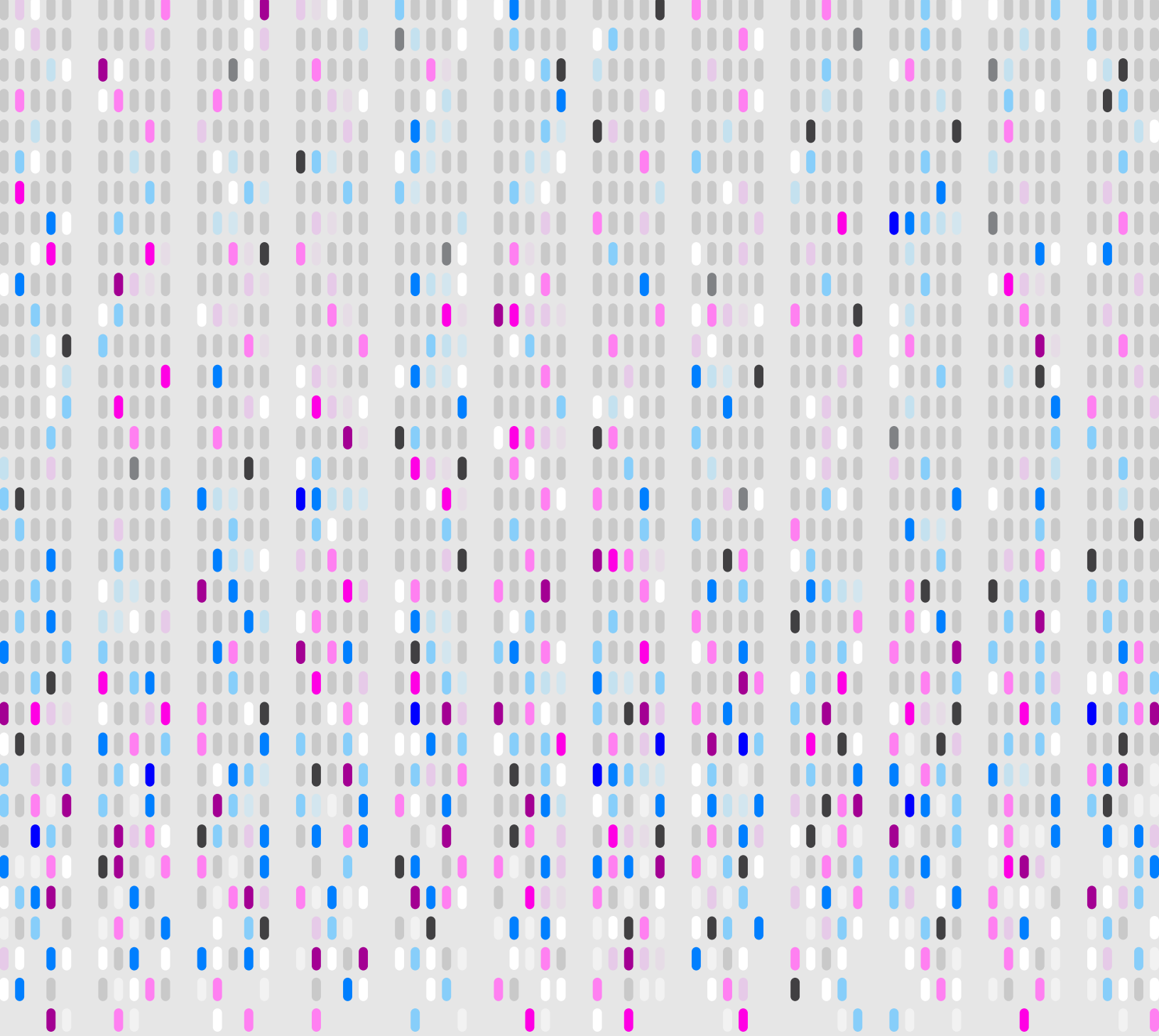

The Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT)

Phase 2 Final Report

April 2025

Blueprint

This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

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Acknowledgements

About the Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change.

Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

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About this report

This report shares findings from Blueprint's evaluation of the **Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT)**. ESAT is an online training tool developed by **Futureworx** that assesses and develops social and emotional skills (SES) for individuals seeking employment support. ESAT fosters self-awareness and motivation to build strengths and close skill gaps, leading to better outcomes in work, education, and life. It also offers employers and service delivery practitioners (SDPs) insights into their clients' SES, readiness for work, and training needs.

Blueprint's *Interim Report* (March 2024) analyzed data gathered from September 2021 to October 2022. This *Final Report* draws on new data collected from October 2022 to May 2024 and provides an analysis of ESAT's effectiveness, adaptability, reliability, and validity.

The report is organized into five sections:

1. **Introduction** (pp. 8–9) provides background on SES and their labour market value, ESAT's history, and its scaling journey as part of the FSC portfolio.
2. **About ESAT** (pp. 10–15) details the ESAT tool, including its purpose, structure, core skills, participant journey, implementation guidelines, and our 15 delivery partners.
3. **Methodology** (pp. 16–19) shares Blueprint's evidence generation approach, learning agenda, data sources, sample sizes, and limitations.
4. **Findings** (pp. 20–40) presents a demographic profile of ESAT users considered in this study and findings on ESAT's effectiveness and implementation adaptability, as well as its reliability and validity as an assessment tool.
5. **Conclusions** (pp. 41–43) offers a summary and discussion of our findings and next steps.

Executive summary

Employers increasingly prioritize social and emotional skills (SES) like adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving, recognizing their role in both job performance and long-term career success. But while many programs aim to develop SES, most focus on children and youth, leaving few robust assessment tools for adult workforce development.

To address this issue, Futureworx created the Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT), an online platform designed to help job seekers assess and strengthen their SES. ESAT fosters self-awareness and motivation and provides employers and service development practitioners (SDPs) with insights into participants' training needs and readiness for work. Its structured approach—integrating self-assessments, observer evaluations, and targeted coaching—aligns staff and participants on SES goals, fosters reflection on employer-valued skills, and generates progress reports to guide development. Since its external launch in 2014, ESAT has been used by over 135 SDPs across Canada and Australia; in programs lasting between three weeks and a year or more; and by college- and community-led organizations offering both technical/sector-focused and essential/life skill training programs.

As part of FSC's **Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio**, Futureworx and Blueprint have explored ESAT's effectiveness, adaptability, and outcomes across different workforce contexts. This *Final Report* for Phase 2 of FSC funding builds upon our previous *Interim Report* (March 2024) with data collected from October 2022 to May 2024. Here, we provide an analysis of ESAT's effectiveness and adaptability across diverse contexts: 15 organizations delivering ESAT across 60 programs and 85 cohorts. Findings are based on administrative and ESAT platform data, surveys and interviews with participants, and staff surveys, interviews, and a focus group. Through a formal analytical process, we also determined what steps might be required to transition ESAT to a validated tool for SES measurements.

Findings offer promising signs of effectiveness, adaptability, and employment-based outcomes:

- **Participant satisfaction and SES awareness.** Most participants were satisfied, found ESAT easy to use, would recommend it to others, and had meaningful and valuable discussions about their skills with staff. Many praised ESAT's objectivity, noting how it improved their confidence in skills development and let them measure progress and reflect on skill changes over time.
- **SES awareness and improvements.** Most participants reported improved awareness of their SES strengths and gaps—feeling more confident with their SES, an increased comfort in discussing them, and a better understanding of how to use them to advance their careers. While participants indicated modest improvements to their SES, staff assessments showed measurable gains across all ESAT categories. Most staff indicated that participants showed improvement in *all* skill areas studied.
- **Staff perceptions.** Staff valued ESAT for its structured approach to discussing SES, especially its visual tools, which engaged participants and illustrated progress. Staff felt the tool was easy to use and felt positive about Futureworx's supports.

- **Opportunities to improve.** Participants suggested clarifying the language used in ESAT questions. For staff, the most common challenges to implementation involved the amount of time required to complete observations, getting employers to use ESAT, and knowing what steps to take based on ESAT results.
- **Evidence of outcomes.** In employment-focused programs, employment rates increased by 17 percentage points and weekly earnings increased by 61% from program start to nine months later. Further investigation using comparison groups will better illuminate ESAT's relationship to employment outcomes and its role in driving them.
- **Guideline fidelity.** On average, programs adopted 4.6/6 of Futureworx's recommended implementation guidelines (at least 4/6 guidelines were followed 92% of the time). The most challenging to implement was having at least three ESAT timepoints. Time constraints were the largest hurdles to meeting all guidelines. To address these challenges, Futureworx may consider streamlining assessments while still maintaining key implementation features.
- **Fidelity and satisfaction.** Satisfaction was 15 percentage points higher in programs with high fidelity than with low. Every one-point increase in fidelity above 3/6 led to a 11% higher chance of satisfaction. Urging organizations to meet implementation criteria wherever possible may be an effective strategy to ensure efficacy.
- **Setting and satisfaction.** College participants reported higher satisfaction than those in community programs and were more likely to recommend. When we controlled for implementation fidelity, college programs saw a 17% higher satisfaction rate and 21% higher likelihood to recommend than community-based programs.
- **Skill focus and fidelity and satisfaction.** Technical skills programs achieved higher fidelity and participant satisfaction than essential/life skills programs. This association disappeared after accounting for program setting and fidelity.
- **Reliability and validity.** ESAT shows promising early results, meeting initial criteria such as face validity and short-term predictive validity. While there is potential for further refinement, the tool has a strong foundation for continued development. Efforts to enhance ESAT's validity could focus on fine-tuning the questions and improving the categorization of skills, which would further distinguish each skill area and solidify its value as a validated SES measurement tool.

What's next?

Blueprint's Phase 3 report (scheduled for spring 2025) will present an updated and refined ESAT Theory of Change, informed by Phase 2 findings and a small case study conducted as part of Phase 3. It will also summarize findings from a feasibility study for a randomized controlled trial (RCT) and perspectives about what other research might be explored, largely to isolate ESAT's effects on employment outcomes. Phase 2 data linkage will be available in August 2025 and included as a separate deliverable in 2026.

1. Introduction

Employers increasingly recognize the importance of social and emotional skills (SES)—such as adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving.[1] These skills, sometimes referred to as 'soft skills,' provide a foundation for career success and lifelong learning.[2,3] The Government of Canada's *Skills for Success* Framework highlights their role in employability and resilience, noting that SES contributes to stronger employment outcomes and career progression.[4] Other research highlights the relationship between SES and longer-term labour market outcomes, including helping workers adapt to economic disruptions.[5,6] Workers with strong SES tend to have stronger foundational learning skills that make it easier for them to upskill or reskill in response to changing labour market conditions.

Despite their importance, measuring SES in workforce development settings remains a challenge. Traditional assessment tools tend to focus on technical competencies, and existing SES assessments often rely on subjective observations rather than structured measurement frameworks. Recognizing this gap, Futureworx developed the Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT): a digital tool designed to help individuals assess their SES, reflect on their strengths and growth areas, and track their progress over time. Built on Futureworx's 40+ years of workforce development experience, ESAT was launched in 2013 with funding from The Counselling Foundation of Canada and RESDAC. Since then, over 135 service providers have used the tool (for more on Futureworx, see **Box 1** on the next page).

In 2020, Futureworx partnered with the Future Skills Centre and Blueprint to conduct an evaluation of ESAT. The evaluation found that practitioners using ESAT observed positive participant outcomes including increased self-awareness of SES. The report offered insights for improving and expanding the use of ESAT across workforce development organizations.

In 2021, Futureworx received additional funding from the Future Skills Centre to work with Blueprint to generate evidence on ESAT's effectiveness, adaptability, validity, and scaling potential as part of the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio. This study explored how ESAT could be used in different contexts and how it could help fill the gap in adult SES assessment in Canada. Blueprint's March

1 Express Employment Professionals. (2021). *New survey: Looking for a job? Employers value soft skills more than ever before.* https://www.expresspros.com/CA/Newsroom/Canada-Employed/New-Survey-Looking-for-a-Job- Employers-Value-Soft-Skills-More-than-Ever-Before.aspx

2 Government of Canada. (2021). Skills for Success. https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html

3 Futureworx. (n.d.). *Employability skills assessment tool.* https://www.futureworx.ca/esat

4 Employment and Social Development Canada. (2024, January). *The new skills for success model.* Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/new-model.html

5 Heckman, J., & Kautz, T. (2012). *Hard evidence on soft skills.* National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/papers/w18121

6 Conference Board of Canada. (2020). *The future is social and emotional: Evolving skills needs in the 21st century.* https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/the-future-is-social-and-emotional-evolving-skills-needs-in-the-21st-century

2024 *Interim Report* shared our preliminary findings using data collected from September 2021 to October 2022.

This *Final Report* builds on those insights with data from September 2021 to May 2024, providing updated findings to guide ESAT's next steps and ongoiwng scaling journey.

Box 1 | About Futureworx

Futureworx is a social purpose organization that develops and delivers innovative employment tools and training and provides outstanding services that support people on their work and personal journeys. Futureworx Society is a charitable organization based in Nova Scotia, whose purpose, since its inception in 1984, has been to help individuals facing employment barriers overcome their obstacles and reach their full potential, both in their community and in the workplace. Today, Futureworx is a leader in developing and delivering innovative employment tools and training, always with a wholistic view that incorporates social and emotional skills or 'soft' skills development. As a high-growth and innovative organization, Futureworx delivers services in every county of Nova Scotia and every Canadian province and works with partners across Canada and around the globe.

2. About ESAT

2.1. Model design

2.1.1. What is ESAT?

The Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT) is a web-based platform designed to help individuals assess, understand, and develop their social and emotional skills (SES). It is used primarily by publicly funded workforce development programs, such as employment services and training providers, to help job seekers and learners develop their employability skills.

Unlike traditional assessments that provide only a final score, ESAT is an interactive, developmentally focused tool that fosters self-awareness and provides structured feedback and progress-tracking through self-assessments, staff evaluations, and coaching discussions.

ESAT is typically used in the context of either a job readiness program, an essential skills program, or a technical training program. These programs are delivered either as part of a community-based employment program or in a college setting. Programs using ESAT vary in length from three to four weeks to a year or longer to allow for deeper behavioural changes and skill development.

2.1.2. ESAT core features

ESAT provides a structured developmental approach with five key features:

1. **Clear skill definitions.** ESAT focuses on nine core SES, each with defined behavioural indicators (see **Table 1**, below).
2. **Multi-perspective assessments.** Participants complete self-assessments, while staff (such as job coaches, trainers, or employers) observe and provide their own evaluations.
3. **Structured feedback system.** ESAT generates visual reports to help participants and staff discuss skill strengths and areas for improvement (see **Figure 1** on page 12 for examples).
4. **Flexible application.** Organizations can tailor ESAT to different training programs, selecting which SES to assess.
5. **Progress tracking.** ESAT allows for multiple assessments over time, enabling participants to see their growth.

Table 1 | ESAT's nine social and emotional skills

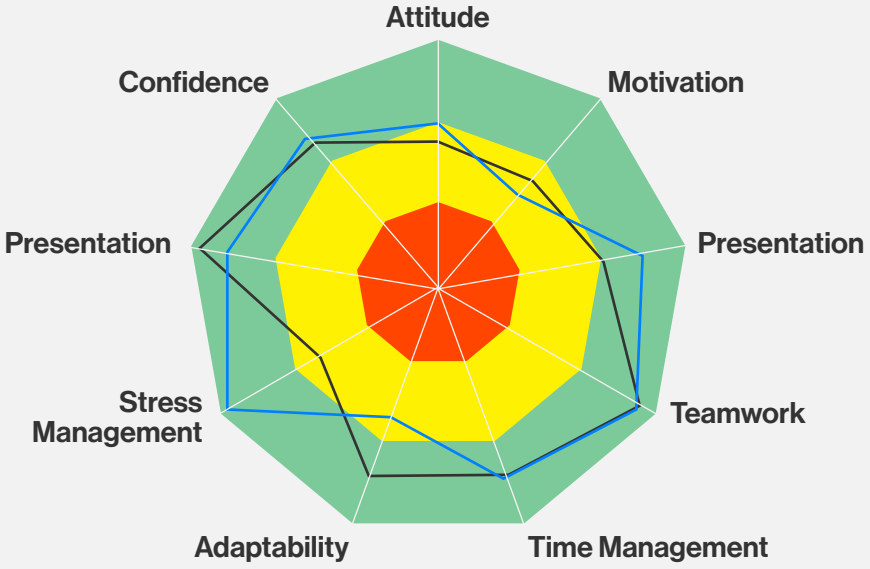
Skill	Description
Accountability	Willingness to admit mistakes, accept responsibility for and learn from them, accept feedback constructively, monitor the quality of work when unsupervised, and display an honest and ethical approach to work and others in the workplace.
Adaptability	Ability to react constructively to both anticipated and unanticipated changes in the workplace, take responsibility for learning needed to adapt to change, and adjust interactions with others based on previous experiences or the formality of the situation.
Attitude	Ways to show or express feelings about a person, work activity, event, or idea, shown verbally or behaviourally. The focus is not on internally held attitudes, but rather on how they are expressed; thus 'attitude' can be thought of as a tone imparted to an interaction.
Confidence	Belief in one's competence and the ability to express one's perspective to others. It includes being able to function in uncertain situations, being appropriately assertive, and taking reasonable chances.
Motivation	Desire to set and achieve high standards on the job. Fundamentally, motivation speaks to desire to be an excellent employee; it involves showing a willingness to expend the effort needed to excel. This can include striving for specific work standards as well as high personal standards associated with setting goals, showing initiative, and doing one's best with and without supervision.
Presentation	How a person appears to others in terms of their dress and adornments, hygiene, etiquette, manners, and language.
Stress Management	Ability to experience workplace stress without it impacting performance or coworkers. It also includes one's ability to keep personal stress out of the workplace. It requires that an employee seek help for stress in a timely manner.
Teamwork	Ability to set and follow priorities, follow schedules for arrival, breaks, etc., and stay on task in an efficient manner, which includes meeting deadlines and communicating efficiently with others.
Time Management	Ability to work cooperatively with others, handle conflict and anger appropriately, communicate effectively, be empathetic, and respect differences (e.g., cultural, religious, gender, etc.).

2.1.3. How ESAT is used

The ESAT process has six broad stages:

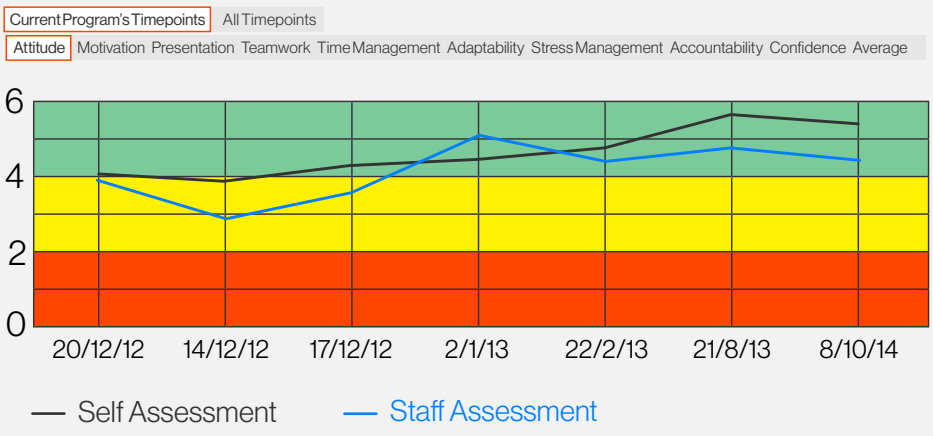
1. **Program staff introduce ESAT** and explain how it works.
2. **Participants complete an online self-assessment** to reflect on their SES strengths and areas for improvement
3. **Staff conduct structured observations** and assess participants based on behavioural indicators.
4. **Staff meet to review scores** and reach a consensus, ensuring consistent evaluations.
5. **Participants and staff discuss results** using ESAT-generated reports (e.g., radar charts) to visualize strengths and opportunities for growth.
6. **Repeat assessments (optional)**. Programs using ESAT over multiple weeks can conduct re-assessments to track skill development over time.

Figure 1 | Sample radar plot produced by ESAT for participant debriefs

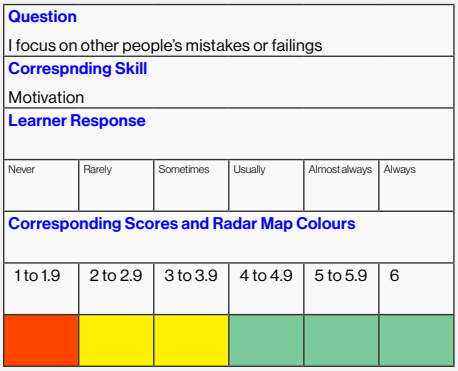


Note. Staff and participant ratings are plotted against three colours. Red (1–1.9) indicates that behaviour is not at an appropriate level for the workplace, yellow (2–3.9) that skills are progressing, and green (4–6) that skill levels are appropriate for the workplace.

Sample "distance travelled" plot to illustrate participant progress



Participant view of ESAT question mapped onto colour-coded scoring system

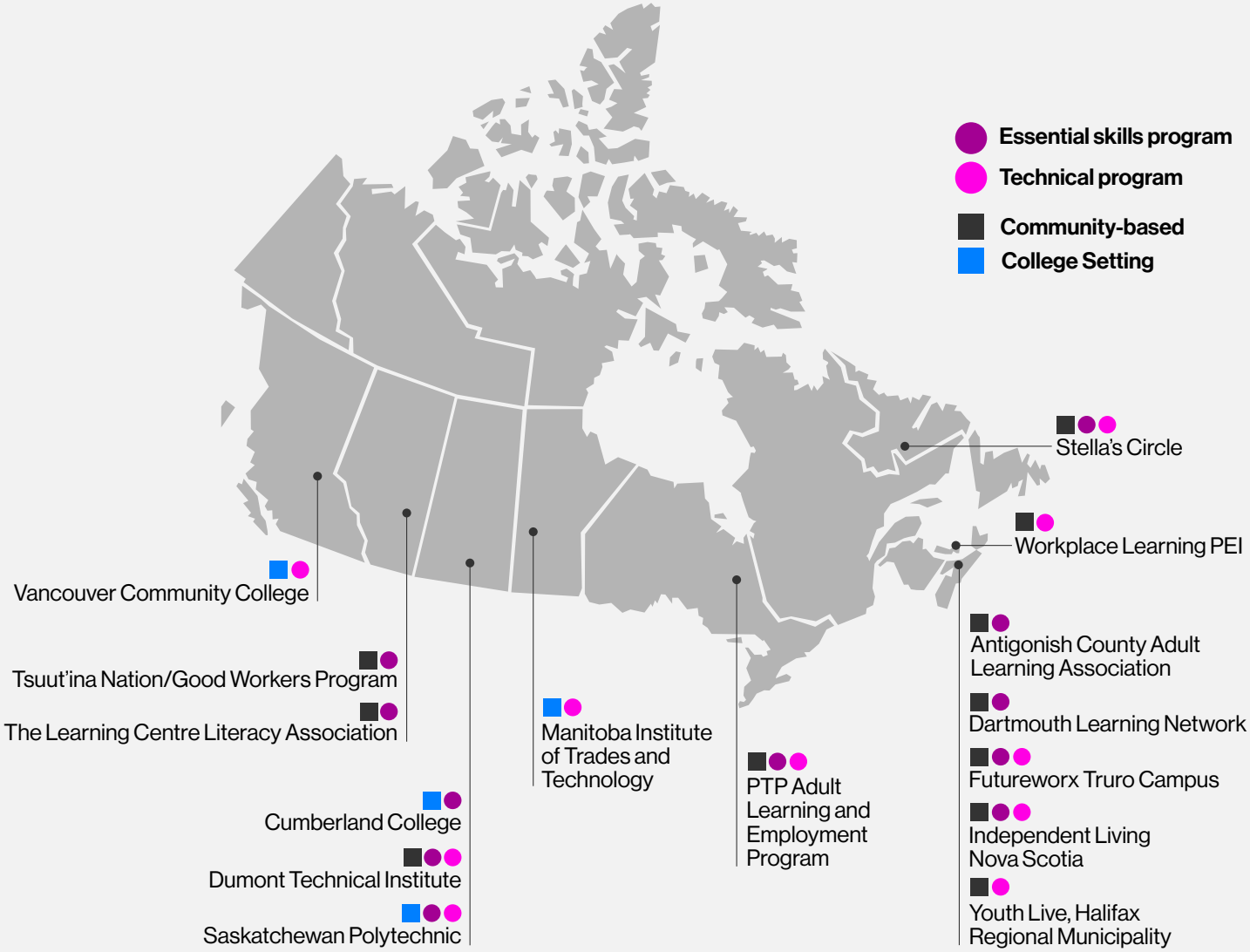


2.2. Partners, programs, and delivery cohorts

2.2.1. Partners and program types

Fifteen delivery partners participated in this study: **11** partners were community-based organizations and **four** were colleges. **Five** partners delivered essential/life skills programs, **four** delivered technical training programs, and six partners delivered both types of programs. **Figure 2** provides a map of our **15** delivery partners.

Figure 2 | ESAT delivery partners by program setting and type



2.2.2. Delivery cohorts

During the study, partners delivered **60** unique programs. Some programs were delivered multiple times, creating **85** delivery cohorts. **Table 3** categorizes the **85** cohorts by program setting and program type. Almost three quarters of cohorts were delivered in a community-based setting. Within community-based settings, **67%** of training cohorts focused on essential skills and **33%** focused on technical skills. Within college settings, percentages were almost exactly reversed: **37.5%** for essential skills and **62.5%** for technical skills.

Table 4 categorizes cohorts by delivery format. Most training was delivered in person (**58.3%**), with **18.3%** of cohorts delivered virtually and **23.3%** delivered in a hybrid format.

Table 3 | ESAT program settings by program type

Program setting	Program type		
	Essential skills	Technical skills	All
Community-based	**67%** (41/61)	**33%** (20/61)	**72%** (61/85)
College	**37.5%** (9/24)	**62.5%** (15/24)	**28%** (24/85)

Table 4 | ESAT program types by delivery format

Program type	Delivery formats		
	In-person	Virtual	Hybrid
Essential skills/life skills	**60%** (21/35)	**64%** (7/11)	**43%** (6/14)
Technical skills training	**40%** (14/35)	**36%** (4/11)	**57%** (8/14)
All program types	**58.3%** (35/60)	**18.3%** (11/60)	**23.3%** (14/60)

* The n for cohorts differs depending on whether information came from administrative data about all the cohorts (N=85) vs. staff end-of-cohort surveys (n=60/85).

2.3. Implementation guidelines

Blueprint invited all **87** organizations using ESAT in 2021 to participate in this research. Those interested were invited to sign a Memorandum of Understanding committing to following Futureworx's implementation guidelines.

Futureworx provided implementation guidelines that reflected their intended use of the tool based on their assessment of what practices result in most effective use of ESAT. **Box 2** outlines the implementation guidelines.

Box 2 | ESAT implementation guidelines[7]

- Program staff explain to participants what ESAT's purpose is and how it works.
- A minimum of two people (program delivery staff, case counsellors/managers, or employers) provide feedback and document observations within the assessment.
- Observer assessments begin at least two weeks after the program begins to ensure a reasonable period to observe participant behaviour.
- Observers and participants use ESAT a minimum of three times, meaning there are at least three assessment timepoints.
- Observers meet and compare notes and scores at the end of each feedback cycle to determine consensus scores for each skill and determine a debriefing strategy for participant strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- A program staff member meets with each participant to share and contextualize ESAT scores and provide coaching at the end of each feedback cycle.

7 The guideline, "Participants are observed across a variety of program delivery formats and contexts, including work placements if applicable, to observe a range of behaviours across situations," was removed because COVID-19 led to more online learning and fewer programs offering work placements than anticipated.

3. Methodology

3.1. Blueprint's common outcomes framework

Our measurement approach includes both indicators that are specific to the ESAT model and common indicators drawn from our Common Outcomes Framework (see **Box 3**).

Box 3 | Common Outcomes Framework

Our measurement approach includes indicators that are specific to an intervention as well as a set of common indicators that are measured for every intervention in the Portfolio.

These common indicators are drawn from Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework, which was developed in consultation with our partners and was informed by review of employment-related outcomes frameworks and measurement approaches both within Canada and internationally. They include:

- Intermediate outcomes that reflect 'in-program' participant experiences and gains (e.g., program satisfaction and skills development).
- Long-term outcomes, such as employment and educational attainment.

Using a consistent approach to measuring outcomes is part of our commitment to understanding how each intervention in the Portfolio is reaching people across Canada and allows us to measure long-term outcomes using Statistics Canada's Social Data Linking Environment.

For more information on Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework, see **Appendix A**.

3.2. Learning agenda

Our learning agenda includes three key questions:

1. **Effectiveness.** What participants were reached? How valuable was ESAT to participants and staff? Did it support SES development and employment readiness?
2. **Adaptability.** How did implementation vary across different settings, and did program fidelity impact outcomes?
3. **What would it take to make ESAT a validated tool?** Given that ESAT was designed to be a development tool, what changes or refinements would be needed for it to meet validation criteria?

3.2.1. A note about assessing ESAT's validation potential

ESAT was originally created as a development tool rather than as a formal psychometric assessment. As part of this study, Futureworx was interested in exploring what would be involved in transitioning ESAT into a validated tool. To address this, we conducted formal tests of both ESAT's reliability (i.e., whether it produces consistent results) and validity (i.e., whether it accurately measures SES). The findings from this study can help Futureworx:

- Identify what changes would be needed to pursue formal validation.
- Enhance ESAT's design by refining its questions and structure to better measure SES.
- Strengthen its credibility and usability for a broader audience, including educators, policymakers, and employers.
- Expand its impact by clarifying its potential as both a developmental tool and, if desired, a validated scale.

By assessing what it would take to make ESAT a validated tool, this study provides Futureworx with a roadmap for potential next steps—whether that means refining ESAT for validation or continuing to develop it as a structured, interactive coaching tool for SES development. This report provides a high-level overview of the validation assessment findings. More detailed findings and recommendations are provided to Futureworx in a technical report.

3.3. Research design and data sources

We report on data collected from September 2021 to May 2024, which includes data presented in our *Interim Report*. Our mixed-methods approach and data sources are described in **Table 5** (below). Further notes on our research design are as follows:

- **Longitudinal analysis of skill changes.** We conducted a longitudinal analysis of both survey and ESAT data to track skill changes from program start to end. Longer-term outcomes will be assessed through Statistics Canada data linkage beginning in fall 2025.
- **Cross-sectional implementation analysis.** We also conducted cross-sectional analyses to explore the extent to which implementation characteristics (e.g., setting, program type, alignment with implementation guidelines) affected outcomes.
- **Reliability and validity.** We conducted the following statistical tests on ESAT's questions and structure to evaluate its reliability and validity, using data from the ESAT platform, participant surveys, and instrument design data:
  - **Face validity:** does ESAT appear to assess SES based on subjective judgments?
  - **Inter-item reliability:** are questions purporting to assess the same skill providing consistent and similar responses?
  - **Divergent validity:** do ESAT skill scores show low correlation with skills with which they are not intended to align, such as those unrelated to SES, like numeracy?
  - **Predictive validity:** do ESAT skills scores effectively predict the specific outcomes we expect them to, like employment?
  - **Construct validity:** does ESAT accurately reflect and assess the nine-skill structure it is designed to assess?

Table 5 | Data sources

	Data sources	No. of participants	% of partner organizations	Description
Delivery cohorts (85 total cohorts)	Administrative data	85	**100%** (15/15)	Data on delivery partners, programs, and cohorts. Collected by Futureworx, with support from Blueprint.
Program participants (650 total)	Participant baseline survey*	650[8]	**100%** (15/15)	Administered at program start to measure socio-demographics and baseline self-assessments of self-efficacy, job clarity, and interpersonal communication.
	Participant exit survey*	**56%** (348/619)[9]	**93%** (14/15)	Administered at program end to measure program satisfaction and post-training self-assessments of self-efficacy, job clarity, and interpersonal communication.
	Participant follow-up surveys*	Three-month: **48%** (292/613) Nine-month: **45%** (278/611)	**93%** (14/15)	Administered three- and nine-months post-training; captured participant employment outcomes.
	ESAT platform data	496	**93%** (14/15)[10]	Cohort information and skill scores for learners participating in the current study. Used for divergent validity and predictive validity testing.
	Essential skills assessment*	**46%** (269/583)	**87%** (13/15)	Administered at program end to assess ESAT's divergent validity. Created by the Essential Skills Group, this is a scientifically validated tool that assesses reading, numeracy, and writing.
	Participant interviews*	25	**60%** (9/15)	Three participants per program selected using stratified sampling on demographics. Responding to low uptake, we adjusted to invite all participants.

8 There is no denominator or response rate for the baseline survey because those who enrolled in the research did so by completing the survey. Due to the way organizations tracked participant information, the total number of enrolled participants in each program is unknown.

9 The denominator declines slightly over time due to research withdrawals and two cohorts that did not administer the exit survey.

10 One partner organization discontinued participation after three of their participants completed the baseline survey, meaning that their data were not reflected in other data sources besides administrative data and baseline surveys.

	Data sources	No. of participants	% of partner organizations	Description
Historical ESAT assessment data for participants outside the project (3,659 records total)	ESAT platform data	3,659	N/A	Skill scores for all learners from Sept. 2013 to July 2024. Used for inter-item reliability and construct validity testing.
Participating program staff (60 staff total)	Program staff surveys	60	**87%** (13/15)	Administered at end of program delivery to capture program key successes and challenges.
	Program staff interviews	35	**80%** (12/15)	Conducted at end of program delivery to capture experience with implementation and perceptions of outcomes. Three organizations did not participate.
	Program staff focus group	12	**27%** (4/15)	Conducted to inform the face validity assessment. All staff were invited and were recruited based on availability and representativeness.

* Respondents received monetary incentives ($20 for each of the baseline, exit, and follow-up surveys; $25 for the essential skills assessment; and $30 for the interview) to encourage participation. Incentives were issued through an external platform (BHN Rewards, formerly Rybbon) that offers gift cards to various vendors (including Visa cards).

3.4. Data limitations

- **Small sample size for implementation fidelity.** The initial open-text survey responses used to evaluate implementation differences proved inconsistent and difficult to assess due to greater-than-expected variation across settings. A multiple-choice question introduced in March 2023 improved categorization but received responses from only **27%** of staff from **16/60** cohorts. While these **16** cohorts represent **60% (9/15)** of organizations delivering ESAT, the generalizability of the findings is limited.
- **Recall bias in participant interviews.** Participants often viewed ESAT as inseparable from their overall program experience, making it difficult to gather clear, specific feedback about the tool itself.

An overview of limitations related to reliability and validity are discussed in the Findings section and presented in more detail in the technical report.

4. Findings

4.1. Effectiveness

To understand ESAT's effectiveness, we analyzed:

1 | **Participant and staff satisfaction with ESAT**
2 | **Participant awareness of and comfort with SES**
3 | **SES gains, as assessed by both participants and staff**
4 | **Labour market outcomes for participants from employment-focused programs**

4.1.1. Program reach

Table 6, on the following page, provides a demographic profile of the participants recruited by participating organizations. In summary:

- The participant sample included more women (**64%**) than men (**30%**).
- The majority were between **18** and **44** years of age (the average age was **34.7**).
- **Fifty-four percent** identified as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Colour (BIPOC).
- Most (**86%**) completed their highest level of education in Canada and most (**69%**) reported their highest level of education attained was a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate (e.g., GED).
- Almost half (**49%**) were permanent residents or landed immigrants.
- Most (**75%**) were unemployed at program start.

Table 6 | ESAT participant socio-demographic data

Participant characteristics		% of respondents
Gender	Woman	**64%** (403/629)
	Man	**30%** (191/629)
	Gender not listed or prefer not to answer	**6%** (35/629)
Age (average=34.17)	16–24	**28%** (170/616)
	25–34	**29%** (179/616)
	35–44	**21%** (129/616)
	45 and above	**22%** (138/616)
Born in Canada		**69%** (389/564)
Immigration status (those not born in Canada)	Canadian citizen (by naturalization)	**28%** (43/155)
	Permanent resident/ Landed immigrant	**49%** (76/155)
	Refugee claimant	**6%** (10/155)
	Other*	**17%** (26/155)
Years in Canada (those not born in Canada at time of baseline survey completion)	Five years or fewer	**40%** (67/169)
	More than five years	**60%** (102/169)
BIPOC		**54%** (226/421)**
Disability		**36%** (225/624)
Highest level of education	University degree	**13%** (85/637)
	College diploma or certificate	**18%** (114/637)
	High school diploma or equivalency certificate (e.g., GED)	**44%** (282/637)
	Less than high school diploma or equivalency certificate	**24%** (156/637)
Completed highest level of education in Canada		**81%** (512/636)
Employed at program start		**25%** (160/636)

* "Other" indicates open-text responses, most of which were "temporary residents."

** This survey response denominator is lower than the number of total baseline survey respondents because the question was adjusted partway through the project to improve our race-related data.

4.1.2. Participant and staff satisfaction with ESAT

Participant perceptions

Participants were satisfied with ESAT and were likely to recommend it. As shown in **Table 7**, **79%** of exit survey respondents noted being satisfied with ESAT. Another **74%** reported that they found the tool easy to use; **84%** were likely to recommend it to others;[11] and **79%** had meaningful discussions with staff about their ESAT results.

Table 7 | Participant experiences with ESAT

Participant experience prompts	Responses	Exit survey results	
Overall satisfaction with ESAT (n=324)	Very satisfied	**45%** (146)	**79%** (257)
	Somewhat satisfied	**34%** (111)	
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	**14%** (45)	
	Somewhat dissatisfied	**3%** (10)	
	Very dissatisfied	**4%** (12)	
Overall, how would you rate your experience using ESAT? (n=324)	Very easy	**32%** (104)	**74%** (240)
	Easy	**42%** (136)	
	Neutral	**24%** (77)	
	Hard	**2%** (7)	
Likelihood to recommend (n=323)	Very likely to recommend	**38.08%** (123)	**83.59%** (270)
	Likely to recommend	**45.51%** (147)	
	Neither likely nor unlikely to recommend	**13.31%** (43)	
	Unlikely to recommend	**1.55%** (5)	
	Very unlikely to recommend	**1.55%** (5)	
Staff within my program had meaningful discussions with me about my ESAT results. (n=321)	Strongly agree	**31%** (101)	**79%** (255)
	Agree	**48%** (154)	
	Neutral	**16%** (50)	
	Disagree	**3%** (10)	
	Strongly disagree	**2%** (6)	

Source. Exit survey

11 There were no significant differences in satisfaction by demographics (see **Figure B1** in **Appendix B** for a demographic breakdown).

In interviews, participants shared positive feedback about ESAT and indicated that discussions with staff were particularly valuable.

> "[Without ESAT], I wouldn't be where I am right now. I would still be lost in the dark."
>
> Participant interview

> "I thought the way it was laid out so you can see your results and ... it shows how you improve over time. I thought that was really great."
>
> Participant interview

> "[The debrief] showed that I was stronger in many areas than what I've believed."
>
> Participant interview

Some participants suggested a few opportunities for improvement, such as clarifying the language used for questions. Some respondents needed multiple passes to interpret what was being asked of them. Improvements to clarity may be especially relevant for English language learners and for reliability and validity (see section **4.3.**).

> "For the most part, I thought [questions] were worded pretty well, but I seem to remember there were one or two that were a little confusing at first read ... I had to read them twice because they had [an] odd grammar ... But once I read it a second time, I was like, 'oh, it just wants to know this.'"
>
> Participant interview

Staff perceptions

In the focus group and interviews, program staff indicated satisfaction with ESAT and its support for their work. Staff noted ESAT provided clarity, a sense of objectivity, and a shared language and structure to support discussions about SES, even among staff in highly diverse program contexts. Interviewees spoke about ESAT being straightforward to navigate.

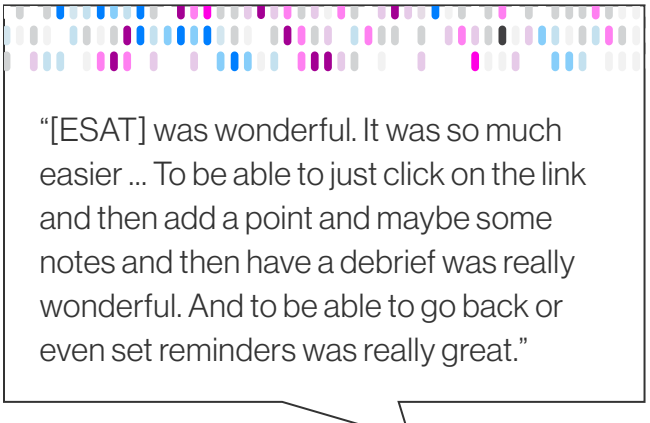
> "Implementation has been really smooth, and I think that makes it stand out as a platform to be used for any kind of job experience programming. The language is simple. It's easy to understand the definitions of those nine employability skills. They're not using different words; they're using words that most people will recognize."
>
> Staff interview

Staff mentioned that ESAT could help participants increase their confidence and self-esteem and reframe conceptions of their SES positively.

"One of the biggest things I discovered, which is normal, is that everybody's self-esteem [was] much lower than what we thought they should feel. And being able to show them this, face-to-face, was just incredible. Saying, 'No, this is where I put you; look at where you put you. You need to understand that you're really good at this.' That was a huge confidence-lifter for them."

Staff interview

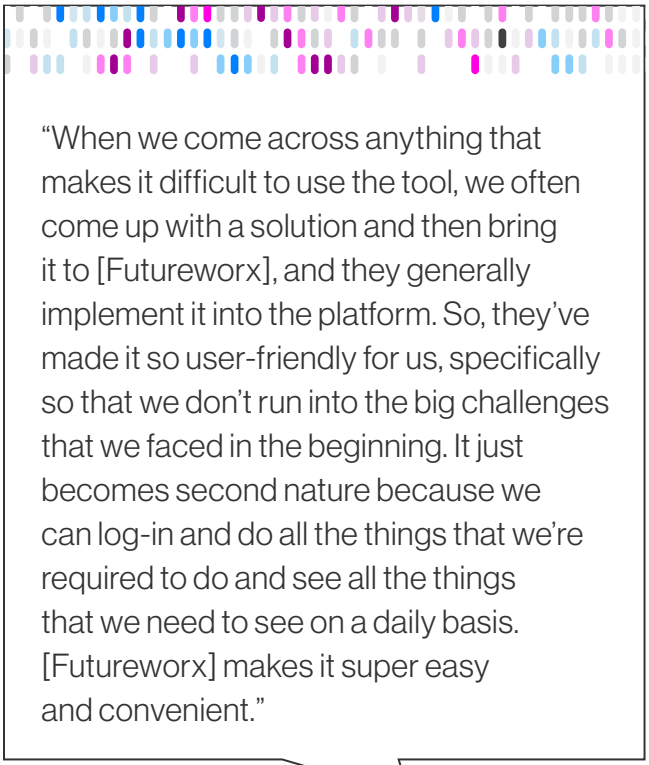
Several staff members praised specific features, including the notes for documenting feedback and the radar plots used to communicate results and guide debriefing discussions.



"[ESAT] was wonderful. It was so much easier … To be able to just click on the link and then add a point and maybe some notes and then have a debrief was really wonderful. And to be able to go back or even set reminders was really great."

Staff interview

Staff felt positive about Futureworx's supports—and particularly their responsiveness to requests for platform support to ensure ESAT was user-friendly and convenient for daily use.



"When we come across anything that makes it difficult to use the tool, we often come up with a solution and then bring it to [Futureworx], and they generally implement it into the platform. So, they've made it so user-friendly for us, specifically so that we don't run into the big challenges that we faced in the beginning. It just becomes second nature because we can log-in and do all the things that we're required to do and see all the things that we need to see on a daily basis. [Futureworx] makes it super easy and convenient."

Staff interview

Staff also noted some challenges related to ESAT's design and implementation. **Table 8**, on the following page, lists the top challenges identified by staff on the end-of-cohort surveys. Notably, time-related challenges occurred for nearly half of the sample. Challenges related to program setting and/or delivery format are discussed in section **4.2**.

Table 8 | Top three ESAT-related challenges reported by staff

ESAT-related challenges (select all that apply)	**% and no. of cohorts for which staff identified this as a challenge** (n=57)
The amount of time required to complete observations/assessments	**46%** (26)
Getting employers to use ESAT	**28%** (16)
Knowing what steps to take based on ESAT results	**28%** (16)
Discomfort with discussing employability skills strengths and gaps with participants	**25%** (14)
Discomfort with coaching participants in response to employability skills gaps	**18%** (10)
Integrating the tool with other program activities	**14%** (8)
The ESAT interface/platform	**14%** (8)
Arriving at consensus scores	**12%** (7)
The clarity of exemplar behaviour descriptions	**12%** (7)
Explaining ESAT to participants	**12%** (7)
Adapting policies and practices to support use of ESAT	**11%** (6)
The relevance of exemplar behaviour descriptions	**7%** (4)

4.1.3. Participant awareness of and comfort with SES skills

After ESAT, participants indicated increased awareness of and comfort discussing SES. As shown in **Table 9**, **83%** of exit survey respondents indicated greater awareness of their SES strengths and gaps and **79%** felt greater comfort discussing them.

Table 9 | Participant awareness of and comfort discussing SES

Participant experience prompts	Responses	Exit survey results	
After using ESAT, I am more aware of my soft skills (e.g., communication, time management, accountability, attitude, collaboration/teamwork, etc.). (n=322)	Strongly agree	**30%** (98)	**83%** (267)
	Agree	**52%** (169)	
	Neutral	**16%** (50)	
	Disagree	**1%** (3)	
	Strongly disagree	**1%** (2)	
After using ESAT, I am more comfortable discussing my soft skills (e.g., communication, time management, accountability, attitude, collaboration/teamwork, etc.). (n=321)	Strongly agree	**27%** (89)	**79%** (257)
	Agree	**52%** (168)	
	Neutral	**18%** (59)	
	Disagree	**0.09%** (3)	
	Unlikely to recommend	**1.5%** (5)	
	Very unlikely to recommend	**1.5%** (5)	

Source. Staff end-of-cohort survey

After ESAT, participants felt more confident about their SES and had a better understanding of how to use them to advance their careers. As shown in **Table 10**, **76%** of exit survey respondents agreed that their SES competencies increased post-ESAT.

Also, **80%** agreed they were more knowledgeable about the skills needed to advance their careers, and **72%** agreed that they felt more confident about reaching their employment and education goals.

Table 10 | Participants' self-perceived value of ESAT towards skills and career

Participant experience prompts	Responses	Exit survey results	
After using ESAT, I feel more competent with my soft skills (e.g., communication, time management, accountability, attitude, collaboration/teamwork, etc.). (n=321)	Strongly agree	**25%** (80)	**76%** (245)
	Agree	**51%** (165)	
	Neutral	**21.5%** (69)	
	Disagree	**1.5%** (5)	
	Strongly disagree	**1%** (2)	
ESAT helped me to understand what skills I need to advance in my career. (n=324)	Strongly agree	**26%** (82)	**80%** (254)
	Agree	**54%** (172)	
	Neutral	**19%** (61)	
	Disagree	**1%** (4)	
I feel more confident that I can reach my employment or education goals because of ESAT. (n=323)	Strongly agree	**25%** (81)	**72%** (230)
	Agree	**46%** (149)	
	Neutral	**25%** (80)	
	Disagree	**3%** (9)	
	Strongly disagree	**1%** (2)	

Source. Exit survey

In interviews, participants noted that ESAT improved their self-awareness and ability to measure progress on skill changes over time. Many praised ESAT's objectivity and utility in improving their confidence in skills development.

"It was uplifting because you are own worst critic. So, it was very positive for me to see my strengths. They've rated me stronger in some of my strengths than I did myself. It was nice to see other people's perspective, and it made my confidence go up. So that was very valuable just to have that objective observation."

Participant interview

4.1.4. Perceived skill gains among staff and participants

Staff assessments

Staff evaluated participants' skills using a scoring system ranging from 1 to 6. A score of 1 meant the desired behaviour was never observed while 6 meant it was always observed. Staff assessed scores at two or more timepoints, creating an initial and final score to show changes.

We calculated the average change in scores to understand improvement across all participants.[12] To make the improvement easier to understand, we express the average change as a percentage of the total points possible on a 5-point scale. For example, an average improvement of 1/5 would represent a **20%** improvement. The calculation's formula is included in footnote 20.[13]

Staff scores for participants increased across all nine skills. As shown in **Table 11**, on average, scores increased by **0.38** points: an **8%** improvement on the scale (from **4.13** to **4.51**). **Sixty-six percent** of participants showed improvement in every skill area. Teamwork showed the most improvement, followed closely by Attitude and Stress Management; Teamwork had an average increase of **0.54** points (**11%** on the scale), with **79%** of users improving.

Table 11 | Staff-assessed ESAT consensus scores

Skill	N	Mean of first score	Mean of last score	Increase in scores	% change within scale	% of participants whose scores increased
Accountability	144	4.11	4.35	0.24	5%	58%
Adaptability	155	4.05	4.32	0.27	5%	57%
Attitude	207	4.22	4.70	0.47	9%	71%
Confidence	126	3.92	4.41	0.49	10%	68%
Motivation	155	4.20	4.47	0.27	5%	63%
Presentation	148	4.18	4.57	0.39	8%	65%
Stress Management	207	4.04	4.48	0.44	9%	71%
Teamwork	200	4.26	4.80	0.54	11%	79%
Time Management	159	4.15	4.49	0.33	7%	65%
Overall average		4.13	4.51	0.38	8%	66%

Source. ESAT platform data, staff-assessed scores

12 We totaled all score changes and divided that by the number of participants. This gave us a number reflecting how much, on average, everyone improved.

13 Skills percentage point change = $\frac{\text{Final ESAT score-First ESAT score)}}{\text{(5 (total scale range)}} \times 100$

Participant self-assessments

Participants self-assessed their skills through ESAT through a series of items on a scale from 1 to 6. One indicated 'the statement never applies' and 6 indicated 'the statement applies in all circumstances.' Participants' self-assessments showed smaller changes than staff in SES. As shown in **Table 12**, on average, scores increased by **0.09 points**, or **2%**; **50%** of respondents reported increased skills over time. The highest increase was for confidence, both in overall score increase (**+6%**) and in the percentage of those reporting an increase (**60%**).

Table 12 | Self-assessed ESAT scores

Skill	N	Mean of first score	Mean of last score	Increase in scores	% change within scale	% of participants whose scores increased
Accountability	220	5.05	5.06	0.01	<1%	45%
Adaptability	268	4.37	4.41	0.04	<1%	47%
Attitude	285	4.68	4.78	0.10	2%	48%
Confidence	198	4.09	4.38	0.29	6%	60%
Motivation	233	4.54	4.67	0.13	3%	49%
Presentation	224	4.71	4.76	0.05	1%	48%
Stress Management	285	4.12	4.21	0.09	2%	52%
Teamwork	276	5.06	5.14	0.08	2%	53%
Time Management	237	4.72	4.77	0.05	1%	48%
Overall average	Overall	4.59	4.69	0.09	2%	50%

Source. ESAT platform data, participant-assessed scores

Lower participant self-assessment scores seem unrelated to satisfaction and willingness to recommend ESAT. Among the nine skills, Confidence had the highest increase, aligning with participant interviews and exit survey results—**72%** of users felt "more confident" in reaching employment or education goals because of ESAT, and **76%** felt more competent with their SES after using it.

Participants self-rating skill gains lower than staff also align with our expectations. Self-reporting on skills is prone to various time- and perception-related biases, such as the Dunning-Krueger Effect.[14] Most participants indicated that their *awareness* of SES increased after using ESAT. If they started with lower levels of awareness, they may have initially overestimated their abilities.[15]

14 Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: how difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(6), 1121–1134. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.77.6.1121

15 Mattern, K., Burrus, J., & Shaw, E. (2010). When both the skilled and unskilled are unaware: Consequences for academic performance. *Self and Identity*, *9*(2), 129–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860802618963

As their understanding deepened, they likely reassessed their competencies, leading to lower self-ratings over time. Notably, some participants described this as an educational experience, where seeing discrepancies between self- and staff-based scores helped them better understand their own skill development. This may explain why participants remained satisfied with ESAT even when their self-assessed skill gains were lower than expected.

4.1.5. Employment and earnings outcomes

Findings on outcomes should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal. This study cannot determine whether ESAT *directly* influenced participant employment outcomes, as other factors may also contribute (e.g., increases in employment rates and earnings may stem from job changes unrelated to participation). To establish causation, larger sample sizes and other research designs, such as randomized controlled trials, are necessary.

Notably, not all ESAT programs included have employment as an immediate goal—some are focused on pre-employment outcomes, such as building life skills. Thus, findings focus on programs with an employment outcome only, which represent **79%** of cohorts and **81% (269/334)** of participants (see **Table B2** in **Appendix B** for more information).

Within this sub-sample, employment rates increased at each timepoint. As shown in **Table 13**, employment increased from **29%** at baseline to **30%** at exit and to **41%** and **46%** at the three- and nine-months points: overall, an increase of **17 percentage points (+59%)**.

Table 13 | Participants' employment rates over time

	% employed			
	Baseline	**Exit**	**Three-month survey**	**Nine-month survey**
Employment rates for those from employment-focused programs (as indicated by staff in end-of-cohort surveys)	**29%** (75/263)	**30%** (42/142)	**41%** (49/119)	**46%** (47/102)

Source. Participant survey

Among employed participants, earnings also increased over time. As shown in **Table 14**, participants' average weekly earnings increased from **$365.49** at baseline to **$558.35** three months later and to **$587.08** at the nine-month mark, representing an increase of **61%**.

Table 14 | Employed participants' weekly earnings over time

Average weekly earnings of those who participated in employment-related programs		
Baseline	**Three-month follow-up**	**Nine-month follow-up**
$365.49 (61/75)	$558.35 (46/49)	$587.08 (38/47)

Source. Participant survey

4.2. Adaptability

To test the adaptability of ESAT across different program contexts and implementation approaches, we considered how participant experiences with ESAT varied across three interrelated implementation factors:

- **Implementation fidelity:** the degree to which a program implemented ESAT according to Futureworx's recommended guidelines.
- **Program setting:** the setting at which the program was delivered (either a community-based organization or a college setting).
- **Program type:** whether ESAT was implemented alongside technical skill training or essential skill training.

Understanding if satisfaction varied across implementation conditions can help us in two ways. First, it may help us better understand the degree to which implementation fidelity is critical to successful implementation. Second, it can demonstrate the degree to which ESAT can be successfully implemented in different context or program types. For this analysis, we specifically considered satisfaction as an indicator of effectiveness. Other, more substantive indicators of effectiveness (such as employment) are likely too strongly related to non-ESAT features of the training programs.

4.2.1. Fidelity to implementation guidelines

ESAT was implemented following most of Futureworx's guidelines. Our end-of-cohort survey asked staff to indicate how many of the six criteria were met, resulting in an average fidelity score of **4.6/6** (most cohorts implemented four to five criteria). As shown in **Table 15**, **12% (3/25)** of cohorts met all six criteria and **92% (23/25)** met at least four.

Table 15 | Average fidelity scores

Fidelity score (out of 6)	**Staff end-of-cohort survey** (n=16/60 cohorts)*
1	**0%****
2	**0%****
3	**8%** (2)
4	**40%** (10)
5	**40%** (10)
6	**12%** (3)

Source. Staff end-of-cohort survey

* Due to the timing of this update, scores are calculated using data that represents **29%** of cohorts (**25/85** cohorts). These **25** cohorts represent **60% (9/15)** of participant program delivery partners.

** No respondents in this sample met only 1 or 2 criteria, and all met between and 3 and 6.

As shown in **Table 16**, five implementation guidelines were implemented **68%** to **100%** of the time. However, the guideline related to assessment cycles was met by only **40%** of cohorts: "Observers and participants use ESAT a minimum of three times, meaning there is at least three assessment timepoints." Staff survey responses (see section **4.1.2.**) and interviews indicated that "time and resource constraints" were the most significant challenge preventing staff from meeting all guidelines.

Table 16 | Cohorts able to meet each of the six recommended implementation criteria

Recommended implementation guidelines	**Fidelity** (staff end-of-cohort survey) (n=25)
Staff explain the purpose and functionality of ESAT to all participants.	**100%** (25)
Observers meet and compare notes and scores at the end of each cycle to determine consensus scores for each skill and determine a debriefing strategy for participant strengths and opportunities for improvement.	**88%** (22)
A minimum of two people (program delivery staff, case counsellors/managers, or employers) provide feedback and document observations within the assessment.	**92%** (23)
A program staff member hosts a debrief session at the end of each assessment cycle for participants to review and interpret their ESAT scores.	**72%** (18)
Observer assessments begin at least two weeks after the program begins to ensure a reasonable period to observe participant behaviour.	**68%** (17)
Observers and participants use ESAT a minimum of three times, meaning there is at least three assessment timepoints.	**40%** (10)

Source. Staff end-of-cohort survey

4.2.2. Relationship between program setting and type and fidelity

We explored if ESAT was systemically implemented with higher fidelity in some program contexts rather than others. As shown in **Table 17**, technical skills programs/sector-specific training achieved higher fidelity to guidelines than essential/life skills programs (**75%** vs. **48%**). College programs achieved higher fidelity to guidelines than community-led programs (**67%** vs. **50%**).

Table 17 shows the percentage of participating programs in which cohorts met an average of five or more fidelity criteria. Due to the small sample size, no statistical tests were applied; findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 17 | Fidelity scores compared with various program settings

Program setting		Fidelity scores	
		5 or more	Fewer than 5
Program setting	Community-led	**50%** (11/22)	**50%** (11/22)
	College	**67%** (2/3)	**33%** (1/3)
Program type	Technical skills/sector-specific training	**75%** (3/4)	**25%** (1/4)
	Essential/life skills training	**48%** (10/21)	**52%** (11/21)

Source. Staff end-of-cohort survey

4.2.3. Relationships between variations in implementation fidelity, program setting, and program type and participant satisfaction

Above, we established that participating programs had a relatively high baseline of fidelity to ESAT implementation guidelines. Implementation fidelity also appears related to setting but not program type. We then assessed whether these factors relate to participant satisfaction. Since these factors are related, we consider both their direct relationship with participant satisfaction and their relationship with program satisfaction when controlling for other factors.

When observing direct relationships, higher implementation fidelity, college settings, and technical program types were all associated with higher participant satisfaction.

Table 18 shows the proportion of participants who responded positively along a range of satisfaction metrics, broken down across cohorts where five or more implementation criteria were met or fewer than five were met. Participant satisfaction was higher in high-fidelity cohorts (**80%**) compared to low-fidelity programs (**65%**): a **15-percentage point** difference. Sample sizes are low, so this difference should be interpreted with caution (p=0.17). No meaningful relationships were observed between fidelity and likelihood to recommend.

Table 18 | Relationship between participant satisfaction metrics and fidelity scores

Fidelity score and participant satisfaction		Fidelity score		P-value (Independent t-test)
		5 or more (n=49)	**Less than 5** (n=46)	
Overall satisfaction	Very or somewhat satisfied	**80%** (39)	**65%** (30)	0.17
Likelihood to recommend	Very likely or likely to recommend	**80%** (39)	**78%** (36)	0.59

Source. Participant survey and staff end-of-cohort survey

Table 19 shows the proportion of participants who were satisfied or likely to recommend ESAT across different program settings and program types.

Participants in programming delivered in a college setting reported higher satisfaction than participants in community-led programming (**88%** vs. **75%**). Similarly, participants receiving technical skills training reported higher satisfaction than those receiving essential skills training (**86%** vs. **74%**). We did not observe meaningful differences in likelihood to recommend across program settings or program type.

Table 19 | Satisfaction and likelihood to recommend across settings and delivery formats

			Program categories					
			Program setting			Program type		
		Overall	Community (n=231)	College (n=117)	P-value (Independent t-test)	Technical skills/ sector-specific training (n=153)	Essential/ life skills training (n=195)	P-value (Independent t-test)
Overall satisfaction	Very or somewhat satisfied	**79%** (257/324)	**75%** (159/213)	**88%** (98/111)	0.08	**86%** (124/145)	**74%** (133/179)	0.12
Likelihood to Recommend	Very likely or likely to recommend	**84%** (270/323)	**82%** (173/212)	**87%** (97/111)	0.55	**82%** (119/145)	**85%** (151/178)	0.31

Source. Participant survey and staff end-of-cohort survey

After controlling for program setting and type, implementation fidelity remains related to satisfaction. Only program setting (and not program type) are related to satisfaction after controlling for implementation fidelity.

Since implementation fidelity is related to both satisfaction and program setting and type, we can investigate the degree to which each of these factors is related to satisfaction when controlling for the other factors. This allows us to rule out the potential that, for example, implementation fidelity is related only to program satisfaction, because higher-fidelity settings also independently have more satisfied participants.

To do this, we used a linear regression model to regress participant satisfaction and likelihood to recommend on fidelity score, organization type, and program type. As shown in **Table 20**, the coefficient for fidelity score indicates the increase in the proportion of satisfied (or likely to recommend) participants associated with each additional one of the six fidelity criteria met by the organization. The coefficients for organization type and program type represent the increase in the probability of a participant being satisfied (or likely to recommend), associated with either being in a college program, or being in a technical training program, respectively.

Table 20 | Fidelity score, organization type, skill focus area and effectiveness

	Coefficient (P-value)			
Outcome (N=95)	**Intercept**	**Fidelity Score**	**Program setting: College program** (reference: Community-led program)	**Program type: Technical skills/sector-specific training** (reference: Essential/life skills training)
Overall satisfaction	0.52 (<0.01)	0.11 (0.07)	0.17 (0.25)	0.01 (0.95)
Likelihood to recommend	0.75 (<0.01)	0.02 (0.76)	0.21 (0.14)	-0.08 (0.54)

Source. Participant survey and staff end-of-cohort survey

Note. The table shows how each of the following factors increases the likelihood of satisfaction or recommendation: a) a one-point increase in fidelity (above the baseline score of three, met by all organizations); b) delivery in a college setting; and c) technical skills program focus. The baseline ("intercept") reflects satisfaction or recommendation likelihood with a fidelity score of three, standard organization type, and training focus. These baseline categories are used to compare the effects of other factors. Results are only relevant for fidelity scores ranging from three to six, as there were no observed fidelity scores below three. Fidelity scores are centred (i.e., given a mean of zero) to estimate a more easily interpreted value for the intercept.

- When we control for program setting and program type, participants were more likely to be satisfied in high-fidelity contexts. Every one-point increase in fidelity above a score of **3/6** led to a **11%** higher chance of participant satisfaction.
- Similarly, when we control for implementation fidelity and program type, college programs saw a **17%** higher satisfaction rate and **21%** higher likelihood to recommend than community-based programs.
- However, after controlling for implementation fidelity and program setting, program type no longer appears to have a relationship to participant satisfaction.

Overall, these findings suggest that both implementation fidelity and program setting may be directly and independently related to participant experiences using ESAT. While program type initially appears to be related to participant experience as well, it appears that this relationship may be simply due to technical programs having higher implementation fidelity.

4.3. Reliability and validity

In this section, we summarize findings from our scale validation exercise. Validation is a formal analytical process that determines how well an assessment measures what it intends to measure. It is a useful process when a tool is designed to measure skills, such as SES, as well as characteristics or behaviours, such as 'presentation,' which are difficult to observe directly in an assessment.

Our purpose was not to determine whether ESAT *is* a valid assessment tool, as it was not expressly designed as one. Rather, we aimed to determine what steps would be required to transition ESAT *to* a validated tool. Not all of these steps may be desirable given that ESAT operates primarily as a developmental tool and is designed to be practical and relevant in an adult learning environment. Each step toward validation would need to be assessed to determine whether it would affect ESAT's usability as a developmental tool.

Below, we provide a high-level summary of our findings. A more detailed technical report has been provided to Futureworx.

4.3.1. Key findings

To assess reliability and validity, we used statistical tests to analyze ESAT's psychometric properties.

ESAT generally demonstrates face validity.

While other validity assessments involve statistical analysis, **face validity** assesses whether individual questions in an assessment tool appear to measure a skill or concept using subjective judgments. Despite its subjective nature, face validity is a key test: if an assessment does not have face validity, it raises serious concerns about its capacity to measure a skill validly.

Overall, ESAT's questions and associated skill categories seem to demonstrate face validity. The tool's design and content align with its intended purpose, and staff and participant feedback suggest that ESAT captures SES concepts in clear, understandable terms. However, our review found some questions could be adjusted to better align with the skills being measured. In the technical report, we identify specific opportunities to increase face validity.

Internal consistency depends on how many questions participants receive in each area.

Measures of **internal consistency** (or **inter-item reliability**) evaluate whether individual questions measuring the same skill yield consistent responses. This is tested by measuring how strongly the individual questions measuring a single skill are related to one another.

Statistical tests showed that if participants received all 12 questions in each scale, most of ESAT's nine skill scales have acceptable internal consistency based on conventional standards for the reliability measure Cronbach's alpha. However, in practice, participants receive six randomly chosen questions for each skill (out of the 12 possible questions). When reliability is calculated based on a six-question version of ESAT, reliability for most skill areas is less strong. In either formulation (a 12- or six-item version), Adaptability and Presentation have lower internal consistency than other skill areas.

These findings suggest that ESAT's internal consistency is dependent on which questions are presented to participants and the total number of questions, with a higher number of questions improving reliability. In the technical report, we outline suggestions to strengthen internal consistency for questions measuring all nine skills, with an emphasis on strengthening Adaptability and Presentation.

ESAT effectively differentiates between SES and 'hard skills.'

Tests for **divergent validity** examine if skill measures are distinct from measures of skills that are conceptually distinct. To assess this, we analyzed correlations between ESAT scores and 'hard' skills assessments to confirm that ESAT does not also measure these skills. We also examined whether ESAT sub-tests measured distinct socioeconomic skills.

Our analysis confirmed that ESAT's measures of SES are distinct from what are sometimes called 'hard' or 'cognitive skills,' including literacy and numeracy.

ESAT can better ensure the nine different SES skills are distinct from each other.

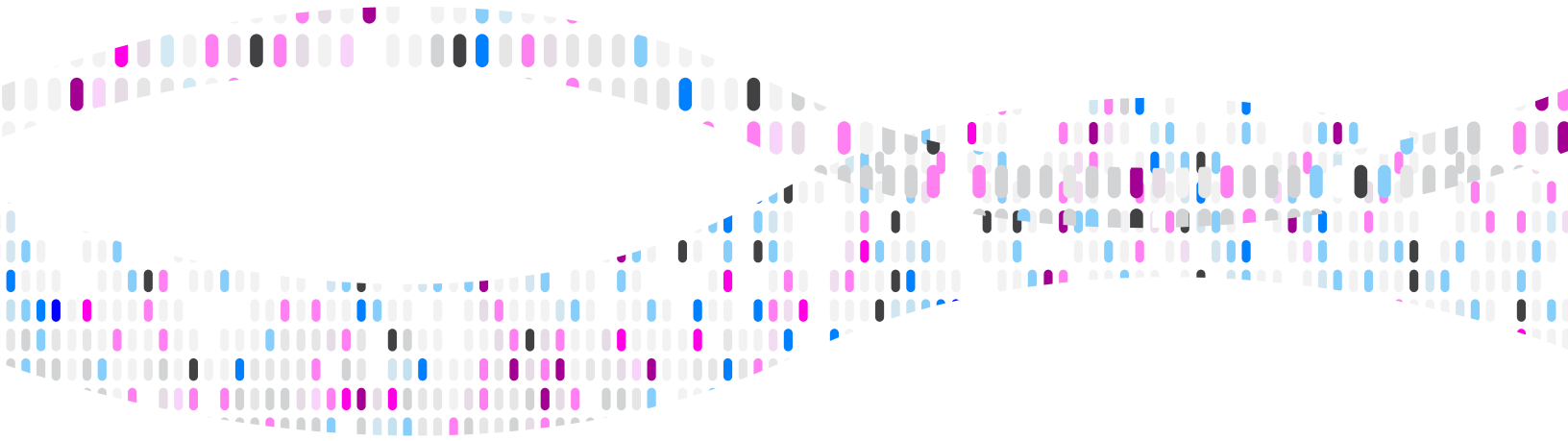
While **divergent validity** tests differentiated between ESAT's SES and hard skills, they found less differentiation between ESAT's SES. We

found that scores from some scales were strongly correlated—and especially Accountability and Adaptability for the staff-assessed skills. This suggests that staff-assessed Accountability and Adaptability capture much of the same information. In the technical report, we make suggestions that should improve divergent validity.

ESAT has moderate predictive validity for short-term employment outcomes.

Tests of **predictive validity** determine how strongly ESAT scores for each of the nine skills are related with subsequent outcomes that they should predict, based on theory. Specifically, we examined whether higher SES scores predicted employment.

ESAT scores showed a positive correlation with immediate job placement and retention at three months post-program. However, SES scores were not strongly linked to employment outcomes at nine months. Since SES is expected to correlate with employment outcomes over longer periods, this finding should be explored with additional long-term data.



5. Conclusions

5.1. Summary of findings

From September 2021 to May 2024, Blueprint evaluated ESAT's effectiveness and adaptability across diverse contexts, assessing its validity and reliability for scaling. Fifteen organizations implemented ESAT across 60 programs and 85 cohorts, balancing consistency with variation.

- **Participant experiences.** Most participants found ESAT easy to use, had meaningful discussions with staff, and would recommend it. Users reported greater confidence, comfort in discussing SES, and a clearer understanding of how their skills can help with career advancement. Many valued ESAT's objectivity for tracking progress. Participants showed modest skill gains, while staff assessments indicated larger improvements across all nine SES areas, particularly in Teamwork.
- **Employment outcomes.** Employment-focused programs saw a 17-percentage point increase in employment rates and a 61% rise in weekly earnings over nine months.
- **Staff perceptions and opportunities to improve.** Staff appreciated ESAT's structured approach and visual tools, finding it easy to use with strong support from Futureworx. Participants suggested clearer question wording, while staff cited time constraints, employer engagement, and guidance on using results as key challenges.
- **Implementation fidelity and satisfaction.** Programs followed an average of 4.6/6 guidelines; 92% adopted at least 4/6. The most challenging to achieve was having three engagement timepoints due to time constraints. High-fidelity programs had rates of satisfaction 15 percentage points higher than those with low fidelity. Every one-point increase in fidelity above 3/6 correlated with a 11% higher likelihood of satisfaction.
- **Setting and satisfaction.** College participants were more satisfied and more likely to recommend than those in community programs. After controlling for fidelity, programs in college settings had a 17% higher satisfaction rate and 21% higher likelihood to recommend.
- **Technical vs. essential skills programs.** Technical skills programs achieved higher fidelity and participant satisfaction. This association disappeared after accounting for program setting and fidelity.
- **Reliability and validity.** ESAT shows promising early results, meeting initial criteria such as face validity and short-term predictive validity. While there is potential for further refinement, the tool is on a strong foundation for continued development. Efforts to enhance ESAT's validity could focus on fine-tuning the questions and improving the categorization of skills, which would further distinguish each skill area and solidify its value as a validated SES measurement tool.

5.2. Discussion

ESAT is an effective complement to training programs and is meeting its goal of building SES understanding.

Both staff and program participants view ESAT positively as a complement to training programs, indicating that it is a worthwhile addition to a range of interventions. Beyond general satisfaction, participants indicated that ESAT achieves its goals of helping them better understand and develop their SES.

Further investigation could better illuminate ESAT's relationship to employment outcomes and its role in driving them.

While this study cannot differentiate whether ESAT contributed to improved participant employment outcomes, it did show that employment increased for participants over time. Higher staff-rated scores on ESAT may be related to higher incidences of employment after programming, but since ESAT is delivered alongside a range of training programs, it is difficult to identify how much these outcomes are due to ESAT compared to other factors. Further research using comparison groups could better isolate the effect of ESAT. We will explore potential designs in the final phase of this project.

ESAT is flexible, though promoting implementation fidelity could boost effectiveness.

Participating organizations were able to implement ESAT with a high level of fidelity despite a diversity of program settings and types. Organizations maintained a high level of participant satisfaction across these contexts. This reinforces our findings from the *Interim Report* that ESAT is a flexible tool. However, we did find that participant satisfaction may be higher in higher-fidelity implementations, which suggests that urging organizations to meet implementation criteria wherever possible may be an effective strategy to ensure efficacy.

Addressing staff time constraints could improve ESAT's effectiveness.

Staff identified time and resource constraints as the primary challenges in implementing ESAT. While ESAT offers flexibility, staff capacity to engage with the process was identified as a key success factor. To address these challenges, Futureworx may consider streamlining assessments while still maintaining key implementation features. Ongoing refinement and testing based on staff feedback could help ensure a balance between rigour and practicality.

Refining ESAT to improve reliability and validity could increase its effectiveness and open opportunities for using ESAT for SES measurement.

Our initial assessment indicated that ESAT provides a promising basis for refinement into a reliable and validated SES measurement tool, opening further use cases. This may also further enhance participant experiences and effectiveness.

5.3. What's next?

Blueprint's Phase 3 report (scheduled for publication in spring 2025) has two objectives:

- Present an updated and refined ESAT Theory of Change, informed by Phase 2 findings and a small case study conducted as part of Phase 3.
- Explore ESAT's possible next steps on its evidence journey. Summarize findings from a feasibility study for a randomized controlled trial (RCT) and perspectives about what other research might be explored.

Phase 2 data linkage will be available in August 2025 and included as a separate deliverable in 2026.

Appendix A

Common Outcomes Framework

	Outcome	Indicators
Socio-demographics	Sex & Gender	Sex at birth
		Self-identified gender
	Age	Age
	Location	Province
		Region & Municipality
	Marital status	Marital status
	Children & Dependents	Children Dependents Household size
	Household Income	Household income
	Education	Highest credential obtained
		Location of highest credential attainment
	Indigenous Identity	Self-identified Indigenous identity
	Francophone status & languages spoken	First language spoken
		Official languages
		Language spoken at home
		Other languages spoken (At home)
	Citizenship Status	Place of birth
		Year of arrival
		Citizenship status
	Racial identity	Self-identification as member of racialized group
	Disability	Self-identified disability
Employment status and history	Employment	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/ part-time)
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Work history	Time since last employed
		NOC code of job
		NAICS code of job
	Income source	Income sources

	Outcome	Indicators
Intermediate outcomes	Program completion	Successful completion of planned activities
	Participant satisfaction	Satisfaction with program
		Perceived Utility of Program
		Likelihood to recommend
Customized intermediate outcomes	Skills gains	Measured gains in specific skills
	Program-specific credential attainment	Attainment of program-specific credentials
Long-term outcomes	Employment and retention	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/ part-time)
		Retention
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Benefits	Presence of benefits including: Paid leave, Health and dental coverage, Pension plan
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Job Satisfaction	Satisfaction with job
		Perceived opportunity for career advancement
		Perceived job security
	Enrolment in further education	Enrolment in further education
		Type of training
		Field of study
	Credential attainment	Attainment of high school or PSE credentials
		Field of study credentials

Appendix B

Table B1 | Satisfaction and likelihood to recommend across settings and delivery formats

Socio-demographic indicator		**ESAT satisfaction** (very or somewhat satisfied only)
Gender	Woman	**81%** (178/219)
	Man	**79%** (63/80)
	Gender not listed	**50%** (7/14)
	Prefer not to answer	**100%** (2/2)
Age	16–17	**0%** (0/1)
	18–24	**82%** (60/73)
	25–34	**80%** (68/85)
	35–44	**79%** (62/78)
	45–54	**80%** (39/49)
	55–64	**75%** (15/20)
	65 and above	**100%** (2/2)
First official language spoken	English	**79%** (168/214)
	French	**100%** (2/2)
	Other	**81%** (80/99)
Immigration status	Canadian citizen (by naturalization)	**77%** (24/31)
	Permanent resident/Landed immigrant (a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities)	**86%** (51/59)
	Refugee claimant	**80%** (4/5)
	Other	**89%** (16/18)
Race	BIPOC	**80%** (92/115)
	Non-BIPOC	**73%** (53/73)
	Prefer not to say	**75%** (9/12)
Disability status	Yes	**82%** (80/97)
	No	**78%** (169/216)

Table B2 | Breakdown of cohorts and participants by program purpose

Program Purpose **Asked as multi-select question on staff's end-of-cohort survey**	**Cohorts** (n=60)	**# of participants enrolled in these cohorts at baseline** (n=650)
Help individuals find employment	**79%** (30/38)	**81%** (269/334)
Other purpose (non-employment-focused, i.e., technical skills, sector-specific training, mental health supports, etc.)	**21%** (8/38)	**19%** (65/334)

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