



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in  
Action on Hearing Loss

Specialist Employment 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

CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
EXCELLENCE



CSE



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## 1. Context

Action on Hearing Loss is a charitable organisation contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the European Social Fund (ESF) project, Specialist Employment Programme. The project aim is to enhance the employability of participants who are deaf, have a hearing loss and/or tinnitus through the provision of specialist support and access to training opportunities. The participants are supported to address their barriers to employment through the opportunity to gain vocational training and qualifications and access to work-experience placements.

Action on Hearing Loss is governed by a voluntary board of trustees, led by the Chief Executive. It is managed in Northern Ireland (NI) by the NI Director who is supported by the Executive Director of Services. The project is managed by the Head of Service and the Employment Team Leader, supported by a team of four staff. Action on Hearing Loss works in partnership with other organisations<sup>1</sup> to deliver level 1 and 2 accredited training courses. At the time of the inspection, 32 participants<sup>2</sup> were registered on the Specialist Employment Programme. The provision for individual participants is tailored to meet their needs, interests and aspirations. Seven (22%) of the participants are in a suitable work-experience placement with a further 7 (22%) 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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>High level of capacity for sustained improvement</b>
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Very good
<b>Quality of provision</b>	Very good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Very good

<sup>1</sup> A full list of partner organisations is provided in the appendix.

<sup>2</sup> 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

Action on Hearing Loss is effective in recruiting the target group through its well-established links with the deaf community, referrals from social services, and the Jobs and Benefits Offices. At the time of the inspection, the project had exceeded its 2015/16 recruitment target and has already achieved its 2016/17 target. It has been particularly successful in progressing 13 participants into employment against a target of nine; progressed eight into further education, significantly exceeding its target of two; and has almost met its target of 38 participating in accredited training programmes with 36 currently supported. Most of the participants display high levels of motivation and enthusiasm and engage well in their learning activities; they participate well and offer opinions in group discussions.

Most of the participants are making sustained progress in their learning and development. They value and benefit from the provision of accredited and non-accredited training, and, in particular, the employability programme supports them very well in their progression towards employment. At the time of the inspection, all of the participants were either still on their accredited training programmes or had achieved their target qualifications

The participants interviewed report that the project has provided them with very good opportunities to develop their employability, and personal and social skills; they report that their confidence has increased significantly as a result of their participation in the project. In addition, the interaction with their peer group has been invaluable in providing a forum where they can meet up, make new friends, reduce feelings of social exclusion and isolation, and also avail of help and guidance to support their progress and development.

### 5. Quality of provision

The participants can access an appropriate programme matched well to their needs including an eight-week employability programme, recognised accredited qualifications/training courses in a range of areas, including, customer service and health and safety qualifications, ongoing one-to-one mentoring, job search, work-experience placement training, and supported employment. Where appropriate, the participants are signposted to education and training programmes in the further education colleges, including, for example, essential skills training. The partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau network facilitates access for participants to information on benefits that support them into work. The project places an appropriate emphasis on ensuring that the participants are able to communicate effectively in their training through the provision of both British and Irish sign language interpreters, who are used to very good effect in the directed training and mentoring sessions.

The organisation works effectively with the participants to support them to address their barriers to education, training and employment. All participants complete a thorough skills needs analysis that informs well their individual planning including the provision of targeted support. For example, Action on Hearing Loss refer participants, where appropriate, to a range of external organisations and agencies, for specialised support in addition to providing interpreters and ongoing support from the employment advisers. The employment advisors meet regularly with the participants to review their progress and these meetings are used effectively to set short and long-term goals and to identify any additional training or support needs. Effective strategies are used to encourage the participants to develop expanded views of their career options and to raise their expectations and aspirations.

The overall quality of the directed training and mentoring sessions observed is good. The most effective practice is characterised by a positive and inclusive learning environment, including the provision of a deaf aware tutor and high levels of engagement by most of the participants. The participants are able to draw on their prior experiences to inform well the discussions on, for example, the importance of first impressions and on dealing with customer complaints. To improve the provision the range of learning strategies could be extended, to include more active learning approaches, such as paired and group activities.

The provision of work-experience placements is effective in enabling the participants to develop essential employability skills and helps them back into the world of work. The employers interviewed report positively on the work of the project including the support given to participants to prepare them for the workplace and the support given to the organisations when they employ a participant. There is regular communication between employers and the employment advisers to ensure that the participants are making appropriate progress in the development of their skills. Action on Hearing Loss also provide ongoing support for up to six months for participants who have progressed into employment, or to supported employment for those who face significant barriers.

The provision for care and welfare impacts positively on the learning and teaching, and the outcomes for the participants. The effectiveness of the guidance and support, provided by the staff, in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences is very good.

## **6. Leadership and management**

Strategic links and partnerships are very good, for example, the organisation has developed highly productive relationships with Belfast City Council, Derry and Strabane Council, Newry and Mourne Council and the Health and Social Care Board which are used well to provide work-experience placements to support the development of the participants' employability skills. There are well-established links with the further education colleges to develop and deliver progression pathways to higher level courses. The board and senior leadership ensure the project is resourced well, the quality of the accommodation is very good in the organisation's Belfast premises, and is good in the Londonderry premises. The project is managed effectively by the employment team leader who is supported very well by an enthusiastic and caring team. The roles and responsibilities of the staff are clearly defined and strong collegiate working relationships exist. The project staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and are well supported to undertake appropriate continuous professional development.

There is a regular scheduled cycle of team meetings focused on the planning and review of the progress of individual participants and a review of the impact of the programme. Action on Hearing Loss have worked hard to address the areas for improvement left in the baseline inspection visit and, in particular, have developed effective systems to measure the distance travelled by the participants. In addition, appropriate safeguarding training has been undertaken by the designated officer and deputy designated officer and their roles and responsibilities are clearly signposted within the offices.

While action has been taken to improve the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes more work needs to be done. The processes need to be strengthened further to make more effective use of key performance data, include feedback from all key stakeholders, including the participants and partner organisations, and to more robustly evaluate the quality of the provision.

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**

Action on Hearing Loss demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants.

## APPENDIX

### A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
Specialist Employment Programme ESF Project 2015/2016	22	157
Specialist Employment Programme ESF Project 2016/2017	36	100

### B. Partner organisations

Belfast City Council  
Newry and Mourne Council  
Derry and Strabane Council  
Health and Social Care Board

### C. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk).

Two ETI inspectors observed 12 participants in a range of settings including mentoring, learning and development sessions, focus groups, and work-experience placements. Discussions were held with the head of services, the employment team lead, the employment and training adviser, two employment advisers, the designated and deputy designated officers, two of the project partners, one employer, the training delivery partner and two interpreters. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' files and personal training plans were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

### D. 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	
<b>Retention</b>	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
<b>Achievement</b>	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
<b>Progression</b>	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.



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