



*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**



Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

of the Steps to Work Employment Provision

in

**A4e
Antrim Contract Area**

June 2013

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF THE ANTRIM CONTRACT AREA (A4e LEAD CONTRACTOR)

The original inspection in March 2012 highlighted strengths in the provision, including the: leadership provided by the head of operations; commitment of the Lead Contractor staff to continuous improvement of the provision; and the good or better quality of most of the directed and work-based training sessions observed.

The inspection also identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- more robust arrangements for the effective analysis and use of data to inform improvement planning;
- the further development of strategies which promote stronger collaborative working between the Lead Contractor and sub-contractors;
- the insufficient use of the Confidence and Motivation and Enhanced Support strands to address the needs of those participants who have significant barriers to employment; and
- the outcomes into employment from the start of the contract (June 2011) to the time of the inspection (March 2012), which were below the Department for Employment and Learning's target.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- collaboration between A4e's local management team with appropriate staff from the wider organisation in the mainland United Kingdom to develop a fit-for-purpose management information system to increase the rigour in the collation and analysis of quantitative data;
- the appointment of a stakeholder manager whose key responsibilities include performance management of the sub-contractors and developing and implementing the employer engagement strategy across the contract;
- the development of collegial working arrangements with key staff from the Jobs and Benefits offices across the contract area, to support the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes into employment;
- the development by the Lead Contractor of a bespoke programme, 'New Beginnings', to promote the Confidence and Motivation strand;

The first improvement plan produced by the organisation in response to the original inspection was adjusted in light of feedback given by the Inspectorate and was of a satisfactory quality; the plan was also adjusted appropriately after the first interim visit.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the strong sense of collegiality among the Lead Contractor staff whose skills are well-matched to their job roles leading to more effective development and management of the contract area;

- the systematic collation, analysis and interpretation of key performance data to inform improvement planning within the Lead Contractor organisation and across the sub-contractors;
- the effective lines of communication and working relationships between the Lead Contractor and the sub-contractors, the Jobs and Benefit office staff, and with other key stakeholders, which are now very good;
- the development of the essential skills provision, including the contextualisation of learning to the participants' work role and the differentiation of the learning to address the variation in levels of ability;
- the effective implementation of the employer engagement strategy, including extensive social clause provision, which is contributing to the high quality work experience placements;
- the significant increase in the uptake of Enhanced Support and the Confidence and Motivation programmes, underpinned by well-targeted staff development and awareness-raising sessions;
- the successful reduction in the backlogs despite the significant increase in referrals; and
- the increase in participant progression rate into sustained employment to 21% which is just below the Department's target of 22%, but above the Northern Ireland average of 19%.

The areas which require further action include:

- to continue to refine further and embed the analysis and use of key performance data to inform and underpin better the quality improvement planning process;
- to strengthen the system and procedures for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning to clearly define the sub-contractors' responsibility for identified actions within the quality improvement plan and their accountability for related outcomes.

Conclusion

In most of the areas inspected, the quality of the Steps to Work employment programme in the Antrim contract area is now very good. The Lead Contractor (A4e) has important strengths in most of its provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2013

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website:
www.etini.gov.uk

