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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

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

of the

Steps to Work Employment Programme

in

TWL East and South Belfast Contract Area

November 2010

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF TWL EAST AND SOUTH BELFAST CONTRACT AREA

The longitudinal inspection in April and October 2009 highlighted strengths in the: Lead Contractor's head office support for quality improvement; high levels of investment by the Lead Contractor in staffing, physical and information and communication technology (ICT) resources to support participants; quality of the training provided by the Lead and sub-contractors; quality of most of the work experience placements; and the strong emphasis on the development of the participants' work-readiness skills, including essential skills.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the inadequate local management of the Steps to Work programme by the Lead Contractor;
- the ineffective procedures for the management of participant referrals; and
- the Lead Contractor's quality assurance processes.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- a reorganisation of the Lead Contractor's Belfast office, including additional staff appointments to enhance their capacity to manage the Steps to Work programme more effectively;
- the development and implementation of a bespoke management information system (MIS) to underpin and inform quality improvement processes;
- the implementation of improved administrative and participant referral processes;
- the recent appointment of a quality manager, and further implementation of quality assurance processes including observation of Lead and subcontractor directed training sessions;
- the provision of a range of opportunities for the Lead Contractor's staff to engage in continuous professional development; and
- further investment in the acquisition of new premises and additional physical resources, including ICT equipment to support the participants.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) carried out an interim follow-up visit in June 2010 and a follow-up inspection in November 2010.

The improvement plan produced by the organisation in response to the original inspection findings was of satisfactory quality and was adjusted appropriately in light of feedback given by the Inspectorate during the interim follow-up visit.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- a recent review of management arrangements within the organisation, which is resulting in more effective decision-making and improved working relationships with the majority of the subcontractors;
- better use of data to track participants' progress and to analyse key performance indicators; and
- enhanced administration and MIS processes.

The areas which require further action include:

- a strengthening of local leadership and management to ensure that the Lead Contractor, sub-contractors and the Jobs and Benefits Office staff work together more effectively;
- the further development of the quality assurance processes; and
- an extension of the range of provision, and action to increase the number of work placements likely to lead to sustained employment.

Conclusion

In most of the areas inspected, the quality of the Steps to Work employment programme provided by TWL remains satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The organisation has demonstrated evidence of improvement but areas for improvement in leadership and management remain to be addressed if the needs of all the participants are to be met effectively.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the remaining areas for improvement.

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