

Education and Training Inspectorate

Steps to Work Provision in Wade Training Southern Contract Area

Report of an Inspection in October 2010



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education 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

All performance statistics in this report have been supplied by Wade Training.

Grading system

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

Performance Level	Grade	Descriptor
Outstanding	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	2	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	3	Important strengths in most of the provision.
		Areas for improvement which organisation has
		the capacity to address
Satisfactory	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for
		improvement in important areas which need to
		be addressed
Inadequate	5	A few strengths; significant areas for
		improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent
		action

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 In September 2008, the Department for Employment and Learning (the 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 individual's personal barriers to employment. Participation in 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 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 up to 13 weeks

but can be up to 52 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 Wade Training is contracted by the Department as Lead Contractor for the delivery of Steps to Work provision in the Southern Region of Northern Ireland. Participants are referred to the Lead Contractor through the Armagh, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown Jobs and Benefits offices.
- 2.2 Wade Training was established in 1985, and is registered as a private limited company. Since 1985 it has supplied a range of training and employment programmes on behalf of the Department. Wade Training has offices in Armagh, Newry and Portadown, and a new purpose-built training facility in the centre of Lurgan. It leads the Partnership of the Southern Region, supported by nine subcontractors, to provide a good geographical coverage and local access for participants to all strands of Steps to Work. In the interval since the first phase of the inspection, which took place in February 2010, the organisation has been restructured. The provision is managed by the Managing Director supported by the Programmes Director, Operations Director, Financial Director, Quality Officer, six development officers, an employment contact officer and two enhanced support officers.

- 2.3 At the time of the inspection, 55 (39%) of the participants had no or few qualifications on entry to the provision, 57 (40%) of them had between one and three General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above, with a further 28 (20%) having four or more passes at GCSE grade C or above. Sixty-four (45%) participants had achieved English and 57 (40%) mathematics at GCSE grade C or above. Thirteen participants (9%) had a Level 3 or higher qualification.
- 2.4 The Southern Region has been severely affected by the recession, particularly by the downturn in the construction industry. Data supplied by the Department indicates that, by July 2010 the Southern Region had the largest number of participants eligible for mandatory participation on Steps to Work. Between September 2009 and July 2010 the numbers of eligible participants increased by 70% from 1150 to 1955.
- 2.5 The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM) 2010 indicate that, of the 26 council districts in Northern Ireland, the Craigavon and Newry and Mourne districts are ranked fourth and fifth respectively on the deprivation index. In terms of the employment rate, the local government districts of Newry and Mourne, Craigavon and Armagh are ranked the seventh, ninth and eleventh most deprived areas in Northern Ireland respectively. Statistics provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) for June 2010 show that the Newry and Mourne district has the fifth highest claimant count at 6.1%. The counts for Armagh and Craigavon are 5.1% and 4.9% respectively, with the Northern Ireland average at 5.0%. It is noteworthy that Newry and Mourne had the highest increase in claimant rate over the year across all 26 districts, at 27.5%, and Armagh had the third largest increase over the year at 20.4%, indicating that unemployment has increased significantly over the last year across the contract area.

3. **PROVISION**

- 3.1 At the time of the inspection, there were 189 participants on the Steps to Work provision across the Southern Region. Forty-seven of them were registered on Step One; 34 on Core Gateway, 12 on a range of Short Accredited Courses and one on Self-Employment. The remaining 142 participants were registered on Step Two; 61 (43%) on Back to Work, 16 (11%) on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) lasting 52 weeks, 32 (23%) on Essential Skills Training, seven (5%) on Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) lasting 26 weeks, 16 (11%) on Self-Employment Test Trading and ten (7%) on Step Ahead. Of the current participants, 70% are male and 38% of them are aged between 18 and 25. Data provided by Wade Training indicates that 33% of the starts on Steps Two strands are voluntary participants, as are most of the participants on the Self-Employment strand.
- 3.2 Wade Training, as the Lead Contractor, was working directly with 150 registered participants across the four offices. Eight of the nine subcontractors were actively working with participants: eleven with Training for Business; three each with Business in the Community, Link Works and Saint Vincent de Paul (SVP) and one with both Parity and Gingerbread; seventeen participants were placed with Inbiz.
- 3.3 On the Step Two strand all of the participants were receiving some form of employability preparation, such as Jobsearch, curriculum vitae (CV) building, and interview skills, alongside their main strand of Back to Work placements, Essential Skills Training, Step Ahead or Self-Employment opportunities. In order to raise occupational skills, 23 participants were

engaged in NVQs and VRQs in a range of professional and technical areas, including: business administration; children's care learning and development; and hairdressing and retailing. In addition, the Graduate Acceleration Programme (GAP) was on offer to the participants, as was a bespoke training programme developed by the Health and Social Care Trust.

4. THE INSPECTION

- 4.1 This report is based on an inspection of Wade Training and a sample of the subcontractors' provision; the work of eight of the subcontractors was inspected. The inspection took place over two phases; phase one took place in February 2010 and interim findings were left with the Lead Contractor at that time. The second phase of the inspection took place over three days in September 2010 and involved a team of five inspectors.
- 4.2 During the inspection, the inspectors:
 - visited 40 participants on work experience with 35 employers;
 - observed ten training sessions in centres operated by Wade Training and its subcontractors;
 - held discussions with 72 participants, individually and in small groups;
 - held discussions with the members of Wade Training's management team and senior staff from the subcontractors inspected;
 - held discussions with key training and support staff;
 - examined a wide range of documentation including samples of participants' written work and their Personal Training Plans (PTPs);
 - held discussions with 35 employers; and
 - held discussions with District Managers, team leaders and advisers 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 Wade Training is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the needs of the participants; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

Overall performance level (grade)	Very Good	(2)
Contributory performance levels (grades):		
Leadership and Management	Very Good	(2)
Employment Outcomes and Achievements	Good	(3)
Quality of Training and Services	Very Good	(2)

5.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good quality of the training and services provided for the participants;
- very good support provided to the participants by all of the staff from the Lead Contractor, and by the subcontractors and workplace supervisors;
- very good leadership and management of the Steps to Work contract for the Southern Region by the Lead Contractor;
- effective collaboration and strategic links between the Lead Contractor, the senior managers and staff from the Jobs and Benefits offices, and local employers;
- · good working relationships with subcontractors; and
- well-developed culture of self-evaluation and improvement planning, which focuses strongly on improving the quality of the training services and on the participants' progression to sustained employment.

5.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- progression rate to sustained employment, at 17%; and
- very low numbers on the Graduate Acceleration Programme (GAP).

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

6. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The leadership and management of the Steps to Work contract for the Southern Region by Wade Training, is very good. While the key personnel responsible for the strategic and operational leadership and management of the programme have changed since the first phase of the inspection, the revised arrangements for managing the employment programme are very effective. Similarly, the quality of the management arrangements of the subcontractors inspected, for those aspects of the Steps to Work provision they offer, is also very good.
- 6.2 There are excellent relationships between the senior managers from Wade Training and the District Managers from the Jobs and Benefits offices. They have worked closely together to make joint approaches to a number of key agencies to identify actual and potential opportunities for employment throughout the region. These strong working relationships have been central to the successful promotion of important strategic links with key employment–based interests, including the Southern Regional Workforce Development Forum, the District Councils, Chambers of Commerce and the Health and Social Care Trust. These links have also been instrumental in the development of a number of employment-based projects with employers and other relevant organisations, including an innovative project with Parity Training.
- 6.3 There are clear roles and responsibilities and open channels of communication which allow information to be shared effectively across the organisations involved in the contract, and for issues of concern to be addressed in a timely manner. The Lead Contractor and subcontractors collectively provide a good range of Steps to Work provision, in an area which has been impacted very adversely by the economic downturn.
- 6.4 The use of the Graduate Acceleration Programme is, however, currently under-developed. It is a matter of concern that, while there are significant numbers of unemployed graduates in the region, only three participants were on this programme at the time of the inspection and this is an issue which needs to be addressed. The Lead Contractor, Business in the Community and staff from the Jobs and Benefits offices need to work together more effectively to market this strand to ensure that sufficient numbers of participants can benefit from it. Similarly, while larger numbers have been referred to the Self-Employment Test Trading strand, further and more robust marketing is required to ensure that potential participants with good business ideas are made more aware of the opportunities provided by this strand.
- 6.5 Most staff are well-qualified. The managers and staff at all levels work effectively across the contract area; they have a strong commitment to, and extensive experience of, working with unemployed people. The staff use a variety of appropriate and challenging strategies to develop the employability of the participants and move them towards sustained employment. There are strong links with a good range of appropriate external agencies, which provide specialist support services for those participants with a range of barriers to employment including mental health problems and alcohol and substance abuse.
- 6.6 The Lead Contractor and subcontractors share a strong commitment to meeting the individual needs of the participants and improving their chances of progressing to sustained employment. The Lead Contractor has made a significant investment in premises, equipment and staffing since the first phase of the inspection, to reflect the significant increase in the numbers of participants across the region. The Lead Contractor's staffing levels have been increased significantly through the appointment of nine new staff, including additional development and enhanced support officers. As a result of the improved focus on widening the

number of potential employers, the employer base has increased from 88 in the first phase of the inspection to the current figure of 142 employers, with whom participants can be placed. In addition, there are almost 100 community-based and voluntary organisations now on the Lead Contractor's database. Despite the good work that has already been undertaken in increasing the range of available and potential employment opportunities, more needs to be done to identify further opportunities, in order to help reduce the backlog of participants awaiting placement and improve the progression rate to sustained employment.

- 6.7 The quality of the work placements is a particular strength of the provision in this region. The Lead Contractor and subcontractors select placements carefully to maximise the opportunities for progression to sustained employment. The employers are committed to the participants and work effectively with the Lead Contractor and the subcontractors to help participants build their skill levels and further their career aspirations.
- 6.8 The Lead Contractor has developed mostly rigorous and robust quality assurance arrangements and appropriate systems are in place for the regular monitoring and review of all aspects of the provision across the contract area including regular observation of directed training and learning sessions and sampling of relevant documentation. Of particular note in the Lead Contractor's quality improvement strategy is the implementation of small-scale pilots of new approaches to specific aspects of training and services, including, most recently, in-depth reviews of the Core Gateway provision and the quality of the participants' Personal Training Plans. These pilot projects are designed, monitored and evaluated systematically and the outcomes are used effectively to promote consistency and standardisation of provision and effect improvement.
- The Lead Contractor has developed a very good management information system which is used effectively to monitor and track participants' progress; it is used well across the contract area. The system enables the Lead Contractor to analyse the data at participant level and identify, for example, those participants awaiting placement by option, office and occupational area. The Lead Contractor has also developed an effective current vacancy database across the four Jobs and Benefits offices, which enables a very good service to be provided to participants, including: identifying local trends in the local employment market; assisting the Employer Contact Officer in matching participants to placements; helping tutors in providing participants with realistic Jobsearch activities and supporting requests for Short Accredited Courses.

7. EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

7.1 Over the first complete year of the contract, from April 2009 to March 2010, the overall progression rate from Step Two provision into sustained employment is 17%, which is below the Department's target of 25%.

Table 1: Progression Rates to Sustained Employment from Step Two

	TABLE 1 - LEAD CONTRACTOR STATISTICS (SOUTHERN REGION)				
Step Two	(2008-2009) 01/10/08 – 31/03/09		(2009 -2010)		
leavers into			01/04/09 – 31/03/10		
employment	Number of	Leavers into	Number of	Leavers into	
	leavers	sustained	leavers	sustained	
		employment for 13		employment for 13	
		weeks or more		weeks or more	
Back to Work	70	9 (13%)	234	31(13%)	
NVQ 52 weeks	10	2 (20%)	20	5 (25%)	
Vocationally Related Qualifications	0	0(0%)	0	0 (0%)	
Essential Skills Training	16	4 (25%)	54	6 (11%)	
Self- Employment Test Trading	5	2 (40%)	43	16 (37%)	
Total	101	17 (17%)	351	58 (17%)	

- 7.2 In the past year, 67% of all leavers participated in the Back to Work strand. The numbers progressing into sustained employment from this strand has remained the same as the previous year, at 13%. The Lead Contractor has developed a range of strategies to address this issue, including: increasing the number of work experience placements likely to lead to sustained employment; employing additional staff including an Employer Contact Officer and a Sales and Marketing Officer; collating and analysing local labour market intelligence to source work experience placements that are most likely to result in sustained employment and providing effective in-house enhanced support. However, further work is required by the Lead Contractor to improve outcomes across the region, including the maintenance of an appropriate complement of staff to address the significant backlog of participants waiting for work experience placements. While overall outcomes in terms of progression to sustained employment are low, most participants on the Back to Work strand are developing very good employability skills while on placement.
- 7.3 Over the past year, the outcomes for the Self-Employment Test Trading strand are good, with 37% of the participants progressing to sustained employment, which exceeds the Department's target. The strand, however, remains under-developed, accounting for only 12% of all leavers.
- 7.4 At the time of the inspection, no participants had completed a Vocationally Relevant Qualification programme so there have been no formal outcomes to date. The qualifications strands are, however, relevant to the participants' needs and aspirations and provide them with good work-readiness skills, which are recognised by employers. The participants have developed good occupational skills and have significantly improved their communication and team-working skills.

- 7.5 The NVQ 52 week strand offers good opportunities for participants to develop their professional and technical skills and their wider employability skills. A key strength is the effective support provided by both the participants' tutors and their workplace supervisors. The participants are developing relevant occupational skills in the workplace; most work effectively in their job roles with the minimum of supervision. Most of the participants are well-motivated and work effectively with supervisors and colleagues, and a significant minority can use their initiative to solve more complex problems. Most participants are committed to finding employment in their professional and technical areas. The majority of them are developing relevant occupational competences and they are making good progress through their assessed work. In the last year, 25% of leavers achieved sustained employment, which is in line with the Department's target, and represents an increase of 5% on the figures from the previous year.
- 7.6 Almost all of the participants on the Essential Skills Training strand are making good progress in their learning in line with their prior achievement. They report increased levels of self-confidence and improved literacy and numeracy skills and recognise the benefit of these improved skills across all aspects of their lives. The achievement rate at level 2 for one subcontractor is particularly good at 55%; tutors with this particular subcontractor demonstrate high expectations of the participants and they respond with high standards of work. The Lead Contractor needs to provide opportunities for the sharing of this good practice with its own essential skills staff. The participants undertaking Essential Skills Training are well-motivated and demonstrate good standards of oral communication skills. Over the last two years there has been a sharp increase in the number of participants registering on Essential Skills Training. The Core Gateway tutors are proactive in encouraging participants to address their essential skills needs. The Enhanced Support tutors also provide very good support to participants during their essential skills classes. Over the past year, progression to sustained employment for those on the Essential Skills Training strand at 11% is comparable with other Lead Contractors in Northern Ireland.

8. QUALITY OF TRAINING AND SERVICES

- 8.1 The arrangements for the inspection of personal support and the safeguarding of vulnerable adults includes the opportunity for the participants to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings by the inspection team with groups of participants across the Lead and subcontractors. One hundred questionnaires were issued to the participants, 58 (58%) of which were returned to the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate); 16 of them contained additional written comments. The returns show that the participants' experiences in Wade Training are very good. Almost all (92%) of the participants' responses and comments to the Inspectorate's confidential questionnaire and interviews were positive. In particular, they appreciated the quality of the work placements and directed training, and the high levels of support provided by almost all of the staff. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with the participants to the Managing Director and senior managers.
- 8.2 The planning for Core Gateway is very good; the participants have good opportunities to develop their Jobsearch, personal and social skills, and as a result improve their employability. The training sessions are run on a regular basis by the Lead Contractor and one of the subcontractors. The providers adopt a flexible approach to the delivery, and additional Core Gateway programmes are timetabled as and when required to meet the increasing demand for places. Participants on the programme are provided with an appropriate induction process and have access to a wide range of good quality support materials. Tutors are increasingly using materials from appropriate online sites to enhance the quality of the programme. Participants on Core Gateway speak highly of the tutors, the support they receive and the content of the programme. In particular, participants value the opportunity to produce a curriculum vitae (CV),

to have access to relevant job availability websites, and to develop their interview skills. As a result of attending Core Gateway they report that they feel more confident and motivated to seek employment. Most of them have a very good understanding of the pathways available to them in Step Two of the programme. The Lead Contractor provides good opportunities for the Core Gateway tutors to meet regularly to share good practice and to promote the improvement of the provision.

- 8.3 A small number of participants are registered on the Step Ahead strand. Almost all of them are benefiting from the opportunity to develop a good range of personal, social and employability skills; they are developing a good range of work-readiness skills including good time-keeping and attendance, good customer service and self-presentation skills. Through their workplace duties they also have good opportunities to develop their collaborative and independent working skills. The Enhanced Support Officers provide very good one-to-one support for those participants who have not worked for a considerable time and are identified as needing additional help in overcoming their barriers to employment.
- 8.5 The range of Short Accredited Courses offered to participants is too limited and needs to be extended to further enhance their opportunities for progression to sustained employment. A significant minority of the participants reported that they were unaware, for example, that they could register for an essential skills class during participation in the Step Ahead strand.
- 8.6 Almost all of the participants report that the range and quality of support provided by the Department's Advisers, the Lead and subcontractor employment officers, and the tutors who provide directed training, are very good. Working relationships between most of the tutors and the participants are very good with effective individual support and encouragement, which enables them to make good progress in their training and learning.
- 8.7 The quality of the participants' Personal Training Plans is good for almost all of the strands. There is good evidence of initial assessment and the plans are individual in nature and focus on each participant's needs, including the key training required to enhance their employability. The plans include appropriate targets for progression to employment and the procedures for the monitoring and review of progress are effective.
- 8.8 The organisation promotes effectively the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. The arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding and Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.
- 8.9 The quality of the work experience placements on the Back to Work strand are good for almost all participants and are matched well to their aspirations and ability. Most participants visited are carrying out an appropriate range of tasks and developing relevant skills. The participants spoke highly of the support they receive from the subcontractors and employers. The use of the Distance Travelled Toolkit provides a valuable structure to enable participants to identify their skills and attributes and is used well by the Lead Contractor to prioritise those participants requiring further development. The introduction of in-house Enhanced Support has been very effective in helping those participants who face acute or multiple personal and social barriers to employment.
- 8.10 The participants on Essential Skills Training welcome the opportunity to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The quality of the training and learning is good or very good across the provision. The initial assessment and diagnostic processes within this strand are very good. The tutors use the findings from the initial assessment process well to plan for, and meet, the wide range of needs of the participants. The Essential Skills tutors and the Enhanced Support Officers work hard to support participants during the directed training sessions.

- 8.11 The participants on the Self–Employment Test Trading strand receive very good support from the specialist advisers. Through relevant training and advice they develop a wide range of appropriate enterprise skills to help them develop and manage their businesses. Most participants are hard-working and motivated, and are enthusiastic about their business prospects. However, the programme is not marketed sufficiently well enough and there has been a recent decline in numbers registering on this strand despite the good outcomes with regard to sustained employment; this is an area which requires immediate attention.
- 8.12 The quality of the NVQ 52 week provision is very good. Participants have access to a satisfactory range of occupational areas to enhance or update their professional and technical competences. The quality of directed training ranges from satisfactory to very good; it was very good in most of the sessions observed. Directed training sessions typically are delivered with clear learning objectives and are linked effectively to the participants' job roles in the work-place. The quality of work-based training is good or better for most of the participants. Workplace supervisors provide good support to the participants in developing their professional and technical skills as well as improving their work readiness skills. Nearly all of the participants are in placements that are matched well to the assessment requirements of their NVQ programmes. More needs to be done, however, to ensure that the provision further matches the skills needs in the area, including health and social care, catering, and manufacturing.
- At the time of the inspection, eight participants were registered on the VRQ strand. Five were registered on a unique programme developed by the Lead Contractor and the local Health and Social Care Trust. The participants began this programme with a ten day mandatory course to improve their confidence and motivation, and were subsequently placed in a range of settings within the Trust, including posts in administration, catering and cleaning. As part of the programme, the participants take units of a level 2 progression award, linked to the Trust's Knowledge and Skills Framework. Those participants with identified weaknesses in essential skills attend Wade Training for additional essential skills sessions. Recent spending cuts within the Trust, however, mean that the employment opportunities which existed in this sector at the commencement of the programme are no longer available. As a consequence, it is very important that the participants, as they come towards the end of their programme, receive well-planned and individual support and guidance to enable them to seek similar employment opportunities within the private and voluntary sectors. The remaining three participants were registered on the Graduate Acceleration Programme which is provided by Business in the Community. While the programme is matched well to the needs of the participants, most reported that they found it difficult to obtain sufficient information about the programme through their Jobs and Benefits offices.

PART THREE

9. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

In order to raise the quality of its provision, Wade Training should:

- work with relevant personnel to market the Graduate Acceleration Programme and the Self-Employment Test Training strand more effectively; and
- work collaboratively with other organisations to continue to establish innovative projects which identify and maximise local skills and resources, and increase the opportunities for participants to find and sustain employment.

APPENDIX

Table 2: Progression Rates to Sustained Employment by Subcontractor

Progression Rates to Sustained Employment from Step Two (1/4/2009 – 31/3/2010)				
Organisation	Number of leavers	% found work for 13 weeks		
Linkworks	41	5%		
Inbiz	43	37%		
SVDP	6	0%		
Parity	0	0%		
Business in the Community	0	0%		
Wade Training	264	15%		
Training for Business	0	0%		
Gingebread	2	0%		
USEL	n/a	n/a		
BeatN Track	0	0%		

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