



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Stepping Stones

Youth Service

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 charitable organisation and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Youth Service European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aim of the project is to engage with young people, aged between 16 and 24, with learning disabilities and difficulties, who are not currently in education, employment or training to promote their sustainable integration into the labour market.

The project is led by the project co-ordinator, and managed by the senior management team which includes the services manager and the chief officer. They are supported by the quality assurance and compliance officer, and two youth outreach workers. The project is overseen by a board of directors that is actively involved in the management and delivery of the project's aims. The training is delivered by the project promoter's own tutors, supported by a range of guest speakers from relevant external organisations.

At the time of the inspection, 16 participants¹ were registered on the Youth Service project. Stepping Stones collaborates with a number of organisations and referral agencies to support and deliver the aims of the project. The participants attend three days each week for training, mentoring and other activities that include various leisure and sporting pursuits and industrial visits. Their individualised learning programme aims to provide them with a level 1 qualification in money management or customer services and non-accredited wider skills development including personal and social development and employability.

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. 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

The recruitment to the projects for 2015/16 was below the target (87%) with 26 participants registered in total. Recruitment to the project has declined further during 2016/17 with only 24 participants registered which is 60% of the target and is therefore an important area for improvement. The standards of the participant's oracy skills and written work are mostly good. As a result of the low recruitment, the number of level 1 qualifications achieved for those participants recruited during 2015/16 is below the target at 24 (89%). During 2016/17 to date, 19 of the participants have achieved a level 1 qualification which is 53% of the original target but if the reduced recruitment is taken into account this improves to 86% and is a good outcome. The participants develop new skills including customer service, working as part of a team and money management with most of them now able to travel independently using public transport.

Most of the participants engage well in their learning and demonstrate high levels of commitment and motivation with their attendance being mostly good. For the year 2015/16, the retention rate is outstanding at 87%. To-date, all the participants who were recruited during 2016/17 have been retained. The progression rates, for those participants, from both years, who have completed the programme are high, with all of them having a positive outcome. It is good, for example, that most of the participants (84%) progressed onto another Department funded training programme with the remainder progressing to further education.

Most of the participants demonstrate high levels of commitment to overcoming significant personal challenges through the one-to-one support received in mentoring and the opportunity to participate in sporting and leisure activities. All of the participants interviewed provided 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, an improved sense of personal wellbeing, greater confidence, improved social skills and improved communication skills.

5. Quality of provision

The curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced and includes customer services, money management, first aid and art therapy. In addition there are good opportunities for the participants to participate in a work taster programme, volunteering and a six week work-experience placement. The provision is well planned with a wide range of activities that include guest speakers who cover a good variety of relevant topics including internet safety, recycling, travel safety and life skills. The curriculum is kept under review to ensure that it is relevant and meeting the needs of the participants.

An assessment tool is used effectively as part of a comprehensive initial assessment process to identify the participants' barriers in a range of appropriate areas including: self-esteem; communication skills; motivation; social skills/relationships; independence; stress/anxiety; and productive use of time. The assessment tool is also used mid way through the program and at the end to monitor the progress that has been made. The outcomes are used well to inform the contents of the participants' individual action plans, however they could be better used to inform and guide the mentoring process. The programme is fully inclusive and the participants report that they have made new friends and that they support each other well.

Overall, the quality of the directed training and the mentoring is good. The planning is effective and supports the participants to build on their existing knowledge and strengths. The tutors have developed very good relationships with the participants and provide effective support. There are however, missed opportunities during the directed training for a wider range of strategies to be used including active learning activities to further progress the participants' learning and to develop their personal capabilities.

The care and welfare arrangements impact positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for the participants. The participants feel well supported and the staff at all levels have an excellent knowledge of the participant's barriers and their issues. Guidance and support provided to each participant is substantial and address well their barriers to progression. All of the participants can avail of both formal and informal support through the youth outreach workers. Stepping Stones provides the participants with signposting to other key services as required and have well developed links to the local health trust.

6. Leadership and management

Strong strategic leadership is provided by the chief officer and the board of directors that includes parent/carer representatives. The organisation provides a number of services and programmes that complement each other well and provide supportive development opportunities for the participants including social enterprise opportunities.

The operational management of the project has remained effective, through a period of significant staffing changes. The new staff, recently appointed, are supported well in their new roles and planning is well advanced to fill one remaining position. The managers' work well together to support each other, the youth outreach workers and the participants. All of the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and all of the project staff are highly motivated committed to working together to address the wide range of support, learning and employability needs of the participants. A particular strength of the project promoter is the understanding that each staff member has of the specific challenges facing the participants. Stepping Stones provides good quality physical accommodation to support the delivery of the project that is easily accessible.

Effective employer links have been developed to provide a good range of opportunities for work tasters and placements opportunities for the participants. Links have also been developed with an appropriate range of organisations to provide good quality volunteering opportunities. Particularly strong links have been developed with the local health trust and other support agencies. Management need to review their processes for marketing and recruitment to ensure that recruitment improves to meet the project targets.

The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process is at an early stage of development. The evaluations need to be better informed by the analysis of a wider range of data with clearer links between the self-evaluation and the quality improvement plan. The quality improvement plan needs to include measurable targets for the staff to work towards.

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 organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The areas for improvement are to:

- implement strategies to ensure the outcomes for the project are met; and
- further improve the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process to bring about sustained improvement in the quality of provision.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
Youth Service 2015/16	26	87%
Youth Service 2016/17	24	60%

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website www.etini.gov.uk.

An ETI inspector and an associated assessor observed participants in learning and development sessions and interviewed participants in focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the chief officer, the services manager, the quality assurance and compliance officer and the outreach workers. Three focus groups of participants, their parents and former participants were also interviewed. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work, personal training plans and reviews, and session plans 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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