



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Action Mental Health

Working it Out

Report of an Inspection in
March 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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1. Context

Action Mental Health (AMH) is a registered charity limited by guarantee which is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Working it Out European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to deliver a range of personal development, vocational skills training and employability programmes across Northern Ireland for people with mental health problems. The project assists them to overcome barriers to further education or employment, while at the same time promoting social inclusion and combating poverty.

The project promoter is managed by the chief executive, supported by the board of directors, the ESF project manager and head of operations, the operations manager and nine service managers. At the time of the inspection, 656 participants¹ were registered on the Working it Out project; most (86%) of them are undertaking full or partial accredited qualifications and a minority (13%) of them are in a suitable work-experience placement. The participants attend the project on a flexible basis, at times best suited to their individual learning and support needs, for a maximum two-year period.

2. Views of participants

Almost all of the participants interviewed reported on their enhanced well-being through engagement on the project and cited numerous examples of how the project has impacted positively on their lives, including development of their self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and socialisation. They also reported positively on the curriculum offer, particularly the provision of accredited and non-accredited training, as well as mentoring and job coaching services. A small number of participants stated that the project has been life-changing, and in some cases life-saving.

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.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

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

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

Outcomes for individual participants vary depending on the nature of the mental health issue they present with. They are, however, encouraged and supported well in their learning and development to achieve realistic goals and most of them meet or exceed the targets set in their individual action plans. Evidence from the inspection showed numerous examples of how the project, through excellent, impactful engagement by staff, is unlocking the participants' potential and enabling most of them to achieve good or better standards of work.

In the health and social care provision, for example, the participants demonstrate good standards in their formative work, with evidence of good extended writing in their written responses and effective marking for improvement by staff. In information and communication technology (ICT), the participants report, and are able to demonstrate, improved ICT skills including the use of office software packages, and greater overall confidence in using computers as a result of completing an accredited ICT programme. In numeracy, the participants demonstrate a better understanding of basic mathematical concepts, and in arts and crafts there are numerous examples of high standards of work using glass, clay and other media. The horticulture provision has also contributed to the participants becoming involved in other associated small enterprise activities.

The enhancement and progression of the participants' personal development is a key strength of the project. Through well-scaffolded support the participants are enabled to progress and develop in an incremental way best suited to their level of ability, at their own pace and under their control. While the project promoter records and tracks the distance travelled and soft skills development of the participants, there is a need to increase the frequency of the soft skills assessments to better demonstrate the overall impact the project is having on the lives of the participants.

Over the last three years, outcomes on the project are high. To date, recruitment levels are in line with the targets set (82%) and the retention rate of the participants is outstanding at 87%. One hundred and thirty six participants, 67% of the target set to support participants into employment, has been achieved. In addition, 161 participants have been supported into voluntary work, which has well exceeded the three-year target of 120. The percentage of participants progressing to further education (31%) or other training (60%) is below the targets set and should be improved further, with better links established with the further education sector. While no specific targets were set, it is of note that a small number of participants have been supported into higher education or self-employment. The number of participants undertaking individual units or full qualifications at entry level, level 1, or level 2 are high and in almost all cases exceed the targets set. Retention rates on full qualification programmes are outstanding (81%), and all of the participants who remain and complete their qualifications across the levels achieve. The project promoter is well-placed to enhance the range of data that is collated and analysed, to include for example, the number of participants who progress from level 1 to level 2 qualifications and to report on the outcomes of qualifications across individual professional and technical areas, across the various service locations.

The participants are developing well their wider skills and dispositions. They speak very positively about the non-judgmental nature of the provision, the positive encouragement and support by staff, the realistic but challenging targets set, how the project is making a difference to their lives and increasing their progression opportunities and life chances. Without exception, the participants reported many examples of the impact of the project and services provided, including: giving hope for the future; providing a routine; identifying coping strategies; the development of new skills to allow them to re-join and integrate into the workforce; reduced isolation; increased socialisation; and a sense of purpose.

The small number of work-placement providers interviewed were positive about their engagement with the project and were well informed, where necessary, about the participants' personal development and learning needs.

6. Quality of provision

A broad and balanced curriculum offer is in place which is participant-centred and tailored well to meet their learning and development needs. It is appropriate that it focuses on the three key strands of personal development, employability, and vocational skills training. The curriculum is kept under review and is responsive to the participants' ongoing needs and feedback from them. A good range of non-accredited and accredited training is provided, ranging from entry level to level 2, to support the participants to ultimately progress to employment. In addition, a wide range of in-house services have been developed to further support the participants. These include an individual placement support programme, an introduction to essential skills provision, a pilot child development class, signposting to an in-house transition programme to help prepare participants for exiting and completing the Working it Out project. The project also provides the participants with access to a range of extra-curricular activities which include walking, horse-riding, walking football and a variety of day trips. Ongoing support is also provided through the project promoter's other funded programmes to enable participants to sustain employment after they progress beyond the Working it Out project.

The project promoter works to good effect with a wide range of referral agencies across the service locations which has supported the effective recruitment to the project. All of the referral agencies interviewed report that the Working it Out project complements well their provision. A majority of them commented on the good levels of communication with the project promoter, including the sensitive way the participants are managed, the high quality of the provision, and the noticeable improvements the project delivers for most of the participants. One referral agency indicated that participants, a majority of whom suffer long-term mental health issues and have difficulty with motivation, communication and dealing with structure, are referred to the Working it Out project as it is innovative and forward-thinking in its approach and the services and courses provided best meet the needs of these participants and help channel their existing skillsets in the most suitable way. In an example of effective practice, the project promoter has created an information DVD which the referral agent uses successfully to help participants decide if they want to join the project.

The initial assessment process is effective in identifying the participants' learning and development needs and barriers to learning and employment. Regular reviews take place with them and relevant stakeholders to track and monitor their progress and update their action plans. A daily contact sheet is also used effectively to keep all of the staff informed about the progress of the individual participants, any issues arising, and to inform them about any ongoing support and development needs.

The quality of the learning, teaching and training observed ranged from good to outstanding and was mostly good. In the most effective practice, relationships between the participants and tutors are very good, the tutors plan the lessons well and work expertly at the level of the participants. In these sessions, staff expectations are high, the learning and teaching strategies are engaging and inclusive, the pace is brisk, and questioning is sensitive but probing and challenging. Consequently, the participants work well independently or in small groups and there is sound evidence of learning and skills development by them. In a small number of the sessions observed, the participants' learning experiences could have been improved by the use of more active learning strategies by the tutors and improved planning for differentiation.

Careers education, information, advice and guidance across most of the service locations is good. Examples of effective practice include the introduction of a weekly careers and advice session to discuss progression pathways with participants on a scheduled basis, attendance by the participants at further education college open days, and individual advice and support given to inform them about possible progression pathways. While appropriate links have been established across the service locations with the local further education colleges, more needs to be done, by the project promoter and the colleges, to encourage higher numbers of participants to progress to further education at level 2 and beyond.

Care and welfare impacts positively on the quality of the provision. Highly effective systems are in place to support the participants to overcome many of their barriers to learning and enable them to develop the skills, confidence and motivation needed to succeed and progress to work or further education or training. It is a strength of the project that all participants are assigned a key worker to underpin the development of a strong and supportive relationship and to build trust. The approach by staff is sensitive, supportive, inclusive and tailored to the participants' needs. The participants comment favourably about the support they receive. It is also noteworthy that annual celebration events take place across the service locations in order to recognise the achievements and distance travelled by the participants.

It is appropriate that participants are regularly consulted and their feedback is sought on a range of issues. They report that senior managers are proactive in responding to their feedback. An effective Client Local Advisory Group (CLAG) has been established which provides good opportunities for participants to feedback on the project and also develop their wider personal development skills.

7. Leadership and management

The quality and impact of the leadership and management of the project, at both strategic and operational levels, is very good. Senior management have a very good strategic oversight of key mental health issues and developments at both a local and national level. A highly supportive ethos based on strong collegial staff relationships and high levels of communication underpins the project's delivery. Effective management information systems have been established and developed to support the delivery of the project and are used well to analyse and report on key performance data.

Highly effective collaborative links and partnerships have been established with a range of key stakeholders to support the delivery of the project including, for example, the five health trusts, local councils, various training providers and volunteer organisations. While links have also been made with a range of employers, these are limited, particularly with private employers. Consequently, links with employers need to be enhanced in order to widen the range of employment opportunities available to the participants.

The project promoter has invested significantly in learning resources and accommodation, which are mostly of a high quality across the service locations; the participants can avail of a range of facilities including well-equipped workshops and classrooms for practical and theory sessions, modern ICT facilities, horticulture and re-cycling facilities, gym facilities and social and relaxation areas. The work of the participants is clearly displayed across the facilities to celebrate their work and achievements.

Staff at all levels are highly committed and hard-working; they work to the values and ethos of the project promoter and have a strong skillset which supports well the needs of the participants. The staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have good opportunities to undertake relevant continuing professional development.

Effective quality assurance processes have been developed to support ongoing improvements in the delivery of the project. While appropriate self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are in place, they could be further strengthened to include more incisive evaluations around core business areas such as the quality of learning, teaching and training and the impact of middle leadership.

8. Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

9. Overall effectiveness

Action Mental Health demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund Working it Out 2015/2016	1166	104%
European Social Fund Working it Out 2016/2017	411	89%
European Social Fund Working it Out 2017/2018	376	82%

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

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

Four ETI inspectors and two associate assessors observed 259 participants in a range of settings, including learning and development sessions, focus groups and work-experience placements. Discussions were held with Action Mental Health's management team, service managers, client development co-ordinators, training co-ordinators, skills coaches and employment officers. Discussions were also held with other key stakeholders and 10 employers/supervisors in the workplace. The management information system, including the tracking and monitoring system, samples of the participants' work, individual action plans and training planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were also 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 learners, 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.

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