



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
GEMS Northern Ireland

CO-MENT project

Report of an Inspection
in December 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for participants, on provision for learning and development, on leadership and management, and on the overall quality of the provision.

Current performance level
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:

Overall effectiveness outcome
The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing any area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.
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, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for 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, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for 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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1. Inspection method and evidence base

Two ETI inspectors met with a total of 24 participants in a range of settings including mentoring, learning and development sessions, focus groups and work-experience placements. Discussions were held with the GEMS Northern Ireland (GEMS) management team, partner organisation co-ordinators, mentors and other key stakeholders. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' personal folders and action plans, and the mentors' programmes of work were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

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. Context

GEMS is a charitable organisation operating from Shaftesbury Square in Belfast, and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the CO-MENT European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to mentor and support young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) to progress towards employment or into education and training. The participants are allocated a personal mentor and receive individualised guidance and support to progress and develop in four zones: learning, leisure, life and work. Their individual programme provides access to a range of accredited level one qualifications including, for example, the construction skills register assessment, essential skills, food hygiene, health and safety, personal development, security industry assessment and other vocationally related training.

The project is led by the GEMS chief executive, managed by project and quality managers, and supported by two area mentors. GEMS leads a consortium of nine partner organisations¹ to deliver the project through the work of four additional area mentors and six community mentors. At the time of the inspection 79 participants² were registered on the CO-MENT project. The participants attend mentoring sessions for three hours per week and the duration of the programme is matched to their assessed needs; around 57% of the participants are in a suitable work-experience placement.

¹ A full list of the partner organisations is provided in the appendix.

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

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for participants	Very good
Provision for learning and development	Good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Outcomes for participants

The outcomes for participants are very good and the standards achieved by most of them are good. Most demonstrate high levels of commitment to overcoming personal barriers and are motivated to progress in their learning and towards employment.

The participants' regular eight week review and individual case studies capture well the progress they have made in each of the four zones of learning, life, leisure and work. In addition to the evidence in the reviews, all of the participants interviewed provided very 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, improved physical and mental health, greater confidence, improved communication, the skills necessary to find employment, and relevant additional qualifications.

GEMS are very effective in identifying and registering participants from the target group. At the time of the inspection, the project was ahead of its recruitment target with average recruitment sitting at 85% of the 2015/2017 two year target, which is very good.

Retention (83%) and achievement rates (87%) are very good to date and GEMS have been particularly successful in progressing participants into employment (35%), further education (22%), and other Department funded programmes (21%). Of the remainder, 6% progressed to other ESF programmes, 3% to voluntary work and 13% to no recorded destination.

6. Provision for learning and development

The quality of the provision for learning and development, including the small number of directed training sessions observed, is good. Participants engage well in the activities and effective strategies are used by the mentors to progress their learning and thinking skills, and to encourage active participation.

The CO-MENT project model is innovative and successful in identifying and supporting individual participants to progress in their learning and development. The mentors agree detailed individual plans with each participant across the four zones which helps identify and prioritise appropriate short-term interventions and actions. This includes regular weekly guidance and support sessions, access to an appropriate range of qualifications, work-experience opportunities, and where appropriate, essential skills, personal development, employability and vocational training. The regular review and support sessions have a strong focus on progressing participants at an appropriate pace towards employment and include effective and targeted jobsearch and work preparation support. While there is a good range of appropriate courses, support and training available for participants; there are some gaps in provision and information about training opportunities across the partners could be shared more effectively. Across the partners, there is a need to review and evaluate the extent and appropriateness of the curriculum provision to plan delivery more effectively, to better share information about training opportunities, and to identify gaps in provision.

The quality of the participants' action plans is very good. Pre-entry advice, guidance and induction are very effective. They include eligibility checks, needs and barriers assessments across the four zones and inform an individual action plan that is regularly reviewed and updated. There is, however, a need to improve the consistency and quality of careers, education, information, advice and guidance, and to develop the "next steps" planning to ensure all participants have a clear individualised learning and training progression plan when they exit the project.

The quality of the care and welfare is very good. The staff across all of the partner organisations provide holistic care and welfare for the participants. There is also good signposting and use of services from a wide range of in-house and external agencies to support participants who have specific needs such as counselling, addiction support and other health related problems.

7. Leadership and management

The quality of the leadership and management is very good. The GEMS board and senior management team are highly supportive of the project, and are effective in setting its strategic direction. All of the staff are highly committed, experienced and provide innovative, effective, individualised mentoring and support to help participants overcome a diverse range of barriers to learning, personal development, and progression.

Strategic links and partnerships are very good. The chief executive is actively involved in shaping and informing policy through participation in a range of relevant forums and committees including the Not in Education, Employment or Training Advisory Steering Group. Innovative management practice includes the use of a floating mentor to provide contingency cover across the partner organisations to minimise disruption to delivery.

GEMS and the partner organisations provide good quality physical accommodation, and learning and training resources to support the delivery of the project. GEMS's main office is easily accessible and in close proximity to the Jobs and Benefits Office, though space was limited due to renovations at the time of the inspection. The partner organisations offer local community based provision including training in a number of specialist areas such as level two qualifications in sport, and leadership. In addition, there is provision of valuable work experience opportunities for participants within the associated social enterprises.

The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are good. GEMS has effective and shared systems in place, across all of the partner organisations, to monitor and track each participant's progress. Individual targets for recruitment and outcomes are set for each partner organisation and discussed at regular performance meetings. Self-evaluation is a standing agenda item on all meetings with a clear focus on continuous improvement. The project promoter is responsive to internal and external feedback, and there is clear evidence of action taken to address areas for improvement from previous ETI visits. To sustain improvement, self-evaluation needs to include more involvement from the partner organisations and should be extended to include observations of mentoring and directed training to ensure consistency in delivery.

Information and communication technology is used very well to support communication and management of the project across the partner organisations. Partner organisations are very positive about the effectiveness of GEMS leadership of the project. They feel well informed and engaged through the regular meetings at different levels including board, management team, partner and mentor. The meetings have an appropriate focus on the planning, review, delivery of the project, and on sharing effective practice.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, GEMS CO-MENT project has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and adults at risk.

8. Overall effectiveness

GEMS NI has a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. To improve the provision further, GEMS need to:

- further develop the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, including better involvement of partner organisations, and the extension of quality processes to incorporate observations of mentoring and directed training.

APPENDIX

Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
CO-MENT ESF project 2015/2016	153	102%
CO-MENT ESF project 2016/17	146	73%

Partner organisations

Ashton Community Trust
Baillie Connor Training
Belfast South Community Resources
Charter NI
North Belfast Women's Information and Support Project
Resurgam Trust
Sally Gardens Community Association
Short Strand Community Association
Upper Springfield Development Trust

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