



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in  
The Conservation Volunteers

Training for Employment project

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

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) is a charitable organisation contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Training for Employment European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to provide a programme of training and development focusing on land-based skills and qualifications, and supporting progression to employment, for the long-term unemployed. The project operates out of office locations in Bangor, Belfast, Coleraine and Londonderry. All participants have the opportunity to undertake a range of accredited level 1 vocational qualifications in: horticulture, land-based studies and employability. They also have the opportunity to gain relevant accredited short courses, including the construction skills register (CSR), essential skills, manual handling and/or first aid, and have access to one-to-one mentoring support, job search and work-experience placements.

The project promoter is managed by an operations director and supported by a team comprising three operations leaders, three senior project officers, two project officers, two training officers, two employability advisers and three administrative staff; only three of these staff work on the ESF project on a full-time capacity. In the past six months, the management team has been restructured and an employability adviser and a training officer have been appointed.

At the time of the inspection, 20 participants<sup>[1]</sup> were registered on the Training for Employment project. The project operates a rolling recruitment and most of the participants attend for a minimum of one day each week, for a period of between three to six months; 100% of the participants, currently enrolled, are in a suitable work-experience placement.

## 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 the provision for learning and development; and
- quality of the leadership and management.

## 3. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Important areas for improvement

<sup>[1]</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

The Conservation Volunteers have effective referral processes in place and at the time of inspection the project was ahead of its recruitment target with 270 participants recruited in 2015/2016, exceeding the target of 210. Recruitment remains steady in the current year, with 105 out of a target of 210 participants for 2016/2017 recruited to date. The achievement rate was exceeded, with 199 participants achieving a level 1 vocational qualification against a target of 190. The achievement rate, however, for short accredited courses was below target with only 29 participants achieving against a target of 100. A key strength of the provision is the sourcing of opportunities to provide participants with varied and realistic working environments and projects to build their vocational and employability skills. All of the participants are well motivated and achieving good or better standards of work at level 1.

While the Conservation Volunteers in year 1, was successful in progressing 39 participants into employment, exceeding the target of 35, and eight into self-employment, against a target of five, they were significantly below the target set for participants progressing into further education or training; only 49 against a target of 142. As a result, the overall positive progression rate is low at 53%; 96 against a target of 182. However, all of the participants interviewed reported an increase in their knowledge of planning horticulture activities and a greater awareness of health and safety risks from their participation on the project. To facilitate effective transition to positive destinations, the participants can choose to continue volunteering and accessing job search to further consolidate their vocational and employability skills. In the first year of the programme the retention rate was outstanding at 89% and remains outstanding to date in year two at 94%.

The majority of the participants are making appropriate progress in reducing their barriers to employment and are developing well their personal and social skills; building their self-confidence and improving their communication and transferable skills. The participants work well together and in groups, taking an active role and contributing effectively to any decision making. All of the participants report that as a result of participating on the project their confidence has increased, they have had an opportunity to meet new people and as a result their quality of life has improved.

### 5. Quality of provision

The curriculum offers a suitable range of appropriate qualifications to improve progression opportunities to employment, for example, grass cutting and health and safety training. All of the participants benefit significantly from the varied practical work-experience available through the project promoter's management of woodlands, wildlife areas, allotments, community gardens and public green spaces including school grounds.

The personal training plans do not adequately capture the participants' barriers to employment or their prior qualifications on entry. The plans need to capture more effectively the participants' essential skills literacy and numeracy needs, to better inform planning for learning and development and to set more appropriate targets for positive progression. There are regular monthly reviews which mostly capture well the progress the participant is making in developing their confidence and range of transferable skills. These could be improved further by adding specific and measurable targets, against which progress could be measured more effectively, and by making better linkages to the soft outcome monitoring form. This would allow the distance travelled by each participant to be captured more holistically.

The quality of the provision for learning and development, including the directed training, practical activities and job search sessions, is consistently good. The planning of the provision for learning ensures a good range of opportunities for the participants to develop new and relevant vocational skills through a good range of interesting projects; the participants take pride in their work and have significant job satisfaction when the projects are completed. There is, however, a need to provide greater differentiation in planning to accommodate more effectively the varied needs of the participants, including greater stretch and challenge for the more able. The arrangements for the recording of work successfully completed could be strengthened, for example, using more photographic evidence to record participant progress and to provide opportunities for literacy work.

The effective care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their development. The project promoter provides the participants with suitable personal protective equipment for the practical work-experiences, for example steel toe cap boots, hats and waterproofs. Childcare allowance is provided, where appropriate, and the project benefits from the availability of minibuses to provide transport to sites and interviews. Signposting to external statutory services, for example, to housing and addiction services is a strength of this provision. An annual celebration event is held to recognise the personal development and achievements of the participants, which are also shared on the project promoter's website, social media outlet and e-newsletter. All of this enhances the participants' experiences and all of the sessions observed were characterised by supportive staff and an awareness of participants' pastoral needs reflecting the overarching purpose of the project and ethos of the project promoter.

## **6. Leadership and management**

The recent management changes and appointment of two new members of staff has led to operational challenges that have affected some of the delivery of the project. Management have identified appropriately, the need to provide essential skills training as an area for improvement on their quality improvement plan, and they are currently trying to source essential skills tutors who can deliver this in the relevant context. There is, however, a clear strategic vision for the project promoter and high levels of regular support for the project team are provided by the regional director. There are detailed contingency plans which enable the project promoter to maintain good quality delivery. The community regeneration projects in Belfast provide the participants with opportunities to enhance their horticulture skills by working on the outside environments including school premises. The effective partnership working with the National Trust at Castleward provides training and assessment to unemployed volunteers with plans in place to develop and expand this provision to other National Trust locations. Two further partnerships, with other agencies, are in place to provide a 12 week programme from the end of January 2017. In addition the quality of the accommodation in the two centres visited is good or better; in Londonderry the new accommodation is excellent.

At operational level, communication between the management and project team is effective and includes a cycle of team meetings which focus on the planning of the project. Good links and partnerships have been developed through the project promoter's wider work and as a result a large number of ESF participants have the opportunity to casually volunteer before registering on the project. Well developed links exist with the Jobs and Benefits Office in Bangor and includes effective referrals in line with participants' career aspirations and personal targets. This best practice could be extended across the provision. The project promoter demonstrates a growing responsiveness to participant needs; as a result the curriculum provision has been amended to reduce the targets for vocational qualifications at level one. There has been a corresponding increase in the target set for accredited short courses; this change better meets the different needs of the participants.

While the project has made a good start to self-evaluation, there are some gaps in their processes. For example, performance data and stakeholder feedback are not used well enough to inform the evaluations. The quality improvement planning actions are not specific enough and need to be more measurable and prioritised to effect improvement. The management information system needs to be developed further to track participant and project progress against the targets set and to inform quality improvement planning. The quality assurance processes need to be extended to include observations of the job search, directed and practical training sessions to ensure quality and consistency in the delivery of the project across all sites.

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:

- update the safeguarding leaflets provided for the participants with shorter information and photos in all office sites.

## **7. Overall effectiveness**

The Conservation Volunteers 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:

- revise the personal training plans to capture more effectively the participant's key barriers to learning and to identify clearly possible progression pathways, particularly to further education and training;
- set specific and measurable targets in the quality improvement plan to ensure actions to promote continuous improvement are effective and timely; and
- use data more effectively to inform programme delivery and improvement planning.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

**A. Project registrations**

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
ESF Training for Employment project 2015/2016	270	129%
ESF Training for Employment project 2016/2017	170	81%

**B. Inspection method and evidence base**

Three ETI inspectors observed 22 participants in a range of settings including jobsearch, directed training and practical based activities. Discussions were held with the Conservation Volunteer's: senior management team, employment advisers and training and project officers. The management information system, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work, personal training plans and planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were also 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	
<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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