



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Ulster Supported Employment Limited

Support and Training to Realise
Individual Development and
Employment project

Report of an Inspection in
January 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

Ulster Supported Employment Limited (USEL) is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Support and Training to Realise Individual Development and Employment (STRIDE) European Social Fund (ESF) project. The STRIDE Project aims to promote social inclusion by offering people with disabilities and/or health conditions, who are long term unemployed or economically inactive, a variety of support and development opportunities. These include training and support to: address their barriers to employment; gain employability skills and qualifications; and enable them to progress toward employment, further education, training or other mainstream government programmes. The programme lasts up to 52 weeks and includes initial assessment, ongoing mentoring and support, workplace training and subsidised paid traineeships to open employment opportunities. The participants can access recognised accredited training in areas such as construction skills register training, customer service, essential skills, food safety, forklift training, health and safety at work, IT Users, ICT Systems and principles, manual handling, progression to employment, safe application of pesticides, retail and Vocational Skills. The interventions offered are tailored to meet the needs of individual participants.

USEL is managed by a chief executive officer who is supported by a board of directors who are appointed publicly and who inform and influence well the strategic direction of the organisation. STRIDE is managed by a project manager, supported by a team of 25 staff. At the time of the inspection 72 participants¹ were registered on the STRIDE project. Twenty-five (35%) of the participants are in a suitable work-experience placement with a further three 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:

- 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	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very Good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Very 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

USEL 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 85 participants recruited in 2015/16, exceeding the target of 70. This success has continued in the current year, with 93 participants targeted in 2016/17 recruited to date, exceeding the target of 80. In the first year of the project, USEL were particularly successful in progressing 19 participants into employment which is significantly above the target of 10; and 13 participants into further education, against a target of 11. A further eight participants (50% against the target set) progressed into subsidised employment. Just over half of the total number of participants (50%) in the first year of the project achieved the target of two externally recognised accredited qualifications. While the number of accredited qualifications achieved to date is low, the project staff have appropriately prioritised this as an area for improvement.

All of the participants interviewed reported that they are highly motivated to progress toward employment or other training and education opportunities. Almost all of the participants engage well with project staff and in the planned activities which meet their needs and interests. Those participants with fewer barriers to employment progress to achieve relevant qualifications and receive appropriate support to access their chosen field of work. A significant minority of participants, who are in work-experience placements, are making sustained progress in the development of their employability skills. In the first year of the programme, retention was very good at 80% and to date, in year 2, the retention is outstanding at 92%.

The majority of the participants are making appropriate progress in addressing effectively their assessed barriers to progression, through, for example, developing their levels of self-confidence and motivation. In discussions with the inspection team, they provided very positive feedback about their experiences on the project to date, in particular the appropriateness of the individually tailored programmes, and on the good progress they had made in developing their personal, social and employability skills.

5. Quality of provision

The curriculum offers participants a wide range of appropriate training and qualifications. In addition, USEL manages well, the internal opportunities for participants to be placed in manufacturing, waste management and recycling social enterprises. The project promoter has developed a wide range of external work-experience placement opportunities that are used effectively to supplement the internal placements for STRIDE project participants.

On entry to the project, the employment service officers agree with each participant short-term interventions and actions. This includes regular weekly mentoring support, 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 pre-employment support. While the pre-entry advice, guidance and induction are effective, the individual participant action plans do not reflect fully this good quality practice, nor do they record consistently the range of barriers to participation and progression. The initial assessment and needs analysis carried out on entry to the programme are not used well enough to set short and long term goals for individual participants, and as a result the review process is not sufficiently well developed.

The quality of the directed training and mentoring sessions observed, is mostly good or better. The STRIDE project's training and development activities are planned well and help the participants recognise and build upon their prior experiences and strengths. The project staff meet regularly with participants and where appropriate with employers, however, the review process would be more effective if there were more specific targets set against which progress could be measured. Participants engage well in the training and development activities, and effective strategies are used by the training and employment services officers to develop the participants' understanding of their past achievements and future direction and to encourage active participation with the aim of gaining employment.

The provision of care and welfare of the participants' impacts positively on their learning, teaching and outcomes. There is an inclusive, caring ethos demonstrated by the organisation with excellent working relationships evident between the participants and staff at all levels. The staff provide holistic care and welfare for the participants and address a wide range of additional barriers to progression including practical support for childcare, travel, clothing and food, as well as confidence building and personal and social skill development. There is good signposting and use of services from a range of external agencies to support participants who have specific needs such as autism and health related problems. The project places an appropriate emphasis on the provision of training to develop the staff's knowledge and understanding of working more effectively with participants with specific conditions and health issues.

6. Leadership and management

The USEL board and senior management team are very supportive of the STRIDE project. The Chief Executive who has been in post for one year has provided a clear strategic focus on developing the business side of the organisation, with a view to providing job opportunities for the clients and participants who engage in USEL's range of programmes. Roles and responsibilities of the project staff are clearly defined and there is a strong team approach to the work. The staff are highly committed to meeting the needs of the participants, are appropriately qualified and experienced, and matched well to their job roles. The staff are provided with good opportunities to undertake continuous professional development. USEL provide good quality physical accommodation, and learning and training resources to support the delivery of the STRIDE project. Effective strategic planning has led to contract arrangements being implemented with local councils and the Housing Executive to expand USEL's work in waste management, recycling and manufacturing, providing an increasing number of employment opportunities for the participants.

At an operational level, the project is managed effectively by a project manager who is supported in the delivery of the project by a team of employment services officers, a training co-ordinator, training officers and employment engagement officers. There is a regular scheduled cycle of team meetings and case conferencing focused on the planning and review of the progress of individual participants, and on the delivery of the project, including sharing effective practice.

The quality of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes is very good. Self-evaluation is a standing agenda item on all meetings with a clear focus on continuous improvement. For example, the STRIDE project staff recognise that the level of uptake of training opportunities is below the targets set and are taking appropriate action to address this, including, the appointment of an employability tutor and signposting participants to essential skills provision in local colleges of further education to ensure access for participants outside of the greater Belfast area. There is good use of information and communication technology, which is used effectively to monitor and track participants' progress. Feedback from staff, participants and key stakeholders are analysed and used

well to inform and effect improvement in the provision. 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. The project is developing well its internal quality assurance processes which include observations of mentoring and directed training, however these need to be extended further to ensure consistency in the delivery of all aspects of the work of the project.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

7. Overall effectiveness

USEL demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants. To improve the provision further the project promoter needs to:

- increase further the number of participants undertaking accredited training programmes, including the essential skills; and
- develop further the quality assurance processes to promote further the consistency in the overall quality of the provision.

The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund STRIDE 2015/2016	85	121%
European Social Fund STRIDE 2016/2017	93	116%

B. Inspection method and evidence base

Two ETI inspectors observed 22 participants in a range of settings including two mentoring and three learning and development sessions, one focus group meeting and seven work-experience placements. Discussions were held with STRIDE's management team, employment service officers and seven employers. The management information system, including the tracking and monitoring systems, action plans, 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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