



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Enterprise Northern Ireland

Exploring Enterprise³ Programme

Report of an Inspection in May 2017

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The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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1. Context

The project promoter, Enterprise Northern Ireland, is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the European Social Fund (ESF) Exploring Enterprise³ Programme. Enterprise Northern Ireland is a membership organisation comprising 27 local enterprise agencies located in each of Northern Ireland's council areas. The enterprise agencies play an important role in supporting local business growth, job creation and enterprise. In partnership¹ with Enterprise Northern Ireland, they also deliver the Exploring Enterprise³ Programme. The Exploring Enterprise³ Programme is a pre-start enterprise programme providing participants who are unemployed, economically inactive or part-time employed with an opportunity to explore self-employment and business start-up. The participants complete an accredited level 1 qualification in Understanding Business Enterprise. In addition, they have the opportunity to participate in study visits, group project work and one-to-one mentoring support, to develop further their personal capabilities, enterprise skills and possible business start-up ideas.

Enterprise Northern Ireland is managed by a chief executive who is supported by a board of directors, a senior management team and business programme teams. The Exploring Enterprise³ Programme is managed by a programme manager and supported by a training and quality assurance manager and a finance and administration officer.

At the time of the inspection, 24 participants² were registered on the Exploring Enterprise³ Programme and were at the pre-assessment stage of the programme.

2. 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;
- effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- quality of provision for learning and development; and
- quality of the leadership and management.

3. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Good

¹ Details of partnership arrangements are provided in Appendix B

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

Through the local enterprise agencies, the project promoter has been effective in identifying and registering participants from the target groups across Northern Ireland. In 2015/16, 465 participants were registered on the programme, which was just under the target of 504. In 2016/17, recruitment remained below the target and consequently requires improvement; 598 participants were recruited against a target of 720. At this early stage in 2017/18, 24 participants have been registered against the target of 492. Retention rates for 2015/16 and 2016/17 are good at 62% and 65% respectively; the majority of the early leavers leave at the pre-assessment stage of the programme. A notable strength of the programme is that almost all (96%) of the participants who remain on the programme, successfully complete the level 1 qualification in Understanding Business Enterprise.

Most of the participants increase significantly their understanding of enterprise and business. They develop, for example, a sound understanding of business processes, marketing strategies and the legislative framework for starting a business or becoming self-employed. In particular, they are able to clarify and refine their entrepreneurial ideas, and extend their skills and confidence to take forward their business start-up plans or pursue other employment or training opportunities.

Over the first two years of the programme, Enterprise Northern Ireland, in partnership with the local enterprise agencies, has been particularly successful in progressing participants to a positive outcome. Over the periods 2015/16 and 2016/17, it is very good that 264 participants progressed to self-employment which is significantly above the target of 199; 98 to fulltime employment which is above the target 62; 85 into part-time employment which is above the target of 60; and 182 into further education, training, or voluntary work which is under the target of 251. For 2015/16, the progression rate to employment, education or training at 62% is well above the programme target of 41%; to date for 2016/17 it is 49% and exceeds the target of 45%. During 2016/17, 33 participants progressed to active job searching which is just under the target of 50³.

An important strength of the programme is the high levels of support provided for the participants which builds effectively their self-confidence and personal capabilities. All of the participants interviewed reported that the programme has increased their team working skills and helped them to think more critically and creatively. Through the programme's project-based workshops and one-to-one business mentoring, the participants establish sound skills in research and planning; team working and networking; and communication. Importantly, the programme has empowered them to work more collaboratively and/or individually to persist in solving problems, re-designing solutions and achieving short-term goals, thus increasing their personal resilience for the world of work.

5. Quality of provision

The programme includes an accredited qualification, project-based workshops and one-to-one mentoring which is well-designed and tailored appropriately to increase the participants' awareness of business enterprise and build their self-confidence. The participants also benefit from study visits to local business enterprises and guest speakers to broaden their understanding of business start-up and to further inspire and motivate them.

³ This target was added retrospectively to the programme in November 2016

The overall planning for the delivery of the programme is effective. Clear and well-documented guidance is in place for each delivery partner. As a consequence, the programme is delivered in a consistent and structured manner. High-quality, standardised learning resources underpin effectively the delivery of the programme which is enriched significantly by the experience and expertise of the business advisers who deliver the programme. The participants report that they benefit particularly from the project-based learning aspects of the programme where they are afforded the opportunities for more flexible, collaborative learning, matched better to their personal interests. It is timely, that the project promoter and delivery partners are planning to expand the project work to provide a broader range of workshops to meet more effectively the diverse range of learning and development needs of the participants.

A robust induction process is used well to inform and evaluate effectively each participant's suitability for the programme, particularly their aptitude for exploring enterprise. Systematic use of the 'Rickter Scale' assesses and monitors rigorously the participant's development of personal capabilities and self-confidence to undertake self-employment or business start-up. As a result, each participant has a comprehensive personal action plan which includes progression, if relevant, to further enterprise training and development.

In the small sample of learning and development sessions observed, the sessions are well-structured; build professional and effective relationships between the tutor and the participants; and promote high levels of engagement.

The care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their learning and personal development. All of the participants interviewed reported that there is an inclusive, positive and supportive learning environment. The business advisers are encouraging and affirming in building their ability and confidence to explore a range of self-employment or business-start-up ideas. Through one-to-one mentoring, the business mentors also provide timely advice and guidance to underpin the participant's confidence and competence in exploring and testing business ventures. In addition, the participants connect with a new group of friends which greatly enhances their social networking skills.

6. Leadership and management

Enterprise Northern Ireland has a clear vision and an appropriate focus on providing pre-entrepreneurial training and business support to local communities. The province-wide network of local enterprise agencies, located centrally in local business communities, provides accessible training and professional support for long-term unemployed or economically inactive participants that enables the majority of them to progress into employment. The project promoter, in conjunction with the delivery partners, is very committed to the success of the programme. The partners work hard to ensure that the participants optimise the benefits available to them through the programme, and the wider support and progression opportunities available through the local enterprise agencies.

Enterprise Northern Ireland has established effective communication channels with the delivery partners. A robust and sophisticated management information system enables key information to be entered locally by the delivery partners and tracked and monitored centrally by Enterprise Northern Ireland. Regular review meetings with the delivery partners ensure that the quality of the provision, participants' work and progression outcomes are monitored and evaluated and that any good practice is shared. While there is an effective and valuable working partnership with the local enterprise agencies, including study visits to start-up business, more needs to be done to link collaboratively with local further education colleges or other innovation agencies to promote progression opportunities to further education or training, if appropriate.

The training environments are conducive to delivering training to a high standard and are well-resourced with learning and support material. A particular strength of the programme is the participants' access to experienced, professional business advisers who are attentive and pro-active in signposting them to additional training and support if required.

The processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning are developing appropriately in line with recommendations from previous ETI visits. While there is growing and confident engagement with the delivery partners to self-evaluate the quality of the provision, a more structured approach is necessary, including better analysis of available data, to identify and prioritise key areas for development, supported by a clearly articulated action plan which is reviewed regularly.

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:

- revise the service level agreements with the delivery partners to include more comprehensive safeguarding guidelines and reporting procedures to ensure partners' policies and practice are up-to-date; and
- track and monitor more closely relevant staff members' completion of appropriate safeguarding training across all of the delivery partners and within Enterprise Northern Ireland.

7. Overall effectiveness

Enterprise Northern Ireland demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. There are areas for improvement that the project promoter has demonstrated the capacity to address and these include the need to:

- extend the range of specialist workshops to meet more effectively the diverse range of learning and development needs of the participants; and
- continue to build capacity across the delivery partners to self-evaluate more incisively in order to develop well-targeted action plans for improvement that are monitored and reviewed regularly.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund Exploring Enterprise ³ Programme, 2015/2016	465	92%
European Social Fund Exploring Enterprise ³ Programme, 2016/2017	598	83%

B. Partnership arrangements

The project promoter, Enterprise Northern Ireland, works in partnership with the local enterprise agencies across Northern Ireland to deliver the Exploring Enterprise³ Programme.

C. 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 one associate assessor observed 14 participants in one learning and personal development session and 13 in focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the Enterprise Northern Ireland management team and representatives from a sample (10) of the delivery partners. The tracking and monitoring arrangements, action plans, and planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

D. 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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