



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
EXTERN

Externworks project

Report of an Inspection in
February 2017

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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

Extern NI is a charitable organisation, contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Externworks European Social Fund Project (ESF). The main aim of the project is to provide training and employment opportunities for adults with significant challenges to progression who in addition to being economically inactive often have additional complex and multiple barriers such as, offending behaviours, medium to high risk offences, homelessness, addictions, mental health issues, and learning disabilities, which severely restrict employment opportunities. All of the participants are referred to Externworks by a range of agencies such as: the Probation Board for Northern Ireland: the Northern Ireland Prison Service: the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Hostels for the Homeless in the Greater Belfast area; other external projects and projects within the Extern group.

The project is delivered across four sites, at Mallusk, Brunswick Street, Maghaberry prison and Shannon Clinic at Knockbracken Healthcare Park. At the Mallusk site the programme lasts for approximately six months and provides accredited training in a range of professional and technical areas including: catering, electrical, employability, essential skills, information technology, business administration, joinery, warehousing and waste recycling. In addition to an accredited level 1 qualification, participants can also access short accredited courses such as construction skills register training, food safety, forklift training, health and safety at work and manual handling. At both the Maghaberry and Knockbracken Health Care Park sites the participants attend for one or two sessions per week. In Maghaberry the participants can undertake accredited training at entry and level 1 in catering and recycling. In Knockbracken Health Care Park the participants can undertake training in catering, essential skills, information technology and joinery. The project also provides an outreach service for refugees and the homeless at Brunswick Street, Belfast. The latter entails delivering information technology training, and the provision of wider employability skills such as curriculum vitae building, job search and job applications.

Externworks is managed by a programme manager supported by a team of 26 staff who work with participants across the four sites. At the time of the inspection 146 participants¹ were registered on the project across the four sites: 16 in Knockbracken Healthcare Park, 28 in Maghaberry, 32 in the Outreach provision and 70 in Mallusk. The participants attend training at the Mallusk site between one and five days each week; at the time of the inspection none of the participants were in a suitable external work-experience placement.

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:

- 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 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	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Important area for improvement
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Good

KEY FINDINGS

4. Outcomes for learners

Recruitment to the project in year one is an important area for improvement with just 61% of the 412 participants targeted actually recruited. In year two, recruitment is slow with just 226 participants on the programme, 44% of the target set. The achievement of short accredited courses in year 1 was good with 82% of participants achieving against a target of 230. The achievement rate in year 2 is also good to date, with a current achievement rate of 64% against the target. A majority of participants have significant barriers to gaining employment due to their offending history. As a result only 19% of the 57 participants targeted in year 1 progressed into employment. This is an important area for improvement and has appropriately been identified by Externworks as a high priority action. Recent changes to staff roles and responsibilities have led to improvements in year 2 with 22 participants to date gaining employment against a target of 71. Most of the participants demonstrate good standards of practical work and a small number develop further their essential skills of literacy, numeracy or ICT skills through the European Computer Driving License qualification. Almost all of the participants develop the skills and knowledge necessary to gain relevant short courses required to enhance their employment.

Across the project, participants are progressing well in the development of new skills and knowledge, often across a range of professional and technical areas that are relevant to their progression to employment. For example, participants develop skills in one or more areas such as working safely, wiring electrical circuits, driving forklift trucks, recycling waste materials, and developing new wood working and cookery skills. Retention on the project in year 1 was an important area for improvement with 59% participants retained on the programme, though this has improved to good in year 2 with 66% of participants retained. Most of the participants who leave the programme early leave for reasons beyond the control of project staff.

The participants interviewed by the inspection team were positive about the levels of support provided by the staff on the project to date, and in particular, reported their commitment to engage with the programme, undertake formal training and to make progress in developing their personal, social and employability skills. A significant minority of the participants report improvements in their levels of confidence and self-esteem through their engagement with the project. The participants value highly the ongoing support and contact with the project which, in many cases, provides an important structure to their week and opportunities for external contact to address social isolation. Staff ensure that participants are involved in commenting regularly on the life and work of the project, however, the outcomes of these meetings with the participants should be used more effectively to inform self-evaluation report.

5. Quality of provision

The overall provision and curriculum planning within Externworks is relevant and matches well the aspirations and potential of most of the participants and provides them with appropriate progression opportunities. The participants can access a range of very good quality curriculum enhancements including short accredited courses and other training to enhance their employability such as induction to employment, personal development, and money management. A key strength of the provision is the range of professional and technical skills areas, that are well resourced and, which the participants can sample to help them decide which area best meets their interests and needs.

All of the participants receive an initial assessment on entry to the project. However, the processes need to identify and record more clearly all of their barriers to progression and employment. The participants' personal action plans also need to be developed further, to use the outcomes from the initial assessment processes better to plan more effectively individualised programmes for the development and removal of their barriers. There is a need to demonstrate the distance travelled by each participant in developing their softer skills through the review processes and the use of specific measurable targets.

The quality of the provision for training, learning and development, including the directed training sessions observed, is mostly good or better. Most of the sessions are planned well to meet the participants individual learning needs and good quality assessment processes are in place. Participants engage well in the activities and effective strategies are used by the tutors to progress their learning and to encourage active participation.

The provision for the care and welfare of the participants impacts positively on learning, training, and outcomes. There is an inclusive, caring ethos demonstrated by the project promoter with respectful working relationships evident between the participants and staff at all levels. Almost all of the participants value highly their attendance at the project and the support and encouragement provided by the staff. The staff address a wide range of additional barriers to participation through the provision of transport, personal protective equipment and daily meals and snacks, as well as confidence building and personal and social skills development. There is also good signposting and use of services from a range of in-house and external agencies to support participants who have specific needs such as addictions, counselling, homelessness and language barriers.

6. Leadership and management

The strategic management of the Extern group supports well the objectives of the Externworks project through significant investment in accommodation, staffing and resources. The Externworks project is strategically aligned to other related projects and there is effective planning for its ongoing development. The project has effective working partnerships in place with a range of referring agencies.

Externworks has, during the second year of the project, undergone a number of staffing changes including the appointment of a new programme manager, a new project manager, the appointment of two development officers, a training co-ordinator and the recruitment of six additional skills tutors. The new management structure is more effectively focused on meeting the targets set in the original bid. Most of the new staff team have been in place for just over six months. There are clear roles and responsibilities for all of the staff and appropriate plans for the delegation of some of the tasks currently undertaken by the programme manager. There has been a renewed focus on increasing and improving the links and the level of engagement with employers in order to increase the number of relevant work-experience placements and employment opportunities available to participants. In order to increase the number of participants gaining employment, project staff need to more strategically identify and prioritise those participants closest to employment.

There are good working relationships between the project team members and the participants. Externworks provides good quality physical accommodation, and learning and training resources to support the delivery of the project across the four sites.

The project places an important emphasis on the provision of continuous professional development to develop the staff's knowledge and understanding of learning, teaching, and training. One member of staff completed the certificate in teaching during the first year of the project, a further seven staff are currently undertaking the programme and it is planned for a further six to undertake the programme in the next academic year.

A bespoke management reporting system is currently under development. The system needs to have the capacity to monitor the overall information and tracking of the participants on the project in order to more effectively record the project's progress towards achieving targets, including the progress of individual participants. The project has appropriate systems in place to quality assure almost all aspects of the provision, including observations of teaching, training and learning. The processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning need to take more account of feedback from the engagement with key external stakeholders and to use the data collated more effectively in order to inform quality improvement planning.

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 needs to:

- ensure that the reporting arrangements in the safeguarding flowcharts are clear and transparent with named individuals in the project; and
- review and update safeguarding policies and procedures, including the staff code of conduct, to promote safe working practices for all staff.

7. Overall effectiveness

Extern NI demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all of the participants. There are areas for improvement that the project has demonstrated the capacity to address. The areas for improvement are to:

- plan more strategically to meet the project's set targets, monitoring progress through the more effective use of performance data; and
- develop further the quality assurance, self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes to take account of all of the recent changes in the project, and to include more effective use of feedback from all of the key stakeholders.

The ETI will monitor how the project sustains improvement.

APPENDIX

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
Externworks ESF project 2015/2016	252	61%
Externworks ESF project 2016/2017	226	44%

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 observed 43 participants in a range of settings including one-to-one and group learning and development sessions, and a focus group meeting. Discussions were held with members of Externworks management team, development officers, skills tutors and key stakeholders. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work and review documentation, and planning documents 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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