



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Steps to Work Provision in
Springvale Learning
West Belfast Contract Area

Report of an Inspection
in January/February 2012



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



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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Statistics

This report uses the most recent statistical data published by the Department for Employment and Learning¹. Any additional data and performance statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by Springvale Learning.

Performance Levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) use the following performance levels in reports:

Performance Level
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

¹¹ Steps to Work Statistical Bulletin: Statistics from September 2008 to September 2011 (Department for Employment and Learning, December 2011).

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In September 2008, the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) introduced its new employment programme, Steps to Work, which subsumed the main New Deal programmes. The primary purpose of the Steps to Work programme is to help participants who are unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment. The programme has been devised to ensure a more flexible approach to provision which can be targeted at the individuals' personal barriers to employment. Participation on Steps to Work is a mandatory requirement for all Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants aged 18 to 24 years who have been claiming JSA for six months or more, and those aged 25 and over who have been claiming JSA for 18 months or more. Steps to Work is also available on a voluntary basis to participants who are unemployed or economically inactive and who want to start or return to work.

1.2 Steps to Work is delivered in a '3 step' process.

Step One: Participants receive ongoing one-to-one support and guidance from an Adviser from the Jobs and Benefits office/JobCentre with the primary aim of helping the participants find work as soon as possible. Available provision is focused on interventions of short duration such as Short Accredited Courses or Core Gateway.

Step Two: This is targeted at participants who require additional assistance to bring them closer to the labour market and help them find and sustain employment. The participant is offered and provided with a wider range of longer-term support; the provision will normally last for between eight and 26 weeks.

Step Three: This is targeted at participants who have completed Step Two but have not found employment. The participant is provided with follow-up support and advice from an Adviser for a period of up to six weeks. They may also access some provision such as Short Accredited Courses or elements of Core Gateway, if needed.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Springvale Learning (Springvale) is contracted by the Department as Lead Contractor for the delivery of the Steps to Work provision in the West Belfast area of Northern Ireland. This region covers the densely populated parliamentary constituency area of West Belfast and most of the participants are referred to the Steps to Work programme from the Jobs and Benefits offices of Andersonstown, Falls Road, and Shankill.

2.2 Springvale was established in 1992 as a private limited company with charitable status. Since then, it has supplied a range of training and employment programmes for the Department. Springvale is located in a purpose built training facility on the Springfield Road, Belfast, approximately two and a half miles from the city centre. Springvale has two further satellite training facilities to facilitate its delivery of Steps to Work provision in the Andersonstown and Shankill areas, particularly Core Gateway and Essential Skills Training. Eighteen sub-contractors support Springvale in the delivery of the Steps to Work provision,

with their offices and training facilities located across the West Belfast contract area. The contract is managed by Springvale's Steps to Work manager, and is supported by a team of 21 staff dedicated to the Steps to Work provision. The team includes the following key contract support staff: an executive officer, an administrative officer, two participant referral advisers and a quality monitoring officer.

2.3 The data supplied by the Department shows that, in September 2011, there were 6,145 Jobseeker's Allowance claimants in the West Belfast area. The number of participants eligible for mandatory participation on Steps to Work in this area has increased from 1,110 in December 2009 to 1,365 in September 2011. While these statistics show a noticeable increase in mandatory claimants, the increase is not as marked as in other contract areas due to the significant numbers of long-term unemployed in this area. The same statistics show that of the 1,785 participants registered on Steps to Work in the West Belfast area at the end of September 2011, 75% were mandatory, 71% were male, and 43% were under 25 years old.

2.4 The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM) indicate that West Belfast is the most deprived Assembly area within Northern Ireland. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) claimant count for December 2011 shows that West Belfast has the highest claimant count for unemployment benefits at 8.7%, which is significantly above the Northern Ireland average of 5.1%.

3. PROVISION

3.1 At the time of the inspection, there were 711 participants on the Steps to Work provision across the West Belfast contract area. Forty-six participants were registered on Step One; 6 on Confidence and Motivation, 24 on Core Gateway, one on Start a Business and 15 on Short Accredited Courses. Six hundred and sixty-five participants were registered on Step Two; 87 (13%) on Back to Work, 24 (4%) on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) lasting 52 weeks, 109 (16%) on Essential Skills Training, 137 (21%) on Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQ) lasting 26 weeks, 25 (4%) on Self-Employment Test Trading, 276 (41%) on Step Ahead and 7 (1%) on the Graduate Acceleration Programme. There were no participants registered on Step Three. Approximately one-third of the participants were on Steps to Work for the first time, with the remainder having been on Steps to Work (or New Deal) at least twice.

3.2 Just over one-half (51%) of the participants had no formal qualifications on entry to Step Two. Of the remainder, 6% had achieved four or more General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSE) at grades A*-C and 17% of them had achieved between one and three GCSE passes at grade C or above. Around 17% of the participants had achieved English at GCSE grade C or above and 14% of them had achieved mathematics. Around 18% had achieved vocational qualifications up to level 3, and a further 6% had education qualifications higher than level 3.

3.3 At the time of the inspection, Springvale was working directly with 478 participants. In addition, 16 of the 18 sub-contractors were actively working with participants: Business in the Community (7), Belfast Metropolitan College (9), Corpus Christi Services (1), Community Service Volunteers Media (1), Dairy Farm Training (13), Divis Joint Development Committee (2), Falls Community Council (15), Impact Training (29), Lenadoon and Suffolk Interface Group (2), NDS Employment and Training (7), Ortus Enterprise (5), Pargaon Training (41), Stadium Projects (5), Upper Andersonstown Community Forum (28), Ulster Supported Employment Limited (2), and Work West Enterprise (20).

3.4 All of the participants on the Step Two strands were receiving some form of employability preparation, including Jobsearch, curriculum vitae (CV) building, and interview skills.

4. THE INSPECTION

4.1 This report is based on an inspection of the Steps to Work provision in Springvale Learning and in most of the sub-contractors' provision. The inspection took place over five days in February 2012 and involved a team of eight inspectors and an associate assessor.

4.2 During the inspection, the inspectors:

- observed 44 directed training sessions in centres operated by Springvale and its sub-contractors;
- visited 109 participants on work experience placements;
- observed or held discussions with 384 participants, individually or in groups;
- held discussions with the members of Springvale's senior management team and senior staff from the majority of the sub-contractors;
- held discussions with key training and support staff;
- examined a wide range of documentation, including samples of participants' written work and their Personal Plans Towards Employment;
- held discussions with 55 employers; and
- held discussions with the regional manager, managers and team leaders from the Jobs and Benefits offices.

5. MAIN FINDINGS

5.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of the Steps to Work employment programme provided by Springvale Learning is good. The organisation is meeting effectively the needs of the participants, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained improvement.

5.2 The main strengths are the:

- very responsive and flexible leadership and management of the provision to meet well the needs of the participants in a challenging economic climate;
- very good links and partnerships with local employers and the very good start in developing strategic links with larger employers;
- outstanding relationships between the Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors, Jobs and Benefits offices' staff and employers;
- very good provision for the Core Gateway and Back to Work strands, particularly the improving participant progression rate to sustained employment for the Back to Work strand;

- good or better quality of most of the direct training or coaching sessions observed; and
- very good personal support provided for participants to improve their self-confidence and preparedness for employment or training, particularly for those furthest from the labour market.

5.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- strategies to improve further the participant progression rate to sustained employment (16%), which is well below the Department's target;
- further embedding of the quality assurance procedures to make better use of qualitative and quantitative data to inform improvement planning across sub-contractors and strands; and
- development and implementation of additional strategies to extend the number of quality work experience placements, and to encourage more participants to experience working in city centre locations and beyond.

Table of Performance Levels

Overall performance level	Good
Contributory performance levels	
Leadership and management	Good
Employment outcomes and achievement	Good
Quality of training and services	Good

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

6. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

6.1 Overall, the quality of the leadership and management of the Steps to Work provision is good.

6.2 The strategic leadership provided by Springvale as Lead Contractor of the West Belfast contract area is good. At all levels within the organisation, there is a clear vision and a strong commitment to the provision of a wide range of high quality training and services, which aim to improve the employment opportunities for all job seekers within the West Belfast area, including those who are long-term unemployed. Springvale's Management Board, Chief Executive and senior managers work hard to develop effective strategic links and partnerships with relevant organisations, agencies and employers, and to promote and support good working relationships with sub-contractors and staff from the Jobs and Benefits offices. In particular, the Steps to Work manager, through a comprehensive knowledge of the social and economic context of the contract area, makes a significant and highly professional contribution to the effective operational management and ongoing development of the provision. The Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors are very responsive and flexible in reacting to the impact of the economic downturn in an already disadvantaged area, to the Department's recent initiatives and revisions to the Steps to Work programme, and to the introduction of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). A good start has been made in the development and implementation of innovative strategies to improve further the participant progression rate to sustained employment. These initiatives include: the development of tailored training and employment preparation programmes with employers offering multiple employment opportunities; appropriate use of social clauses within local government contracts; and, a recently proposed development of an in-house employee recruitment service for small businesses.

6.3 The quality of the links and partnerships across the contract area is good. The Lead Contractor has established, and manages well, a broad range of sub-contractors who reflect well the composition, community backgrounds and needs of the local community. These include community and voluntary sector organisations, private sector organisations, and other education and training providers. There is effective communication and outstanding relationships between the Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors. Through well-attended monthly meetings there are good opportunities to share information, monitor participant referrals, report on performance outcomes, and develop and disseminate good practice. There are also outstanding relationships with the staff of the local Jobs and Benefits offices. Through regular meetings with the office managers and team leaders, the Lead Contractor monitors effectively the backlogs, the referral process, and any changes to administrative procedures. A recent pilot involving case-conferencing between Springvale and staff from one of the local Jobs and Benefits offices has been particularly effective in providing joint support for participants who are long-term unemployed. The Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors have established effective links and partnerships with an extensive range of potential local employers and agencies. The Lead Contractor is aware that the majority (70%) of the participants' work experience placements are within the immediate West Belfast area. Although a good start has been made in encouraging participants to undertake work experience placements outside the immediate area, more needs to be done at both strategic and operational management levels to source and promote quality work experience placements and employment opportunities in the city centre and beyond. To date, the strategies implemented, appropriately, to develop further employment opportunities within

the greater Belfast area include: an increased focus on securing new work experience placements within the private sector; tailored recruitment solutions with larger employers; the development of strategic relationships with employers in the construction industry to maximise the use of social clauses in local government building and maintenance contracts; and the engagement with key stakeholders, such as sector skills organisations, the local Workforce Development Forum and the West Belfast Partnership Board.

6.4 Tracking and monitoring arrangements are good. The Lead Contractor collates and tracks regularly the occupancy and participant progression rates to sustained employment across the contract area, for each sub-contractor and for each strand. Where persistent low performance is identified, the Lead Contractor is proactive in addressing poor performance through its annual review of sub-contracting agreements. It is timely that the Lead Contractor is commissioning the installation of a bespoke management information system to provide more robust monitoring and reporting information across a wider range of key performance indicators. The inspection confirms that there is a need for more effective analysis of data and key performance indicators, particularly within the Qualifications and Essential Skills Training strands. This should include, for example, retention and achievement rates for each professional and technical area and the level of uptake across the various levels of the essential skills. The use of existing and up-to-date labour market information to inform the Jobs and Benefits office managers and the participants of potential employment opportunities, and to inform planning decisions around the current curriculum offer and the portfolio of services, is underdeveloped. As a result, a minority of the participants' work experience placements and/or professional and technical training are in employment sectors in which, according to the labour market information, potential opportunities for employment are very limited.

6.5 The Lead Contractor is committed to self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, and has implemented a range of appropriate quality assurance measures. At the time of the inspection, however, the quality assurance arrangements were at various stages of development, and as a result are satisfactory overall. There are effective and efficient arrangements in place for quality and compliance monitoring across the sub-contractors, which contribute well to the identification and sharing of good practice in certain strands of the provision, including Core Gateway, Jobsearch and contract administration. The Lead Contractor's senior managers along with staff from the quality unit regularly analyse feedback from these quality monitoring visits to plan appropriate workshops and seminars to promote and develop good practice in Core Gateway and Jobsearch; this needs to be extended to all strands. The use of qualitative and quantitative data to inform the annual self-evaluation is satisfactory. There is, however, insufficient feedback to sub-contractors on the appropriateness of their improvement plans, and only limited monitoring of the progress and effectiveness of actions taken by the sub-contractors in addressing the key areas identified for improvement.

6.6 There is appropriate and regular performance reporting to the Lead Contractor's Management Board, which leads to robust performance management and target-setting for Springvale's senior managers and staff.

6.7 The staffing arrangements across the contract area are very good. Recently, the Lead Contractor reviewed its own management and staffing arrangements to ensure that the management structure, and staffing roles, responsibilities and levels are matched well to the needs of the provision. As a result, over the last eighteen months there has been significant improvement in the organisation's capacity for the development of strategic leadership; a new executive officer has been appointed and supports well the operational management of the contract, which enables the Steps to Work manager to focus more specifically on aspects of strategic leadership and improving performance outcomes for participants into sustained employment. The provision of dedicated and well-qualified staff to manage

participant referrals, deliver the Confidence and Motivation strand, develop employer engagement, and provide effective job coaching and mentoring has significantly improved the quality of the service provided to participants. The participants have access to a good range of high quality professional and technical, essential skills and Jobsearch resources, which are used to good effect to improve their employability. These include well-equipped workshops, kitchens, hairdressing salons, computer suites and sound studios equipped with industry standard equipment. The Lead Contractor is currently commissioning a virtual learning environment (VLE) to improve the use of information learning technology (ILT) within the participants' training and support arrangements.

6.8 Very good professional development arrangements for the staff are in place. These include access to level 3 qualifications in advice and guidance and the University of Ulster's Certificate in Teaching. There is also a good range of workshops to share good practice and to standardise aspects of the provision across the contract. These include sessions on the quality of the Personal Plans Towards Employment, and consistency in the provision of Core Gateway and in the production of self-evaluation reports. A small number of tutors are taking relevant higher degrees to support their own professional development. The Lead Contractor's Steps to Work manager regularly benchmarks good practice in England, and engages well in Springvale Learning's organisational strategic business management and planning.

7. EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

7.1 Overall, the employment outcomes and achievements have improved significantly and are generally good. During the period September 2008 to March 2011, based on data supplied by the Department and summarised in the Appendix, the overall participant progression rate from Step Two provision into sustained employment for 13 weeks is 16%, which is just below the Northern Ireland average at 18%. Although this participant progression rate is significantly below the Department's target of 25%, it needs to be set in the context that the West Belfast contract area has the largest number (2,965) of participants leaving Steps to Work over this period, representing 24% of the Northern Ireland total, is in the most deprived area of Northern Ireland, and that the participant progression rate into sustained employment has improved steadily from 6% in 2008-09 to 18% in 2010-11. It is a concern that the participant progression rate into sustained employment for the Shankill Jobs and Benefits office, at 8%, is significantly below the West Belfast contract area average (16%). There is also undue variation in the participant progression rate into sustained employment across the sub-contractors, ranging from 0% to 25%. The overall participant progression rate to sustained employment for 26 weeks, at 79%, is just under the Northern Ireland average at 81%; for the latest quarter ending December 2010, however, it is noticeably above the Northern Ireland average by 7 percentage points.

7.2 The Lead Contractor manages well the participant referral backlogs to Step Two strands, which have decreased steadily to 40% of the participants waiting between 4 and 15 weeks during the third quarter of 2011, which is considerably below the Northern Ireland average of 53% for the same period. The percentage of participants waiting more than 15 weeks is consistently low at around 9%, and well below the Northern Ireland average of 28%.

7.3 The employment outcomes and achievements for the Vocationally Related Qualification (VRQ) and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training strands are satisfactory. The participant progression rate into sustained employment for 13 weeks for VRQ (15%) and NVQ (20%) are both below the respective Northern Ireland averages of 20% and 22%. It is good that most of these participants (VRQ 89% and NVQ 76%) continue to sustain work for 26 weeks. Retention rates are good on the VRQ strand at 76%, but inadequate on the NVQ strand at 51%. The achievement rates are satisfactory on the VRQ

and NVQ strands at 67% and 61% respectively. Outcomes and achievements, however, vary significantly across professional and technical areas and across the Lead and sub-contractors. The best outcomes are in specialised provision such as media and engineering where there is a good match between the provision and an identified employment need. The worst outcomes are in professional and technical areas where employment opportunities are limited, such as the construction trades. Most of the participants who are in work experience placements are highly motivated and work to good standards, with participants in health and social care and child care often demonstrating very good standards of work. The participant progression rate to sustained employment for the Graduate Acceleration Programme (GAP) provision is low at 15% for 13 weeks, but those graduates who acquire jobs all manage to sustain them beyond 26 weeks.

7.4 The employment outcomes and achievements for the Essential Skills Training strand are mostly good. Around 14% of the participants progress into sustained employment for 13 weeks, which is slightly above the Northern Ireland average of 13%; the percentage of participants continuing to sustained employment for 26 weeks is very good at 90%, and well above the Northern Ireland average of 79%. The overall retention rate on the Essential Skills Training is good at 74% and the achievement rate is very good at 83%. Although the Lead Contractor has not gathered specific outcome data to show the number of participants achieving literacy and numeracy at level 2 across the contract area, there is evidence to suggest that a minority of the participants make very good progress in their learning from a low base and enhance significantly their employability by achieving level 2 qualifications. Outcomes on the pilot essential skills provision within Core Gateway are outstanding at 100%. It is noteworthy that Springvale is continuing this essential skills provision in Core Gateway.

7.5 The employment outcomes and achievements are also generally good on the Step Ahead strand. The participant progression rate into sustained employment for 13 weeks at 35%, is just above the Northern Ireland average at 34%. The percentage of participants continuing to sustain employment for 26 weeks at 82% equals the Northern Ireland average. Most of the participants report significantly improved levels of confidence and an increased motivation and willingness to find and sustain employment. Most of them contribute effectively to the work of the employing organisation. Around 45% of the participants who undertake the Step Ahead strand achieve a qualification in a short accredited course, which needs to be improved upon. In addition, more needs to be done to ensure a closer match between the participants' job-roles and the course taken. Too few of the participants avail of the opportunity to improve their essential skills.

7.6 The employment outcomes and achievements on the Self-Employment strand are good. The participant progression rate to sustained employment for 13 weeks at 32%, although below the Northern Ireland average at 48%, is well above the Department's target.

7.7 The employment outcomes and achievements for the Back to Work strand have improved significantly and are good. Although the participant progression rate to sustained employment for 13 weeks at 13% is below the Department's target, it has increased significantly from 5% in 2008-09 to 15% in 2010-11. As a result, this latest available progression rate is just under the Northern Ireland average for 2010-11 at 16%. Similarly, over the same period the percentage of participants who sustained 26 weeks in employment increased significantly from 71% to 91%, averaging 76%; the Northern Ireland average over this period is 77%. The standards of work achieved by the participants are mostly very good. Most of them are motivated and enthused by the skills they gain in the workplace; they develop suitable employability skills, gain self-confidence, and improve their interpersonal skills to enable them to work effectively in a team or to interact with the general public. In particular, participants requiring Enhanced Support are making good progress in mixing with other workers and taking instructions from their supervisors.

8. QUALITY OF TRAINING AND SERVICES

8.1 Overall, the quality of the training and services provided for participants by the Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors is good.

8.2 The arrangements for the inspection of the personal support and safeguarding of vulnerable adults include the opportunity for the participants to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings by the inspection team with individual and groups of participants across the Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors. Prior to the inspection, 350 questionnaires were issued to the participants, of which 245 (70%) were returned to the Inspectorate; 73 of them contained additional written comments. The returns show that almost all of the participants consider their experiences in the West Belfast Steps to Work provision to be very good or better, and in particular they value the high levels of personal support provided for them. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with the participants to the Lead Contractor.

8.3 The quality of the provision for Core Gateway is very good; it is well-managed and the Lead Contractor is responsive to the caseloads of the Advisers in the Jobs and Benefits offices with sessions being organised and provided flexibly across the contract area. There are very good relationships between the Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors delivering the Core Gateway provision and there are good opportunities for the sharing of good practice, including materials. The quality of the training provided is mostly very good; the sessions are well-structured and planned and the tutors work hard to develop good working relationships with the participants. Most of the participants engage well in the sessions and the tutors help them to identify their personal qualities and skills and to match these to potential employment opportunities. In addition, the participants are provided with a range of useful information to help them make informed choices about the strands available in Step Two. Most value the opportunity to improve their CV alongside their interview skills, as well as developing their Jobsearch skills. The Core Gateway provision could be enhanced further by ensuring that the tutors have regular access to up-to-date local labour market information as well as opportunities to develop a wider range of approaches and activities to engage more effectively the minority of very hard to help participants.

8.4 The quality of the provision for Short Accredited Courses is good. The Lead Contractor offers a good range of courses to the participants in response to direct referrals from the Jobs and Benefits offices. The success rates across these courses are outstanding at 100%. There is regular provision of the most frequently requested courses, for example, Basic Food Hygiene, Security Guarding and Construction Skills Register. All of the participants undertaking Short Accredited Courses are registered with the Lead Contractor. A good start has been made in tracking the employment outcomes for participants completing Short Accredited Courses in security guarding, and this practice should be extended to other aspects of the provision. The Lead Contractor also needs to ensure that the provision of Short Accredited Courses in Step Two of the programme, more effectively meets the employability needs of all of the participants.

8.5 The quality of the Enhanced Support and the Confidence and Motivation provision is good. The Lead Contractor has recently reviewed its arrangements for Enhanced Support and for the Confidence and Motivation strand. As a result, staff from the Lead Contractor revisited the Jobs and Benefits offices to update Advisers of the aims and objectives of the range of provision for additional support available. The Lead Contractor has also appointed an appropriately qualified and experienced staff member to co-ordinate and provide additional enhanced support to identified participants. During the week of the inspection, there were two participants receiving in-work support, 18 participants in receipt of

pre-employment enhanced support and 6 on the Confidence and Motivation strand. All of these participants were registered directly with Springvale and were receiving very good quality support. However, it is essential that the Lead Contractor continues to work closely with staff in the Jobs and Benefits offices, and the sub-contractors, to ensure that the support needs of all of the participants across the contract area are identified and met effectively.

8.6 The quality of the provision for the VRQ, NVQ and GAP strands is good. There are effective arrangements in place with a range of sub-contractors to deliver qualifications in a wide range of professional and technical areas. The Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors have made a good start to the development of a portfolio of 26-week qualifications linked to the QCF across most of the professional and technical areas. Most of these are matched well to the participants' job aspirations and interests. There are examples of innovative curriculum planning, particularly in childcare and in engineering skills where, through collaborative work with sub-contractors and local employers, provision has been developed creatively to maximise the participants' employability. In children's care, learning and development, for example, one of the sub-contractors has worked closely with representatives from the local Health and Social Care Trust to incorporate units which will prepare participants to work as childminders. The GAP provision is led and managed very well, and is characterised by the hard work of the sub-contractor's staff to ensure a good match of placement to the participant, reflecting appropriately their qualifications and career aspirations.

8.7 The quality of the directed training across the VRQ, NVQ and GAP strands ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. It was very good or better in 43% of the sessions observed, and good or better in 86% of them. These good or better sessions are characterised by thorough planning, which provide participants with appropriate levels of challenge and good opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding of principles and practice relating to their occupational sector. Enhanced Support is used effectively to remove barriers to learning for individual participants, including those with dyslexia and mental health issues. In contrast, the remainder (14%) of the sessions which were satisfactory were characterised by low levels of challenge and insufficient planning for differentiation.

8.8 With the exception of those participants completing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) qualifications, most participants benefit from appropriate, and in a significant minority of instances, very good work experience placements. The placements are well managed by the Lead and the sub-contractors, which enable the participants to apply their knowledge and develop appropriate practical skills in relevant contexts. In contrast, the ICT provision is just satisfactory. The provision has grown rapidly without sufficient strategic planning, leading to large numbers of mixed ability groups of participants, working towards different qualifications, with too few work placement opportunities. In this area, initial assessment is not used well enough to inform Personal Plans Towards Employment or to set and monitor short-term goals.

8.9 The quality of the provision for the Step Ahead strand is good. A cohesive and dedicated team, who relate very well to the participants, work hard to source a large number of jobs within the voluntary and community sectors. The majority of the participants are placed in real and challenging work environments, and undertake meaningful job roles; most of them are enhancing their work-readiness and improving their employability and other transferable skills such as team-working and communication skills. There is evidence, in a small number of the employers, of too many Step Ahead participants being employed. This results in over-staffing, insufficient access to appropriate equipment, a lack of challenge in the job role and diminished opportunities for the acquisition of work-readiness skills. Almost all of the participants are very positive about the support and encouragement they receive from the Springvale staff and their employers. The participants on the 26-week strand value

the opportunity of being in employment again and most are eager to remain in employment. The participants benefit from the well-planned, regular and tailored Jobsearch provision, and there are examples of good outcomes in terms of the success of some of them in gaining employment in the wider job market. While regular reviews of the participants' progress take place, which are valued by the participants, these could be strengthened through a sharper focus on job-related targets to be achieved between the review periods and an enhanced role for the employer in the review process.

8.10 The quality of the provision for the Essential Skills Training strand is good. The Lead Contractor has good quality improvement processes in place which include a robust quality review cycle, compliance audits and observations of directed training sessions. Although the Lead Contractor has worked hard to include all the sub-contractors in these quality assurance processes, including the introduction of annual sub-contractor self-evaluation reporting, the quality of the self-evaluation by a minority of sub-contractors requires further development. In particular, there is a need to share and standardise good practice in teaching and learning across the essential skills provision. While the staffing and resources for the essential skills are good overall in nearly all of the delivery venues, it is a concern that a small number of tutors are not fully qualified in line with the Department's requirements.

8.11 The majority (64%) of the essential skills directed training sessions observed were good or better. In these sessions, the tutors understand the variety of learning and support needs of the participants and provide effective levels of challenge, motivation and support through a range of training and learning strategies, particularly for those furthest from the workplace. In the satisfactory (18%) or inadequate sessions (18%), the learning is overly directed with too little time allocated for differentiated learning, group work or discussion. The teaching is often de-contextualised, and opportunities to contextualise the training and learning within employability and personal development contexts are missed. Initial and diagnostic assessment processes are well-embedded in the literacy and numeracy provision and inform well the teaching and learning, but are underdeveloped in the ICT provision. Almost all of the participants in the literacy and numeracy strands are placed in good quality work experience placements. In contrast, those undertaking the essential skill of ICT are not all in work experience placements and more needs to be done to source appropriate placements where they can apply their vocational skills and develop further their employability skills.

8.12 The quality of the provision of the Self-Employment Test Trading strand is good. The strand is led and managed well by the Lead Contractor and the two Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs). The working relationships and quality of communication between the providers and the Lead Contractor are very good. The majority (80%) of participants are registered with one of the two LEAs sub-contracted to deliver the strand. The business adviser of one of the providers promotes the strand very effectively through, for example, raising participants' awareness of the strand at Core Gateway sessions and by publishing articles in the local press; this needs to be replicated by the other LEA. Appropriately, the LEAs have identified the need to collaborate more closely with each other to promote local enterprise including the provision of the Self-Employment strand. The sub-contractors provide the participants with comprehensive information regarding grants and loans available to support their businesses and make good use of existing expertise through their well-established links with a range of external agencies which includes local banks, the Prince's Trust, Health and Safety Executive and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). In addition, a range of business clinics are regularly made available to participants to develop their skills in marketing, social networking, customer care, and e-commerce. The participants report that they receive very good support from their advisers ranging from completion of a business plan and financial projections to moral support and administrative and book-keeping advice.

8.13 The quality of the provision for the Back to Work strand is very good. Over the last two years, the management and staff resources have been strengthened. The staff have clear roles and responsibilities and a good knowledge of local employment opportunities; a good start has been made to promote the Back to Work strand to employers in the wider city centre and in the greater Belfast area. The quality of the work experience placements are good or better and are matched well to the participants' interests, needs and job goals; approximately two-thirds are in the private sector, the remainder are in the voluntary or community sector. It is, however, a concern that there are currently no work experience placements in the public sector in this contract area. The Lead Contractor and sub-contractors promote and inform participants and their employers of the availability of the Employer Subsidy in a timely manner. Recently, the Lead Contractor has worked innovatively to develop partnerships with a range of private employers to use this strand to meet their human resource needs. Almost all the participants are very complimentary about the support provided by the employment advisers. In particular, they welcome and appreciate the regular encouragement provided by text and phone. The arrangements for initial assessment are satisfactory; participants' initial assessment interviews, on occasions, are inappropriately conducted in a public space, affording them insufficient privacy and confidentiality.

8.14 The quality and level of the personal support provided for participants is very good. The participants report that they appreciate the commitment and the hard work of their tutors and employment advisers in supporting them to develop their employability skills, secure work experience placements and prepare for interviews. The Jobsearch provision for participants is mostly very good. Participants are provided with a minimum of two days each week, where they are supported well by job mentors to find and secure suitable employment. In particular, the participants report that they value highly the advice and coaching they receive in completion of a CV and any application forms, and preparing for interviews.

8.15 The quality of the Personal Plans towards Employment ranges from satisfactory to good, and is generally good. Through well-developed referral and initial interviewing processes, key information regarding the participants' prior employment and training is captured well and appropriate overarching targets are set. Further development of this process, however, to capture relevant personal information and interests to help plan for effective progression towards employment, is required. While there is regular monitoring and reviewing of participants' progress, there is inconsistent use of employer input in this process and in the setting of incremental targets to measure the participants' ongoing progress in developing and improving their employability. The Lead Contractor has appropriate arrangements in place to monitor the quality of the Personal Plans towards Employment and to identify and share good practice across the Lead Contractor's and sub-contractors' provision.

8.16 Springvale Learning promotes effectively the safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults. The organisation has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding. The arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.

PART THREE: KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

9. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

9.1 In order to raise the quality of its provision, Springvale Learning should:

- explore, develop and implement an increased range of innovative approaches to increase further the progression of the participants to sustained employment;
- strengthen its quality assurance procedures, especially the more regular use of data and key performance indicators and the regular reviewing of sub-contractors' improvement plans; and
- develop a greater range of work experience placements for participants, and actively encourage more of them to seek employment in city centre locations and beyond.

APPENDIX

Table 1 – West Belfast Contract Area – 13 Week Performance Benchmarked to Northern Ireland Average					
All participants in the West Belfast Contract Area who moved from Step 2 into unsubsidised or subsidised employment sustained for 13 weeks compared to Northern Ireland total (September 2008 to March 2011)					
Period	Sep 2008-Mar 2009	Apr 2009-Mar 2010	Apr 2010-Mar 2011	Total for September 2008 to March 2011	
Contract Area	West Belfast Contract Area			West Belfast	Northern Ireland Total/Average
Total Leaving Step 2 Lead Contractors	194	1,210	1,561	2,965	12,209
Moved to Subsidised or Unsubsidised Employment	10%	20%	23%	21%	24%
Sustained 13 Wks	6%	15%	18%	16%	18%

Table 2 – 13 Week Performance for the West Belfast Contract Area by Step 2 Strands						
Period		Sep 2008- Mar 2009	Apr 2009- Mar 2010	Apr 2010- Mar 2011	West Belfast Total/Average	Northern Ireland Total/Average
Back to Work	Total Leaving Steps to Work	145	797	900	1,842	7,812
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	5%	13%	15%	13%	15%
Essential Skills	Total Leaving Steps to Work	17	89	131	237	958
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	24%	10%	15%	14%	13%
NVQ	Total Leaving Steps to Work	23	161	228	412	1,612
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	0%	20%	22%	20%	22%
Qualifications	Total Leaving Steps to Work	8	143	160	311	817
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	13%	15%	16%	15%	20%
Self-Employment	Total Leaving Steps to Work	1	20	32	53	711
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	0%	55%	19%	32%	48%
Step Ahead	Total Leaving Steps to Work	0	0	110	110	294
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	0%	0%	35%	35%	34%
Total	Total Leaving Steps to Work	194	1,210	1,561	2,965	12,209
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	6%	15%	18%	16%	18%

Table 3 – West Belfast Contract Area – 26 Week Performance Benchmarked to Northern Ireland Average

All participants in the West Belfast Contract Area who moved from Step 2 into unsubsidised or subsidised employment sustained for 26 weeks compared to Northern Ireland total (September 2008 to Dec 2010)

Period	Sep 2008- Mar 2009	Apr 2009- Mar 2010	Apr 2010- June 2010	Jul 2010- Sep 2010	Oct 2010- Dec 2010	Total for September 2008 to March 2011		
Contract Area	Belfast West Contract Area					Belfast West Area	Northern Ireland Total/Average	
Total Leaving Step 2 Lead Contractors	194	1,210	370	396	394	2,564	10,405	
Sustained 13 Wks	12	177	53	76	71	389	1,870	
Sustained 26 Weeks	Total	7	134	44	61	63	309	1,523
	% of Total Leaving	4%	11%	12%	15%	16%	12%	15%
	% sustaining 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	58%	76%	83%	80%	89%	79%	81%

Table 4 – 26 Week Performance for the West Belfast Contract Area by Step 2 Strands

Period		Sep 2008- Mar 2009	Apr 2009- Mar 2010	Apr 2010- June 2010	Jul 2010- Sep 2010	Oct 2010- Dec 2010	West Belfast Total/Average
Back to Work	Total Leaving Steps to Work	145	797	241	237	216	1,636
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	7	103	29	33	34	206
	% of 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	71%	70%	76%	82%	91%	76%
Essential Skills	Total Leaving Steps to Work	17	89	31	35	31	203
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	4	9	5	9	3	30
	% of 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	50%	89%	100%	100%	100%	90%
NVQ	Total Leaving Steps to Work	23	161	52	57	63	356
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	0	33	8	13	17	71
	% of 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	0%	79%	88%	46%	88%	76%
Qualifications	Total Leaving Steps to Work	8	143	32	42	40	265
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	1	21	4	11	8	45
	% of 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	0%	90%	100%	91%	88%	89%
Self-Employment	Total Leaving Steps to Work	1	20	5	10	9	45
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	0	11	2	1	1	15
	% of 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	0%	82%	100%	100%	100%	87%
Step Ahead	Total Leaving Steps to Work	0	0	9	15	35	59
	Sustained for 13 Weeks	0	0	5	9	8	22
	% of 13 weeks which continued to sustain 26 wks	0%	0%	80%	89%	75%	82%

Table 5: Progression Rates to Sustained Employment from Step Two by Lead Contractor and Sub-Contractor

From Start of contract: 29/09/2008			To date of inspection: 23/01/2012		
Organisation	13 weeks			26 weeks	
	Number of Leavers	Number of Leavers sustained employment for 13 weeks	% into sustained employment for 13 weeks	Number qualifying for 13 wks sustained emp at time of inspection	% sustaining 13 wks which continued to sustain 26 wks
Armstrong Learning	8	1	13%	0	0%
Belfast Metropolitan College	120	24	20%	10	42%
Business into the Community	13	2	15%	2	100%
Corpus Christi Services	66	7	11%	6	86%
Colin Glen Trust	70	1	1%	0	0%
Community Service Volunteers Media	33	8	24%	5	63%
Dairy Farm Training	384	42	11%	30	71%
Divis Joint Development Committee	55	1	2%	0	0%
Falls Community Council	43	1	2%	1	100%
OTHER	501	2	0%	2	100%
Impact Training	373	27	7%	5	19%
Lenadoon & Suffolk Interface Group	3	0	0%	0	
NDS Employment & Training	501	121	24%	84	69%
Ortus Enterprise	16	4	25%	4	100%
Paragon Training	414	53	13%	33	62%
Springvale Learning	2718	340	13%	198	58%
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	113	17	15%	12	71%
Ulster Supported Employment Limited	22	0	0%	0	
Workwest Enterprise	63	15	24%	8	53%

Table 6: West Belfast Contract Area – Summary of Backlogs

			Jan-Dec 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Contract Area Total/Average	NI Total/Average
Back to Work	No Referrals		563	141	90	309	1,103	30,759
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	392	133	77	85	687	13,814
		%	70%	94%	86%	28%	62%	45%
	> 15 wks	Number	64	8	13	8	93	8,959
%		11%	6%	14%	3%	8%	29%	
Essential Skills	No Referrals		196	58	30	124	408	6,000
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	124	54	26	69	273	2,804
		%	63%	93%	87%	56%	67%	47%
	> 15 wks	Number	15	4	4	0	23	1,700
%		8%	7%	13%	0%	6%	28%	
NVQ	No Referrals		291				291	3,317
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	214				214	1,549
		%	74%				74%	47%
	> 15 wks	Number	48				48	915
%		16%				16%	28%	
Qualifications	No Referrals		105	94	79	135	413	3,755
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	70	90	62	69	291	2,249
		%	67%	96%	78%	51%	70%	60%
	> 15 wks	Number	13	4	17	5	39	764
%		12%	4%	22%	4%	9%	20%	
Self-Employment	No Referrals		12	7	6	20	45	2,270
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	12	6	5	4	27	934
		%	100%	86%	83%	20%	60%	41%
	> 15 wks	Number	0	1	1	3	5	635
%		0%	14%	17%	15%	11%	28%	
GAP	No Referrals		32	6	12	16	66	1,388
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	23	5	11	13	52	714
		%	72%	83%	92%	81%	79%	51%
	> 15 wks	Number	4	1	1	3	9	229
%		13%	17%	8%	19%	14%	16%	
Total No of Referrals	No Referrals		1,199	306	217	604	2,326	47,489
	> 4 wks < 15 wks	Number	835	288	181	240	1,544	22,064
		%	70%	94%	83%	40%	66%	46%
	> 15 wks	Number	144	18	36	19	217	13,200
%		12%	6%	17%	3%	9%	28%	

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