



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Ashton Community Trust

Local Employment Intermediary
Service (LEMIS+)

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 registered charity and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS+) European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to provide the unemployed, economically inactive and young people aged between 16 and 24 who are not in education or training with a suite of services which help them overcome their personal barriers to employment and develop work-related skills that enable them to progress toward employment.

The project is led by the project manager, and managed by the senior management team which includes the head of employability and training services and the operations manager. They are supported by a quality assurance co-ordinator, a quality assurance officer, a training officer, an employment liaison co-ordinator, five mentor co-ordinators, a team of mentors, tutors, employment liaison officers, wellbeing officers 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. Ashton Community Trust collaborates with a number of partner organisations and referral agencies to support and deliver the aims of the project¹ across Belfast.

At the time of the inspection, 1074 participants² were registered on the LEMIS+ project, across four strands. The participant engagement strand provides one-to-one mentoring and advice with an action plan being developed to address barriers to employment, identification of participant's skills and employability needs. The skills for employment options encourages participants to avail of training, education, work-experience placement, citizenship and volunteering opportunities to increase their prospects of moving into employment. The into employment strand supports participants to carry out job search activities, complete a curriculum vitae and application forms and to develop job interview techniques. The employment support strand provides participants with ongoing support and assistance and follow-up on their entry to work. This can also include support for the employer through employer liaison service if required additional support will be provided to the participants, including help with childcare and benefit advice for those returning to work.

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.

¹ Partner 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.

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

KEY FINDINGS

4. Outcomes for learners

Ashton Community Trust is very effective in identifying and registering participants from the target group. In 2015/16, the recruitment target for the project was exceeded (129%) with 2456 participants being recruited. During 2016/17, with two months remaining, recruitment has reached 79% of the target with 2196 participants recruited to date. The number of qualifications achieved during 2015/16 is below the target (32%) however this has improved significantly in 2016/17 and is currently at 78% of the target. The participants engage well in their learning, can work independently or collaboratively in small groups and complete the tasks set to a good standard. They made appropriate responses when questioned by the tutor and demonstrate a good understanding of the work being undertaken. The standards of work in their portfolios of evidence are of good quality, there is evidence of a range of presentation methods including extended writing with detailed answers to the tasks set. Where appropriate, participants are supported by the project promoter to complete specialist training, so that they can successfully progress in specialist areas where there are clearly identified opportunities for example, one participant has recently completed a level 4 interpreter/translator and is now actively researching possible employment and other progression opportunities online.

Most participants are motivated to progress in their learning and towards employment. The retention rate for the 2015/16 cohort is inadequate at 49%, it has improved significantly in 2016/17 and is currently very good at 70%. The project has been particularly successful in progressing participants into employment. The progression into employment during 2015/16 exceeded the target (168%) with 639 participants taking up employment. In the current year, the progression into employment has already been exceeded (130%) with 713 of the participants successfully moving into employment. The participants' progression rate into further education and other training is below the target for both 2015/16 (32%) and the current year (30%) and is in need of improvement.

The participants are very positive about their experiences on the project and almost all of them reported that they are developing well their personal, social and employability skills through their participation in a range of learning, training, and personal development activities. They particularly highlighted how their independence, confidence and self-esteem have increased as a result of them being engaged on the project.

5. Quality of provision

Ashton Community Trust and their partner organisations have developed a broad and relevant curriculum offer that includes mentoring, training, wellbeing support and employer liaison to support the development of the participants' personal, social, and employability skills. The provision is participant centred, delivered in a flexible manner across a wide range of community and out-reach centres, and supports appropriate progression opportunities. It includes an appropriate range of accredited and non-accredited professional and technical training, personal development, and enrichment programmes, and has been designed to meet the needs of a large number of participants from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds and cultures, many of whom present with significant, and often complex, barriers to learning and employment.

The participants' personal files are of a good quality, are individualised, and capture well their previous experiences, qualifications, and barriers to learning and employment. The rigorous initial assessment process, including the use of an individualised barriers and needs assessment, is linked appropriately to a detailed action plan that results in a highly individualised approach which enables all of the participants to get the support they need. The participants are kept well-informed about their progress through regular reviews. The action plans are reviewed and updated regularly. Appropriate internal processes are also in place to measure the development of the participants' personal and social skills, and the impact the programme is having on improving their life chances.

The quality of the directed training observed was good. The session was well planned, good learning resources and a range of teaching and learning strategies were used. There was, however, limited use of information learning technology to support learning and training. The mentoring session was also planned well and the participant was very well supported to research possible employment and progression opportunities.

The participants interviewed were positive about their experiences on the programme and the support they received from staff. The well developed mentoring and support systems are highly valued by the participants and are impacting positively on improving their life and employment opportunities.

The processes in place for care and welfare are impacting positively on the participants. The participants interviewed stated that they are very well supported by staff, that the project is delivered in as flexible a manner as possible to meet their individual needs, and that they are actively encouraged by staff to take responsibility for their own personal development.

6. Leadership and management

The strategic management of the project is outstanding. The project promoter works closely with four partnership organisations to deliver the project effectively across the wider Belfast area. Management and staff, across the partner organisations, are committed to making the project a success, resulting in a well planned provision with excellent channels of communication and very effective collegial working relationships to support the extensive provision. Very effective links and partnerships have been established with a wide range of statutory and other voluntary and community organisations, external support agencies, and employers to support the delivery of the project.

A consistent and standardised approach to the delivery and administration of the project has been established across the partner organisations and appropriate management information systems and processes have been developed to manage it, including a range of electronic systems to support collaborative working and information sharing. These have, however, resulted in a significant amount of administration and paper-work for staff and participants and there is a need to review and streamline the systems to make them more efficient and minimise the duplication of administrative processes.

Staffing levels for the project are very good. Staff interviewed, across the partner organisations, are enthusiastic and committed to supporting the participants. They are provided with appropriate opportunities to undertake relevant continuing professional development. The quality of the accommodation to deliver training and mentor and support the participants is mostly good.

Ashton Community Trust demonstrates a strong commitment to self-evaluation and quality improvement. The management and staff have acted positively to feedback received from the ETI and this has resulted in improved processes. An appropriate emphasis is placed on obtaining feedback from key stakeholders and this is acted upon effectively by the project promoter. For example, changes were made to timetables that led to improved retention. However, there is a need to refine and develop the processes further, particularly the analysis and use of key performance data and the identification and prioritisation of key strengths and areas for improvement in the self-evaluation report, and the use of specific targets in the quality improvement plan.

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:

- update the policy to include clearer lines of reporting of safeguarding issues from the partner organizations to Ashton Community Trust.

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 review and streamline the management information systems, across the partner organisations, to make them more efficient; and
- to continue to refine and develop the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
LEMIS+ ESF project 2015/16	2456	129%
LEMIS+ ESF project 2016/17	2169	*79%

* This % is to the end of January 2017. There are 2 months remaining for the 2016/17 registrations.

Partner organisations

- East Belfast Mission
- GEMS NI.
- Impact Training (Greater Shankill Job Assist)
- Upper Springfield Development Trust

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 associate assessor observed participants in a learning and development and mentoring sessions and interviewed 11 participants in focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the head of training and employment, managers from the partner organisations, training and employment operation manager, the project co-ordinator, the quality assurance co-ordinator and quality assurance officer, the education co-ordinator, employment liaison services co-ordinator, communications officer, mentors and tutors. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work, personal training plans 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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