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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Survey

Provision for the New Deal Lone Parent and New Deal for Partners Programmes

Inspected: November 2006-February 2007

CONTENTS

Section	Page
SUMMARY	
STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. CONTEXT	1
3. PROVISION	2
4. THE SURVEY	2
5. MAIN FINDINGS	4
OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION	
6. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	6
7. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES	7
8. QUALITY OF TRAINING AND LEARNING	8
KEY PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT	
APPENDIX	

A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small minority

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) is piloting a new 6-point grading scale to replace the original 4-point scale as set out below. Where grades are recorded in this report, the grade is given on both the old and the revised scales.

ORIGINAL GRADE	REVISED GRADE	DESCRIPTOR
1	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence
1	2	Consistently good; major strengths
2	3	Important strengths in most of provision. Areas for improvement which organisation has the capacity to address.
2	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
3	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
4	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Since 1998 there has been a significant reduction in the number of unemployed claimants throughout Northern Ireland on the New Deal programmes. This reduction in unemployment figures has influenced the Government to turn its attention to groups of people who fall into the category of the “economically inactive”. This includes people who traditionally had not been encouraged to take up employment, such as lone parents and partners of benefit recipients. The Department for Employment and Learning has designed programmes specifically aimed at these groups of people.

1.2 The aim of this survey is to evaluate the effectiveness of the New Deal Lone Parent (NDLP) and New Deal for Partners (NDP) training programmes, in helping lone parents and the partners of benefit recipients in finding permanent employment.

1.3 A lone parent is specified as “a person who has no partner and who is responsible for, and a member of the same household, as a child or young person under the age of 16 years.” Partners of claimants of a range of qualifying benefits, for example, Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income Support, and Incapacity Benefit are also being targeted. While these two groups have been the focus of this survey, the number of partners on the programmes is very small.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 The primary aim of the NDLP and NDP programmes is to help and encourage participants to improve their job prospects and job readiness, and to increase their employment opportunities. While both the NDLP and NDP programmes are voluntary and there are no sanctions if participants withdraw from the programme, the overall objective is to help those who are able to work to move back into the world of employment.

2.2 In April 2004, 45% of lone parents in Northern Ireland were in work, in comparison to 54% of lone parents in Great Britain. The Government has set the target of 70% of lone parents being in work by the year 2010. There are currently no targets for the number of partners of benefit recipients starting work.

2.3 The NDLP and NDP programmes are managed directly by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and information on these options is provided to prospective participants through Personal Advisers (PAs) in the DEL Jobs and Benefits Offices and Jobcentres.

2.4 All lone parents and partners on benefit are required to attend one or more work-focused Interviews (WfIs) in a local Jobs and Benefits office area, during the period of their benefit claim. The purpose of WfIs is to discuss previous work history, experience, skills and qualifications and to encourage prospective participants to consider work as a viable alternative to a life on benefit. All interested lone parents and partners are then referred to a New Deal PA. The PA assists prospective participants to address their barriers to employment through: a series of interviews; the provision of support and guidance; practical assistance in finding suitable childcare; making job applications; and identifying appropriate training courses. All of these aim to help the participants move into employment at the earliest opportunity.

3. PROVISION

3.1 While a range of provision/training programmes are available to lone parents and partners, including the mainstream New Deal programmes, this survey focuses on three specific aspects of funded training, which have been specifically designed for lone parents and partners of claimants. These are accredited pre-employment training, 13 week and 26 week programmes, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 courses in a range of vocational areas over a 52 week period, and NVQ Level 3 in Children's Care, Learning and Development (CCLD). The latter is the only Level 3 programme funded under the NDLP and NDP programmes in support of the NI Childcare Strategy. These training programmes entitle the participants to the additional benefits of travel and childcare costs, childcare assistance or subsidy, and a training allowance or premium.

3.2 Finding employment is the main aim of the NDLP/NDP programmes. However, for those lone parents/ partners who have not been in employment for some time, it may not be practical or realistic to find a job immediately. In these cases a short period of accredited pre-employment training may be necessary in order to provide them with the required skills and knowledge to compete for jobs. Accredited pre-employment training courses are occupationally focused and aim to provide or improve vocational skills in areas such as information and communication technology (ICT) or administration. Lone parents/partners may undertake one or more approved pre-employment training courses of up to a maximum of 13 weeks duration which will lead to a full or part qualification. This training is provided mostly by Training Providers in the private sector. In this survey the three training providers offering pre-employment training all provided short ICT training courses only.

3.3 Lone parents/partners can undertake a full NVQ course within the NDLP/NDP programmes in Colleges of Further Education (FE) and are permitted by legislation to undertake associated work experience placements. These arrangements apply only to those lone parents/partners who are participating in NDLP/NDP and are referred to the NVQ course by their New Deal Personal Adviser. Lone parents/partners undertaking NVQ courses at Further Education Colleges while participating in NDLP/NDP continue to be eligible for Income Support or other existing benefits for the duration of their course. Department for Employment and Learning provide funding for NVQ training for a maximum of three days each week over a 52 week period. Lone parents/partners may only be funded for one NVQ Level 2 course through NDLP/NDP. However participants who complete the NVQ Level 2 in CCLD can be funded for an NVQ Level 3 in CCLD.

3.4 In addition to the 13 week accredited pre-employment training courses and 52 week NVQ courses provided by FE colleges, one private training provider in Northern Ireland is permitted to provide a 26 week training programme with a target outcome of three NVQ units and associated work experience placements. This provider was also included in this survey.

4. THE SURVEY

4.1 This report is based on a series of visits by the Inspectorate to four Institutes of Further and Higher Education (Colleges) and four private Training Providers, between November 2006 and February 2007.

4.2 At the time of the inspection, there was a total of 217 participants enrolled on a wide range of NVQ courses across all of the Colleges, 176 enrolled on a range of NVQ Level 2 courses and 41 participants on the NVQ Level 3 in CCLD. Only three of these participants were on the New Deal for Partners programme, while the rest were lone parents. In the four colleges visited as part of the survey, there were 77 participants on NDLP and one on NDP (35% of total enrolments). Almost all of the participants were enrolled on CCLD (28 participants; nine on level 2, 19 on level 3), 25 on hairdressing level 2, and 12 on beauty therapy level 2.

4.3 At the same time a further 252 participants were enrolled on accredited pre-employment training programmes across a range of training providers. Of these participants only two were on the NDP programme. All of these participants were undertaking ICT courses such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), and Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT). In the three training providers visited as part of the survey, 26 participants were enrolled on Accredited Pre-Employment programmes (10% of total enrolments).

4.4 A further 13 participants were registered, in a fourth training provider, on a 26 week programme with an end target of three NVQ units. These participants were registered on NVQs in administration (5 participants), catering (4 participants) and Information Technology (4 participants).

4.5 All of the participants in both the NVQ provision and pre-employment training programmes were female.

4.6 In the course of the survey, inspectors observed 34 training sessions, and visited 24 participants in the workplace. Discussions were held with the senior managers responsible for the training provision, vocational tutors, employers and participants. The inspectors sampled vocational portfolios, internal and external verifier reports and other relevant documentation.

4.7 During the survey the Inspectorate evaluated the:

- extent to which the participants on NDLP/NDP are on a programme matched appropriately to their needs, abilities and aspirations;
- standards and outcomes achieved by the participants on these programmes;
- quality of the training and learning;
- effectiveness of leadership and management;
- extent to which participants improve their job readiness as a result of participation in the programme; and
- extent to which participants gain employment as a result of undertaking their training programme.

5. MAIN FINDINGS

5.1 CONCLUSION

In the organisations inspected, the overall NDLP and NDP programmes have strengths in many aspects of the training and support arrangements with a few important areas for improvement to be addressed.

5.2 NEW DEAL LONE PARENT AND NEW DEAL FOR PARTNER ACCREDITED PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROVISION

The main strengths across all the providers are the:

- significant development in confidence and self esteem reported by most participants;
- high levels of individual support provided by tutors for participants throughout their learning programme;
- good resources including equipment and materials to support participants in their learning;
- good standards demonstrated by most participants in using general software applications; and
- good opportunities to gain accreditation in ICT.

The main areas for improvement, across all the providers, are the:

- poor retention rates;
- need for all participants to undergo appropriate initial assessment to inform individual training plans which clearly identify relevant targets for each participant;
- need to track the progress of individual participants to ensure that there are opportunities for progression in their learning and a reduction in duplication of programmes undertaken; and
- need for all providers to monitor and analyse the data relating to the key performance indicators of retention, success and progression to inform action for improvement.

5.3 NEW DEAL LONE PARENT AND NEW DEAL PARTNER NVQ TRAINING PROVISION

The main strengths across all of the providers are the:

- high levels of motivation, increased confidence and self esteem of almost all of the participants;

- good opportunities for participants to develop their knowledge and skills alongside learners from other programmes;
- good quality of almost all of the directed training;
- good quality of almost all of the work placements providing appropriate work experiences well matched to the needs of the participants; and
- good standards demonstrated by most participants across the vocational programmes.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- poor retention rates;
- in three of the four colleges, a need for overall co-ordination of New Deal provision across all vocational areas, including analysis and evaluation of data in relation to the key performance indicators of retention, success and progression to inform action for improvement;
- need for most of the colleges to ensure closer monitoring and greater support for participants in the workplace including structured training plans which integrate work in directed training and in the workplace; and
- need for more formal and structured careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) for all participants throughout their programme to support progression.

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

6. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

6.1 The quality of the leadership and management of the NDLP and NDP programmes in both NVQs and Accredited Pre-employment Training in most organisations is only satisfactory. In the two organisations where leadership and management are excellent, the provision is well co-ordinated; there are clearly defined communication channels and good working relationships at all levels. In these organisations the NDLP/NDP co-ordinators work hard to plan both directed, and workplace training where appropriate, and are committed to the provision of high quality training to meet the needs of the individual participants. In the organisations where leadership and management are only satisfactory, there is little overall co-ordination of the NDLP/NDP provision and the overall needs of individual participants are not being well met.

6.2 All of the organisations are committed to the provision of training for lone parents and partners. The support mechanisms in each organisation are generally good and there are good levels of support for individual learners. In a minority of organisations management are proactive and ensure that a range of barriers to learning are removed. For example, in a small number of organisations course fees are claimed directly from the DEL and uniforms and practice materials are provided with no additional cost to the participants. In other organisations participants report that these financial implications often cause barriers to participation in the programme.

6.3 In addition, the guidelines for the NDLP/NDP programmes do not allow providers to compensate participants for the additional transport costs incurred in rural areas where participants are travelling long distances, often without a public transport infrastructure. Similarly the guidelines do not take account of the variations in childcare costs across urban and rural areas. There is a need for the DEL to review the provision to ensure consistency in practice in this regard across all organisations.

6.4 The arrangements for the monitoring and review of trainee progress in both directed training and, where appropriate, the workplace, are poor for most of the providers. Training plans prepared for most of the participants as they begin their training are generally poor. They do not reflect in sufficient detail individualised learning goals, based on each trainee's strengths and weaknesses as identified through thorough initial assessment. Most employers are not given sufficient information about the programme the participant is undertaking. As a consequence, good opportunities for the participants to practise and develop their skills in a planned and systematic way in the workplace are missed.

6.5 In almost all of the organisations there is a need to develop a more rigorous and systematic approach to the analysis of a range of performance indicators, including retention, success and progression rates. Only a small number of organisations were able to provide reliable data at the beginning of the Survey. None of the organisations had explored with the DEL the reasons for the variations in data collected internally and those provided by the DEL.

6.6 In almost all of the organisations, quality assurance procedures are not sufficiently robust to identify major weaknesses in the quality of the training and learning including participant experiences in the workplace. There is also a need to place more emphasis on suitable arrangements to secure the effective involvement of both participants and employers, in the review of the quality of provision.

6.7 Most of the tutors are well informed about progression routes and career opportunities within their vocational area and provide their trainees with informal careers education. There is, however, a need to develop more formal and systematic approaches to the provision of careers education in almost all of the organisations, including effective Jobsearch provision which incorporates interview skills, to enable more trainees to progress into work, on completion of their programme. However, consideration also needs to be given to the high numbers of trainees undertaking training in vocational areas, CCLD, hairdressing and beauty therapy, where job opportunities are limited and where participants realistically will be unable to earn sufficient salaries to relinquish benefits and enter full time employment.

7. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

7.1 Almost all of the participants are highly motivated and committed to achieving their target qualifications. They respond well to their tutors, other participants and where appropriate, workplace supervisors. The time-keeping and attendance of the majority of the participants are good. Almost all of the participants report increased confidence and self esteem due to participation in the programme.

7.2 The standards of underpinning knowledge and occupational skills are good for the majority of participants on the NVQ courses, including those on the 26 week programme, and are commensurate with their ability and stage of training. Most of the participants on the 26 week programme (63%) who complete their three NVQ units progress to a mainstream New Deal programme to complete their NVQ. Tutors in most of the organisations have high expectations of the participants and, as a result, most achieve good standards in their practical work. Almost all of the participants on the pre-employment programmes, while developing their ICT skills, have no opportunities to progress or become more work ready, because of the lack of workplace experience and lack of opportunity to apply their skills.

7.3 In almost all work placements participants develop new personal, social and occupational skills. In all of the work placements visited, participants are able to adopt safe working practices and understand the health and safety requirements of their occupational area.

7.4 The collation of valid, reliable data on retention, success and progression across the different strands of provision in the organisations inspected proved unsatisfactory. Statistics provided by the DEL do not correlate with statistics provided by the organisations. In relation to the NVQ provision in the colleges, DEL does not take account of the fact that all of the programmes extend into a fourth term due to the suspension of training over the summer months. The DEL therefore base their statistics on one academic year and the result is that there is inconsistency in the data provided by the colleges and in that provided by the DEL. For example, in one college for the year 2004-2005, DEL report a success rate of 33%, whereas the organisation reports a 68% success rate.

7.5 Overall the retention rates on NDLP and NDP programmes are poor, most below 50%. Very often participants are poorly prepared for the demands of the programme and given that almost all participants are lone mothers with young children, attendance is poor. This suggests that initial advice and guidance needs to be strengthened for participants before they undertake a training programme.

7.6 From the statistics provided by DEL, in 2005-2006, the success rates for participants completing accredited pre-employment training across the organisations inspected, range from poor to excellent, most are poor. Statistics for participants successfully completing NVQ courses in the colleges inspected in the survey are all poor at below 35%. In both these categories the organisations claim that almost all of the statistics held by the DEL are incorrect.

7.7 There is considerable variation across the organisations in the progression rates to employment or further education or training. In most of the organisations there are no formal systems in place to monitor progression. Most of the participants interviewed during the survey stated that they would be unable to come off benefits in the near future as they would be financially disadvantaged by being in low paid employment.

8. QUALITY OF TRAINING AND LEARNING

8.1 Across the organisations inspected, good relationships exist between tutors and participants, and where appropriate between participants and their employers. The participants in the organisations value highly the professional expertise provided by their tutors. Induction is generally well organised in relation to providing the participants with good opportunities to develop an understanding of the administrative requirements of their training programmes, as well as the content and assessment requirements. However in almost all of the organisations, the induction process needs to be strengthened and extended. A thorough initial assessment should take place, including analysis of the participants' personal competences and work readiness, in order to prepare them more effectively for the demands of the programme and the workplace.

8.2 In all of the eight organisations inspected during the survey, strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the overall quality of the training and learning; in two of the organisations there were significant strengths. Of the 34 directed training sessions observed during the survey, 16 (47%) had significant strengths, strengths outweighed areas for improvement in 14 (41%), and there were more areas for improvement than strengths in 12% of the sessions.

8.3 For the majority of the participants on the NDLP and NDP programmes, the directed training sessions are well planned. In these sessions, a good range of training and learning approaches is used, and participants are provided with challenging learning experiences, which enable them to discuss relevant issues and topics and share their experiences. In the majority of organisations providing pre-employment training programmes there is good individual support and good development of participants' skills in using general applications software. However, the lack of recording and tracking leads to duplication in provision for returning participants who tend to undertake a range of ICT courses at a similar level, which do not afford progression opportunities.

8.4 There is considerable variation in the quantity of the directed training provided for participants on NVQ courses. For example in beauty therapy the majority of colleges surveyed provide directed training for NDLP/NDP participants for two days each week plus a further day in work experience. A further College provides a total of four days training each week. It is unsatisfactory that one College provides training for only one day each week in this vocational area.

8.5 The quality of individual training plans are poor for most participants and do not provide sufficient detail on the overall training needs of individual learners. In almost all of the colleges the use of Individual Student Learning Agreements (ISLAs) is not an appropriate tool for NDLP/NDP participants.

8.6 There is considerable variation in the provision for the development and assessment of essential skills across the organisations. In the best practice, all participants undertake an effective initial assessment to determine the level of individual support required and the outcomes of the assessment are used to plan and implement an appropriate programme of support. In these situations, the essential skills are developed well in directed training by the vocational tutors, and there is evidence of supportive marking for improvement in vocational portfolios. In contrast, in a significant minority of organisations, the provision of initial assessment is not sufficiently robust to inform planning for the support of essential skills in vocational training, despite the fact that a minority of participants have essential skills needs.

8.7 The quality of the assessment procedures ranges from satisfactory to excellent across the organisations. The pace of assessment is good for a minority of the participants and they make good progress in their vocational units. In the best practice the assessment of participants' work in directed and workplace training is comprehensive and rigorous, and participants are provided regularly with feedback that promotes improvement. However, in a majority of organisations the pace of assessment is too slow, and does not commence early enough in the programme to ensure that the participants who complete have been assessed in all of the units in which they are competent.

8.8 The quality of the work placements ranges from satisfactory to good for most participants, and is mostly good. Most participants have good opportunities to develop both their occupational and personal skills, including working with others. Where the workplace training is good, the workplace supervisors make good use of individual training plans to ensure the participants are gaining appropriate and good quality practical experiences, and consolidate the work undertaken during directed training. However, the quality of the workplace training is poor for most of the participants, due to the lack of appropriate individual training plans. In these situations, there is little integration of directed and workplace training and employers are not involved in setting and monitoring short-term training targets.

8.9 Almost all of the participants undertaking pre-employment training courses up to 13 weeks duration do not have work placements opportunities, and therefore do not have opportunities to develop their work readiness and develop their skills in a work-based situation.

8.10 The quality of the training accommodation, equipment and resources is generally good in most of the training organisations surveyed.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following priorities for improvement need to be addressed if the quality of the provision for participants on the NDLP and NDP programmes is to improve.

THE DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING needs to:

- Review its procedures for recording data to establish a robust, transparent system with all organisations for the collation and analysis of data on retention, success and progression relating to NDLP and NDP.
- Review its tracking and monitoring system to ensure that learners who engage in pre-employment training make real progress without unnecessary duplication.
- Review the NVQ provision to ensure equality of opportunity for all, including travel and childcare costs, and consistency across providers in the removal of obstacles at registration in relation to payment of fees and practice materials.
- Review the Accredited Pre-employment training provision to include opportunities for workplace training to allow participants to develop their work readiness by applying their skills in a work placement.

PROVIDERS need to:

- Implement individual training plans and progress reviews, to facilitate the tracking and monitoring of participants' progress.
- Develop and implement strategies to ensure that employers are made aware of the content of programmes and are enabled to contribute to the establishment and monitoring of appropriate training targets.
- Develop and implement more rigorous and robust quality assurance processes to monitor and evaluate the quality of NDLP and NDP programmes, and inform action for improvement.
- Integrate a more formal and structured CEIAG programme into the training programmes to ensure consistency in approach for all participants.
- Implement robust procedures for the ongoing collation and analysis of data in respect of NDLP and NDP.

ORGANISATIONS INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY

Pre-Employment Training Providers

Fermanagh Rural Community Initiative
Gingerbread
Paragon Training (NI) Limited
YMCA, Lisburn

NVQ Providers

East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education
Fermanagh College of Further and Higher Education
Newry and Kilkeel College of Further and Higher Education
North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education

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