



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Something Special

Diverse Ability

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

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1. Context

Something Special is a charitable association, contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Diverse Ability European Social Fund Project (ESF). The main aims of the project are to provide education to people over 18 years of age with learning disabilities to enhance their basic employability opportunities and address the issues they face in relation to social inclusion in general day to day society. The project aims to deliver Awards at Level 1 in Employability and in Making Informed Career Choices, as well as Entry Level qualifications in Independent Living and Household Skills, Skills for Further Learning and Employment and in Independent Living and Personal Development.

The project is led by a manager who took up post in August 2016, and she is supported in her role by a management committee, an employment support officer, appointed in September 2016, and three learning support workers. In the past two years, two external providers consecutively delivered the training but are no longer involved with the project and therefore the training is now delivered by the manager.

Something Special are based in a rural setting, approximately one mile from Eglinton, and almost all of the participants are collected and transported by bus to the centre. At the time of the inspection 30 participants¹ were registered on the Diverse Ability project: six participants are in their first year of attending the project; and 24 participants are in their second year. The participants attend the project between one and five days each week. While external work-experience is part of the planning, none of the participants are, or have been, in a suitable placement to date.

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 participants;
- effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- quality of provision for learning and development; and
- quality of the leadership and management.

3. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address urgently the significant areas for improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires significant improvement
Quality of provision	Requires significant improvement
Leadership and management	Requires urgent improvement

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

The overall outcomes achieved by the project to date are significantly below the targets set in the original bid. Recruitment to the project in year one was low at 60% of the target of 40 set by Something Special. In year two, the impact of organisational and staffing changes has led to very low recruitment with just six participants registered to date (15% of the target set). The project needs to take urgent action to confirm formally the entry level qualifications undertaken and achieved by a small number of the participants in the project through a previous external provider, in order to start meeting the targets set for the achievement of qualifications. The majority of participants have improved their communication skills through engagement with the project and frequent oral presentations on topics of interest, however, their progress has not been monitored well enough and most participants are not achieving to their full potential.

Overall progress in learning and training is too slow and requires significant improvement, for example, none of the participants have made any progress towards completing formal qualifications at entry level or level 1 since March 2016. There is some recent evidence of written formative work, however, the work is not set within the context of an individual education plan and is not clearly linked to targets for progression. Though almost all of the participants have strong aspirations to engage in a work-experience placement linked to their interests, it is not good enough that none of them have been placed in an external placement through the project to date.

The participants interviewed by the inspection team reported that they enjoy attending Something Special and feel that their engagement with the project has impacted positively on their life experiences and improved their self-confidence. They highlight the importance of having a social outlet and enjoy the group dynamic.

5. Quality of provision

At the time of the inspection, the curriculum planning was underdeveloped, not sufficiently structured and not matched well enough to the participants' needs. To benefit more fully from the project, the participants need to be able to access a structured, well-planned and cohesive training programme which supports more clearly the development of their personal, social and employability skills. The project promoter needs to provide participants with good quality supported work-experience placements, within a shorter time-frame. The curriculum plan should also take due account of the planning for the environmental, recycling and waste management work which is at an early stage of development. The impact of all of these experiences requires significant improvement and should be monitored and tracked more closely, regularly and effectively.

While the participants' individual education plans identify appropriately the strengths and some of their barriers to progression, there are gaps, and the initial assessment process needs to be more robust and to better inform individualised planning. The review processes are in need of improvement and would benefit from taking place more regularly, and to be based on specific and measurable targets against which progress could be measured more effectively. In particular, there is a need to identify progress in softer skills more effectively and to demonstrate the distance travelled by each participant.

The discrete whole-group learning and development sessions observed were participant-centred, and engaged almost all of the participants well in appropriate, engaging activities which impacted positively on their social inclusion and personal development. During the inspection, activities observed also included inputs from guest speakers. However, the planning lacked coherence and differentiation; the purpose, aims and objectives of the sessions were not apparent, nor how the needs and interests of the individual participants were being met in order to build upon their prior experiences.

The care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their personal and social development. There is a strong rapport between staff, participants and parents, and positive relationships have been maintained despite the many organisational changes which have taken place. A participant council has been established since September 2016 and the participants are involved in commenting on the life and work of the project. The outcomes of the council meetings are recorded but this process should be enhanced further to include a formal written response against each action point.

6. Leadership and management

The protracted changes to the delivery of the training programme have resulted in a long period of instability for both the organisation and the participants. In response to the challenges faced, the management team need to plan strategically to identify clearly and prioritise the necessary actions to urgently promote the development and progression of the Diverse Ability project in the best interests of the participants. This should include the overall planning of the programme, clearer definition of the roles and responsibilities of all of the supporting staff and the delegation of some of the tasks currently undertaken by the manager.

Links and partnerships with local schools, and the University of Ulster are good and joint musical events have been planned and performed to external audiences. However, links with employers are underdeveloped, and there is an urgent need to extend and improve employer engagement to increase the number of relevant work-experience placements available to participants. The project needs to increase its recruitment and to raise awareness of the services they provide more widely.

Something Special provides good quality physical accommodation, and learning and training resources to support the delivery of the Diverse Ability project.

A management reporting system needs to be developed to monitor the overall information and tracking of the participants on the project in order to more effectively record the project's progress towards achieving targets, including the progress of individual participants. While the project places an appropriate emphasis on the provision of training to develop the staff's knowledge and understanding of safeguarding and first aid, there is a need to develop further the staff's knowledge and understanding of how to work and communicate more effectively with participants with specific disabilities.

The organisation urgently needs to implement more effective processes to quality assure all aspects of the provision. The processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning need to be updated and strengthened to take account of: the changes in staffing; the new model of delivery; the better use of a range of performance data; the inclusion of feedback from participants and all stakeholders in order to identify areas for improvement and demonstrate the impact of the project.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department. However, the organisation needs to:

- update and display openly the reporting arrangements for safeguarding in the project and to ensure consistency across the range of safeguarding policies and procedures; and
- review and update the safeguarding leaflet to include more appropriate use of language and to better inform participants and their families of the safeguarding arrangements in the project.

7. Overall effectiveness

Something Special needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the participants. The areas for improvement are to:

- urgently develop the curriculum planning to meet the employability and progression needs of each individual participant;
- develop further the initial assessment processes to inform better the individual education plans, to identify more clearly the range of barriers of each participant, and to include more specific individual targets for their progression;
- develop an employer engagement strategy in order to increase the number of external work-experience placements available for participants;
- plan strategically to meet the project's set targets including the more effective tracking and monitoring of the project's performance data; and
- develop further the quality assurance, self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes to take account of all of the recent changes and to include more effective use of feedback from all of the key stakeholders.

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 within 12 months.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
Diverse Ability ESF project 2015/2016	24	60%
Diverse Ability ESF project 2016/2017	6	15%

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 19 participants in four learning and development sessions and a focus group meeting. Discussions were held with three members of Something Special's board of directors, the manager, the employment support officer and two of the learning support workers. Samples of the participants' work and individual education plans 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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