



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
DFPF Ltd trading as People 1st

LEMIS+

Report of an Inspection in
December 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

DFPF Limited, trading as People 1st, is a private company contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the LEMIS+ European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to prepare people who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive to overcome their barriers and progress into employment; this includes care leavers, ex-offenders, people with convictions, the homeless and those with a history of drug and alcohol abuse.

The project is managed by the project manager, supported by a project co-ordinator and a team of mentors. The project is overseen by a board of directors who receive quarterly reports on the performance and outcomes attained by the project.

At the time of the inspection, 684 participants¹ were registered on the LEMIS+ project. The programme is delivered to the participants within local communities through individual mentoring to support them to identify and overcome their barriers to employment; the provision includes training, employability skills development and addressing motivational and confidence-building needs. The participants are provided with an individualised programme to mentor and support them in developing their career planning and employability skills through accessing a range of pre-employment training, including level 1 short training accredited courses to support their progression to employment. These courses are delivered through a variety of modes of delivery, including one and two day courses, reflecting well the participants' range of training and employability needs.

2. Views of participants

The inspection team met with a sample of participants, individually within their mentoring support sessions and by telephone contact, as well as visits to two referral agencies, with a third referral agency contacted by phone. Three jobs and benefits offices were also visited to observe participants during the mentoring and support sessions. All of the participants reported positively about their participation on the project and commented that they valued greatly the support and guidance provided by the mentors.

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

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

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

Over the past three years, People 1st has developed highly effective relationships with appropriate referral agencies and organisations in the voluntary and community sector in order to support recruitment from the project's target group. Whilst recruitment was slow in year one at 60% of the target, the project promoter is currently on track to meet its overall recruitment target, with 684 participants recruited against a target of 720 (95%) to date.

Almost all of the participants are making good progress in their learning and development, through accessing the one-to-one tailored support and mentoring sessions. All of them are supported to undertake a variety of career planning activities and a majority (66%) are developing well their occupational skills through engagement in appropriate short accredited training courses in a range of areas, including construction, food safety, fork-lift truck licence and security. The short accredited training courses are sourced from a range of delivery organisations to enable participant attendance and are well matched to meet individual participants' training needs and to support their progression to employment.

The retention rate for the project has shown an upward trend; in 2015/16 it was good (63%), very good in 2016/17 (76%) and outstanding (84%) to date in 2017/18. A strength of the project has been its success in progressing and supporting 385 participants into employment, significantly exceeding the target (195%). The project provides effective, supportive progression for participants into a range of employment areas, including a six month follow-up with those who have successfully progressed to employment. The project promoter has supported 66% of the participants to undertake short accredited training courses and exceeded the progression into the other training target (253%). Of the participants who have completed short training accredited courses, over one-half (55%) of them have progressed to positive employment outcomes.

The flexible and supportive one-to-one mentoring system is a strength of the provision and has been a key factor in improving the participants' confidence and self-esteem. Through their engagement with the project almost all of the participants can demonstrate improved confidence and motivation. In the three jobs and benefits offices visited, the mentors help participants make progress by tailoring the support provided to match closely with the individual participants' needs and aspirations. All of the participants interviewed are making appropriate progress in reducing their barriers to employment and are developing well career planning and employability skills through the mentoring and support sessions.

6. Quality of provision

People 1st has developed a well-planned provision that includes a range of supportive services to provide participants with advice, guidance and one-to-one mentoring to support the development of the participants' career planning and employability skills. The planning is well-matched to the needs of individual participants and delivered using a 'participant-centred' approach, including opportunities for them to access short training accredited courses matched to their training needs and employment goals.

The project promoter provides effective pre-entry advice, guidance and induction to the participants. A coherent approach to planning, identifying, reviewing and supporting the participants' individual needs is in place with a strong focus on progressing them at an appropriate pace towards employment. The mentors agree individual action plans with each participant across the project to identify and prioritise appropriate actions to support their progress towards employment. A key strength of the project is the multi-agency approach with an appropriate range of organisations, including referral agencies and voluntary and community organisations. The participants' personal files capture well their prior experiences, qualifications, and barriers to employment. As a result, most of them overcome successfully their barriers to employment.

The quality of the provision for learning and development, including the eight mentoring sessions observed, is good or better. In the more effective sessions, there was effective use of information and learning technology to support the learning and skills development. The mentors engage effectively with the participants and foster very good working relationships through a range of well-considered strategies and appropriate support. The processes and systems used by the mentors for identifying and managing participants' individual support needs are well-established and effective. This includes providing tailored advice, guidance and signposting to a range of short accredited training courses along with voluntary and community organisations to support effectively the participants' progression to employment. The programme of short accredited training courses provided are key to supporting the participants to overcome their barriers to employment and progression, where they are developing further their employability and occupational skills.

The arrangements for care and welfare impacts positively on the participants' learning and development. There is a flexible approach to the delivery of the project, where participants have the opportunity to continue to receive on-going advice and guidance after successfully gaining employment. The managers and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting the care and welfare needs of the participants. They are allocated a mentor and receive individual support as an integral part of the project delivery. There are effective links to signposting to a range of services to support participants who have specific needs, including pre-entry advice linked to the holistic needs of the individual participants.

7. Leadership and management

The senior management team are highly supportive of the project and are effective in setting its strategic direction. Strategic links and partnerships are well-established and support the good levels of recruitment to the project; they include collaborative working relationships with a range of appropriate referral agencies, community and voluntary organisations and a range of jobs and benefits offices in the region.

Management and staff are highly committed to making the project a success. A key strength of the provision is the expertise, skills-set and professionalism of the mentors, who work collegially to effectively enhance the participants' employment opportunities and build positive relationships with them. There are frequent opportunities for staff to meet and discuss progress; there is also a cycle of regular, quarterly meetings to monitor and review outcomes and address any issues. The roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly defined and staff reported positively on the availability of continuing professional development opportunities they can access and the external support that is available to them as appropriate.

Whilst the processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement are well-embedded and include appropriate systems to support regular review and tracking of the project outcomes, the use and analysis of data to reflect the impact of the work of the project could be further developed to better inform the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes.

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

The People 1st LEMIS+ project 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 People 1 st LEMIS+ 2015/2016	144	60%
European Social Fund People 1 st LEMIS+ 2016/2017	311	130%
European Social Fund People 1 st LEMIS+ 2017/2018	229	95%*

* This % is to the end of November 2017. There are 4 further months still for the 2017/18 registrations.

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

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

One ETI inspector and one associate assessor observed eight participants in mentoring sessions and spoke with five participants by phone; they also met with three referral agencies, including three jobs and benefits offices. Discussions were held with the management team, the project manager, the quality assurance manager, the co-ordinator and mentors. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work and personal training plans, and mentors' planning documents 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 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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