



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Stepping Stones

The Gatelodge Training and
Employment Services

Report of an Inspection in
April 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

Stepping Stones is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide The Gatelodge Training and Employment Services (The Gatelodge) European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aim of the project is to improve the employability skills of participants with learning disabilities in order to help them gain employment in the hospitality sector. To support this aim, all of the participants are assigned a key worker at the beginning of the project and have the opportunity to work towards accredited level one industry and vocationally related qualifications, as well as accessing a work-experience placement and job search activities. The qualifications offered include a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Food Preparation and Cookery, an NVQ in Food Service, and a range of short courses which include: customer care; personal budgeting and money management; food hygiene; health and safety in the workplace; and non-accredited Barista training.

The project promoter is led by the chief executive officer, and is managed operationally by a services manager. The project work is supported by an employment co-ordinator, an employment officer, a job coach, a cafe manager, a trainer, a vocational trainer, an assistant chef, two catering assistants and two customer service assistants. There is currently a recruitment process underway for an operations manager. All of the training is delivered on-site in the social enterprise cafe which is open to the public. At the time of the inspection 31 participants¹ were registered on the project. The participants attend the project between five and 21 hours each week for a maximum of three years. The participants working towards the NVQ complete their work-experience placements in the in-house cafe two days a week and attend one day a week for their theory classes. The majority of the participants (58%) are placed in the cafe on a work-experience placement, 32% are in external work-experience placements, two are accessing job search and one is in supported employment.

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;
- 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. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Good

¹ 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

Stepping Stones met its recruitment target in year one with 15 participants recruited in 2015/16, exceeding the target of 12. In year two recruitment was slightly below target, with 19 out of a target of 22 participants recruited. One participant has been recruited to date at this early stage in year three. The achievement rate was exceeded in year one, with 54 level 1 qualifications achieved against a target of 44, and 56 qualifications achieved against a target of 75 in year two with a further nine participants currently on target to achieve their qualification. A key strength of the project is the provision of the accredited training and in-house work-experience placements, through the social enterprise cafe, which provide realistic working environments and events to develop the participants' vocational and employability skills. All of the participants are motivated and achieving good standards of work at level 1. For example, they have well developed food preparation, front of house and team working skills, demonstrated through a recent afternoon tea event for the parents and carers of the participants. There are plans in place to progress four of the current cohort of participants to the NVQ level 2 in Food and Beverages.

Due to the varied, complex and additional learning needs of the participants, the duration of the programme may last up to three years. As a result only two participants have completed the project to date with both of these progressing into further training; none of the participants have progressed into employment to date. However, the structure of the project supports the participants' progress within the service. For example once a participant has completed training or is job-ready, they progress to the employment services provision within the project. There are currently 18 participants availing of the training element and 13 availing of employment services with some crossover between the two services. While the majority of the participants are placed in the in-house cafe, there is a need for the project promoter to continue to promote and plan for the progression of each participant into external placements to further consolidate their vocational and employability skills and maximise the opportunities for supported and paid employment. In the first two years of the programme the retention rate was outstanding at 93% and 95% respectively.

The majority of the participants interviewed reported that participation on the project has improved their confidence and communication skills and helped them to develop a range of skills in hospitality and customer service practice. The parents and carers interviewed supported these findings and commented on the positive impact of engagement with the project on the participants' personal development. Their observations included: the increased levels of maturity and personal presentation; the development of new friendships; the positive impact of the supportive staff; and the new skills participants developed through the high quality of the industry cafe environment where both training and placements are offered.

5. Quality of provision

The appropriate curriculum offer of accredited and non-accredited training opportunities and short courses is supporting well the development of the participants' personal, social and employability skills. The participants also have the opportunity to avail of additional support for job profiling/matching, job search, job applications, preparing for interviews, accessing work-experience placements and on the job support provided through the project's employment services team. The curriculum offer includes appropriate short courses to develop the wider personal and social skills of the participants for example the recent healthy eating training session. An annual review takes place between the participants, staff, parents/carers and social workers to discuss progress while on the programme.

However, this needs to be developed further to plan more holistically for progression beyond the project. While the project has made a good start to planning and introducing industry visits and guest speakers, the curriculum offer would benefit from a more structured schedule of activities on an annual basis.

There is an effective induction process which includes individual profiling, risk assessments and an outcome star measurement to track distance travelled in the personal and social skills and a learning style assessment. Each participant has an appropriate personal training plan (PTP) which details clearly previous qualifications, learning needs and career preferences and milestone targets for their NVQ qualifications. Whilst these are reviewed every six months, this process could be improved further by linking the outcomes from induction against individual targets for progression at all stages in the project.

The quality of the directed training and learning and development sessions in the small sample observed was good. There are good relationships and a strong rapport between all of the staff and participants. In the most effective practice, there is effective planning and structured activities. Classroom based activities could be enhanced further through the use of appropriate technology enhanced learning.

The care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their development. The participants report that they feel well supported by staff and that they enjoy attending their training and work-experience placement in the Gatelodge. Project staff keep parents/carers and social workers appropriately informed about the progress made by the participants. In addition, reasonable adjustments have been made to the daily activities for participants, for example, planning for extended breaks where required. Participants can also avail of subsidised meals from the in-house cafe and there is an annual outing to further strengthen their personal and social skills. The project promoter is currently planning its first annual celebration event to recognise the participants' achievements.

6. Leadership and management

The Gatelodge has recently undergone a number of important staffing changes; two new members of staff were appointed with advanced planning underway to recruit an operations manager. The recent changes have negatively impacted the timelines for the implementation of some of the actions on the project's quality improvement plan. Despite these changes, the roles and responsibilities of all staff are clearly defined and staff skills and attributes match well their job roles. All of the staff are highly committed to meeting the individual needs of the participants. There are clear lines of communication between the management and project team and these are supported by a cycle of quarterly meetings. For example, staff in the employment service meet with the training co-ordinator on a monthly basis to review participant progress. The newer staff members require additional support from the senior management team to ensure they have the necessary skills to contribute fully to the success of the project.

While there is a management information system in place and a social impact tracker which tracks the distance travelled by participants on the project, the information collated could be used more effectively to demonstrate the impact of participation on the project on the participants' lives and also to plan more effectively for progression.

The overall quality of the training environment is good. The classroom environment would benefit from a greater range of information and communication technology equipment; this has already been identified by the project promoter and funding has been applied for to help support this development.

The Gatelodge has good links and partnerships with referral agencies and the local special schools, day care centres, social workers and the local Health and Social Care Trust. However there is a need to develop further the links with employers to provide a greater range of external supported work-experience placements and job opportunities. There is a need to communicate the participant's progression opportunities more effectively to participants and their parents/carers and to encourage participants to progress more quickly, where appropriate into a suitable pathway. The project promoter needs to develop links with the local further education college to facilitate the delivery of and support for essential skills in literacy and numeracy to improve the wider employability skills of the participants and support their written work. The project promoter has developed a 'We See' campaign to advertise and market the project better and to improve recruitment to the project in the final year of the programme. They are beginning to see positive outcomes from this initiative in terms of increased referrals.

While the project promoter demonstrates a commitment to quality improvement and has made a good start to the use of self-evaluation to begin to improve systems and practice, further work is required to extend this across all aspects of the project. The project promoter needs to use the wide range of data collated, including performance data, to better identify and prioritise the key strengths and areas for improvement. There is a need to have a greater focus on obtaining wider stakeholder feedback to inform better quality improvements and to support the judgements made. The quality improvement plan should be further developed to include more specific and measurable actions that link clearly to the self-evaluation report.

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:

- further develop the positive behaviour policy to state more clearly the expectations of both the participants and staff.

7. Overall effectiveness

Stepping Stones 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. The areas for improvement are to:

- develop further the self-evaluation processes to include the more effective use of the project's performance data, and the use of more specific and measurable targets within the quality improvement plan to improve outcomes further; and
- strengthen individual participant progression planning and related support to increase the number of participants moving into employment.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund The Gatelodge 2015/2016	15	125%
European Social Fund The Gatelodge 2016/2017	19	86%

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 observed and met with 8 participants in a range of settings including two learning and development sessions and a focus group meeting. Discussions were held with the chief executive officer, services manager, employment coordinator, job coach, employment officer, cafe manager, trainer, vocational trainer and two customer service assistants, and six sets of parents. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work and personal training plans, and the trainers' 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 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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