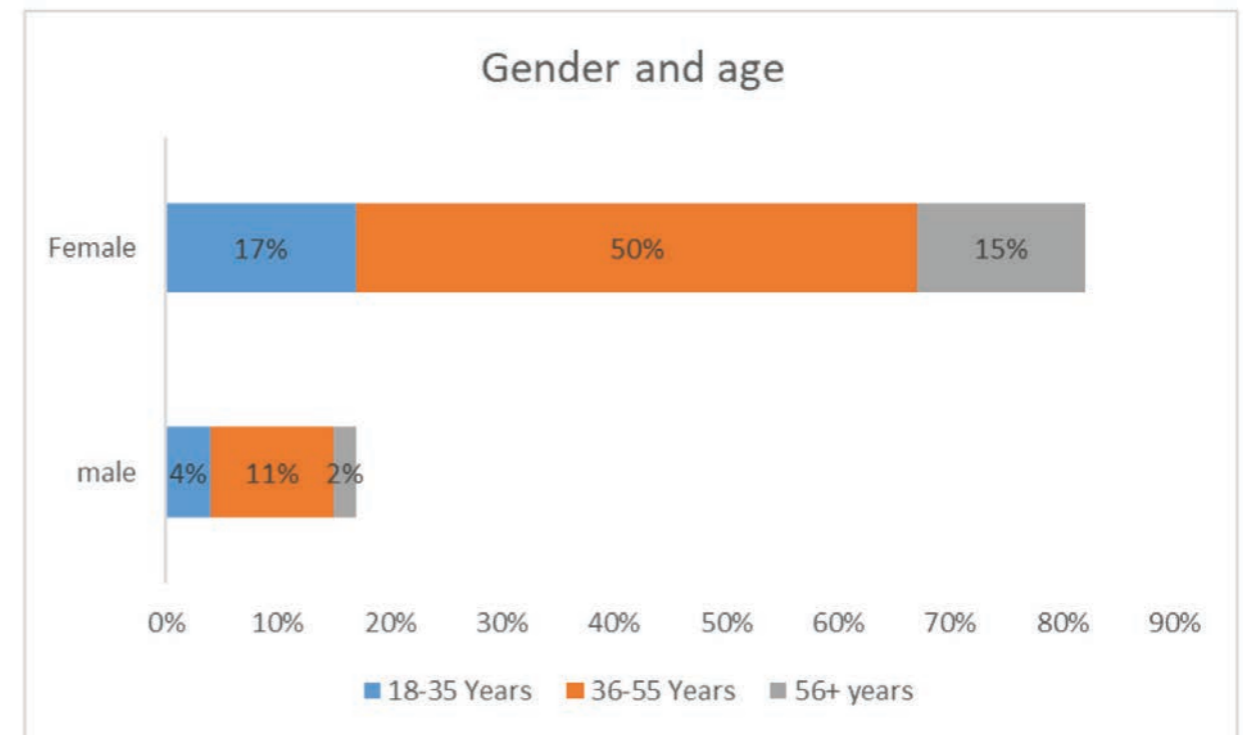


Figure 1 Age and Gender of respondents

4.2.2 Service sector and service type

The distribution of employment in service sector was as expected and in line with the overall profile of designated officers (HSE, 2020). Fifty-eight percent are working in voluntary – HSE funded services, 23% directly in HSE services, 19% in the private sector. As with our total study population, just over three quarters of respondents work in services for Adults with Disability, while 16% work in Older Person’s services and 9% said ‘other’. The majority of designated officers working with adults with disabilities are employed in the voluntary sector.

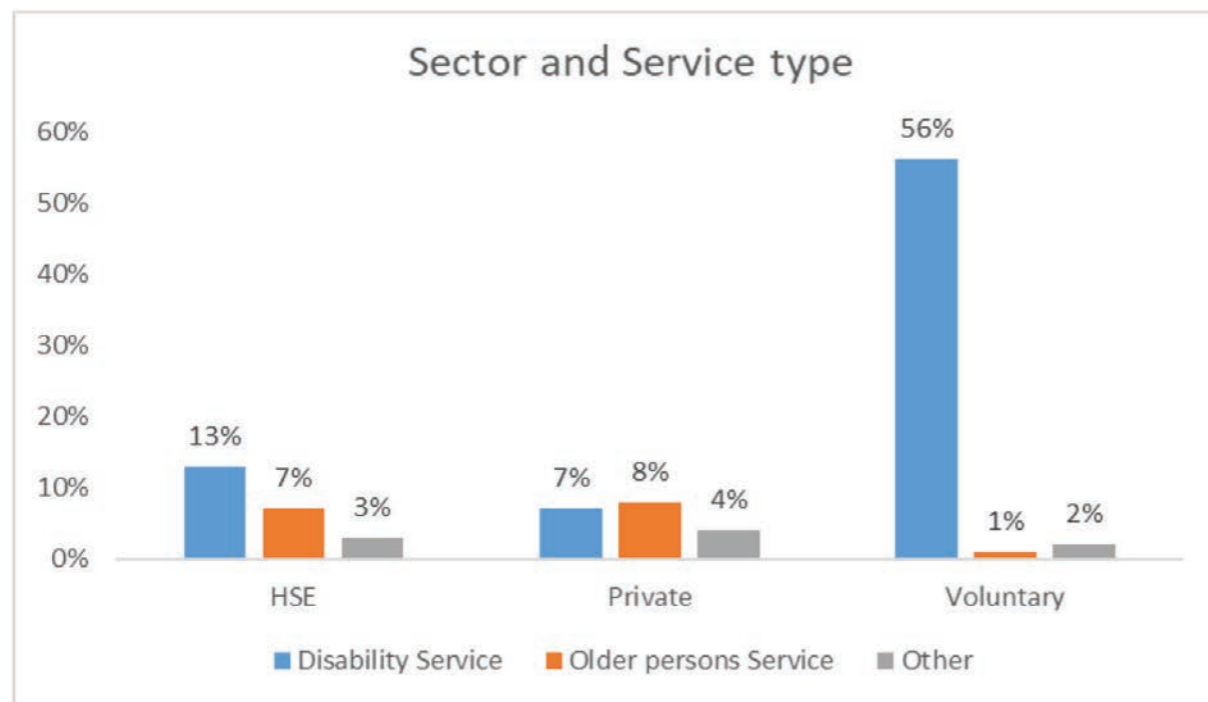


Figure 2 Service sector of respondents and service provision

4.2.4 Length of time in adult safeguarding designated officer role

Over three quarters of respondents had been in the designated officer role for a duration of 2 years or less, with almost half being in the role less than one year.

Table 1 Length of time in an adult safeguarding designated officer role

Less than 1 year	50	47%
1-2 years	33	31%
2-3 years	10	9%
3 years or more	10	9%
Not a designated officer	3	3%

4.2.6 Professional background of designated officers

Social care workers and social workers combined account for 41% of respondents with nursing representation at 29%. Management and administration category makes up 22% of respondents. It is acknowledged that this does not preclude them from also belonging to the other professional grouping provided e.g. nurse managers.

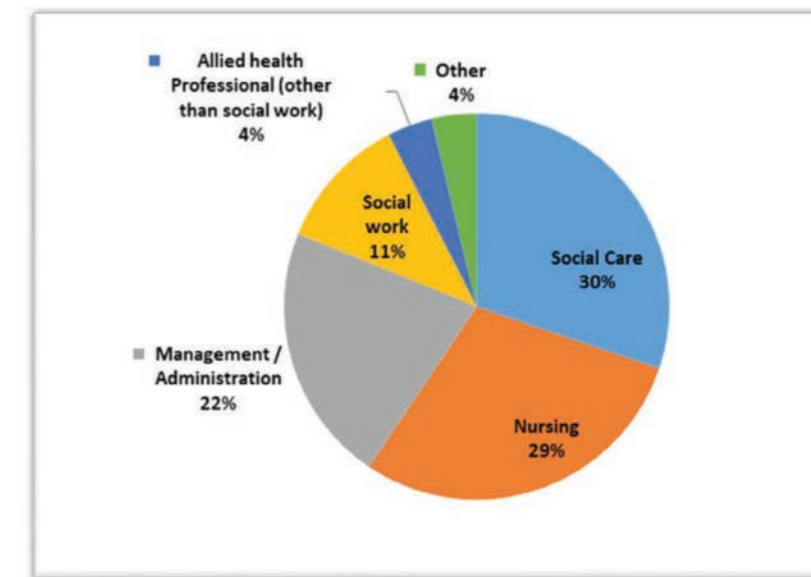


Figure 3 Professional background of respondents

4.3 Readiness for online learning

The factors relating to readiness for online learning examined are learner attributes, time management, communication and technical competencies. These are looked at in two different ways. Firstly, respondents are asked how important these factors are for them in their online learning and then they are asked how confident they are in their own ability for each subset.

4.3.1 Online learner attributes

As observed in Figure 4 respondents placed high importance on all learner attributes. The attribute with the highest mean score 4.5 was ‘to learn from a variety of formats (lectures, videos, podcasts, online discussion /conferencing)’. This attribute also had the highest combined score of importance (96%).

Figure 5. shows the same attributes but from the perspective of confidence respondents expressed in themselves. Across all learner attributes, respondents overwhelmingly expressed themselves to be ‘somewhat confident’ and ‘very confident’. As with importance, the attribute with the highest level of ‘very confident’ expressed (56%, M= 4.53) was ‘to learn from a variety of formats (lectures, videos, podcasts, online discussion /conferencing)’. The attribute with the highest combined confidence score was ‘to set goals with deadlines’ (97%, M=4.46).

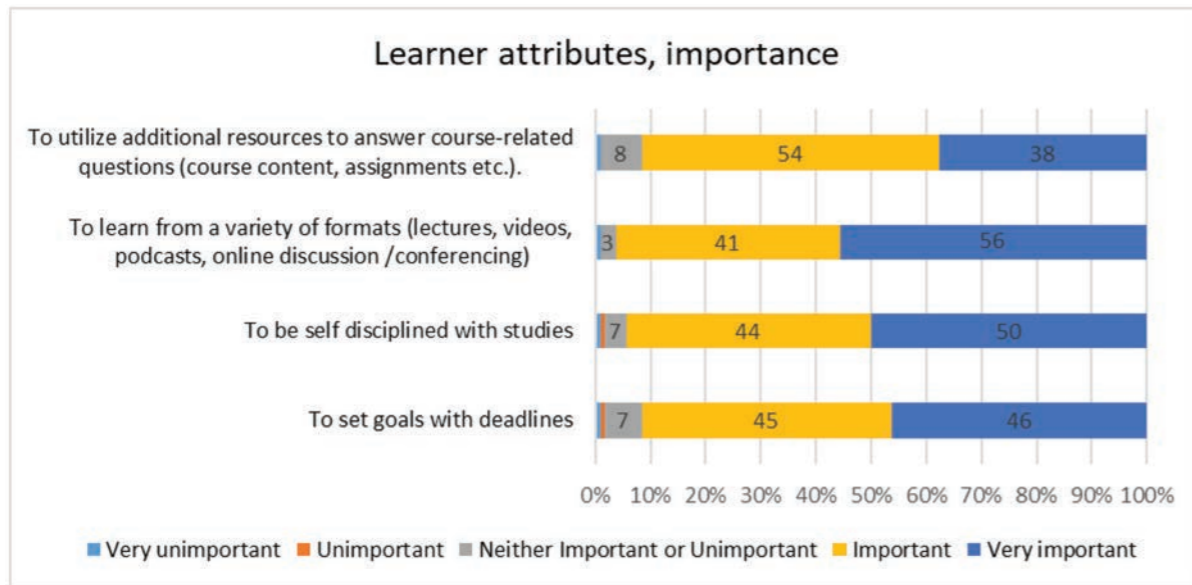


Figure 4 Online learner attributes, importance placed

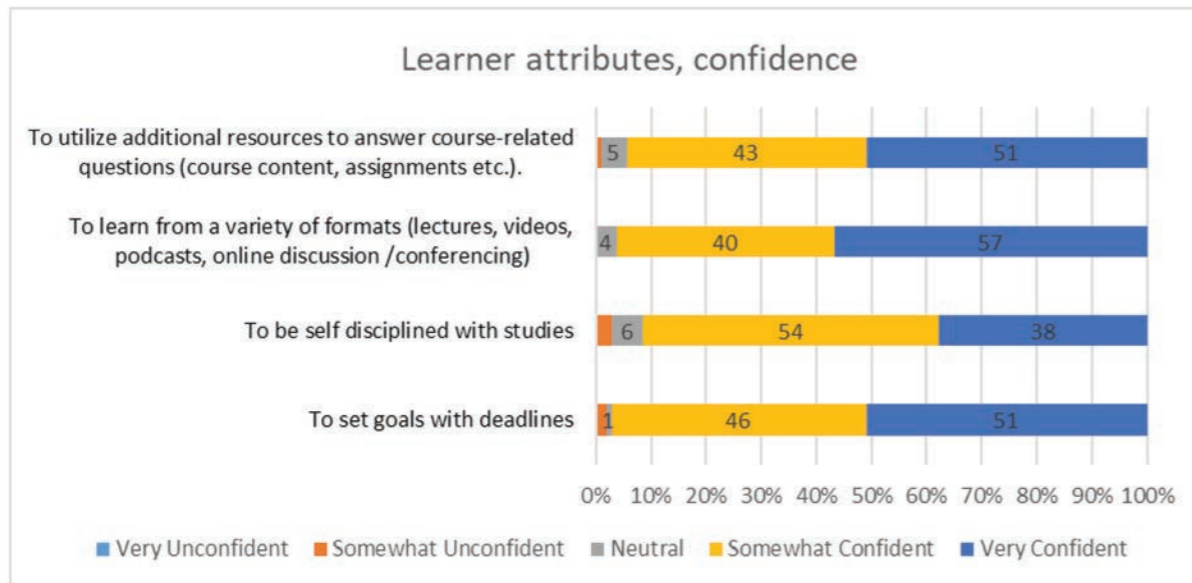


Figure 5 Online learner attributes, confidence placed

4.3.2 Time management

The time management attributes explored were; to stay on task and avoid distractions while studying, to complete assigned course work on time and to manage course deadlines while meeting work commitments. The importance of these for online learning was overall highly rated, as shown in figure 8. All three were rated as important (between 33 – 42%) and very important (between 51-66%) with mean scores of 4.43-4.62.

While these time management factors were deemed important it can be observed in figure 9 that the confidence expressed in respondents' own ability to achieve this was lower. 'To stay on task and avoid distractions while studying', while most respondents rate this as important or very important they declared themselves only somewhat confident in accomplishing this for online learning. There was a higher degree or neutral (neither confident or unconfident) at 15% and somewhat unconfident at 8.5%. Mean scores ranged from 3.89-4.5.

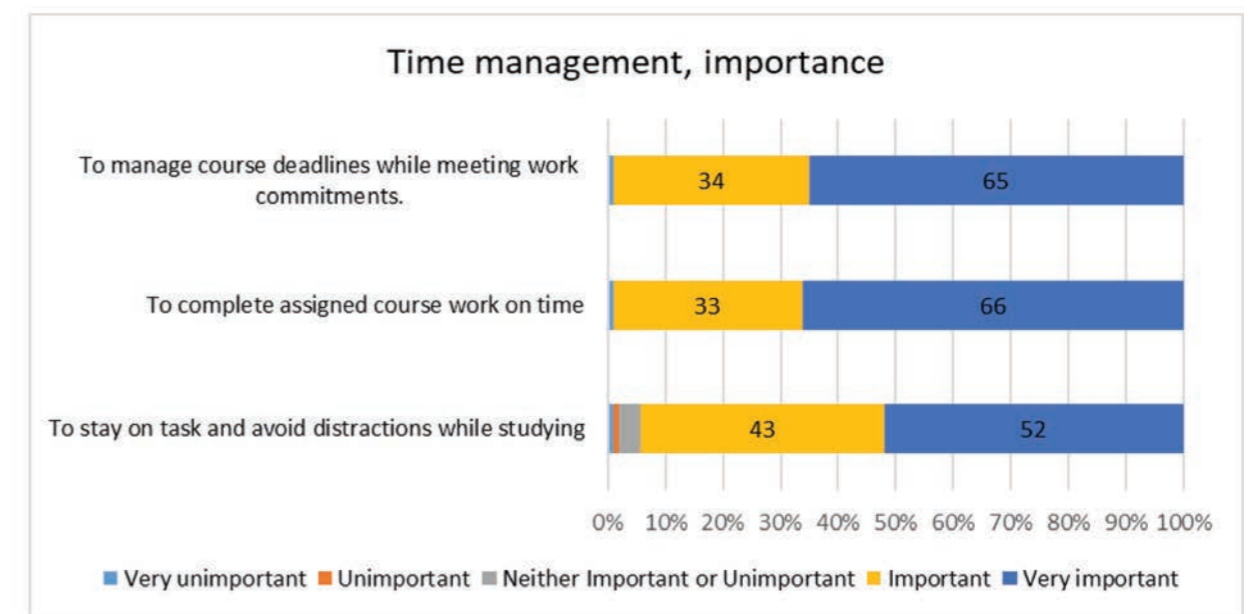


Figure 6 Time management, importance

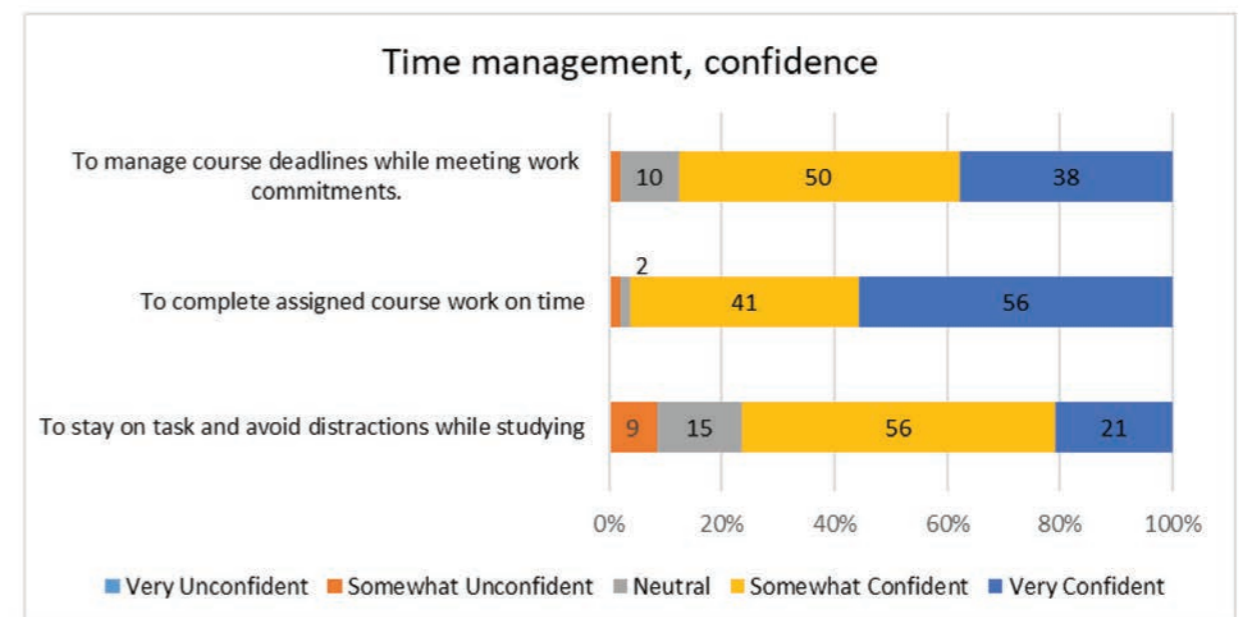


Figure 7 Time management, confidence

4.3.3 Communication

High importance (important and very important) was placed on all competencies for communication in online learning. Combined ratings for importance are all observed to be high, with the highest score for ‘discussing assignment with the instructor and other course participants’ (94%, M=4.3) and the lowest score for importance (while still high) is ‘use asynchronous technologies’ (74.5%, M=4.02).

All the competencies show a similar profile in the breakdown of levels of confidence expressed. Respondents have in the main expressed these levels to be somewhat confident and very confident with the greater proportion of responses falling in to the very confident categories.

Comparing figure 10 and 11 the difference between the importance of certain communication competencies for on-line learning versus the confidence that respondents have in their own ability is observed. Where there is a less proportion of respondents deeming importance in all competencies (M=24.7), it is seen that they report confidence in these competencies to a higher degree (M=26.9).

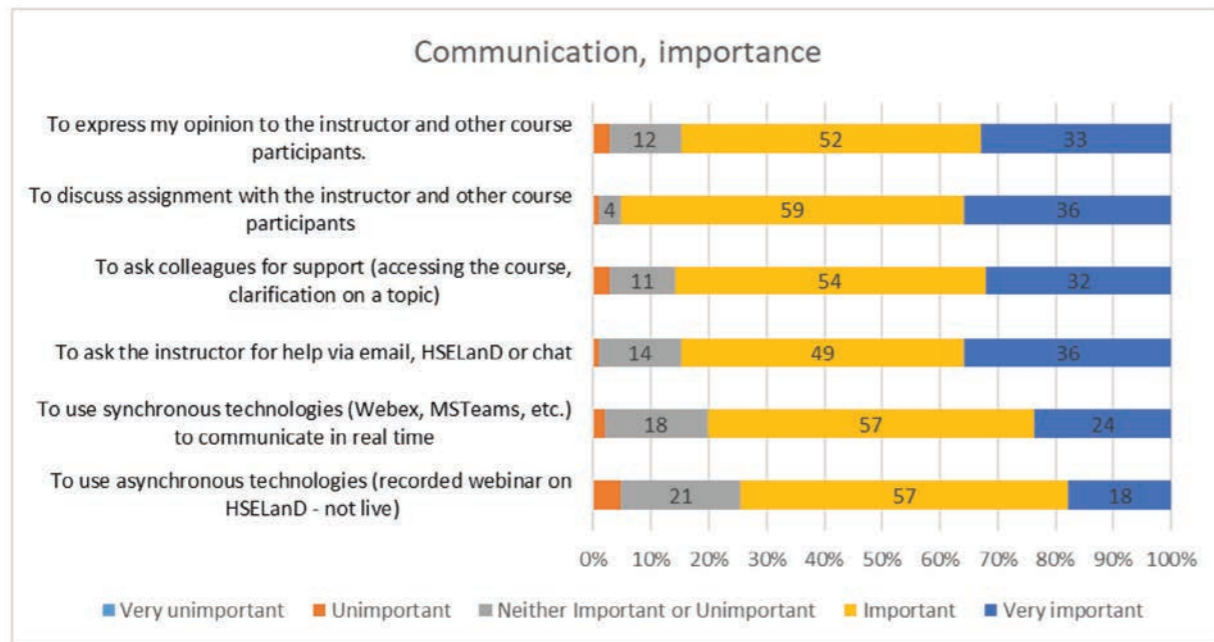


Figure 8 Communication, importance

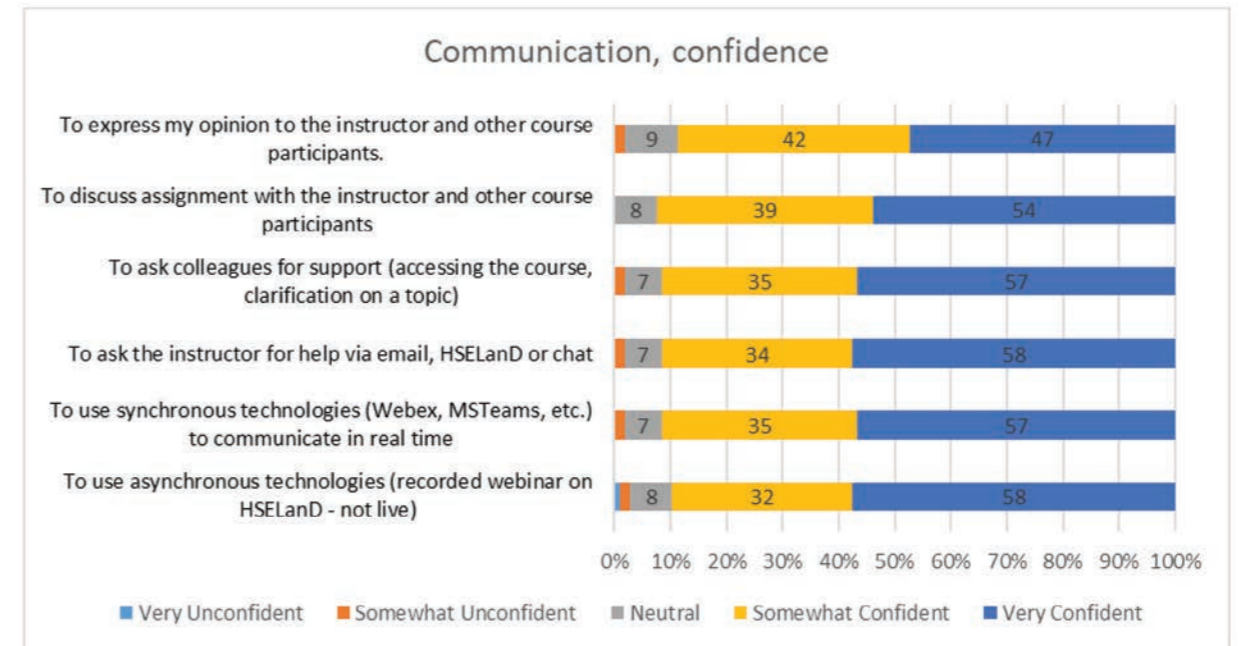


Figure 9 Communication, confidence

4.3.4 Technical

The technical competencies explored were; *complete basic computer operations (e.g. creating and editing documents, managing files and folders), navigate through the course in HSELand, participate in course activities (discussions, assignments, interactive webinar sessions) and access helpdesk/technical support within your organisation for assistance.* Once again, high importance was placed in each of these (M=4.35-4.44). Being able to *complete basic computer operations* had the highest scoring in the very important rating (57%) and the highest combined rating was for the importance of *participating in course activities* for online learning. (98%).

High confidence levels were reported across all technical aspects with each scoring in the sixty percent-and-over range. As with the communication competencies, confidence ratings (M=18.5) expressed higher than importance (M=17.6).

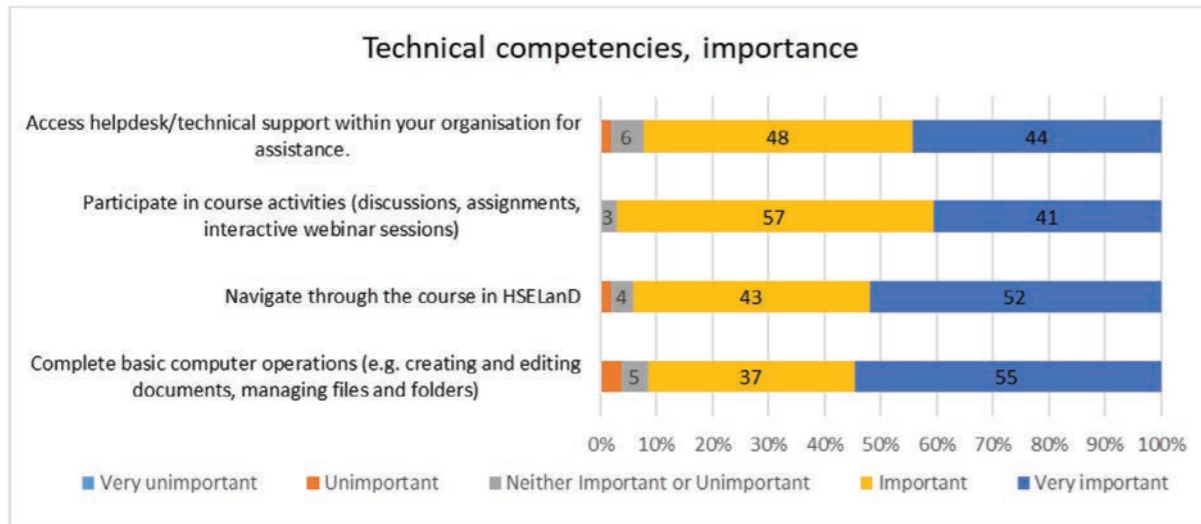


Figure 10 Technical, importance

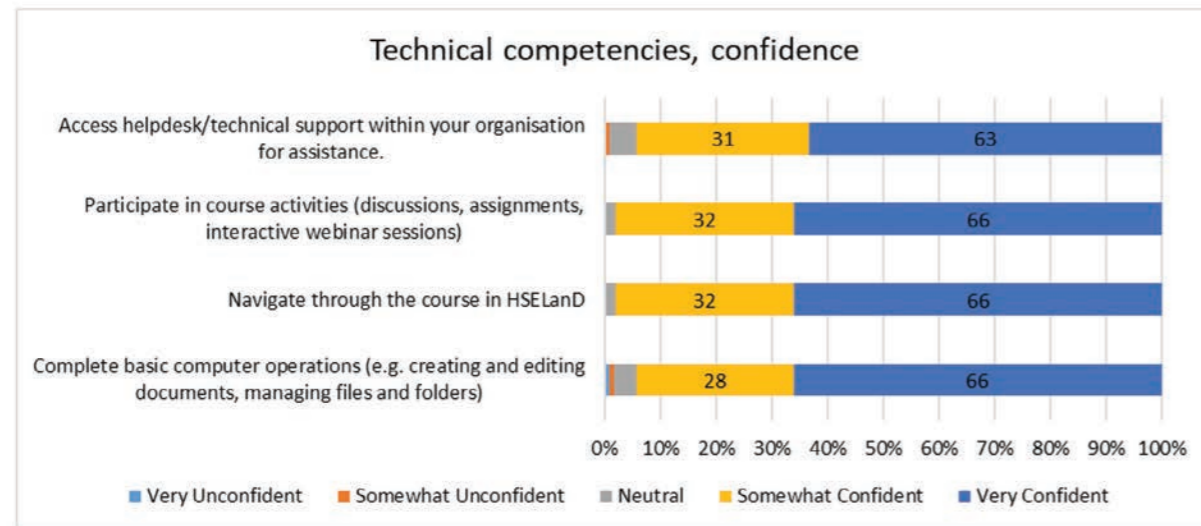


Figure 11 Technical, confidence

4.4 Perceptions of blended programme

Perceptions of the blended learning training programme are considered within two themes, perception of online contributions and perception of the workload. In addition to these, answers to an open-ended question inviting additional thoughts are explored.

4.4.1 Perception of online contributions

Overall, the perception of online contributions to online learning have been positively expressed with respondents agreeing (48-62%) and strongly agreeing (22-30%) with all statements within this theme (M=3.94-4.07). The highest score was noted for the statement contributions from others prompted me to reflect more on the ideas in this course.

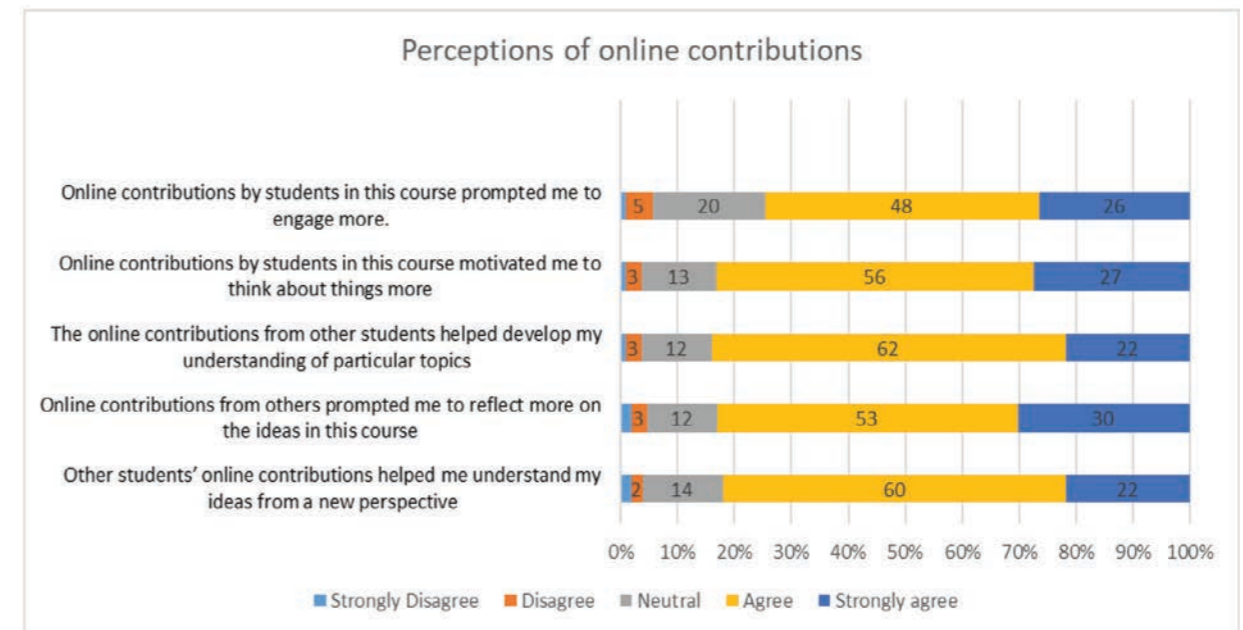


Figure 12 Perceptions of online contributions

4.4.2 Perceptions of the online workload

Perception of the online workload were even more positively expressed (than online contributions) with 52-62% agreeing and 28-39% strongly agreeing across these statements (M=4.09-4.25). The highest level of agreement (over 90% combined) was conveyed for both 'the balance between the online activities and the other tasks was well adjusted' and 'the workload for online activities was suitable' and the highest mean score for 'the workload for the online activities was suitable'.

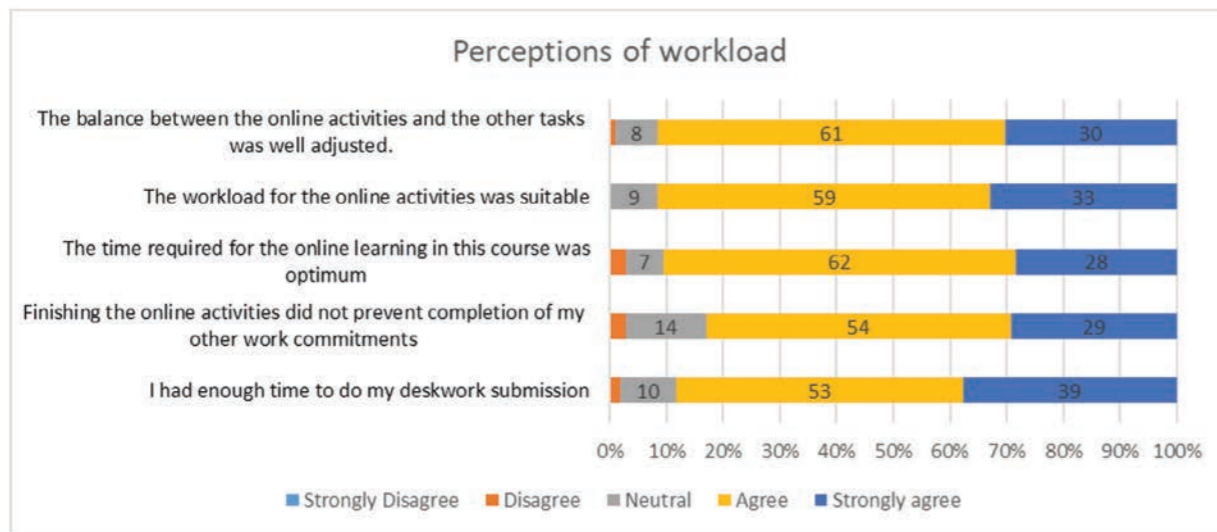


Figure 13 Perceptions of workload

4.5 Further analysis

Cronbach's scale validity test was conducted on each of the sub-theme scales within the readiness for online learning scale (SROL) and the perceptions of blended learning environment scale (PBLQ). All sub-theme scales, bar the learner attributes-confidence scale, met the validity criteria (Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7 (Pallant, 2016)).

Distribution analysis (tests of normality) revealed all the readiness for online learning and the perceptions of blended learning variables scores data violates the assumption of normality (sig values <.05) with histograms revealing negatively skewed data for most scale variables. To explore possible relationship between 1) readiness for online learning and demographics variables and 2) perceptions of blended learning and

demographic variables, The minimum expected call frequency assumption was not met for Chi square tests of independent.

Given the abnormal distribution, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Tests were conducted between: 1) blended learning perception total score variable and gender variable and 2) readiness for online learning total score variable and gender variable. In both instances, there was no significant difference across the groups.

One-way ANOVA was also conducted to determine if there was a difference in 1) readiness for online learning scores and 2) perceptions of blended learning scores for the demographic categorical variables (age, professional background, job sector, client group and length of time as a designated officer). There was no significant difference observed with all sig.values >.05.

4.6 Open-ended feedback

The final question in the online survey provided opportunity for fuller responses as it was open-ended. A quarter of respondents (n=28) gave additional commentary in this final question which sought additional thoughts about their perceptions of the blended designated officer training. Responses were examined for recurring themes as well as being categorised broadly into recommendations, negative and positive comments. Of the 26 comments, there was a substantial mix of positive commentary (16), recommendations for improvement (5), expressions of preference for classroom-based training (6) as well as two critical comments.

The majority of the positive comments related to the blended learning and the balance between individual and online group contributions.

'I found the training and information on line very good and informative, I was able to adjust my time and study around my work load and completion of the studies/assignments.'

'I felt it was very practical training which gave everyone different scenarios to work with which then covered more than one scenario from more than one viewpoint. Other peoples opinions stem from their experiences working in different backgrounds which gave all of us attending the training a more rounded view of how things may be perceived and how different people deal with different situations.'

'The balance between Live Webinar and activities was helpful'

Other benefits identified were the mix of professions and sectors involved in the workshop and the case scenario work.

'I was very happy with the online training and support I got from the safeguarding team. The examples given really teased out the direction to take with safeguarding'

'I really enjoyed the group discussion element of the training, trainees coming from different areas led to different perspectives which led to broader views - which all led to a successful outcome for me. Many thanks'

The critical comments related to interaction lacking, technical difficulties though with an acknowledgement that this was in spite of good learning methodologies.

Recommendations for improvement included more focus on safeguarding paperwork, longer interactive sessions, increased time-period between case scenario submission and the interactive workshop. 'More classes' was also suggested. This may have related to the number of interactive sessions or it may be a reference to having a greater number of dates to choose from.

Six respondents expressed a preference for classroom-based delivery and the opinion that this would promote greater discussion and interaction.

4.7 Existing HSeLanD evaluation survey (designated officer programme)

In addition to the online survey used in this study, results of a pre-existing evaluation questionnaire on HSeLanD, the HSE's learning management system, was analysed. This data has not been analysed prior to this study. This questionnaire is sent to all staff who complete designated officer training via this blended approach for anonymous completion.

4.7.1 Survey results

The HSeLanD evaluation questionnaire uses ten questions employing a Likert scale of agreement and two open ended questions. This online survey is emailed to participants after they have completed the programme and there is no onus to complete it.

Of the 233 population that completed designated officer training from November 2020 to end of February 2022, 87 completed surveys were submitted giving a 37% response rate. The ten questions concerned perceptions relating to the programme content, online delivery and general observations.

4.7.1.1 Content

Statements relating to programme content were all rated positively by the majority of respondents. The statements with the highest combined agreements (88% each) were 'the content of the programme was clear and easy to understand' and 'I was able to achieve the learning outcomes as stated in the programme'.

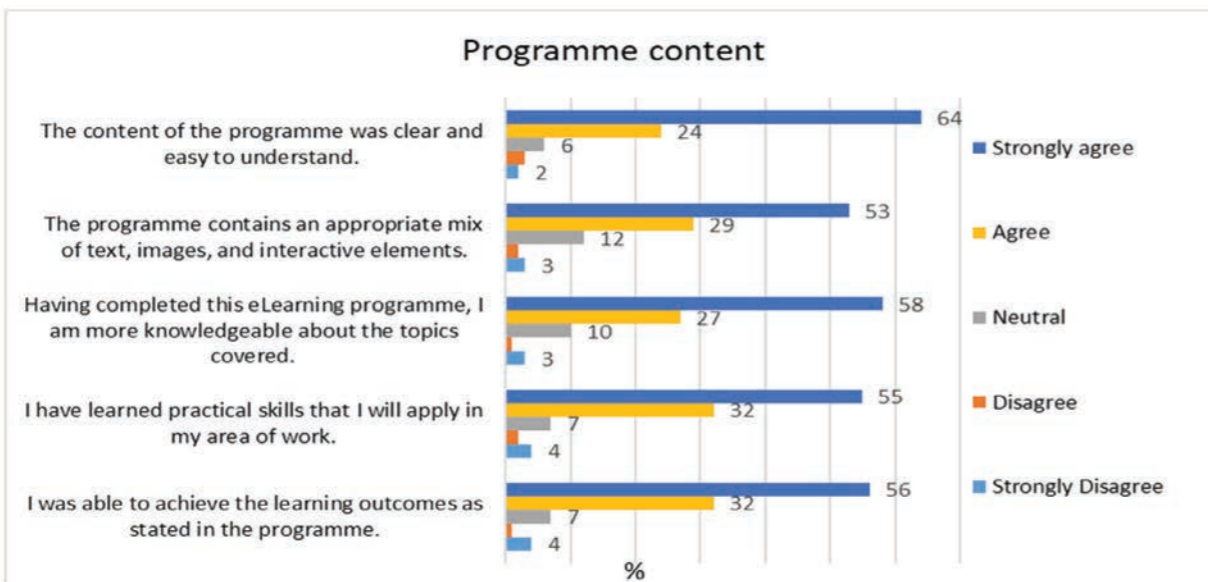


Figure 14 Programme content

4.7.1.2 Online delivery

The benefit of accessing and completing components of this programme at participants' own pace and in their own time was recognised with 65% strongly agreeing.

The highest neutral response was for 'I

preferred completing the programme online rather than completing in a classroom setting'. This is the only occurrence of a neutral (neither agree nor disagree) response scoring higher than the agree options. A higher strongly disagree, relative to disagree scores in other statements, is also noted (8%).

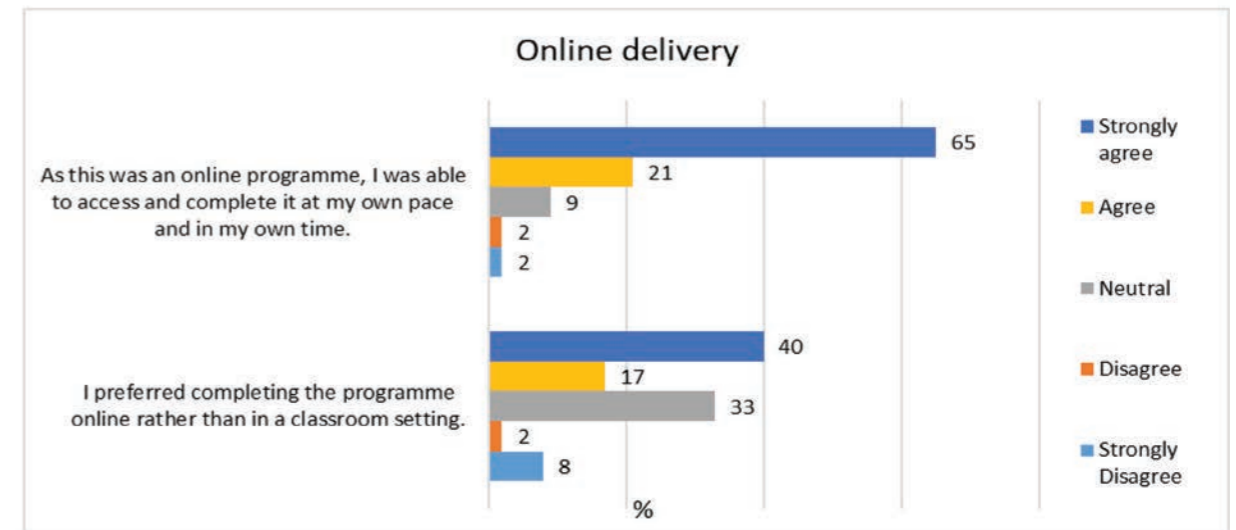


Figure 15 Online delivery

4.7.1.3 General perceptions

The question 'I would recommend the programme to others' question had very high strongly agree score (66%) and a

combined agreement response of 87%. High relatability to one's role was also observed.

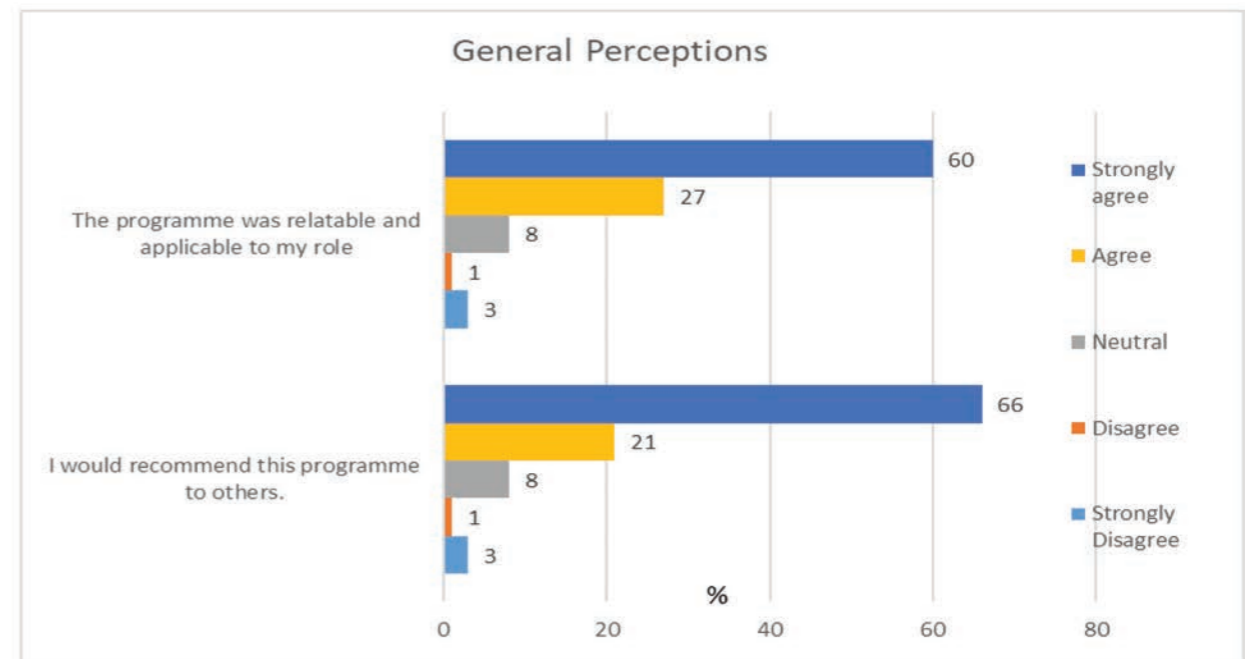


Figure 16 General perceptions

4.7.2 Open-ended feedback

The two open-ended questions were 'please tell us what you would change about the programme' and 'please provide any other comments or suggestions about the e-learning programme'.

Of the 87 respondents, 65 and 61 answered these questions respectively. Of respondents 64% answered 'no' or 'nothing' to the first question what you would change about the programme. For the 2nd question, 62% said 'no' or 'none' for any other comments or suggestions about the e-learning programme. Discursive commentary is considered with the context of these small numbers who elaborated (n=23).

For both questions responses of 'no', 'nothing' and 'none' were coded and separated out. All other responses were collectively categorised into a number of themes; technical, interactive-ness, facilitation, online versus classroom, content and general.

Content (n=26)

Twenty-six comments were broadly themed as content related and these were further categorised as complimentary (n=14) or as making recommendations for improvement (n=12).

The recommendations related to getting specific individualised feedback on submitted case scenario work, including more case scenarios, having a greater focus on required paperwork and '.... having an element where small groups could

work together on a safeguarding scenario might be a helpful addition to the course'.

The positive comments related to the programme being informative, enjoyable, relevant and well laid out. In addition one respondent commented '*... programme did give me the insight of the importance of safeguarding the vulnerable older persons'.*

Online versus classroom (n=12)

Respondents expressed preferences for both online/blended learning (n=5) and classroom (n=7) delivery.

Some expressed the advantage of being able to do the programme in their own time (*'doing remotely was good', 'doing online was really good'*) with the added benefit of being able to re-listen to recorded elements. *'Because I could take this course at my own pace and review and re-listen to each topic if needed, I felt I was able to understand the information better'.*

Another recognised the COVID-19 context the programme has been delivered in - *'Obviously with COVID-19 concerns it was unable to be completed in person. But I feel that an in person course for this topic would have really enhanced the learning and experience'.*

The preference for classroom delivery over online/blended was evident also – *'Classroom based*

learning when restrictions lift', and 'I look forward to return to face to face training'.

Technical (n=8)

Four responses indicated some issues with access and timing of components of the programme:

'I am unclear about the next steps and face to face elements of the programme', and

'E-module keeps sticking and needs to be repeated', while another reported, 'No, I Found it easy to understand and laid out well'.

A couple of the comments relating to technical aspects were ambiguous in nature; *'maybe organised it on Zoom'* and *'I suppose the set-up of the webinar'.*

General (n=6)

Four of these general comments were that the programme was good and expressing thanks, one suggested more time to read the slides. Another comment didn't relate to the programme itself but expressed some of the frustrations that can be experienced in the role -

'In other health care organization, the role of designated officer has a social care background and is a highly authorised and qualified person. However, in my part, it entails huge responsibilities that overpower the other more important day-to-day

governance and management in my designated centre.'

Online interaction (n=4)

One of the respondents reported that '*..it was great to hear the experience of how others answered the scenario from session 2', while the other three identified that more interaction would have been welcomed.*

Facilitation (n=3)

Three responses related to facilitators with two complementing the facilitators (*'...very good'* and *'... excellent'* and one comment indicting sound /audio problem *'increase the voice of the speaker as its quite low'.*

4.8 Conclusion

This section has combined and presented the findings from two separate surveys, a post programme evaluation questionnaire from HSeLanD as well as an online survey specifically tailored to this study. To summarise and conclude this section, the results are considered as they pertain to the research objectives.

What competencies do designated officers consider important for their readiness for online learning?

Designated officers principally reported that all the specified competencies (online learner attributes, time management, communication and technical competencies) are important to very important. The highest importance was placed in time management competencies.

What are designated officer perceptions of their readiness for online learning?

Designated officers expressed they were confident to very confident in their ability to accomplish all competencies in online learning. The highest confidence was in the technical competencies. While less confidence was reported in time management, it had a high score nonetheless. Time management was the only grouped competency that scored lower in confidence level versus reported importance. It is concluded that designated officers readiness for online learning is high.

What demographic factors relate to their perceptions of their readiness for online learning?

Statistical analysis did not reveal any relationship between categorical variables (gender, age, work sector, type of service, length of time as designated officer, and client group) and readiness for online learning. Distribution analysis revealed negatively skewed data with most scores in the positive end of each scale. Readiness for online learning has been found to be high regardless of demographic factors.

What are the designated officer perceptions of the online contributions and online workload in the blended learning programme?

Designated officers reported positively on the five items relating to online contributions with mean scores ranging from 3.94 to 4.07. The highest score was observed for 'online contributions from others prompted me to reflect more on the

ideas in this course'. The five constructs relating to perceptions of blended learning workload were also positively reported on (M=4.09-4.25). The mean scores from designated officers indicate their positive perceptions of the blended learning experience.

What are the designated officer perceptions of the blended designated officer programme?

The mean scores from the PBLEQ indicate positive perceptions of the blended learning experience. This finding is further cemented by the overall affirmative opinions toward the programme demonstrated in the online survey's open-ended question and the HSeLanD evaluation questionnaire. The HSeLanD questionnaire's themes of programme content, online delivery and general perceptions, were all rated favourably by the majority of respondents. It is concluded that designated officers' perceptions of the blended programme are predominantly positive while areas for improvement have been identified.

5. Discussion of findings (designated officer programme)

5.1 Introduction

This section considers the findings in conjunction with the literature reviewed. Mutual findings are identified as well as apparent differences between this study's results and previous similar research.

5.2 Demographics of sample population

5.2.1 Gender and age

This study's respondents are predominantly female (87%). While this is broadly in line with the overall gender profile of HSE staff which is 78% female (HSE, 2022), it did impact on determining if gender and readiness for online learning were correlated. In this study, no significant difference (using Mann-Whitney U Tests) was found between readiness for online learning and designated officers' gender. While this is in parallel with previous readiness studies (Hung et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2020) it must also be considered with caution in light of the unequal distribution of gender observed in this sample and the small scale of the study.

The age breakdown within this study was 18-35 years at 21%, those aged 36-55 years made up the majority at 61% and 17% were aged 56 or over. Age had not been captured as a continuous variable, which influenced analysis options. As age category was divided into three groupings, One-way ANOVA was conducted. There was no significant difference in online learning readiness or perceptions of blended learning and age. Many of the studies reviewed did not

seek to determine if there was a difference in readiness across age groups (Hung et al., 2010; Yilmaz, 2017; Wei and Chou, 2020; Ranganathan et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2021; Çınar et al., 2021). In Martin et al. (2020) where this analysis was captured it did not reveal a difference.

Similarly, some quantitative studies reviewed on perceptions of blended learning did not seek to determine differences in perceptions between age groups (Rahman et al., 2015; Han and Ellis, 2020; Bhagat et al., 2021). This analysis was undertaken in Shantakumari and Sajith (2015) with no significant difference established.

5.3 Readiness for online learning

The findings relating to online learning readiness have been presented across the four constructs of online learner attributes, time management, communication and technical and these are considered within the dimensions of importance for online learning and confidence to achieve them. Designated officers principally reported that all the specified competencies are *important to very important* and that they were confident to very confident in their ability to accomplish all competencies in online learning. It is concluded that designated officers are demonstrating high readiness for online learning.

5.3.1 Online learner attributes

The importance of learner attributes in online learning has been evident in the literature (Zimmerman and Kulikowich, 2016; Broadbent, 2017; Bovermann et al., 2018; Cheon et al., 2021; Heo et al., 2021). This study using the instrument from Martin et al. (2020) examined online learner attributes such as self-discipline, goal setting and self-direction. The highest mean score of importance was 'to learn from a variety of formats' and designated officers also reported the highest confidence in this area. Similar to Martin et al. (2020), in this study lowest importance was placed on 'using additional resources to answer course related questions' and the lowest confidence score was evident for 'being self-disciplined with studies'.

5.3.2 Time management

Of the three dimensions of time management there was consistency between highest and lowest scores across importance and confidence constructs. For both importance and confidence, the lowest mean scores were for 'staying on track and avoiding distractions'. This was also the case in Martin et al. (2020). Highest scores were seen for 'completing assigned course work on time'. Time management was the only dimension of online learning readiness where confidence scores were lower than reported importance scores. This may speak to the challenges for staff trying to complete online learning while balancing existing workloads. The necessity for online learners to exhibit time management skills such as prioritising workloads and planning

assignment completions has been identified elsewhere (Cho and Cho, 2017; Cheon et al., 2021). The related HSeLanD survey item about 'accessing and completing at my own pace and in my own time' did not reveal great time pressures, as only a very low number of respondents disagreed with this statement.

5.3.3 Communication

The communications scales scored higher (combined) than other online learning readiness dimensions indicating the value placed in communication for online learning and the confidence respondents expressed in their own ability. The highest confidence was expressed in ability to 'use synchronous technologies to communicate in real-time' and 'to ask colleagues for support' in online learning. The importance of communication in online learning readiness is well-established (Hung et al., 2010). Respondents expressed less confidence in 'expressing my opinion to the instructor and other course participants' and so consideration should be given to develop, as recommended in Tang et al. (2021), opportunities to enhance student-student interactions and peer support.

5.3.4 Technical

The significance of technical competency for online learning is apparent. High confidence in technical competence is associated with enhanced online learning performance (Yu, 2018; Heo et al., 2021). After communication, the technical dimension scored next highest in importance and confidence for online

learning indicating the high regard for technical competencies.

Importance of technical readiness for online learning has been established as being predictor of learner satisfaction and motivation (Yilmaz, 2017; Bovermann et al., 2018) so these findings of high technical readiness are welcomed.

As with others studies using the same scale (Martin et al., 2020; Chaves, 2021), in this study, learners are placing high importance on technical competence for online learning, with 'complete basic computer operations (creating and editing documents, managing files and folders)' scoring highest. Learners expressed high confidence in their technical competence. In another similar study, despite technical competence being reported as high, it was also reported that unstable internet connectivity was a significant barrier (Chaves, 2021). While this issue was not included in this study, it is worthwhile considering it given the disparity of broadband connectivity across Ireland (Cullinan, 2021; Weckler, 2021). Even where technical competence is high this does not rule out other technical barriers, which may need attention in order to optimise readiness for online learning.

5.4 Perceptions of blended learning

The rationale for determining students' perceptions of blended learning programme has been presented in section three. Positive perceptions of blended learning can be related to perseverance of learners (Bovermann et al., 2018) and intended learning outcomes achievement (Ellis et al., 2016; Bhagat et al., 2021).

5.4.1 Perception of online contributions

The mean scores achieved for perception of online contributions ranged from 3.94 to 4.07, all higher than those in Han and Ellis (2020) which ranged from 2.77 to 3.14. They (ibid) found that usefulness of online contributions of other students to be a key aspect of the online learning environment. The questionnaire items for online contributions relate to contributions by other students and so spoke to the interactive-ness within the programme. The value of online contributions in blended learning in the form of learner interactions is investigated within many of the studies looking at perceptions of blended learning (Rahman et al., 2015; Shantakumari and Sajith, 2015; Hewett et al., 2019; Bhagat et al., 2021; Lomer and Palmer, 2021). Qualitative analysis of blended learning in a workplace context determined that positive perceptions of human interaction positively influence learning, satisfaction and engagement (Hewett et al., 2019). The importance of online contributions is also recognised by others (Rahman et al., 2015; Bhagat et al., 2021). Bhagat et al., (2021) recommend blended learning course designers give attention to increasing collaborative online activities that correspond with learning objectives.

The importance of online contributions from and with other learners in this study are evidenced by the high mean scores and are also reflected in discursive responses. Responses to the open-ended question revealed some insights into perceptions of online contributions:

“I was very happy with the online training and support I got from the safeguarding team. The examples given really teased out the direction to take with safeguarding”.

“I really enjoyed the group discussion element of the training, trainees coming from different areas led to different perspectives which led to broader views - which all led to a successful outcome for me”

“I felt it was very practical training which gave everyone different scenarios to work with which then covered more than one scenario from more than one viewpoint. Other people’s opinions stem from their experiences working in different backgrounds which gave all of us attending the training a more rounded view of how things may be perceived and how different people deal with different situations”.

In contrast to the high scoring for online contributions and the mostly positive comments, a small number expressed negative opinions regarding online contributions and interactions, with one respondent deeming them less worthwhile than contributions that take place in a classroom context:

“In my experience of online blended learning participants do not communicate as freely as in the classroom situation and this detracts from the overall course content”.

“I didn't think there was much interaction and learning from group

work online. For a course like this, I feel that is an important aspect that was missed”.

Open-ended feedback in the HSeLanD survey relating to online contributions and interactions was mixed. Out of four responses, one was favourable while the other three identified that greater levels of interaction would have been beneficial. The qualitative research of Hewett et al. (2019) established that human interaction within blended learning is linked with greater behavioural and cognitive engagement. This is an important consideration given that, albeit a small number of, designated officers have reported that interaction may have been lacking.

5.4.2 Perceptions of online workload

The perception of the online workload scored even more favourably than online contributions in this study with mean scores between 4.09 and 4.25. Parallels are seen with the Han and Ellis (2020) findings which indicated respondents did not find the online workload unmanageable or burdensome. In the HSeLanD survey, only one item related to workload and time commitment. This was rated favourably contributing to the overall positive perceptions of the programme.

Many of the studies examining perceptions of blended learning did not explore online workload and those that did (Shantakumari and Sajith, 2015; Hewett et al., 2019; Han and Ellis, 2020; Bhagat et al., 2021) did so to varying degrees. While perceptions are largely

seen to be positive towards blended learning there are some indications in one of these studies of online workload and time commitment items being rated less favourably (Shantakumari and Sajith, 2015).

None of the commentary supplied in response to the open-ended question related to online workload. Those that spoke to the related issue of time commitments were favourable in terms of being able to balance blended course requirements with work commitments:

“I was able to adjust my time and study around my work load and completion of the studies/assignments”.

“The blended learning gave me an opportunity to complete the training while attending to my day to day job”.

Open-ended feedback in the HSeLanD survey reflected one of the advantages of blended learning, as noted in Rahman et al, (2015) in that it can be flexible and balanced with existing work commitments:

“Because I could take this course at my own pace and review and re-listen to each topic if needed, I felt I was able to understand the information better”.

5.5 Perceptions of blended learning from HSeLanD evaluation survey

The questions from this evaluation survey were grouped into themes of programme content, online delivery and general

observations as presented in section 4. Open-ended responses and questionnaire items relating to online contributions and online workload have been considered above in 5.4.1 and 5.4.2. All other aspects of the HSeLanD evaluation survey are dealt with below.

5.5.1 Perceptions of programme content

A number of statements in the evaluation survey related to programme content and it was also observed as a theme in open-ended feedback. These statements were all very positively rated with only minimal numbers assigning a neutral stance or disagreement with these statements.

Perceptions of blended learning specific to programme content were also explored in other studies (Rahman et al., 2015; Shantakumari and Sajith, 2015; Han and Ellis, 2020; Lomer and Palmer, 2021). Shantakumari and Sajith (2015) and Han and Ellis (2020) also found perceptions of blended learning relating to programme content to be positive.

As noted in section four, open-ended feedback within the HSeLanD evaluation which related to programme content was mixed. Of 26 comments themed as programme content related, fourteen were favourable and twelve responses noted areas for improvement. Nine respondents specifically referred to the scenario element of content, which employs PBL. These responses were a combination of recognising the value of PBL in helping to work through real life complex safeguarding situations, as well as proposing a greater number of scenarios be used in the programme into the future.

“Maybe more scenarios and examples to go through in the group so you would be aware of, when you need to do up a safeguarding plan”.

“I would have more than one case study per group to complete prior to the online classroom. I feel I would become more confident if I had more to do and then discuss in the group setting as I learned from others perspectives within the group setting as well”.

This comment above demonstrates the necessity of learner involvement, reflective thinking and collaborative working as crucial components in PBL as highlighted in Lu et al (2006).

5.5.2 Perceptions of online delivery and of the blended programme in general

While there is some overlap here between perceptions of online delivery and online workload the outstanding item from the HSeLanD survey relates to preference for online completion rather than classroom. While agreement with this statement outweighed disagreement there was a higher proportion of neutral responses here than in comparison to all other survey questions. This can be seen to indicate a greater level of mixed views. These mixed views were also evident in the open-ended feedback with seven respondents expressing a preference for classroom delivery versus five preferring online/blended.

“Obviously with Covid-19 concerns it was unable to be completed in person. But I feel that an in person course for this topic would have really enhanced the learning and experience”.

“Really enjoyed the fact that I could complete on line”.

The small number of open-ended responses should be considered in the context of the majority of respondents answering ‘no’ when asked if they had anything to add or suggestions to make.

Other studies looking at online delivery reported that learners determined ease of use in blended learning to be of value. Learners in Shantakumari and Sajith (2015) quantitative study on students’ viewpoints of blended learning reported that it was easy to follow and so enhanced their learning. Ease of use was also reported in Rahman et al. (2015) as being of importance. They determined that perceived ease of use has an influence on satisfaction in blended learning.

Designated officers reported a high relatability to their role and agreed with the statement they would recommend the programme to others. Open-ended feedback relating to the blended programme that was general in nature was favourable.

6. Conclusion and recommendations (designated officer programme)

6.1 Introduction

The study aims to assess designated officers’ readiness for online learning and their perceptions of the blended designated officer training programme. The literature reviewed in section 2 promotes the approach of online blended learning as being effective in achieving its aim and as being well received by learners. The rationale for assessing readiness for online learning is discussed and it is offered that readiness for online learning and learners’ achievement are positively linked (Yu, 2018).

This section considers the implications of the findings of this study and reflects on conclusions. Recommendations are proposed within the study’s separate themes of readiness for online learning in section 6.2 and perceptions of blended learning in section 6.3. Section 6.4 considers other supplementary recommendations arising from the literature review and section 6.5 presents a summary of recommendations.

6.2 Readiness for online learning

Readiness for online learning was examined across four constructs, online learning attributes, time management, communication and technical competencies. Designated officers demonstrated high readiness for online learning as they reported placing high value on the importance of these attributes for online learning and they expressed confidence to use these competencies in online learning.

Readiness for online learning is high. As readiness has been found to be a predictor of satisfaction and motivation in blended learning (Yilmaz, 2017b), this strengthens the position to continue with a blended learning format for this adult safeguarding programme.

6.2.1 Online learning attributes

While scores were high across the scale of online learner attributes, a lower level of importance was reported in ‘using additional resources to answer course related questions’ and lower confidence was expressed for ‘being self-disciplined with studies’.

There may be merit in better promoting and highlighting the additional resources that designated officers are expected to access and utilise in completing this programme as other studies (Çırak Kurt and Yıldırım, 2018b; Siah et al., 2021) have found programme resources to be important to learners’ satisfaction. Materials should be reviewed to ensure that they are appropriately aligned with the programme’s learning objectives and can provide scaffolding.

Information provided at programme enrolment may need review and revision to adequately inform designated officers of the requirement for a degree of self-directed work within this programme.

6.2.2 Time management

While confidence in time management practice was high, the confidence scores were lower than the scores for importance placed on time management.

It was noted in the findings section that there may be challenges for staff in trying to complete online learning while balancing existing workload. A related question in the HSeLanD evaluation survey did not reveal this to be a challenge with designated officers positively identifying with the flexibility that blended learning allows and affirming that it can be balanced with existing workloads.

The lack of time allocation for digital learning has been noted as a barrier to learner engagement (CIPD, 2021; Hayden, 2021) as it can be difficult to set aside time against the competing demands of work. While designated officers did not reveal this, it is nonetheless recommended that managers recognise the time commitment involved in this training programme and allocate dedicated time for programme completion accordingly.

6.2.3 Communication

Out of the four online learning readiness dimensions, communication scored highest for both importance placed in it and confidence in their own ability. While high, less confidence was evident in 'expressing my opinion to the instructor and other course participants'.

Consideration should be given, as recommended in Tang et al. (2021), to develop opportunities to enhance peer support.

6.2.4 Technical

The critical importance of technical readiness for online learning readiness has been reported (Yilmaz, 2017; Bovermann et al., 2018; Yu, 2018; Heo et al., 2021). Designated officers reported high levels of technical readiness and this contributes to their readiness for online learning.

This study looked at self-reported technical competencies. Assessing and addressing any gaps in technical ability, beyond self-reported competence, may be helpful in further supporting online learning readiness.

While this study focused on individual technical readiness, it is observed that there are wider technical issues such as internet connectivity (Chaves, 2021) and broadband accessibility across Ireland (Weckler, 2021) that may impact on online learning readiness. Further exploration may be merited to gauge if these are concerns for designated officers.

6.3 Perceptions of blended learning

Perceptions of blended learning were garnered from two separate data sources, the study's online survey as well as the HSeLanD evaluation data. Evidence from both of these instruments demonstrate that perceptions of the blended learning programme are high, it is well received, and designated officers would recommend it to others.

6.3.1 Perceptions of online contributions

The importance of online contributions from and with other designated officers undertaking the programme are evidenced by the high scores and are also reflected in discursive responses.

While discursive commentary relating to online contributions was mostly positive, there were a number of suggestions from a small number of designated officers suggesting greater levels of interaction could be supported. While the numbers are small it would be worthwhile undertaking development work with facilitators focusing on further supporting online collaboration as this is such an essential component of ensuring positive blended learning outcomes (Hewett et al., 2019).

6.3.2 Perceptions of online workload

The scale items relating to perceptions of online workload as well as the one HSeLanD survey item relating to workload were all rated favourably. Designated officers did not report difficulty with workload. Time commitment responses were considered alongside those relating to workload and they too were positively reported on with designated officers appreciating the flexibility that the blended programme facilitates.

While the workload associated with this programme is not identified as problematic, it is important that work time is allocated to workplace training and that staff are not expected to dedicate personal time to it. As noted in 6.1.2

designated officers should be allocated dedicated time to undertake and complete this blended learning training programme.

6.3.3 Perceptions of programme content

The HSeLanD evaluation instrument dealt with the issue of programme content. All four scale items relating to programme content scored highly indicating overall satisfaction. Discursive commentary in response to open ended questions also revealed positive perceptions of programme content as well as suggestions for programme improvement.

Suggestions for improvement centred on problem based learning, specifically to increase the number of safeguarding case scenarios used. The case scenario work within the programme provides the basis for collaboration.

The particular value of scenarios grounded in PBL for safeguarding education has been addressed in the literature review. Safeguarding issues are by nature complex and multifaceted. PBL focusing on problem solving (Thomassen and Jørgensen, 2021) and so using such scenarios in safeguarding education makes it practical and realistic.

While there are practical considerations as to how many case scenarios could be used throughout a single programme it is worthwhile increasing the pool of case scenarios facilitators could assign to designated officers and this recommendation should be fulfilled.

6.3.4 Perceptions of online delivery

The consideration of designated officers preference for online completion over traditional classroom attendance was dealt with by one question in the HSeLanD evaluation questionnaire and was also addressed in discursive commentary arising in response to open ended questions.

As noted in the findings, agreement with this statement outweighed disagreement with the majority of designated officers expressing a preference for online learning for this programme. Having noted this, it is also earnest to highlight that there was a higher proportion of neutral responses here than in comparison to all other survey questions indicating a greater level of mixed views.

While most designated officer expressed preference for online learning over classroom attendance, it may be appropriate within this blended learning programme to offer the face-to-face element of the blend as a choice. If this was possible and practical, designated officers could self-nominate to attend either an online synchronous workshop or a classroom-based workshop for this component of the programme. Given the positive perceptions of the blended programme with its online synchronous session and with most respondents expressing preference for this format there may not be sufficient uptake to make a classroom offering viable but this should be explored.

6.4 Additional recommendations

In addition to the recommendations arising from the findings of this study relating to readiness for online learning and perceptions of blended learning, other recommendations are proposed in light of gaps identified in the literature.

The issues that designated officers are faced with in adult safeguarding concerns are difficult matters requiring care and sensitivity. While the issue of peer-to-peer support has been raised as a matter to address within training programme design, it is also worthy of consideration for designated officers in their roles more generally. This aligns with Çırak Kurt and Yıldırım (2018) who reported on the need to develop peer connections that extend beyond the classroom.

While this study has focused on the views of designated officers themselves, it would add to this body of work and give a more complete picture of the designated officer programme to include examination of readiness for online learning of the facilitators of designated officer training.

Facilitators have an significant impact on adult learning generally (Rangel et al., 2015) and within online learning (Siah et al., 2021). In considering readiness for online learning, the need to include examination of facilitators and not just students has also been identified by others (Li, Gilles et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2021). It is not just the learners that have had this sudden shift to online learning foisted on them, but the same can be said of facilitators. They transitioned to delivering programmes online with little

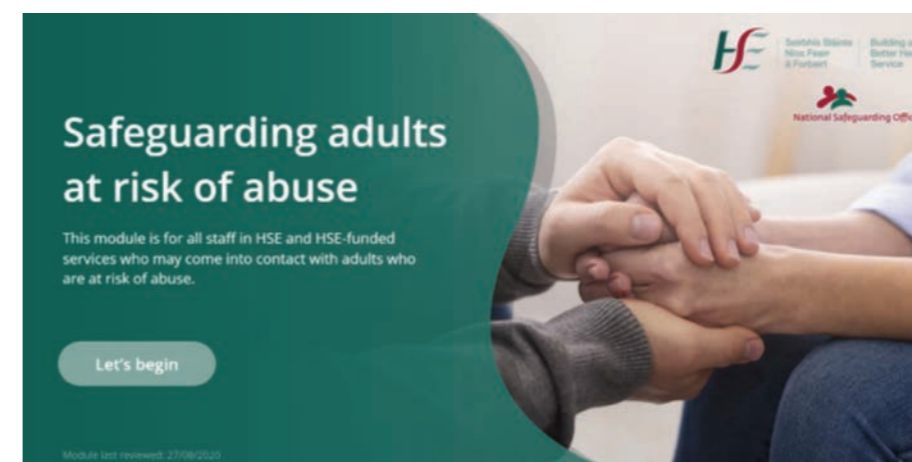
consideration given to their technical competence to do so.

Facilitators' readiness for and confidence with online learning is as important as that of learners and should receive attention also. As highlighted by Bolliger and Halupa (2022) the importance of competence in online pedagogy and technical skills are critical for effective online learning. There may be professional development gaps in supporting facilitators to deliver effective online and blended learning programmes, this should be explored and any apparent gaps addressed.

Part B: Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning Programme

An examination of staff learners' perceptions of the Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme.

Part B: Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning



71. Introduction

7.1 Introduction

Planning for the development of an adult learning programme for HSE and HSE funded services began in 2019 with the establishment of a project group. There was an ever-increasing demand for adult safeguarding training for staff and it was felt eLearning was an appropriate mechanism to increase availability and accessibility of training.

It was fortuitous that programme planning had commenced pre COVID-19 given the subsequent requirement for social distancing and its consequences for training delivery.

The project group, along with subject matter experts worked with HSeLanD and Aurion, and an advisory group provided valuable contributions as the programme was developed.

The Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme was launched in September 2020 and had a very positive uptake immediately. Within the first month, there were 7,000 completions and by year-end 2020, this number had risen to 45,983. In 2021, there were 52,205 completions of the programme on HSeLanD.

7.2 Methodology

HSeLanD distribute an invitation link to complete an evaluation survey to all staff who complete the eLearning programme. This survey is anonymous and voluntary.

The questionnaire tool comprises of ten Likert scale questions asking respondents to rate their level of disagreement or agreement with statements relating to the programme. In addition to these ten questions, additional data is collated from two open-ended questions allowing those responding an opportunity to elaborate.

7.3 Results

7.3.1 Response Rate

Between September 2020 and February 2022 7,823 staff submitted evaluation questionnaire responses to HSeLanD. This represents a 12% response rate for the time-period involved.

7.3.1 eLearning content

Questions relating to eLearning content demonstrated high satisfaction with the programme as observable in Figure 17. Each of these questions had a combined agreement level of 89-92% with very small number of respondents disagreeing with the statements.

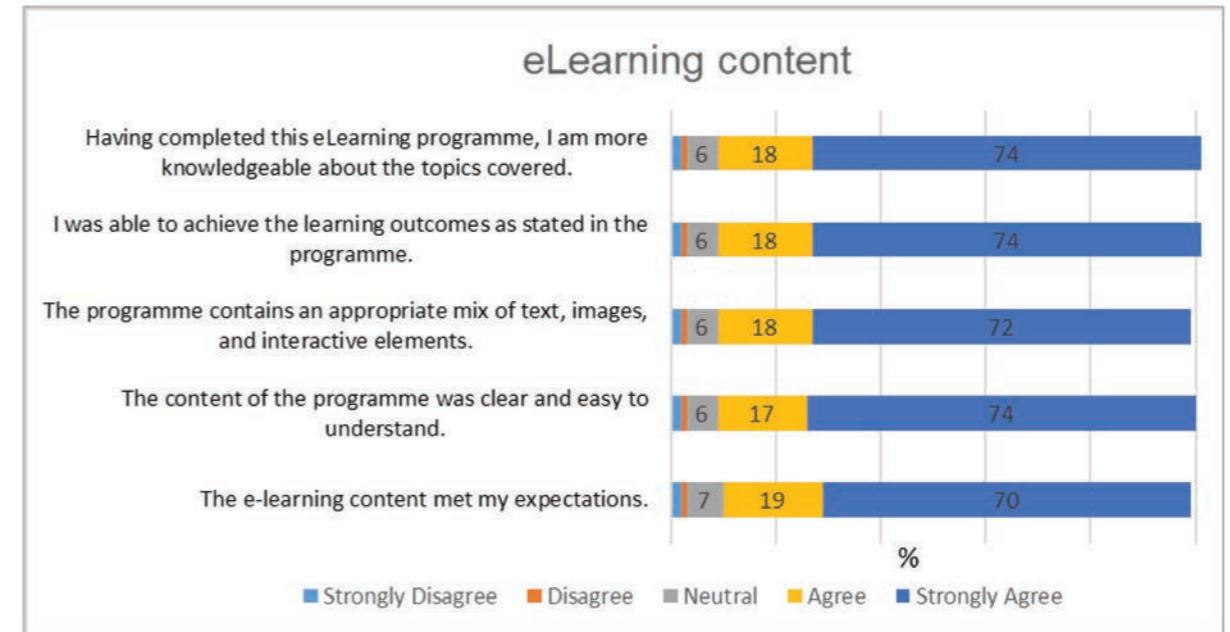


Figure 17 eLearning content

7.3.2 Relevance of training to role

Two questions related to applicability of this safeguarding training to their role and these again showed high approval for the statements that it was relatable and applicable to their role (89%) and that they learned practical skills that they will apply in their area of work (90%). The majority of these responses fell into strongly agree category (71% and 72% respectively) as shown in Figure 18. Comparable to the programme content questions, disagreement with these statements was minimal (3%).

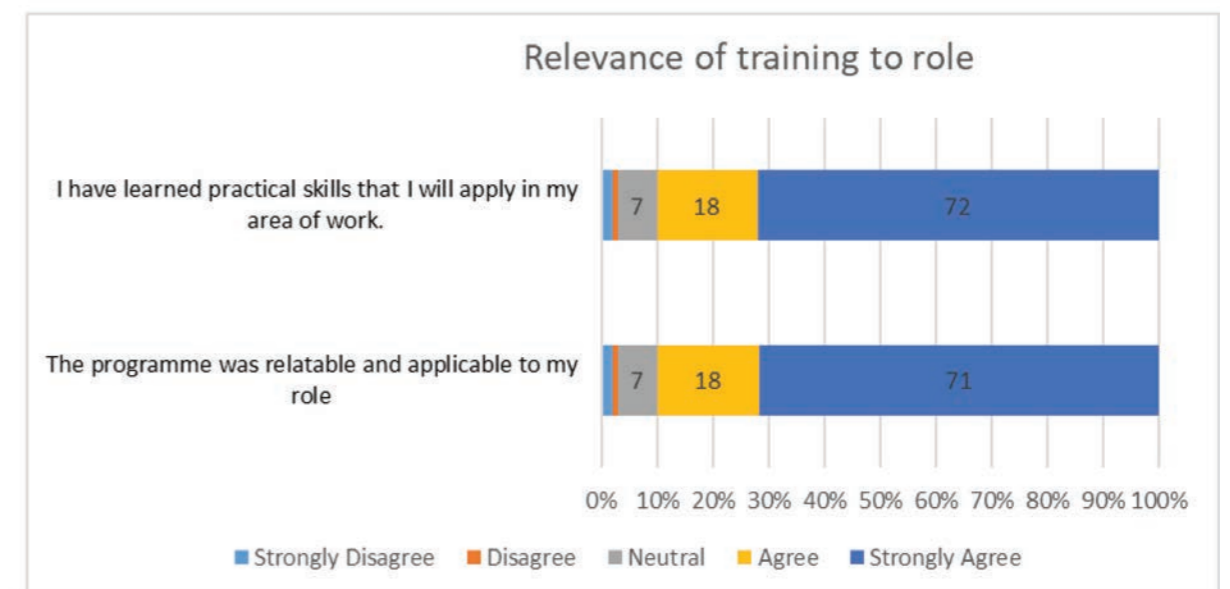


Figure 18 Relevance of training to role

7.3.4 Online format

Two questions related to the online format of the programme asking respondents about accessing and completing the programme at their own pace and the second question asking about preference for online versus classroom.

Once again, the level of agreement with these statements was high (81% & 91%) and disagreement levels were minimal. A higher neutral response compared to other questions in the survey is observed here, 13% compared to 6-7%.

Overall, satisfaction is expressed with the programme delivery via online learning.

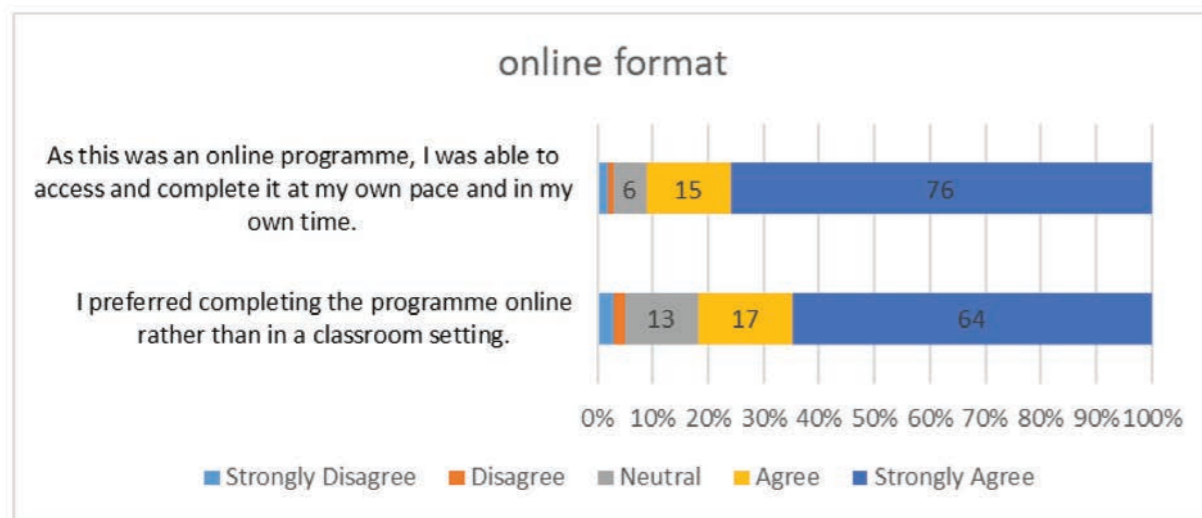


Figure 19 online format

7.3.5 Recommend to others

Respondents indicated a strong willingness (91%) to recommend the programme to others (see Figure 20) which is in line with the overall positive findings from this evaluation data.

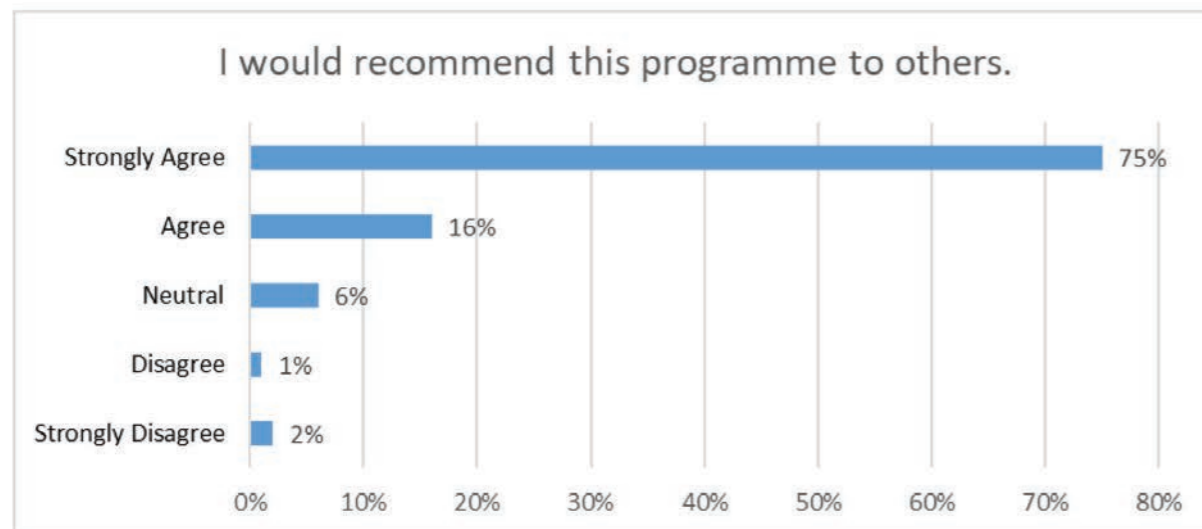


Figure 20 recommend to others

7.3.6 Open-ended feedback

The two questions asked were “please tell us what you would change about the programme” and “please provide any additional comments or suggestions about the eLearning programme”.

The two open-ended questions were answered by 6,341 (Q1) & 5,915 (Q2) respondents respectively signifying 81% and 76% of the survey population.

Most respondents across both questions answered ‘no comment’ / ‘nothing to add’.

Q1 3994 responded ‘no’ / ‘nothing’ while 2346 gave a fuller response (out of 6341)

Q2 3980 responded ‘no’ / ‘nothing’ while 1931 gave a fuller response (out of 5915)

For both questions responses of ‘no’, ‘nothing’ and ‘none’ were coded and separated out.

Across both questions combined, 4,277 provided fuller responses. Of these responses a number of themes emerged with the vast majority of commentary being positive. Two responses were deemed not applicable

Discursive commentary is considered with the context of the number of responses providing further elaboration (n, 4275). All of these responses were collectively categorised into 10 themes as depicted in order of volume of responses and summarised in figure 21. While there is some overlap between themes, contributions are counted in one category only according to its most conspicuous theme. A sample of comments is provided for each theme.

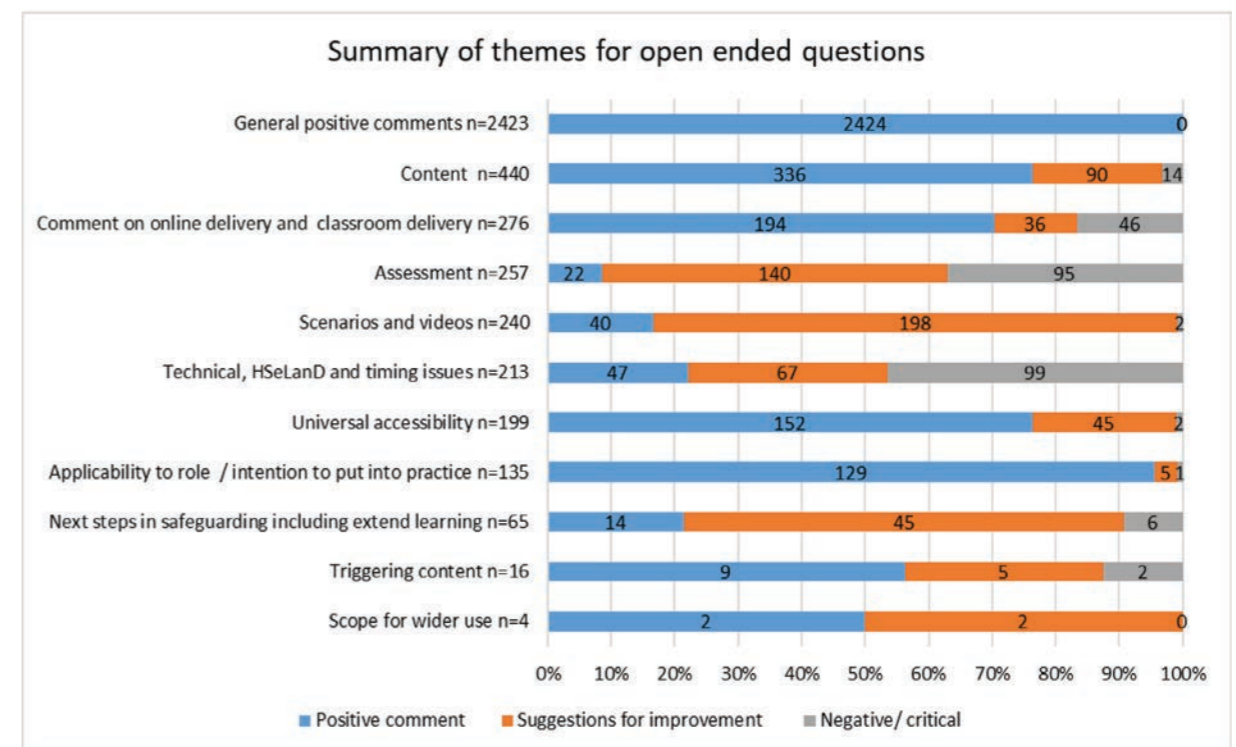


Figure 21 Summary of themes from opened ended questions

General positive commentary

n=2423 (31% of total respondents).

General positive comments made the single largest theme. These were positive comments that did not fit with the more defined themes that emerged.

- It was a good course no need to change anything*
- It's perfectly fine for me. I think it is well presented.*
- Course was easy to understand and very educational*
- Really enjoyed this programme*



Content

n=440 (5.6% of total respondents).

The next major theme related to the programme content. Over three quarters of these were positive where it was reported the content was appropriate, aided learning and met its objectives. Most suggestions related to providing further abuse examples and additional scenarios.

Positive (n= 336)	Suggestions (n=90)	Critical (n= 14)
<p><i>Very interactive and examples were great. Easy to use. Mix of videos and examples to read was great.</i></p> <p><i>its nice to participate in these programmes as its good to know when you start working in the health care environment</i></p> <p><i>Excellent scenarios. Helps relate to types of abuse if you see a face</i></p> <p><i>Excellent clarity, definitions of abuse and examples</i></p> <p><i>No, I found it very helpful and informative. I enjoyed doing it as it was interactive and educative.</i></p>	<p><i>Good course, covers all types of abuse. Could indicate statistics in Ireland ..on types of abuse most prevalent at this time.</i></p> <p><i>Some more examples of digital abuse would be helpful.</i></p> <p><i>More video of example of kind of abuse.</i></p>	<p><i>It oversimplifies the scenarios</i></p> <p><i>very difficult course</i></p>

Comment on online delivery and classroom delivery

n=276 276 (3.5% of total respondents)

Learners conveyed benefits of online learning for them, namely accessibility, being able to go at a slower rate and repeat elements as well as the convenience of being able to do choose a time and place.

Positive (n= 194)	Suggestions (n=36)	Critical (n= 46)
<p>No. I think it is very accessible and the fact that it is online facilitated me to do it at a time that suited me.</p> <p>.. E learning is a great way of learning at ones own pace in a comfortable environment, without any distractions.</p> <p>.. Very clear and found I paid more attention rather then sitting in a room for more than a hour.</p> <p>.. i took notes @ my pace & able to continue with the course..</p> <p>.. loved how I could go back at my own pace to review and answer questions</p> <p>I personally struggle with online learning and prefer in class learning. But the module was faithfully represented in terms of its length, which was great, take a bow!</p>	<p>The pandemic restricts this of course but a mix of both approaches is vital for staff to learn effectively and to ensure that attitudes are explored fully to inform practice.</p> <p>In a class room setting would be better for me as I am not able to use computers that well.</p>	<p>Prefer if it was in classroom setting; discussion and questions missing online.</p> <p>While I could complete the safeguarding adults at risk online and in my own time, group work in the classroom was a missed opportunity.</p> <p>interacting in a group setting to learn from and hear people experiences and stories is better than online learning, i find it very boring</p>

Preference expressed for classroom or online delivery

Of the 276 that elaborated on classroom and / or online delivery, 261 expressed a preference for one mode of delivery over the other. Ninety reported a preference for classroom/ in-person delivery and 171 expressed a preference for eLearning. Some of the commentary is shared below.

Online preference (n=171, 2% of total respondents)	Classroom preference (n= 90, 1% of total respondents)
<p>I think the programmes are informative and easy to understand. E learning is a great way of learning at ones own pace in a comfortable environment, without any distractions.</p> <p>The e-learning programme is very useful because you can study at your own convenient time and place without any pressure.</p> <p>I would not change this programme in any way I would recommend this programme to all my co workers as I enjoyed it so much as I could do it online rather than in a classroom</p> <p>The e-learning program is easy to navigate and one work at their own pace which is important. I would encourage my work colleagues to do the courses also.</p> <p>Great for a working mother.</p> <p>....because its Eliminates the need for travel.</p> <p>more easier this online learning compare to sit the classroom</p> <p>Good mix of communication/interaction methodologies</p> <p>As a training medium; I believe that the eLearning programme is an excellent tool for improving the capacities of Health Care Services providers to help them deliver excellent care services to those who subscribe to their services. i would recommend that more courses be made accessible through this medium.</p>	<p>I think the content was excellent however i do think that classroom based sessions where people can explore experiences also need to be included in training sessions on safeguarding. People learn from each other and this aspects is missed with online learning only.</p> <p>The pandemic restricts this of course but a mix of both approaches is vital for staff to learn effectively and to ensure that attitudes are explored fully to inform practice.</p> <p>i miss the discussions we had in person as this presentation is very good but black and white and in real life it can be very difficult and emotional for the abused person . discussion of how this can be handled in person is helpful</p> <p>helpful programme but prefer learning in a classroom setting</p> <p>There is nothing to change - clear, visual, well presented. But I will always prefer face to face training.</p>

The assessment

n=257 (3% of total respondents)

Three percent of elaborated commentary related to the assessment associated with the module. While most of these comments made suggestions for improvement, this was one of only two themes where negative comments outweighed positive.

The required pass rate of 100% was a source of frustration for some learners and most of the critical comments related to this.

Positive (n=22)	Suggestions (n=140)	Critical (n=95)
<p>easy to understand questions</p> <p>Nothing to add. There was a lot of material covered in the course. The exam was challenging as well.</p> <p>Very easy to understand and very good that it gives the option of retaking the exam if you get a question or two wrong</p>	<p>make it easier to narrow down which question you may get wrong</p> <p>I feel that it should let you know in the exam, what questions you have got wrong. So you can go over the section itself.</p> <p>Change the pass rate score..... 100% is way too harsh</p> <p>i suggest a score of 80 % will be enough to pass</p> <p>Well put together but 100% pass rate with multiple choice was onerous</p> <p>some more multiple choice questions can help consolidate learning</p>	<p>I cannot see what question I am answering incorrect - which makes it very difficult to pass exam</p> <p>I think the exam is crazy, having to get 100%</p> <p>Quiz takes to long.</p> <p>I really find it very difficult to complete the exam, because I was confused and nervous unlike the other ones. The exam wasn't so easy for my but I later succeeded. in the 6th attempt.</p>

Scenarios and videos

n=239 (3% of total respondents)

The majority of responses within this theme were suggestive – with calls for more scenarios and more videos to be included the module.

Positive (n=40)	Suggestions (n=198)	Critical (n=1)
<p>videos are very beneficial</p> <p>I found the piece that was acted out had way more impact on me ..</p> <p>I loved the videos it gave a real feel to what actually goes on and how to approach it..</p> <p>it was excellent easy to understand and great scenarios ..</p>	<p>Maybe go into the other different types of abuse</p> <p>The scenarios were excellent for walking through the steps of reporting abuse so maybe more of those</p> <p>More videos easy to understand</p> <p>Highlight the vulnerability of asylum seekers and refugees to all forms of abuse, particularly unaccompanied minors.</p> <p>Include case vignettes regarding human trafficking (to include sexual and forced labour)</p> <p>I would have liked to see actors playing out the roles from the beginning to when the safety plan was done.</p> <p>some more examples of report writing</p>	<p>some of the questions would throw you</p>

Technical, HSeLanD and timing issues

n=214 (2.7% of total respondents)

This is the second theme where, unlike the other themes, critical commentary outweighed positive. Issue raised varied from learners own technical experience, hardware issues (audio not working), network issues (videos not playing, module stopping) and difficulty accessing certificates.

Regards timing, some learners felt the course duration was just right with others reporting it took too long or not long enough.

Positive (n=47)	Suggestions (n=67)	Critical (n=99)
<i>No I am just not great with computers. But I got there</i>	<i>make it easier to navigate around the website.</i>	<i>I found it hard to access the portal at first.</i>
<i>The content was very precise and clear. The duration was very convenient.</i>	<i>make some of the courses shorter</i>	<i>Some of the videos were not responsive</i>
<i>i found it hard to access the programme, as i am not very computer literate, but once i got in it was fine</i>	<i>...the training should be longer and more in-depth</i>	<i>Whilst I was proceeding through the course the videos froze occasionally and I had to refresh the page a number of times.</i>
<i>It was excellent. A bit fiddly but overall change nothing</i>	<i>More explanation regarding the certificate after you pass your test.</i>	<i>The course was great but it didn't work very well on iPad</i>
<i>There were some technical issues before starting, But nothing to change about the content</i>	<i>exam should be at end and not have to go out to separate pages</i>	<i>The programme seemed to go back to the "launch" screen several times</i>
		<i>Accessing the certificate should be more easier if it is possible.</i>
		<i>The sound of the speaker is not audible</i>
		<i>it is not suitable for those who don't like technology</i>
		<i>Duration is very long</i>

Universal accessibility

n=199 (2.5% of total respondents).

Most comments here complimented accessibility features built into the programme.

Some of the technical and accessibility suggestions made are already features of the programme and may speak more to technical / network capabilities on the part of the users (e.g. make it mobile friendly, improve accessibility features).

Positive(n=152)	Suggestions(n=45)	Critical (n=1)
<i>No. It was user friendly and easy to follow. very good inclusive way to learn</i>	<i>Put Subtitles and Interpreter on screen</i>	<i>The text is very hard to see.</i>
<i>I felt it was easier to learn and keep in as it was narrated.</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>I didn't enjoy the whole thing being narrated, I prefer to read at my own pace</i>
<i>I think the program was very well laid out, explained everything really well and was easy to complete and didn't take too long.</i>	<i>more images to help with learning.</i>	
<i>I think the programme is very well structured. I found the content, the examples, the support of images, audio and text very interesting. I would leave it as it is.</i>	<i>make questions easier to understand</i>	
<i>Good mix of training - and the online videos.</i>	<i>i would like to ask for more voice audios</i>	
<i>Was useful to have the words spoken verbally on the training slides.</i>	<i>I would provide ear plugs so that it can be completed in an open plan office without disturbing other people.</i>	
<i>My English is not very good. but the training was not just verbal. All the information was written so I could understand it better.</i>	<i>Pictures would be beneficial</i>	

Applicability to role / intention to put into practice

n=135 (1.7% of total respondents)

Just under 2% of commentary spoke about applicability to the learners' role and their intention to put this learning into practice. The bulk of these comments were favourable with learners reporting that they felt able to transfer this learning into practice in their workplace and were more confident in their ability to recognise and respond to abuse concerns.

Positive (n=129)	Suggestions (n=5)	Critical (n=1)
<p><i>I think the programme is applicable to staff working on the frontline and supports the identification, reporting of situations that present as abuse.</i></p> <p><i>The programme was very useful and informative to my current role.</i></p> <p><i>I enjoy the course and it is practicable for my role. I have added more knowledge to what I learned before</i></p> <p><i>I feel I am more informed about it and better equipped to deal with a situation should it ever arise.</i></p> <p><i>i really enjoyed it and will put it in to practice in the future as i am more aware of the definition of abuse that can happen</i></p> <p><i>It was a very interesting course, and the skills can be applied in my work.</i></p> <p><i>I would recommend everyone in any profession to complete this as it can apply to anywhere.</i></p>	<p><i>Too general, needs to be tailored for specific roles and targeted to each role</i></p> <p><i>I think it is very good. I think this should be refreshed more as safeguarding is such a fundamental part of our role</i></p> <p><i>I suggest more people should be made aware how abuse happens and never to ignore when an abuse is noticed or reported.</i></p>	<p><i>Not really relevant to my role</i></p>

Next steps in safeguarding including extend learning

n=65 (0.8% of total respondents)

This theme was comprised of comments relating to the extend safeguarding learning resources as well as comments which related to putting learning into practice and having further opportunities for at work discussions.

Positive (n=14)	Suggestions (n=45)	Critical (n=6)
<p><i>Was great start and good to have support reference materials at end.</i></p> <p><i>no I have to say I don't think I would change anything... the only thing I would change is how to get individuals to put there learning into practice.</i></p> <p><i>It's has enough extra resources to explore the topic further</i></p> <p><i>.. the sample reports for the line managers very helpful</i></p> <p><i>it was enjoyable and informative with the option for the user/student to explore further into the subject matter.</i></p>	<p><i>Staff need opportunities for discussion and to be able to discuss situations that they have conflict with that may or may not be abuse</i></p> <p><i>More help on documentation</i></p> <p><i>I'd add a section called refresher or pop quiz, where people log in every few months to keep the knowledge fresh.</i></p> <p><i>Staff could do a role play at work for practical learning</i></p> <p><i>I would like to discuss in a group</i></p> <p><i>Please include some detail on what the managers should do when they receive a report of abuse</i></p> <p><i>I suggest DOs provide additional training to staff .. following completing the eLearning programme to consolidate the training.</i></p>	<p><i>... It did not offer advice as to how to make a safeguarding plan or what should be included in same.</i></p> <p><i>I had a question regarding clarity of procedures in reporting an incidence of safeguarding.</i></p> <p><i>I was expecting a bit more content - often situations are more complex than those described on the course and require the intervention of very experienced professionals</i></p>

Triggering content

n=16 (0.2% of total respondents)

A small proportion of comments indicated that the content was upsetting to watch with a smaller number suggesting a content warning be added to the module.

Positive (n=9)	Suggestions (n=5)	Critical (n=2)
<p><i>It was a very good course, hard to watch at times but it goes to show what can happen, unfortunately!</i></p> <p><i>I found the programme interesting and a bit upsetting at times to realise how some people exploit others who are more vulnerable.</i></p> <p><i>this was really good, though shocking.</i></p> <p><i>I found the videos hard to watch but relevant</i></p>	<p><i>Warning about triggering content</i></p> <p><i>Put warnings before showing abuse. When reading it, it is less painful, but seeing it it's really shocking</i></p>	<p><i>The first video on psychological abuse, physical abuse and neglect is distressing to watch.</i></p> <p><i>Perhaps add a warning about content which may be upsetting at the start. I found it difficult to watch some of the videos</i></p>

Scope for wider use

n=4 (0.05% of total respondents)

Suggestions that the programme should be made available to schools and that it should be accessed prior to any work in a nursing home were put forward.

7.4 Discussion of findings & recommendations, eLearning programme

***E*Learning content**

There was high satisfaction with eLearning content. The open-ended responses provided further insight into perceptions of content with scenarios and videos being well received and were thought to illustrate the issues well. Suggestions for additional scenarios and video depicting abuse types were made. Revisions to content will need to be cognisant of policy scope and legislative contexts.

***R*ole relevance**

Learners reported that the programme had high relevance to their and that their learning could be put into practice in their area of work.

***O*nline format**

Satisfaction with the mode of delivery was high with the benefit of being able to complete the programme at the learners own pace and at a time of their choosing. There was higher satisfaction reported with online completion than with classroom delivery. It is observed in the additional commentary that a number of factors related to this; convenience, pandemic restrictions and also universal accessibility factors. For some they reported feeling more comfortable being able to keep to their own pace, replay scenarios and questions within the module. There is a strong a case to continue with eLearning.

While some expressed preference for classroom delivery they were in the minority. There was a recognition that

valuable discussion can be lacking within online programmes and there were suggestions that more needs to be done to continue safeguarding discussions and learning after training has been completed. The managers' toolkit to extend safeguarding learning (which is part of the module's extending learning resources) should be promoted in a more structured way to increase its use.

***A*dditional feedback**

The assessment part of the module drew some comment from a small proportion of respondents. The requirement to obtain 100% to pass was reported as onerous by some. This requirement should be reconsidered at the time of programme review. Input should be sought from subject matter experts to re-examine this requirement and consider if 80% pass rate may be deemed appropriate.

Difficulty with phrasing of one question in the assessment was highlighted. This question had been amended in November 2021 after feedback was received but it is clear some of the survey responses on this related to before this change was made.

***C*onclusion**

The eLearning programme has been well received with respondents rating the content favourably and reporting strong applicability to their role. Open-ended questions provided for more in-depth perceptions of the programme to be reported and this was observed to be mostly complimentary with some suggestions for improvement provided. This will be of benefit when reviewing the programme in 2023.

Part C: Summary of recommendations

Part C: Summary of recommendations

8. Introduction

The summary of recommendation herein relate to both section A of this report (the study of designated officers on the blended learning training programme) and section B (evaluation of Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme).

8.1 Summary of recommendations

The recommendations proposed throughout this report are summarised below.

Designated officer programme

- Continue with a blended learning format for the designated officer programme
- Highlighting the additional resources that designated officers are expected to access and utilise in completing this programme
- Materials should be reviewed to ensure they are appropriately aligned with the programme learning objectives
- Information provided at programme enrolment may need revision to adequately inform designated officers of the requirement for a degree of self-directed work within this programme
- Managers should assign dedicated time for programme completion
- Consider assessing gaps in technical ability in addition to self-reported competence
- Consider further examination of wider technical issues that may

impact on online learning readiness for designated officers

- Undertake development work with facilitators of training focusing on further supporting online collaboration
- Increasing the pool of case scenarios facilitators could assign to designated officers
- Continue with the blended learning format for training as is, but consider if feasible to offer designated officers an option to self-nominate to attend a classroom-based workshop instead of the existing online synchronous workshop for that portion of the programme
- Consider the need to assess the online learning readiness of facilitators of designated officer training
- Consider developing a mechanism of peer support for designated officers to support them in this role

Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme

- Continue with eLearning as the minimum required training at least triennially.
- Build on the manager's toolkit for safeguarding learning so as to support managers to extend safeguarding learning after eLearning has been completed.
- Consider if practice development sessions would assist managers to incorporate use of this toolkit into their service.

- Re-establish eLearning development group to undertake review of the programme in 2023.
- Group will consider the 100% requirement for passing the module.
- Content revisions will be considered.

Work has commenced with HSeLanD to action many of these designated officer programme recommendations. It is hoped to begin offering in-person workshops within the blended designated officer programme in quarter four 2022.

8.2 Concluding remarks

Various reports have highlighted the implications for vulnerable adults when adult safeguarding concerns aren't recognised and dealt with (O'Neill, 2006; Flynn, 2013; McCoy et al., 2016; HSE (NIRP), 2021). The importance of adult safeguarding training for staff working in services with adults at risk of abuse has been emphasised by the regulatory authority HIQA (HIQA, 2022).

The Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme is due for review in 2023 and the findings in this report will contribute in a meaningful way to that review process. Revisions may be considered in light of policy or legislative changes that arise but for now the applicability of the training to older persons services and services for persons with a disability remain.

The recommendations herein have been compiled by the HSE National Safeguarding Office so as to incorporate them into future workplans.

Work is planned to expand the *managers toolkit to extend safeguarding learning* and further actions are planned to promote its use. This will support managers to supplement safeguarding learning with onsite learning after the minimum required training has been completed.

Consideration is being given to provisions to further support and enhance designated officers' online learning readiness. Recommendations for adaptations to the blended designated officer programme have been reviewed and considered for implementation so that ongoing programme improvement can be accomplished.

Development work with facilitators of designated officer training has commenced with the first practice development day held in June 2022. Further work is planned to improve and support programme development.

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