Education and Training Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in Access Centre Northern Ireland (NI) Limited

Skills to Succeed 3 project

Report of an Inspection in November 2019

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Appendix

1.   Context

Access Centre Northern Ireland (NI) Limited (Access Centre) is a private limited company that operates from training premises in North Belfast. It is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the European Social Fund project, Skills to Succeed 3. The project is delivered in collaboration with two other partner organisations, Insight Accessibility for the delivery of the learning and development sessions, and New Life Counselling who provide counselling services for those participants who require them.

The project aims to support people with medical conditions and physical or mild learning disabilities to develop information and communication technology (ICT), business administration and employability skills, and to progress to further education, training, voluntary work or employment. At the time of the inspection, 30 participants[1] were registered on the Skills to Succeed 3 project. All of them attend training for up to at least one half-day or full-day per week.

The project is managed by a project manager, who is supported by a small team that includes a tutor, a work-placement advisor and a small number of volunteers. The project is overseen by a board who receive quarterly updates on the outcomes attained and the project's performance.

2.   Views of participants

The inspection team met and spoke to a sample of participants, both on an individual basis during their learning and development sessions and in a focus group. They are highly positive about their experiences on the project and, in particular, the tailored provision and high levels of support they receive. All of the participants report that their levels of confidence and self-esteem have improved significantly, that the project is supporting them very well in developing their personal, social and employability skills, and that they value greatly the one-to-one support they receive from the staff and volunteers.

3.   Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all participants, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for participants;

- quality of provision; and

- effectiveness of the leadership and management.

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[1]All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter at the time of the inspection.

4.   Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Good

KEY FINDINGS

5.   Outcomes for participants

The project promoter has well-established links and effective working relationships with an appropriate range of external organisations and referral agencies. These collaborative links have been used well to support the very good levels of recruitment to the project; to date, 46 participants have been recruited against an overall target of 50 (92%).

The participants are highly motivated and engage very well in their learning. They make good use of a range of paper-based and online learning resources, specialist software and ICT equipment in the completion of their work. In the sample of learning and development sessions observed, the participants completed a range of practical ICT and computerised accounts tasks to a good or better standard. They demonstrated a sound understanding of the work being undertaken and applied their ICT skills to good effect. The work in their portfolios of evidence is also of a good or better standard and there is effective marking for improvement with good feedback to support ongoing development.

The overall retention rate, to date, is outstanding (87%); it is very good for year one (79%) and is currently outstanding for year two (95%). A majority (73%) of the participants who have completed the programme achieved their targeted qualifications. In addition, all of the participants who have left the project before they fully completed have achieved at least one unit of their targeted qualification. A strength of the project has been its success in exceeding well its targets for progressing and supporting participants into employment (200%), to further education or another training organisation (150%), or to undertake other training (300%).

Through their engagement on the project, almost all of the participants demonstrate improved wider skills and dispositions. The evidence shows that they are building resilience in overcoming their physical, personal and social barriers to learning and employment.

6.   Quality of provision

An appropriate curriculum offer is in place to meet well the individual learning needs of the participants and support the development of their personal, social and employability skills. They are provided with good opportunities to achieve work-related accredited qualifications in business administration and ICT, up to level 2, as well as employability and other relevant non-accredited training.

The quality of the provision for learning and development, including the small number of sessions observed, is good overall. The learning resources have been adapted to meet well the individual learning and support needs of the participants. The participants are supported individually by the tutor and the volunteers to progress through their tasks at an appropriate pace. While the learning and development sessions are effective, they consist mainly of practical training with one-to-one support for the participants. A wider range of learning and teaching strategies should be implemented to create a more dynamic, interactive and stimulating learning environment for them.

The arrangements for care and welfare impact positively on the participants' learning and development. The manager, staff and volunteers demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting the care and welfare needs of the participants and engage effectively with them to foster very good relationships and provide individualised and targeted support. Effective links have been established with an appropriate range of support organisations and agencies to meet well the wider needs of the participants. They receive individual and well-planned guidance and support as an integral part of the project delivery and appropriate sign-posting and referral processes are in place to meet their learning and progression needs. The project team work hard to ensure that a participant-centred approach is taken to support them to overcome their barriers to learning and training whilst addressing wider issues such as mental health problems or physical disabilities in a highly sensitive and supportive manner.

Effective pre-entry advice, guidance and induction processes are in place and the processes and systems used for identifying and managing the participants' individual support needs are a key strength of the provision. The individual learning plans capture well their prior experiences, qualifications, and barriers to learning and employment, and identify clearly the participants' training goals, career aspirations and learning support needs. The tracking and monitoring process is robust and used to good effect to monitor the participants' progress. Their personal development is an integral element of this and it is reviewed quarterly to reflect the progress they are making. At all times, there is a strong focus on progressing the participants, at an appropriate pace, to further education, training or employment. As a consequence, almost all of the participants are making good progress in addressing and overcoming their barriers to learning and progression.

7. Leadership and management

The project manager and board are highly supportive of the project. Oversight arrangements are good and appropriate strategic links and partnerships have been developed to support its delivery. Despite difficult financial circumstances and operating constraints, management, staff and volunteers remain highly committed to making the project a success.

Although staffing levels have reduced over the past three years, they have been adequately maintained to facilitate the delivery of the project. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and include an employability and work-placement advisor role to support the participants to progress beyond the project. All of the project staff and volunteers are well-experienced in delivering training, and relevant continuing professional development is provided to them to support their delivery of the project aims.

Overall, the quality of the training accommodation is suitable to meet the training needs of the participants. As the training room is small only a limited number of participants are able to undertake practical training at any particular time and, as a result, class sizes are also small. The project promoter has, however, invested well in a broad range of ICT equipment, software and resources to support the participants' diverse learning needs, resulting in a well-resourced learning and training environment.

While appropriate self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are in place they need to be further refined and developed to support ongoing improvement across the provision. Going forward, the key areas for improvement need to be more clearly identified and the quality improvement plan aligned better to the findings of the self-evaluation report. In addition, the findings should be more evaluative and presented in a more concise manner in order to avoid duplication of content.

8. Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect the current legislation and practice.

9. Overall effectiveness

Access Centre demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants. To improve the provision further, the project promoter needs to:

- continue to increase the number of participants to voluntary work whilst participating on the course, which is too low at 23%;

- improve further the quality of the learning and development; and

- refine further the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A.   Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund Skills to Succeed 3 2018/19	24	96%
European Social Fund Skills to Succeed 3 2019/20	22	88%*

* Recruitment to year 2 continues until end of March 2020.

B.   Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website www.etini.gov.uk.

Two ETI inspectors observed eight participants in two learning and development sessions and spoke with five participants in a focus group. Discussions were held with the project manager, the work placement advisor, the tutor and two volunteers. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work, individual learning plans, review documents and programmes of work were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

C.   Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on Outcomes for Participants, Quality of Provision and on Leadership and Management.

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the project promoter:

The project promoter has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

The project promoter demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

The project promoter needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor and report on the project promoter's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

The project promoter needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor and report on the project promoter's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
Achievement	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.