



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Ashton Community Trust

Creating Opportunities and Real
Experiences (CORE)

Report of an Inspection in
March 2017



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

Ashton Community Trust is a charitable organisation and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Creating Opportunities and Real Experiences (CORE) European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aim of the project is to integrate young people, aged between 16 and 24, living in North Belfast into the labour market and, in particular to target those young people not currently in education, employment or training.

The project is led by the project co-ordinator, and managed by the senior management team which includes the head of employability and training services and the operations manager. They are supported by the quality assurance and training officer, an education and employment support officer, six mentors, three tutors and administration staff. The project is overseen by a Board of Directors that is actively involved in the management and delivery of the project's aims. The training is either delivered by the project promoters own tutors or by tutors from three sub-contracted organisations¹.

At the time of the inspection, 118 participants² were registered on the CORE project, across three strands that include mentoring, skills training and work-experience placements. Ashton Community Trust collaborates with a number of organisations and referral agencies to support and deliver the aims of the project. The participants attend mentoring at least monthly or more frequently when they require additional support. Their individualised learning programme aims to provide them with access to employability skills and a range of accredited and relevant level one professional and technical qualifications including catering and hospitality, construction, childcare, design, health and social care, retail and customer service. In addition they also have the opportunity to complete first aid and food hygiene qualifications.

2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the outcomes for participants;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the quality of provision for learning and development; and
- the quality of the leadership and management.

3. 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 Sub-contractor organisations are listed in the appendix.

² All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter at the time of the inspection.

KEY FINDINGS

4. Outcomes for learners

The recruitment to the projects for 2015/16 was below the target (69%) with 218 participants being recruited, this was partly due to the late start of the project with no adjustments being made to the original target. Recruitment to the project has improved significantly during 2016/17; at the time of the inspection the recruitment had reached 90% of the target with 285 participants being recruited with one month remaining. The team of mentors are very effective in recruiting participants and recruitment is enhanced significantly by the links with a range of outreach centres across North Belfast. The participants engage well in their learning and the attendance is mostly good. The standards of their written and practical work are good or better. The number of level 1 qualifications achieved is below the target at 141 (19%). As a result the management have negotiated revised targets with the Department for subsequent years of the project based on the outcomes achieved during 2015/16. During 2016/17 to date, the number of level 1 qualifications achieved by participants has increased considerably to 543 and is currently 76% of the target.

Most of the participants are motivated to progress in their learning, and to achieve employment. Those participants with fewer barriers on entry progress more quickly to employment. For the year 2015/16, the retention rate is good at 68%. The progression rates, for those participants who completed the programme are high with 99% of them having a positive outcome. Over half of the participants (54%) progressed into employment which exceeded the target set by 150%, and 41% of them progressed to further education or training. As a result of the success in moving participants into employment, the targets for those moving into further education and training were not met. For the current year, 2016/17, the retention rate has improved and is currently outstanding at 85% and the project promoter is making good progress towards achieving most of their targets. The progression rates for the participants who have completed their programme remain high with 95% of them having a positive outcome. The progression of participants to employment is 43% with over half of them (52%) progressing into further education or training.

Most of the participants demonstrate high levels of commitment to overcoming significant personal challenges. All of the participants interviewed provided positive feedback about their experiences on the project to date and could identify the progress they had made. This included, for example; increased self-esteem, an improved sense of personal wellbeing, greater confidence, improved communication skills, being able to work independently and as part of a team, improved employability skills and improved attitudes to work. Most of the participants are keen to access employment as quickly as possible and there were good opportunities to avail of employment, particularly in call centre customer services.

5. Quality of provision

The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes children's care, learning and development, construction, employability, fabrication and design, first aid, food hygiene, health and social care hospitality and customer service, nail and beauty and retail. The timetabling of the provision is well planned on a monthly basis and includes a sampling option so that the participants can make informed choices. The curriculum is kept under review to ensure that it is relevant and meeting the needs of the participants. Recent curriculum developments include a five day call centre pre-employment programme and for those participants who have more complex needs a six to eight weeks Support With Education, Employment & Training (SWEET) programme has been designed to help them overcome barriers, improve confidence and achieve accredited qualifications. Signposting is provided, where appropriate, to other external opportunities including essential skills literacy and numeracy.

The programme is fully inclusive and a key strength of the provision is its highly individualised approach which enables all of the participants, including those who are hardest to reach and furthest from employment, to enter the programme assured of tailored support. The process is informed effectively by a detailed initial assessment process, including the use of an individualised barriers and needs assessment which is linked appropriately to a detailed action plan that is reviewed and updated regularly. The project model is flexible and identifies and supports each individual participant to progress at their own pace.

Overall, the quality of the directed training, and employment preparation and review sessions, is mostly very good. The planning is effective and supports the participants well to build on their existing knowledge and strengths. The tutors use a broad range of strategies to progress the participants' learning and to develop their personal capabilities. The training, and the interaction with the mentors, is also very effective in raising the participants' aspirations and building the participants' determination to succeed, as part of the holistic support provided by the project promoter. The team of mentors deliver weekly outreach activities across the North Belfast area in over 15 outreach clinics that are run weekly.

The care and welfare arrangements impact positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for the participants. The guidance and support provided to each participant is substantial and address well their barriers to progression. All of the participants can avail of regular support sessions, both formal and informal, through the mentors, who have a detailed understanding of the needs of the young people, and the wider communities with which they work. The regular review and support sessions have a strong focus on progressing the participants to employment and include a range of effective work preparation support and links to agencies like Disability Action, where appropriate. The participants' regular twelve week reviews, and a range of individual good news case studies, capture well the progress that each participant has made in personal development and across all of the key areas of the programme, including progression into employment. The twelve week review period is also triggered earlier if any issues of concern are identified by the mentors who work, very effectively, across the programme.

Ashton Community Trust provides the participants with signposting to other key services and, for example, in the last six months, 46 participants on the programme have accessed a Food Bank service, 87 independent advice service sessions have been offered and accessed for better off calculations and benefits and housing related queries, fourteen young people have been referred to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and 14 participants have accessed sexual health and well-being support.

6. Leadership and management

The strategic management is outstanding with a shared strategic vision across a wide range of organisations for how the programme can be used effectively to meet the needs of young people in North Belfast. The management of the programme is very good. The managers use key management information processes to implement, monitor review and evaluate strategic and operational planning however there is a need to review the processes to simplify the data collation and analysis procedures. There are regular team meetings, to monitor and to inform all aspects of the work of the project, for example, there is a full team standardisation meeting on the first Friday of each month and monthly departmental meetings attended by the mentors, to report on and to track progress. The mentor case load is carefully managed to ensure equity.

The middle managers work together to develop and manage the curriculum effectively to meet the needs and aspirations of the participants. All of the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and all of the project staff are committed to addressing the wide range of support, learning and employability needs of the participants. A particular strength of the project promoter is the understanding that each staff member has of the specific challenges facing the participant groups. The appointment of a quality assurance and training officer, and an employment and education support officer, supports effectively the work of the project, and these appointments have increased significantly the project promoter's capacity for monitoring and for effective self-evaluation. The staff all have appropriate experience and qualifications with the mentors all having at least a level 3 Advice and Guidance Qualification.

Effective links have been developed with a wide range of support organisations, community groups and youth workers who have a good understanding of the programme and how it can be used to help the young people. The project promoter has well established links with a good range of employers. There are effective links with other training organisations, colleges and support agencies to support and enhance the participant's experience. The project also has links with a sports project, which allows the participants access to the University of Ulster and to motivational sports activities and talks from a range of visiting speakers in that setting.

Ashton Community Trust provides good quality physical accommodation and whilst the project staff are located on the Cliftonville Road, all participants can access all the project promoters premises to use information technology and recreational facilities.

Ashton Community Trust places a very high priority on self-evaluation and quality improvement. The processes are well embedded with a clearly defined quality cycle in place. The project promoter is very responsive to feedback received from the ETI during previous visits and as a result they continue to develop processes well. Data is being collated effectively, both internally, and from all key stakeholders, to inform improvement. There are monitoring and tracking systems in place which record appropriately progress against the projects targets. The data collation and analysis could be strengthened further to track the achievements of those who progress to further education, training and employment in greater detail. This would strengthen further the target setting in these areas.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect broadly the guidance from the Department. However, the project promoter needs to:

- develop further the procedures to ensure that they include arrangements for all sub-contract staff who deliver training, where appropriate.

7. Overall effectiveness

Ashton Community Trust demonstrates a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the participants. There are areas for improvement that the project promoter has demonstrated the capacity to address. The areas for improvement are to:

- continue to develop the self-evaluation and quality improvement processes to evaluate the impact that the curriculum has on progression and the achievement of the projects targets; and

- review and refine the data collection and analysis particularly the tracking of the participant's entry qualifications and barriers, the progress they make and their destination on leaving the program.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
Creating Opportunities and Real Experiences 2015/16	218	69%
Creating Opportunities and Real Experiences 2016/17	285	*90%

* This % is to the end of February 2017. There is 1 month remaining for the 2016/17 registrations.

Sub-contracted organisations

- Complete Construction Training Services
- People 1st
- Swann Training Services

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 and an associated assessor observed participants in learning and development sessions and interviewed participants in focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the head of training and employment, training and employment operation manager, the project co-ordinator, the quality assurance and training officer, education and employment support officer, mentors and tutors. The representative from an employer, the Not in Education, Employment or Training Forum, a sub-contractor's training co-ordinator and a focus group of representatives from outreach centres and community referral partners were also interviewed. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work, personal training plans and reviews, and session plans were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report 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 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 organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The organisation 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 organisation'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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