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*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

North Down and Ards New Deal Consortia

Inspected: October 2006

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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 minority

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

Grading System

ETI 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 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	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

1. CONTEXT

1.1 North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (NDAIFHE) has been the Lead Partner for the New Deal consortia in both the Ards and North Down District Council areas since the introduction of the New Deal initiative in 1998. The composition of the consortia is the same for both areas, and the members meet as a single consortium on a monthly basis. The size of the consortium has reduced significantly over the past two years, particularly over the last six months, as a result of the closure of two of the partners, Enterprise Ulster and Ards Community Employment Services (ACES). As a consequence of the loss of these providers, the Lead Partner has negotiated additional provision with its existing partner, Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI). MENCAP is also an active member of the consortium, offering supported placements for participants with learning difficulties. Two former consortium partners, Ards New Horizons and the National Trust continue in a supportive role as placement providers. Rutledge Joblink Bangor recently joined the consortium as a secondary provider of Voluntary, Environmental and Preparation for Employment options for the North Down consortium. Currently only NDAIFHE and CVNI have participants registered on the New Deal programmes. The consortium is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning to deliver the training and work experience options of the New Deal 18-24 and 25+ programmes in both the Ards and North Down District Council areas.

1.2 The Assistant Director, Head of Training, in NDAIFHE is responsible for the strategic management of all New Deal programmes. The Deputy Head of Training oversees the operational aspects of the programmes. She is supported by two full-time New Deal co-ordinators, one of whom is the principal co-ordinator. In addition, a Quality Co-ordinator advises on quality procedures and processes on all New Deal programmes.

1.3 Over the last three years, figures supplied by the Department for Employment and Learning in October 2006 indicate that the number of New Deal leavers in the Ards consortium decreased from 31 across the period April 2003 to March 2004, to 12 in the period April 2005 to March 2006. Across the same period, the numbers of New Deal leavers in the North Down consortium, increased from nine to 15. At the time of the inspection, there were only 26 participants registered with the consortium.

1.4 A majority (54%) of participants have no qualifications on entry to the programme. A minority (27%) have achieved at least four General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. The remaining 19% have fewer than three GCSEs.

1.5 The latest figures (September 2006) published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) indicate that the claimant count rate in the Ards area is 2.2%, slightly below the Northern Ireland (NI) average figure of 2.7%. The claimant count rate in the North Down area is 1.9%.

2. PROVISION

2.1 At the time of the inspection, 26 participants were registered on the New Deal programmes, across the two consortia. Twelve participants were on the programme for 18-24 year olds, including five on the Full-Time Education and Training option and one on Essential Skills Training. Six participants were registered on the Voluntary Sector option.

There were no participants on the Environmental Task Force option. Fourteen participants were registered on the programme for adults aged 25 and over, 13 on the Preparation for Employment Programme and one on Education and Training Opportunities.

2.2 The majority of participants are registered with the lead partner, NDAIFHE. At the time of the inspection, NDAIFHE had 20 registered participants, five on the Full-Time Education and Training option, six on the Voluntary Sector Option, one on Essential Skills Training for 18-24 year olds, seven on the Preparation for Employment Programme and one on Education and Training Opportunities. Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland had six participants registered on the Preparation for Employment Programme.

2.3 Two of the participants on Full-Time Education and Training and the participant on Education and Training Opportunities are working towards units of a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 in administration, and two participants on the Full-Time Education and Training option towards units at NVQ level 2 in customer service. One participant is working towards the NVQ level 2 in children's care, learning and development (CCLD). The participant registered on Essential Skills Training for 18-24 year olds, is targeting appropriate essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Most of the participants on the Preparation for Employment Programme are placed in voluntary or community placements.

2.4 This report is based on an inspection of all the consortium options for 18-24 year olds and for adults aged 25 and over.

2.5 The lead partner, in collaboration with the consortium partners, produced a self-evaluation report and development plan on behalf of the consortium.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 During the inspection, almost all of the participants were visited in the workplace. Seven participants were observed in directed training. Discussions were held with the Head and Deputy Head of Training, the managers of CVNI, MENCAP and Rutledge Joblink Bangor, the New Deal co-ordinators, the career development tutor, vocational tutors, employers and participants. In addition, inspectors examined samples of the participants' work where appropriate, and other relevant documentation. A sample of participants completed a questionnaire prior to the inspection, which provided them with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their training and learning experiences.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the organisation has important strengths in most of its educational and training provision. The inspection has identified a number of areas for improvement, which need to be addressed if the needs of the participants, and those of the community and the economy are to be fully met. The organisation has the capacity to bring about the improvements required. Current leadership demonstrates capacity for self-improvement.

4.2 STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

The main strengths are the:

- increase in personal confidence, self-esteem and employability of the participants;
- opportunities for participants on Full-Time Education and Training and Education and Training Opportunities programmes to gain additional qualifications; and
- average progression rates to sustained employment for participants on the New Deal 25 and over programme, at 20% (Ards) and 16% (North Down), which are above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for all consortia of 10%.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- average progression rates to sustained employment for 18-24 year olds at 16% and 20%, in Ards and North Down respectively, in comparison with the NI average for all consortia of 19%; and
- small numbers on Essential Skills Training.

4.3 QUALITY OF TRAINING AND LEARNING

The main strengths are the:

- commitment of staff, their understanding of the needs of the long-term unemployed and the strategies they use to develop the employability of the participants;
- rigorous procedures for the initial assessment of participants' work-readiness and essential skills, and the effective use of the outcomes of assessment to inform planning for the development of employability skills;
- good quality workplace training for most participants, including those on the Preparation for Employment Programme;
- good quality of the learning and development plans produced by the lead partner, and the regular and rigorous review of participant progress;
- excellent quality of the directed training across all of the options;
- innovative and individualised approach to Jobsearch, which focuses on addressing identified barriers to employment; and
- good quality of the information, advice and guidance provided for participants, which enables those who are motivated to find work and to progress in their training and learning.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- standardisation of the procedures for initial assessment and learning and development plans across the consortium; and
- provision of more accredited short courses for participants on both 18-24 and 25 and over options, by all consortium partners.

4.4 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The main strengths are the:

- strong leadership and management at every level;
- culture of commitment to challenging barriers and increasing motivation;
- resources committed to the programme, particularly the staffing complement; and
- excellent links and strong relationships with local businesses and community and voluntary organisations.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- procedures for the collation, analysis and use of data to inform action for improvement; and
- rigour of the consortium's development plan to support the monitoring and evaluation of progress made against specified objectives.

Table 1

GRADES

Grade	Revised Grading System	Original Grading System
Overall Grade	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Standards and Outcomes	3	2
Training and Learning	2	1
Leadership and Management	2	1

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

5.1 Across all of the New Deal options inspected, attendance and time-keeping are good for the majority of participants. On the Full-Time Education and Training, Education and Training Opportunities and Essential Skills Training options, the majority of the participants are well motivated and keen to progress in their learning. A significant minority (35%) of the participants have been on New Deal previously; a quarter (25%) of 18-24 participants are returning to New Deal for at least the second time and 38% of participants on the Preparation for Employment option have been on the New Deal programme on at least two previous occasions. A significant minority of the participants have multiple barriers to employment, including personal and social problems. Across all of the options, a significant minority of the participants lack sufficient motivation to progress to sustained employment.

5.2 Most of the participants on Full-Time Education and Training, Education and Training Opportunities, Voluntary Sector Option and Essential Skills Training demonstrate good occupational skills in the workplace. They are able to perform an appropriate range of duties with limited supervision and are valued highly by their employers. The majority of the participants on the Preparation for Employment programme achieve satisfactory standards in the workplace.

5.3 Standards of work in the vocational or essential skills portfolios of work are mostly good. The Full-Time Education and Training and the Education and Training Opportunities participants have a sound understanding of the content of their training programmes and a secure understanding of health and safety issues in the workplace. There are good opportunities for these participants to gain additional qualifications, including word-processing. These participants also apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well to enhance the quality of the work in their vocational portfolios.

5.4 During the period April 2003 to September 2005, the figures provided by the Department for Employment and Learning show 87 leavers from the 18-24 New Deal options in the Ards consortium, and 64 from the same options for the North Down consortium. Progression to sustained employment for the Ards consortium, at 16%, is below the NI average of 19% for 18-24 options across all consortia, and, for North Down and Ards, the progression rate is slightly higher, at 20%.

5.5 Across the same period, the figures provided by the Department for Employment and Learning show 106 and 37 leavers from the 25 and over programme in the Ards and North Down consortia respectively. The figures provided by the Department for Employment and Learning indicate that the average figures for progression to sustained employment from the 25 and over programme, for the Ards Consortium and North Down consortium are 20% and 16% respectively, which compare favourably with the NI average for all consortia of 10%.

5.6 The numbers recruited to Essential Skills Training across the two consortia are small. Over the last three years, the figures provided by the Department for Employment and Learning show two and five participants aged 18-24 as leavers from the Essential Skills Training in Ards and North Down and Ards respectively. Of these, none progressed to unsubsidised employment.

5.7 Across the same period, the figures provided by the Department for Employment and Learning show that that three participants aged 25 and over, started Essential Skills Training with the Ards consortium. Two of the participants completed the programme and one left early. None of these participants progressed to unsubsidised employment. In the North Down consortium, the one participant who completed Essential Skills Training did not progress to unsubsidised employment.

5.8 In view of the small numbers on Essential Skills Training across both the New Deal for 18-24 and 25 and over options, there is a need for all consortium members to identify and implement strategies to increase participation in this option, to equip participants more effectively with the skills required for the labour market.

6. QUALITY OF TRAINING AND LEARNING

6.1 The analysis of the participant questionnaires, completed prior to the inspection, indicate that over 90% of respondents enjoy their experiences in the Ards and North Down New Deal Consortia. The key features highlighted by the participants include the quality of the advice and guidance and the high levels of support provided by the staff.

6.2 Excellent relationships exist between almost all of the participants, staff members and employers, across all of the New Deal options. The lead partner has implemented rigorous arrangements for initial assessment, which include appropriate procedures for assessing the participants' personal and work-related competences, and their essential skills of literacy and numeracy. The outcomes of assessment are used effectively to identify barriers to employment and inform planning for the development of employability skills.

6.3 The provision of directed training for participants on Full-time Education and Training, Education and Training Opportunities and Essential Skills Training, is excellent. Almost all participants attend directed training for at least one day each week. A good range of training and learning approaches is used and tutors work hard to encourage participants in administration and customer service to acquire the full NVQ and word-processing qualifications, rather than simply the required NVQ units. One of the participants on the Full-Time Education and Training option in administration is placed in a community organisation and is working towards a youth work qualification as well as the NVQ.

6.4 In contrast, there is insufficient provision of short training courses, to enhance the employability of participants on the Voluntary Sector Option and the New Deal options for adults aged 25 and over. While a significant minority of the participants complete short training courses during their period on Gateway, including Construction Skills Register (CSR) and Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) courses, only one of the Voluntary Sector and one of the Preparation for Employment Programme participants, are currently undertaking short courses. The consortium is currently sourcing a relevant qualification for one participant on the Voluntary Sector option, who is working in an animal sanctuary. One of the participants on the Preparation for Employment option is working towards an accredited course in horticulture, and will transfer to Education and Training Opportunities to complete the course. There is a need for more accredited short courses to be provided by all consortium partners for participants on both the 18-24 and 25 and over options, to improve employability.

6.5 The quality of the directed training is also excellent across the induction and career development sessions inspected. Sessions are well planned to ensure the pace and content is appropriate to individual needs, and tutors work hard to increase participant motivation and challenge barriers to learning. There is a good match between directed training and the needs of the individual to enhance their employability. In Essential Skills Training the learning activities are vocationally relevant and help the participants to deal with the demands of the workplace training.

6.6 The quality of the workplace training is good or excellent for most of the participants, and is matched well to their aptitudes, abilities and career aspirations. The majority of participants on the Preparation for Employment Programme have good opportunities to experience the demands of the workplace and are sufficiently challenged by their workplace experiences. Members of the consortium work hard to ensure that those returning to the New Deal programme have sufficient opportunity to develop additional work-related skills, attempting to ensure that they are not returned to a placement they have previously experienced, and that there is an opportunity to build on existing skills and experiences.

6.7 The learning and development plans provided by the lead partner are of excellent quality and incorporate clear short-term training targets. The employers of participants on Full-Time Education and Training and Education and Training Opportunities are provided, through the recently-developed learning pathway in the workplace documents, with concise summaries of the tasks the participants are expected to perform in the workplace, including relevant essential skills. As a result, the employers are well informed about the content of directed training and are involved in setting targets across the training period. There is a need for best practice in relation to the development of learning and development plans to be shared across the consortium partners.

6.8 The procedures for monitoring and reviewing participant progress are rigorous and robust. Trainees are visited regularly in the workplace by New Deal support staff and by vocational assessors. Assessment is thorough and rigorous for participants on Full-Time Education and Training, Essential Skills Training and Education and Training Opportunities. Participants are assessed at regular intervals and receive detailed feedback on their performance. Across the options inspected, most employers and supervisors provide good support for participants in the workplace.

6.9 The provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance is excellent within the consortium. The introduction of the career development tutor, who provides regular and individualised advice and guidance to participants, represents an innovative approach to Jobsearch. The provision is effective in challenging blocks to employment, improving participants' self-esteem and self-confidence, and providing informed guidance for long-term career planning.

7. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

7.1 The leadership and management in the Ards and North Down Consortium is excellent at all levels. The Head and Deputy Head of training provide strong strategic leadership. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the New Deal period is used most effectively to meet the individualised needs of participants and enable them to progress their work-related skills. Staff are well-qualified and deployed effectively to provide high levels of support for participants. The New Deal co-ordinators, career development and vocational

tutors and administrative staff work well as a cohesive team. They have a strong commitment to, and extensive experience of, work with unemployed people, and use a variety of appropriate and challenging strategies to develop the work-readiness and employability of the participants. There are strong links with a wide range of external agencies, which provide specialist support for participants with a range of barriers to employment including: learning difficulties; mental health problems; and alcohol and substance abuse.

7.2 Relationships are good between consortium members. The monthly consortium meetings are well attended by the consortium members, and include the New Deal Personal Advisers, the New Deal Team Leaders and the Managers of the local Job Centres. The recent addition of Rutledge Joblink Bangor as a secondary provider will require the lead partner and other members of the consortium to work together to re-define roles and responsibilities and agree procedures and protocols, which reflect most appropriately the needs and interests of future participants.

7.3 The designated Quality Co-ordinator works hard to ensure that self-evaluation and development planning procedures are implemented rigorously and effectively across all relevant areas. There is a good match between the self-evaluation report and the findings of the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate). Effective procedures are in place to obtain regular feedback from participants and employers, which is used appropriately to plan for improvement. While good use is made of qualitative and quantitative data to support the evaluation of the quality of the training and learning, there is a need for the consortium to analyse the data more extensively, to strengthen planning for progression to sustained employment, particularly in relation to the 18-24 New Deal programme. There is also a need to improve the rigour of the consortium's development plan to support the monitoring and evaluation of progress against clearly defined, time-bounded, measurable targets and objectives.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Ards and North Down New Deal Consortia need to revise the annual development plan to take account of the following key priorities.

1. The development and implementation of strategies to:
 - improve the low rate of progression to sustained employment on the 18-24 programme; and
 - embed best practice in initial assessment and the development of learning and development plans, across the consortium.

2. The provision of more short courses for participants on the Voluntary Sector and the Preparation for Employment Options.

NEW DEAL SUMMARY – APRIL 2003 TO MARCH 2006

(a) New Deal for 18 to 24 Year Olds Lead Provider: North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (Ards)

	Leavers	Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
		Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Option	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	46	0%	7%	2%	0%	0%	4%	87%	22%	13%
Completers	41	0%	22%	0%	2%	2%	10%	63%	29%	20%
All	87	0%	14%	1%	1%	1%	7%	76%	25%	16%

(b) New Deal 25+ - North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (Ards)

	Leavers	Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
		Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Subsidy	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	35	3%	11%	3%	6%	0%	6%	71%	37%	37%
Completers	71	1%	31%	0%	1%	0%	14%	52%	14%	11%
All	106	2%	25%	1%	3%	0%	11%	58%	22%	20%

(c) New Deal for 18 to 24 Year Olds – Northern Ireland

	Leavers	Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
		Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Option	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	2657	6%	10%	1%	5%	0%	14%	64%	25%	18%
Completers	3076	1%	34%	1%	2%	1%	17%	44%	24%	19%
All	5733	3%	23%	1%	3%	1%	15%	53%	24%	19%

(d) New Deal 25+ - Northern Ireland

	Leavers	Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
		Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Subsidy	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	1180	4%	12%	1%	5%	0%	11%	67%	24%	20%
Completers	4496	0%	37%	0%	1%	1%	20%	40%	9%	7%
All	5676	1%	32%	1%	3%	1%	18%	40%	12%	10%

NEW DEAL SUMMARY – APRIL 2003 TO MARCH 2006

(a) New Deal for 18 to 24 Year Olds Lead Provider: North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (North Down)

		Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
	Leavers	Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Option	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	40	3%	8%	0%	8%	0%	5%	78%	33%	15%
Completers	24	0%	21%	4%	8%	0%	21%	46%	33%	29%
All	64	2%	13%	2%	8%	0%	11%	66%	33%	20%

(b) New Deal 25+ - North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (North Down)

		Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
	Leavers	Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Subsidy	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	12	0%	17%	0%	8%	0%	17%	58%	42%	33%
Completers	25	4%	28%	0%	0%	4%	32%	32%	8%	8%
All	37	3%	24%	0%	3%	3%	27%	41%	19%	16%

(c) New Deal for 18 to 24 Year Olds – Northern Ireland

		Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
	Leavers	Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Option	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	2657	6%	10%	1%	5%	0%	14%	64%	25%	18%
Completers	3076	1%	34%	1%	2%	1%	17%	44%	24%	19%
All	5733	3%	23%	1%	3%	1%	15%	53%	24%	19%

(d) New Deal 25+ - Northern Ireland

		Immediate Destination on Leaving Option							Found Work within 13 weeks of Leaving Option	
	Leavers	Gateway	Follow Through	Employment Subsidy	Unsubsidised Employment	Benefits	Others	Unknown	Total	Sustained
Early	1180	4%	12%	1%	5%	0%	11%	67%	24%	20%
Completers	4496	0%	37%	0%	1%	1%	20%	40%	9%	7%
All	5676	1%	32%	1%	2%	1%	18%	46%	12%	10%

NEW DEAL – IMMEDIATE DESTINATION ON LEAVING ESSENTIAL SKILLS – APRIL 2003 TO MARCH 2006

Lead Provider: North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (Ards)

(a) New Deal for 18 to 24 Year Olds

	Leavers	Options				Follow Through	Unsubsidised Employment	Return to Benefits	Other	Not Known
		Employment	Education & Training	Voluntary Sector	Environmental Taskforce					
Early	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Completers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
All	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

(b) New Deal 25+

	Leavers	Options				Follow Through	Unsubsidised Employment	Return to Benefits	Other	Not Known
		Employer Subsidy	Self-Employment	PEP	Education & Training					
Early	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Completers	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
All	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0

NEW DEAL – IMMEDIATE DESTINATION ON LEAVING ESSENTIAL SKILLS – APRIL 2003 TO MARCH 2006

Lead Provider: North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education (North Down)

(a) New Deal for 18 to 24 Year Olds

	Leavers	Options				Follow Through	Unsubsidised Employment	Return to Benefits	Other	Not Known
		Employment	Education & Training	Voluntary Sector	Environmental Taskforce					
Early	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Completers	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
All	5	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3

(b) New Deal 25+

	Leavers	Options				Follow Through	Unsubsidised Employment	Return to Benefits	Other	Not Known
		Employer Subsidy	Self-Employment	PEP	Education & Training					
Early	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Completers	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
All	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

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