



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in  
Mencap

EmployAbility

Report of an Inspection in  
February 2018



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



## Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Context	1
2. Views of participants	1
3. Focus of the inspection	1
4. Overall findings of the inspection	2
5. Outcomes for learners	2
6. Quality of provision	3
7. Leadership and management	4
8. Safeguarding	5
9. Overall effectiveness	5
<b>Appendix</b>	
A. Project registrations	
B. Inspection methodology and evidence base	
C. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate	

## **1. Context**

Mencap is a charitable project promoter, limited by guarantee, and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the “EmployAbility” European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aim of the project is to promote the active inclusion and participation of economically inactive people with learning disabilities of working age, across six localities in Northern Ireland (NI). The project is designed to improve the participants’ (trainees’) employability skills through a range of targeted interventions and support, including vocational profiling, workplace-based training and job search to enable them to feel more ready, motivated and able to search for work. All of the participants are supported by a local team of employment officers for the duration of the programme.

The EmployAbility project operates across all six localities with offices in Belfast, Newry, Omagh, Derry-Londonderry, Magherafelt and Bangor. The project works in collaboration with both the North West Regional College and the South Eastern Regional College to deliver work-placements in support of discrete college provision for young people with learning difficulties. It also collaborates with all five of the health and social care trusts who act as referral agents to the project.

The project is managed by a Project Manager and an Area Operations Manager; it is delivered by a team of six service managers (one per office), 36 employment officers, two learning disability equality officers and an employment support worker. Administration, systems and finance support is provided by one full-time and two part-time administrators, a part-time business finance analyst and a part-time business support officer. At the time of the inspection, 249 participants<sup>[1]</sup> were registered on the project and 189 of them (76%) were in suitable work-placements. The participants typically engage for a minimum of two hours each week and up to three days in a work-placement, where applicable. The programme duration varies depending on each participant’s personal needs and goals: total engagement normally ranges from a minimum of nine months to a maximum duration of three years.

## **2. Views of participants**

The inspection team met with participants individually, in work-placements, employment and during focus group discussions. Almost all of those interviewed could clearly identify their progression pathway, felt well supported by their employment officers and highly valued the advice and guidance, particularly in relation to securing their work-placements and/or employment.

## **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.

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<sup>[1]</sup> 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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Very good
<b>Quality of provision</b>	Very good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Very good

#### KEY FINDINGS

##### 5. Outcomes for learners

Mencap places a strong and appropriate focus on developing the participants' employability skills through the work-placement element of its provision, although no accredited training is offered to them. The majority of the participants undertake work duties to a good standard in a range of appropriate work-placements. Many of them benefit from training and development from the work-placement providers, for example, using work-related equipment such as cash registers, electronic stock control systems and industrial cleaners; it is clear that many of the participants develop practical work skills that can be transferred to other working environments. The placement providers and employers interviewed commented positively on the opportunities for the development and application of the participants' wider personal and social skills, including working independently and using own initiative.

Mencap works effectively with a wide range of referral agencies, including all five health and social care trusts, to support recruitment to the project. As a result, it is on track to meet the overall target of 616 participants across the duration of the project, with 525 participants recruited to date (85%). The retention rate on the project was very good in year one at 86%, outstanding in year two at 98% and remains outstanding at 98% in year three to date. It is noteworthy that the project has exceeded the overall target set of 10% for progression by participants into supported paid employment, currently at 11%. In addition, the project has also exceeded the 15% target set for participants progressing into further education or training, currently at 17%.

The employment officers, across all the offices, are effective in working with all key stakeholders, including parents/carers where applicable, to match participants to relevant and appropriate placements which are linked well to their needs and interests. The Mencap staff work hard to ensure the pace of progress of each participant is matched closely to their readiness for the workplace, confidence and capability; the levels of support are monitored closely and tapered off appropriately as they progress, in order to support independence whilst sensitively increasing challenge and enhancing their resilience.

All of the participants interviewed reported very positively about their engagement in the project. They detailed the gains they have made in their personal, social and employability skills, noting for example: improved levels of confidence; independence (in particular travel); and in the development of their wider employability skills including, work readiness, interview skills and in some cases customer service skills. The project promoter has recently revised to good effect the processes for recording the overall distance travelled by the participants in their acquisition of personal, social and work skills against their baselines, and is in the process of collating the results to demonstrate better the overall impact of the project on the participants' lives.

## **6. Quality of provision**

An appropriate curriculum is provided to participants, including one-to-one progress review meetings, bi-weekly job clubs and ongoing opportunities to engage in relevant work-placements. For those 16 -20 year old participants who attend college, the majority attend discrete provision in one of two further education colleges; they attend college-based provision for three days each week, which includes some accredited qualifications such as the essential skills and employability qualifications. On the other one to two days, Mencap staff support the participants in the work-placement element of this provision.

On commencement of the project, all of the participants receive a full induction to ascertain whether they are interested in gaining work-experience, voluntary or paid work. The induction process is robust and includes the completion of an in-depth personal and vocational profile, an employability assessment and an action plan to address personal barriers to work. The comprehensive My Profile document contains accurate baseline information and is used to good effect to ensure the employment officers secure work-placements which are a good match with the participants' interests, job aspirations and capability. It is also used well to ensure participants are signposted to the right progression route and with an appropriate pace of progression, which is aligned closely with their work-readiness.

All of these processes culminate in a training agreement which is informed well by the participants' social, economic and family background as well as their chosen employment sector. When a participant is deemed ready to commence a work-placement, the employment officer completes a tailored risk assessment process. This process is detailed, participant-centred, and includes risks individualised to the participant, such as specifics around their learning difficulty, literacy and numeracy needs alongside any medical conditions which may require consideration. It is a strength that this process also involves parents/carers for the 16-18 year old participants, and the employer.

In addition to the risk assessment, for those in a work-placement, there is an effective health and safety checklist visit (four weeks after the placement starts) which revisits and checks the retention by the participant of relevant information on matters such as safeguarding, health and safety, fire risk and lifting technique. The quarterly progress reviews are appropriately robust; the employment officers are beginning to use a new visual target chart to good effect to reflect clearly the progress made by the participants in their acquisition and application of employability skills, to highlight any gaps and action plan to address them. The employment officers adhere closely to the core values of the organisation, are honest in their reviews, involve the employers and set challenging but achievable targets. Contact logs clearly detail the level of engagement with each participant and contribute well to the overall monitoring progress, proactively dealing with any emergent issues.

The care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on the development of their employability. The project team work hard to provide a participant-centred and tailored provision and work effectively with all of those involved with the participant to ensure they are meeting their priority needs and goals. There is effective signposting to a range of specialist external organisations to support participants with additional needs, ongoing health conditions or enhanced support as required; this has included support to explore and apply for SMART travel passes, driving lessons, driving theory and forklift training. Route training is also delivered extensively by staff in all areas, in line with individual support needs, to encourage the participants to become more adept and independent at using local transport and community transport options, which can in turn equip them with the knowledge and skills to enjoy more active social lives. An annual reflection event is also held to acknowledge the progress made by participants and this is attended and supported well by work-placement providers and employers.

## **7. Leadership and management**

Mencap has a clear strategic vision for the project to ensure that it meets the participants' needs, which is underpinned by the organisation's core values. The senior management team are actively involved in a range of steering groups and forums and, consequently, are well informed about the wide-ranging needs of the participant group. The roles and responsibilities for all staff are clearly defined and the senior management team are effective at ensuring the project team have manageable caseloads in recognition of the participants' varied and complex needs. This has contributed to the high levels of retention and work-placement rates across the project. The project team is highly skilled and the project promoter is committed to the continuing professional development needs of the staff, with opportunities for them to access appropriate job-related development, for example, the recent mental health awareness and other bespoke training.

The project promoter has developed a good working relationship with the two further education colleges who deliver education and training for those participants in the 16-20 age group, with good sharing of relevant information and collaborative meetings with parents/carers to discuss the progress of the participants. The strategic links with the colleges could be further developed through more shared quality monitoring and overview of the impact of both aspects of the provision on the development of the participants' employability skills, to ensure the participants make the best possible progress across both aspects of the provision and to share good practice.

The project benefits from a comprehensive management information system (trainee update tool), which is used well by the project team to monitor and track each participant's progress and engagement in a work-placement. The service managers update this system monthly and meet with employment officers in a timely manner to discuss any concerns with each of their caseloads and to share and identify strategies for improved participation; all of the team are effective at logging their engagement with participants and measuring their progress, including in the acquisition and application of the softer skills. The overall progress against the project's key performance data is also tracked and used well to produce reports on progress to senior management.

Mencap's employer engagement team have developed strong links with a wide range of employers to provide appropriate and well-matched work-placements. A small number of employers have also been engaged to facilitate mock interviews and other support work to build the participants' independence, confidence and resilience in looking for work. A key strength of the project is the learning disability awareness training which is offered to all prospective employers and work-placement providers. This training, appropriately, is delivered by two learning disability equality officers who have first-hand experience of living with a learning disability, and is valued highly by those employers who had taken part. The uptake of this training, however, could be monitored more closely to ensure a higher participation rate by prospective work-placement providers and employers. Those employers that have completed the training report on the positive attitudinal changes and commented that the employment officers are extremely supportive and use the trusting relationship with the participants to encourage them to progress in the workplace. In addition, the employer agreements are mostly fit-for-purpose, well-tailored and helpful.

The project promoter is committed to quality improvement, responsive to feedback and continues to refine and develop further its quality assurance processes through, for example, revised participant agreements, file audits and a soft skills tracker. All of these processes are supported and informed well by feedback from a variety of key stakeholders and quarterly quality improvement project team meetings. Whilst the self-evaluation process has been developed and improved, there is a need to embed further the use of more evaluative language and to make more effective use of the project's performance data to analyse trends in performance across all of the project's sites to better inform the key strengths and areas for improvement, and to identify and disseminate best practice across all of the offices.

The quality of the accommodation across the sites visited during the inspection ranges from good to very good; it is mostly well-resourced to cater for the needs of all of the participants. The employment officers are also provided with good equipment and connectivity to facilitate the recording of progress reviews and work-placement visits.

## **8. Safeguarding**

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:

- review and revise their Child Protection Policy, currently the Mencap national policy, to ensure it meets more specifically the needs of the EmployAbility participants. It will be important that the policy is shared with parents and employers and is easily accessible to them; and
- ensure that the roles and responsibilities for safeguarding are clarified as soon as possible between the further education colleges and Mencap, outlining to the participants and their parents/carers the key safeguarding staff covering both aspects of the provision across the organisations.

## **9. Overall effectiveness**

Mencap 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
The EmployAbility ESF project 2015/2016	323	90%
The EmployAbility ESF project 2016/2017	106	82%
The EmployAbility ESF project 2017/2018	96	74%

## B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website: [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk).

Two ETI inspectors and one associate assessor observed 43 participants in a range of settings, including a one-to-one progress review, job club sessions, focus groups, work-placements and in employment. Discussions were held with the project manager, the area operations manager, six service managers, 16 employment officers, 21 work-placement providers, one learning disability equality officer, three employers, two college staff, two parents and the project's administrator. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work and personal training agreements, and the team's planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were also 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	
<b>Retention</b>	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
<b>Achievement</b>	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
<b>Progression</b>	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.

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