



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

**South and East Belfast
New Deal Consortium**

Inspected: May 2008

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number

The statistics in this report have been supplied by the Department of Employment and Learning.

Grading system

The education and training inspectorate (Inspectorate) is piloting a new 6-point grading scale to replace the original 4-point scale as set out below. Where grades are recorded in this report, the grade is given on both the old and the revised scales.

ORIGINAL GRADE	REVISED GRADE	DESCRIPTOR
1	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence.
1	2	Consistently good; major strengths
2	3	Important strengths in most of provision. Areas for improvement which the organisation has the capacity to address.
2	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed.
3	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action.
4	6	Major shortcomings which require urgent action.

PART ONE

SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Belfast Centre for Learning (BCL) is the lead partner of the South and East Belfast New Deal Consortium. The consortium consists of seven other members: Bryson House (BH), Transition Training (TT), Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI), North City Training (NCT), Short Strand Community Forum (SSCF), Ace Ventures (AV), and East Belfast Community and Education Centre (EBCEC). The consortium is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) to provide employment programmes under the New Deal 18 to 24 and 25+ programmes in the South and East Belfast District Council area.

1.2 The Steps to Work (StW) programme is being piloted in six Jobs and Benefits Offices (JBO) across Northern Ireland (NI). Two of the JBOs within the South and East Belfast New Deal Consortium are involved in the pilot of the StW programme. The two offices involved are Knockbreda and Shaftesbury Square, Belfast. Steps to Work replaced New Deal 25+ in April 2007 but since February 2008 the pilot has been extended to include clients in the 18 - 24 year old age group. As part of the StW provision, the customer base has been widened from New Deal eligible customers and clients in Pathways pilots, to include participation by Job Seekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and 'economically inactive' clients.

1.3 The South and East Belfast Consortium is managed by BCL from its premises in Rossmore Avenue, Belfast. The Company Director is responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of the New Deal provision and is well supported by the New Deal Co-ordinator.

1.4 The area covered by the consortium draws in participants from socially disadvantaged groups living in areas which include Short Strand, Newtownards Road and Lower Ormeau Road. Three of the wards in East Belfast are amongst the most deprived in NI. The latest figures (April 2008) supplied by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) indicate that Belfast is ranked as having the third highest claimant count in Northern Ireland (NI) with 3.6% of the available workforce registered as claiming a specific unemployment related benefit.

1.5 The majority (66%) of the participants had no qualifications on entry to their programme. A minority (14%) of participants had achieved level 2 qualifications in English or mathematics and a small number (9%) had achieved four or more General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above. The remaining 11% had achieved other qualifications at level 2 or above.

2. PROVISION

2.1 At the time of the inspection 82 participants were registered across the consortium. Twenty-six were registered with AV, 21 with BCL, 12 with BH, eleven with TT, five with EBCEC, three with CVNI, and two each with NCT and SSCF.

2.2 Twenty-six participants are registered on the New Deal 18-24 options: five on the Full Time Education and Training (FTET), 17 on the Voluntary Sector Option (VSO) and four on the Essential Skills Training (EST). Twenty-one participants are registered on the 25+ options: 17 on the Preparation for Employment (PEP) programme and four on the Education and Training Opportunities (ETO). The remaining 35 participants are registered on the StW pilot programme.

2.3 The five participants on the FTET option are working towards a range of full National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at level 2: three in information technology (IT) practitioners, one in professional cookery and one in wood occupations.

2.4 The three participants registered on the ETO option are also working towards the full NVQ in IT users.

2.5 The four participants registered on the Essential Skills option are targeting essential skills qualifications at an appropriate level in literacy and numeracy. Almost all of the participants on PEP are placed in a range of voluntary or community placements and a small number are working in the private sector. The majority of the participants on the VSO are placed in the voluntary sector where they have good opportunity to undertake appropriate work experience.

2.6 Participants on the StW programme have the opportunity to follow a range of training options. The majority (63%) of the participants are undertaking the 13-week option. A minority (20%) are working towards a range of NVQs at level two: four in IT practitioners, two in children's care, learning and development (CCLD) and one in business administration. The remaining six participants are registered on the 26-week option, and are working towards a Vocationally Recognised Qualification (VRQ): five in IT users and one in media. At the time of the inspection, however, none of the participants had been referred to the Pre-Employment Enhanced Support programme to address identified barriers to employment and training.

2.7 Very few participants on the VSO, PEP options of New Deal and the 13-week StW element target any recognised qualifications. The majority of participants on these options/elements are mandated to register on New Deal/StW. They select these options/elements as they are the shortest options/elements available to them which do not require participants to follow a qualification.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 In May 2008, a team of four inspectors visited BCL and carried out an inspection of participants, both in the workplace and directed training. The team observed 35 participants in the workplace and 14 in directed training. Discussions were held with the director of BCL, with representatives from consortium partners, with course tutors, with workplace supervisors and employers, and with participants. The inspectors examined a wide range of documentation including the consortium self-evaluation report and development plan, samples of the participants' written work and other relevant documentation.

3.2 Prior to the inspection, approximately 68% of the participants completed a questionnaire which provided them with an opportunity to comment on the quality of their training and learning experiences. All participants were happy with the provision.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 The South and East Belfast New Deal Consortium has important strengths in most of its educational and training provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the organisation has the capacity to address.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- effective co-ordination provided by the lead partner;
- good relationships between consortium members;
- good quality of essential skills training;
- good standards of occupational skills demonstrated by the majority of the participants in the workplace;
- thorough monitoring and review of participants' progress; and
- effective quality assurance procedures.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- poor quality work-placements for a minority of participants across the consortium;
- expansion of the network of supportive employers;
- uptake of additional qualifications by participants to enhance employability;
- percentage of participants moving into sustained employment at 14% on the 25+ programme, which is below the Department's target of 15%;
- rate of progression at 21% into sustained employment on the 18-24 year old option, which is below the NI average of 22%; and
- provision of occupationally-specific Jobsearch activities.

Grades	Revised Grading System	Original Grading System
Overall Grade:	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Leadership and Management	2	1
Achievements and Standards	3	2
Quality of Provision for Learning	3	2

PART TWO

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of leadership and management in the South and East Belfast New Deal Consortium has significant strengths. The director of BCL provides effective leadership and is well supported by the New Deal co-ordinator. The lead partner has well-established operational and administrative arrangements in place and consortium partners understand well the operational requirements of the New Deal and StW programmes.

5.2 There are good communication channels across the consortium and relationships between consortium members are very good. Regular consortium meetings are held to review and plan the operation of the consortium. These are well attended by the consortium members, including appropriate representation from the local Jobs and Benefits Offices. This broad representation at consortium meetings contributes to a holistic review of each participant's individual needs and progress.

5.3 While consortium partners have developed good links with a range of local employers, and other voluntary and community bodies, it is important to extend these links further to continue to provide a greater range of workplace experiences for all participants.

5.4 There are some opportunities for participants to achieve additional qualifications to enhance their employability, including qualifications in conflict handling, customer service, health and safety, manual handling, text processing, word processing and food safety. However, while the lead partner is proactive in sourcing additional qualifications, when requested by participants, the uptake is limited.

5.5 Formal arrangements to review and evaluate the quality of provision across the consortium are good. The consortium has developed and integrated effective quality assurance procedures, including the systematic review and evaluation of the key performance indicators, into the operational and business planning processes within almost all of the partners.

5.6 The self-evaluation and development planning process has been mostly carried out rigorously and effectively. There is a good match between the self-evaluation report and the findings of the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate). Good use is made of qualitative and quantitative data to support the evaluation of the quality of the training and learning.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 Attendance and timekeeping are good for most participants across the consortium. On FTET, EST, and the qualifications strands of StW, most participants are well motivated and keen to progress in their learning. The self-confidence and personal effectiveness of most of the participants on VSO are improving. In contrast, the majority of participants on

the PEP demonstrate a lack of motivation and commitment to gain employment on completion of training. Almost two-thirds of PEP participants have been on the New Deal programme before, on at least two previous occasions, and they have low expectations of progressing to sustained employment.

6.2 Most of the participants on FTET, EST, VSO and StW demonstrate good occupational skills in the workplace. They are able to perform an appropriate range of tasks with limited supervision and are developing their employability skills in the workplace. A minority of the participants, however, lack initiative and are unable to work effectively without close supervision.

6.3 Almost all of the participants on PEP achieve satisfactory standards in the workplace. However, a significant minority present with multiple barriers to employment including personal, social and motivational problems, and employers have low expectations of these participants.

6.4 The consortium maintains a range of mostly good quality work placements which are selected to match the needs and abilities of the participants. They provide the participants with good opportunities to progress to sustained employment. In contrast, a minority of work placements provide insufficient opportunities for the participants to develop their personal and transferable work skills. In these placements the pace of work is slow and the range of communication and organisational skill requirements are limited.

6.5 The majority of the participants on the FTET and EST options, and qualifications strands of StW are making good progress in achieving their target qualifications. A minority (12%) of PEP participants are progressing well towards achieving the Healthy Learning Works programme which is designed to make participants work ready for entry level positions in the South and East Belfast Health Trust.

6.6 The standards of literacy and numeracy skills for participants on FTET and EST options, and qualification strands of StW are mostly good. The standard of written communication and presentation in the portfolios of evidence is good, in terms of occupational competence. Almost all of the participants have good standards of oral communication and are able to discuss their work and to identify appropriate links between the work they complete in their directed training and the work carried out in the workplace.

6.7 Statistics available from DEL for the period 2006-2007 show that across the consortium the percentage of participants on the 18-24 year old options moving into sustained employment is 21%, which is just below the NI average of 22%.

6.8 For the same period, statistics show that the percentage of participants on the 25+ New Deal options progressing to sustained employment are 14% for South and East Belfast consortium, which is above the NI average of 11% but below the 15% target set by DEL.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 All the consortium members provide a highly supportive and caring environment for all the participants. Very good relationships exist between tutors and participants and between participants and their employers across the consortium. In all of the training sessions observed during the inspection, the participants are well supported in their learning.

7.2 The provision of directed training for participants on FTET, EST and StW is good. Almost all participants attend directed training for at least one day per week and in TT, participants complete a 10-week in-house training period before being placed in an appropriate work environment. In contrast, the provision of short training courses, to enhance the employability of participants on PEP, VSO and 13-week option of StW is poor. Only a small minority (9%) of the participants registered on these programmes are undertaking any short training courses.

7.3 The quality of the directed training observed was consistently good. Sessions were well planned to ensure the pace and content was appropriate to individual needs. A good range of training and learning approaches were used for FTET and StW participants in CCLD and IT users. In EST, the initial assessment process was very good, and the tutor used effectively the findings from the assessment to inform the teaching and learning programme. For example, good use was made of differentiated training and learning to meet the needs of all participants and provide them with an appropriate level of challenge.

7.4 The quality of the workplace training on PEP and VSO is variable. Most of the participants have good opportunities to experience the demands of the workplace in terms of timekeeping, taking instruction and the standard of work completed. A minority, however, who have been on New Deal before, return to the similar type of work placement and do not, therefore, have sufficient opportunity to develop additional work-related skills to enhance their employability.

7.5 Almost all the participants have their progress monitored regularly in the workplace. In BCL, the CCLD tutor undertakes a thorough weekly review of learning in directed training for each individual participant. Within the essential skills provision the tutor monitors closely the participants' progress through the Learning Development Plan (LDP). Most employers visited during the inspection feel they are well informed about the content of the directed training and sufficiently involved in setting targets across the training period.

7.6 All participants have access to Jobsearch provision at fixed intervals during their programme. However, Jobsearch activities are not sufficiently, occupationally-specific and tailored to the individual needs of the participants.

PART THREE

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

South and East Belfast New Deal Consortium needs to revise its annual development plan to take account of the following key priorities for development, the:

- rate of progression to sustained employment on both the 18-24 and 25+ programme; and
- implementation of the Pre-Employment Enhanced Support for those participants on the StW Programme identified with significant barriers to employment and learning.

APPENDIX

Statistics supplied by the DEL for South and East Belfast New Deal Consortium

Table 1 New Deal options for 18-24 year olds

Period	Number of leavers	Progressed to sustained employment
April 2004 – September 2007	402	21%

Table 2 New Deal options for 25+ year olds

Period	Number of leavers	Progressed to sustained employment
April 2004 – September 2007	471	14%

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