



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
First Steps Women's Centre

Women Towards Education and
Employment

Report of an Inspection in
May 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

First Steps Women's Centre is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Women Towards Education and Employment European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to provide a holistic personalised programme to up-skill and empower unemployed and economically inactive women in the mid-Ulster area and prepare them for the workplace. Participants are provided with opportunities to develop their personal, social and employability skills, improve their health and well-being, undertake accredited and non-accredited training, and avail of one-to-one mentoring and support. A significant minority of the participants are newcomers from a range of countries and ethnic backgrounds, for whom English is not their first language. All of the training is delivered in the project promoter's main training facilities in Dungannon, with childcare facilities available on-site to support those participants who require it.

The manager of First Steps Women's centre is supported by a board of directors, a senior management team, 14 part-time staff, 15 self-employed tutors, and a small number of volunteers to deliver the Women Towards Education and Employment project. At the time of the inspection 114 participants¹ were registered on the project. The participants remain on the project until they have achieved their personal targets, and can attend training for up to two-half days per week, or avail of help and support which is delivered on a flexible basis to best meet their personal development needs.

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 outcomes for learners;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the quality of provision; 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	Very 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 project are high; in year one, 261 participants were recruited out of a target of 213, and in year two, 190 participants were recruited out of the same target. The overall retention rate, to date, is very good at 76%; it is good in year one at 68%, and outstanding in year two at 88%. Over the two years of the project, to date, 97 participants, out of a target of 26 have achieved entry-level qualifications, and 154 participants out of a target of 116 have achieved qualifications at level 1. Four hundred and twenty one participants, out of a target of 174, have completed non-accredited training programmes. In year one, 65 participants out of a target of 22 progressed to employment or self-employment on leaving the project, and in year two, 26 participants progressed out of a target of 22.

The standards of work demonstrated by the participants in their directed training are mostly good or better. The participants observed are well engaged, enjoy their learning experiences, and are making good or better progress in the completion of their training programmes and the achievement of their personal learning and development goals and targets. In information technology (IT) the participants are developing well their basic IT skills through the use of industry standard office application programmes; in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) they are making good progress in the development of their written and oral communication skills; and in digital photography they use scanning and digital editing software effectively to manipulate and improve the quality of photographs and images that were developed using more traditional processing techniques.

More work needs to be done to increase the number of participants progressing to higher level qualifications beyond the project; only 15 participants have progressed to date, out of a target of 110 in each of years one and two. The number of participants availing of work-experience placement opportunities is also low, with only 32 participants, out of a target of 37 in each of years one and two, undertaking a placement.

All of the participants interviewed reported on the positive impact the project has had on their personal and social development, particularly the development of their confidence and self-esteem, the provision of training to improve their personal well-being and enhance their employability skills, and the social opportunities provided to allow them to meet new people and build friendships.

5. Quality of provision

The curriculum offer matches well the individual development needs of the participants; a good range of accredited and non-accredited training, from six to 24 weeks duration, is offered in information technology, health promotion, essential skills, and ESOL to support the overall development of the participants' personal, social and employability skills. The participants also receive benefit and welfare advice and support and, until recently, were provided with guidance on employment and progression opportunities which participants identified as an important element of the provision. Due to staffing issues the provision is currently suspended but management have plans in place to resume it through an alternative staffing process.

The processes used to track and monitor the progress of the participants need to be developed further and more formalised. At present, they do not capture effectively the holistic progress individual participants are making in the development of their personal, social, and employability skills, and in their accredited training. The quality of the participants' personal training plans is weak; although an appropriate induction process is in place, the participants could be better supported to identify and set more specific learning and development targets. The processes used to review and inform the participants of their progress are also under-developed.

The overall quality of the learning, teaching and training observed is very good. In the most effective practice there is evidence of detailed planning, good explanation and demonstration by the tutors, high levels of engagement by the participants, and very good one-to-one support. The less effective practice is mainly tutor-led with limited opportunities provided for the participants to engage or interact. Although a tutor observation process is in place, it needs to be more evaluative and identify more clearly the strengths and areas for development that the tutors need to address to support on-going and sustained improvement in the quality of their learning, teaching and training.

The quality of the care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their personal development. A strong ethos of care and support and mutual respect permeates the organisation, which is characterised by a welcoming learning and social environment and very good collegial working relationships between staff and participants. A range of social activities are also provided for the participants, including for example, a walking group, with good uptake and early indications that it supports well the development of the participants' mental health and well-being. All of the participants interviewed stated that they feel safe and secure while in the organisation. They also benefit from a number of in-house services including a transport service and childcare facilities which help to reduce their barriers to participation on the project; the childcare staff are multi-lingual which is a very positive aspect of the provision for newcomer participants and their children.

6. Leadership and management

The project is well managed at both strategic and operational levels. Management and staff are well-experienced and highly committed and their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Good opportunities are provided for staff to undertake ongoing continuing professional development. Appropriate management systems and processes are in place to manage the project including regular staff meetings to provide updates and support the ongoing development of the project. Management are also responsive to external evaluations and have taken appropriate actions to address previous ETI feedback.

Very good links and partnerships have been established with a range of external organisations, statutory agencies and other community and voluntary groups to support the participants. The project promoter has also established good working relationships with a range of referral agencies including the local Job and Benefits office to identify and support appropriate recruitment to the project. Links to employers, however, need to be developed further to provide better opportunities for participants to undertake relevant work-experience placements, avail of work sampling activities and/or progress to employment.

The quality of the accommodation and physical resources is good; plans are currently in place to provide more modern and fit-for-purpose childcare facilities.

Appropriate processes are in place for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, however, there is a need to develop them further including the need to be more evaluative in the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and to make more effective use of key performance data in the self-evaluation report, as well as to set more specific and measurable targets, in the quality improvement plan.

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:

- ensure that relevant safeguarding training is carried out for specified staff and board members as soon as possible; and
- develop a more formal positive behaviour policy for the participants.

7. Overall effectiveness

First Steps Women's Centre demonstrates 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:

- improve the quality of the participants' personal training plans and to develop further the processes used to track and monitor the progress of the participants;
- further improve the quality of the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning including the need to be more evaluative in the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and to make more effective use of key performance data in the self-evaluation report, as well as to set more specific and measurable targets, in the quality improvement plan; and
- develop links to a wider range of employers to improve the work-experience placement and employment outcomes of the project.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
Women Towards Education and Employment ESF project 2015/2016	261	123
Women Towards Education and Employment ESF project 2016/2017	190	89

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website www.etini.gov.uk.

Two ETI inspectors observed 32 participants in directed training, and spoke to eleven participants in a focus group meeting. Discussions were held with the chief executive, ESF project manager, monitoring officer, finance officer, training and education co-ordinators, childcare staff, support service staff, and tutors. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work and personal training plans, and planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

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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