



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Women in Business

The Connect Programme

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

Women in Business is a charitable organisation, and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Connect Programme European Social Fund project, which it delivers in partnership with East Belfast Enterprise. The main aim of the project is to provide a one-stop shop to inspire, encourage, motivate, and support women, who are unemployed or economically inactive, to move into further training, secure jobs, or start up their own business. The participants are provided with the opportunity to undertake a progression to employment qualification, at level 1.

Women in Business is managed by the chief executive who is supported by the programme manager and the programme co-ordinator. At the time of the inspection 378 participants¹ were registered on the project. The programme is delivered in a flexible manner and provides opportunities for the participants to attend a range of workshops, master classes, one-to-one mentoring sessions, and training sessions at a time that best suits their needs. Participants can remain on the programme for its entire duration, from the date when they first enrol, and are not allocated a specific end-date. It is possible that individual participants may not be fully engaged with the project for specific reasons, or due to their personal circumstances, for particular periods of time.

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	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

Recruitment levels to the programme, to date, are high with 92% of the original target met successfully. Most of the participants who engage regularly on the programme demonstrate good or better standards of work. They participate well in the range of themed workshops and mentoring/training sessions provided and complete tasks such as business planning, marketing, SWOT analysis, action planning, research, and e-marketing to a good or better standard.

The participants interviewed are progressing well on the programme in line with their personal career goals and aspirations. The progression of participants to self-employment (83%) is high against the target set. Progression to supported employment is in need of further improvement (48%) and, although progression to further and higher education, training, or voluntary employment has improved slightly in year two of the programme, it is still too low (9%) and needs to be further improved. Overall outcomes indicate that over one-half (53%) of all of the participants who have engaged and completed the programme, to date, have progressed to self-employment, supported employment, voluntary work, further and higher education, or training.

While most of the participants on the programme engage regularly with programme staff, a small number of participants do not keep in regular contact. A review of the processes used to communicate with participants has been carried out, and the number of participants not engaging on a regular basis has decreased, however, management should continue to develop appropriate processes to ensure that all participants engage fully and achieve to their highest potential.

The participants are well motivated and inspired to learn and develop relevant business development and employability skills, including the necessary skills and competences needed for self-employment. They are developing well their confidence, self-esteem and employability skills and competences and they can express their opinions respectfully, demonstrating mutual respect for others from a wide range of backgrounds, work/life experiences, and ability levels.

5. Quality of provision

The curriculum offer is matched well to the needs, aspirations, ability, and previous experiences of the participants and is delivered in a flexible manner. Regular feedback from the participants helps to inform ongoing planning for the workshops and one-to-one mentoring sessions. The skills and knowledge acquired through the programme effectively supports the participants to progress to employment, self-employment or further education or training.

Appropriate processes are in place to track and monitor the progress the participants are making on the programme, including the development of their personal, social, and employability skills. However, this information is contained in a number of documents and is not captured in a cohesive and centralised manner. The participants' personal training plans need to be reviewed to ensure that the progress the participants are making is captured in one overall document to inform better their progress and on-going learning and development needs.

The practical workshop sessions are well planned and the learning resources are of a good or better quality and are differentiated to match and support the varied ability levels and work/life experiences of the participants. The mentors provide very good guidance and support to ensure that each participant is maximising the opportunity to develop appropriate skills and competences to support their personal development and progression to employment.

The quality of the care and welfare provided by the programme staff and mentors is good and impacts positively on the learning experiences for the participants. The participants interviewed reported that they feel well supported on the programme. Appropriate processes are in place to signpost those participants with additional learning support needs to relevant organisations and agencies.

6. Leadership and management

The programme is led and managed well both at a strategic and operational level. Management have established good links and partnerships with a wide range of external organisations and agencies to support the delivery of the programme. Good on-line resources and information have been developed to support participants and good channels of communication have been established with them to ensure that they are kept up-to-date and well-informed about on-going events and to allow them to register for relevant workshop and mentoring sessions.

The mentors deployed are well-experienced and those interviewed are self-employed practitioners operating a range of small businesses across various markets and disciplines. The quality of the accommodation used for workshop training and mentoring sessions is good.

Management have taken appropriate action to address the areas for improvement identified during the baseline inspection. While the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning have improved, they need to be developed further, particularly the better analysis and use of key performance data, the use of more evaluative language, and the clearer identification of key strengths and areas for improvement in the provision.

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:

- provide relevant safeguarding training for specified staff as soon as possible; and
- keep up-to-date with current changes to safeguarding practices and ensure that relevant safeguarding information is made available for participants on its on-line platform.

7. Overall effectiveness

Women in Business demonstrate 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:

- review the processes used for personal development planning to ensure that the personal training plans capture, in a more integrated and cohesive manner, the progress the participants are making on the programme;

- continue to improve the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning; and
- monitor outcomes from the programme, particularly the progression of the participants to supported employment or higher and further education, or training.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund The Connect programme 2015/2016	323	215%
European Social Fund The Connect programme 2016/2017	184	46%

B. Inspection method and evidence base

Two ETI inspectors interviewed six participants in a focus group. Discussions were held with the chief executive, the Women in Business management team, East Belfast Enterprise staff, and mentors. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work and personal training plans, and mentors' planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were scrutinised. No training was taking place during the inspection visit.

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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