

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

WORK-BASED LEARNING INSPECTION

Skills for Life and Work in Springboard
Opportunities Limited

Report of an Inspection in May 2023



Providing Inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



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Introduction

Springboard Opportunities Limited (Springboard) is a registered charity, established in 1992, based in Belfast city centre and delivering a range of training programmes. The programmes are delivered through a youth work development model.

Springboard is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Skills for Life and Work training programme, which the organisation has branded as “HeadStart”. DfE introduced the Skills for Life and Work programme in September 2021 to replace Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work Level 1 of Training for Success. It is a programme designed for young people aged 16-17, or under 22 years for those with a disability, and under 24 years for those who qualify under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) (2002).

In May 2023, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection to Springboard on behalf of DfE, having previously carried out a baseline inspection visit for the Skills for Life training programme in May 2022. Directed training is delivered in the Townsend Outreach Centre, Belfast, with the exception of the essential skills provision which is delivered by a sub-contractor at its premises, also in Belfast.

At the time of the inspection, 51 trainees were registered across the professional and technical (P&T) areas of customer service and youth work practice; 29 in year 1 and 22 in year 2 of the programme (all data in this report was provided by the organisation). Of the 51 trainees, 25 were registered on the level 1 customer service, and 26 on the level 1 youth work practice. In the essential skills, all of the trainees were completing information and communication technology (ICT); 39 were completing literacy/ communication and 43 were completing numeracy/ application of number.

Only a minority (22%) of the trainees entered their programme with four or more GSCE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. A significant minority (31%) of them entered the programme with no formal qualifications.

A high proportion of the trainees have significant and complex additional support needs. Over half (51%) of them have a disability and the remainder (49%) present with a range of additional support needs, as consequence of health and wellbeing matters, educational and social disadvantage. For example: 48% have been impacted by suicide of a family member or friend; 45% regularly access support such as psychiatric care or counselling; and almost one-third (31%) were homeless or in supported accommodation. The organisation reports that over two-thirds (69%) of the trainees have been influenced by paramilitary activity.

Views of the trainees and staff

Inspectors met and spoke with 25 trainees during their learning, teaching and training sessions and in focus group meetings. They all spoke very positively about their experiences in the organisation and how they feel respected. In particular, they value the supportive youth development workers and the learning sessions, which they

reported are highly enjoyable. They like the more informal learning environment, where they have fun while learning. Most of the trainees are able to identify aspects of their learning which they find most helpful. They all reported that they feel safe and secure and that the staff are responsive to their needs and concerns.

Sixty-three percent (32) of the trainees registered completed the online inspection questionnaire. Almost all of the responses indicate that the trainees: find their programme interesting and challenging; are provided with clear guidance and rules (code of conduct) around acceptable and unacceptable behaviours; receive good opportunities to undertake additional learning to enhance their core qualification; and that staff in the organisation care about their progress and wellbeing.

Just over one-fifth also provided written comments which were wholly positive about their experiences in the organisation. They highlighted in particular the kind and helpful staff.

Eighty-eight percent of the staff (7) completed the online inspection questionnaire. They reported that the organisation: supports them well to deliver learning; there are good channels of communication; and they are given regular feedback on how to improve their work. Those staff who provided written comments were wholly positive about the high levels of support they receive to further their professional development, as well as the organisation's people-centred and supportive ethos.

Focus of the inspection

The report is based on an inspection of the provision for the Skills for Life and Work training programme, and the essential skills. The inspection focused on the P&T areas of customer service and youth work practice. The inspection also included the capacity of the organisation to identify and bring about improvement, and the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding.

Summary of overall findings

Overall effectiveness

At the time of the inspection visit, and in the areas evaluated, Springboard has the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the trainees.

Overall quality of the programme inspected

Programme	Proportion of registrations	Performance Level
Skills for Life and Work	100%	Good

Overall quality of the professional and technical areas inspected and the essential skills provision

Programme	Performance Level
Customer service	Good
Youth work practice	Good
Essential skills	Good

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and apprentices reflect current legislation and practice.

Strengths

- The effective youth work approaches which support well the trainees' holistic development, including developing their confidence, self-esteem, self-worth, and team-working skills.
- The extensive and well-targeted care and welfare arrangements, evident across all aspects of the provision.
- The staff have high expectations of, and aspirations for, the trainees, resulting in most of them making good progress across all aspects of their training programmes.
- The retention rate (97%) for the current cohorts is outstanding.
- The curriculum which is individualised to meet well the identified complex needs of the trainees.
- The good quality of the customer service, youth work practice and essential skills provision.
- The quality of training sessions observed, all of which were at least effective, with the majority evaluated as highly effective.
- The provision of careers, education, information, advice and guidance which is very well integrated within the trainees' programmes.
- The strategic and operational leadership which is underpinned by effective communication between the management team and the staff.
- The appropriate actions taken by managers to address most of the areas for improvement identified at the baseline inspection visit.

Areas for improvement

- To continue to progress the implementation of a more sustainable model of delivery for the essential skills.
- To monitor further attendance across all aspects of the trainees' programmes, to ensure that those at risk of not completing and/or achieving their programme are identified and appropriate interventions are put in place.

- To increase access to work-experience placements, through strengthening further the engagement with employers.
- To develop further the quality improvement planning processes, to capture more clearly the actions to address the areas for improvement identified by the organisation.

Key findings

- Youth work development approaches and principles are embedded in the design and delivery of the HeadStart programme. The co-design processes create a genuine engagement and a clear role for the trainees in the design and delivery of the provision. As a consequence, a well-designed and considered curriculum is provided for the trainees, and individualised to address their identified learning needs and barriers to education and training. Their work readiness skills are enhanced through the completion of additional qualifications, such as child protection training, first aid and health and safety qualifications. Along with the personal and social development workshops, group enrichment activities are also provided, including teambuilding activities, and participation in charity events of importance to the trainees, such as to support those impacted by suicide and self-harm, and social activities. The programme of activities builds effectively the trainees' confidence, self-esteem, self-worth, team-working skills and promotes well their health and well-being. The organisation also offers an annual residential, as an additional development opportunity for trainees.
- In the sessions observed, the learning, teaching and training is highly effective. The youth work qualified tutors are adept in using a range of effective strategies to skilfully manage and facilitate group activities, in order to maximise learning and improve the trainees' personal capabilities. Role play, active groupwork, paired and peer learning are central to the well-planned and structured sessions. The tutors have created successfully a safe and trusted learning environment, where the consideration of challenging subjects is often part of the learning and trainees are confident to participate in the discussions. A number of trainees exhibit specific additional learning needs and/or challenging behaviours which staff managed extremely well during the sessions observed, adapting quickly to address these and ensure progression in the learning continued.
- The essential skills sessions observed were effective. There was a very good awareness of the barriers to learning, which informed well the teaching strategies and very good levels of support for individual trainees. The tasks were well-planned and contextualised appropriately to real-life scenarios, which enabled the trainees to see the meaningful application of their ICT, literacy, and numeracy skills.

- The delivery of the essential skills provision in literacy and numeracy is sub-contracted to another provider as Springboard has been unable to appoint its own essential skills tutors. Springboard continues to work to recruit appropriately qualified essential skills tutors, as the sub-contractor and the organisation have identified concerns about trainees' attendance being adversely impacted by the current arrangements. While action has recently been taken to address these concerns, with the provision of transport for the trainees to travel to the sub-contractor, there are concerns about the sustainability of these arrangements.
- In all of the sessions, the trainees are developing well their oral skills and their ability and confidence to articulate their views and present in front of their peers. The trainees reported that they benefit from further support, if required, during one-to-one sessions with dedicated mentors.
- Most of the trainees are making good progress across all aspects of their training programmes and the retention rate (97%) for the current cohorts is outstanding. The progress the trainees make in overcoming their assessed barriers to progression could be tracked better in the personal training plans.
- A significant minority of the trainees have completed their essential skills courses, and all have achieved their targeted qualification (30%, ICT; 44% literacy/communication; and 30%, numeracy/application of number). To date, of the trainees who have completed entry level or level one, none have progressed to a higher essential skills level.
- Overall, the standard of the trainees' written work was good or better. A range of written tasks are used to develop their writing skills: they can write in paragraphs with good levels of vocabulary and, have good oral skills. The trainees are also developing well their mental mathematical and problem-solving skills.
- Effective systems are in place to track and monitor trainee progress in learning and training. There is, however, a need for continued monitoring, particularly of attendance across all aspects of the programmes to ensure that those at risk of not completing and/or achieving their programme are identified and appropriate interventions are put in place.
- The provision of careers, education, information, advice and guidance is very well-integrated within the trainees' training programme. The progression pathways are clearly presented and as a result most of the trainees are very well-informed of the full range of education, training and employment options available to them. The organisation has high aspirations for, and expectations of, the trainees. The wide range of enrichment activities such as site visits, visits to the local university, including talks from the university's coordinator for the community youth work degree and extra-curricular activities, raises the trainees' expectations and encourages them to aspire and achieve.

- Many of the trainees are not sufficiently work-ready to engage in the placements, however, a range of work placement preparation activities, such as mock interviews and further personal development support, are in place to build their capacity to sustain work-experience placements. Through the recent recruitment of a placement development officer, Springboard is building on its previous engagements with employers, to increase further its bank of work-experience placements options to meet the diverse needs of the trainees.
- At the time of the inspection, the majority (50%) of the trainees were on work-experience placements matched well to their interests and capabilities. The employers who spoke with inspectors reported that the trainees were progressing well in the work-experience placement, with all trainees leading in workplace activities.
- The provision for care and welfare, and support for emotional health and wellbeing, which is effective and embedded across the programme, starts with daily breakfast clubs and morning check-ins, and includes a purposeful personal development and preventative curriculum. A wellbeing officer plans for and provides support to trainees. There are extensive and well-targeted care and welfare arrangements in place, with a wide range of appropriate internal and external specialist services provided to meet and address wider personal, social and emotional needs of the trainees; these include one-to-one mentoring support and counselling services. In focus group meetings, the staff reported that the trainees present with significant challenges and require high levels of support. Coaching and mentoring sessions enable trainees to access needs-led support such as solution focused, therapeutic practice and intense one-to-one support. The staff mentor, coach and support the trainees to reflect on their development and also, to facilitate their personal and social growth and build their employability skills.
- The organisation funds a travel card for those who need it to access their training and work-experience placement, but also to enable them to widen their horizons by accessing a placement outside of their local area. The provision of funding for childcare by the organisation, as part of the programme, has been availed of by a small number of trainees and is crucial in providing them with much needed support to participate.
- Overall, the provision is led and managed effectively, supported well by the enthusiastic, committed and skilled staff who know about the trainees as individuals and care about them and their wellbeing. The skills and dispositions of all of the youth development workers are well matched to their job roles. The staff support each other well and are highly skilled in the use of reflective practice and this effectively informs future planning.
- The staff appreciate the regular supervision sessions with their managers, in which they can discuss issues, such as concerns about safeguarding the trainees and how to support and develop the trainees' knowledge of self-care. The staff feel valued in the organisation and enjoy their work.

- The self-evaluation process is used to provide a good overview and evaluation of the quality of the provision. The key strengths are clearly identified, informed well by feedback from the trainees and staff. The organisation, however, needs to develop further the quality improvement planning processes, to capture more clearly the actions to address the areas for improvement identified by the organisation.
- Since the baseline inspection, the organisation prioritised and addressed the safeguarding findings. These improvements include: further development of the adult safeguarding aspect of the combined child protection and adult at risk policy, using current language and practice, and development of the associated reporting procedures for both child protection and adult safeguarding; and the development of a summary staff code of conduct which reflects more fully the nature and range of the organisation's work with trainees.
- Springboard provides staff with group and targeted, bespoke individual professional learning opportunities, to develop both their occupational and pedagogic skills. Recent professional development activities include: two staff who have completed the DfE endorsed certificate in teaching, with two more scheduled to enrol in September 2023; and a staff member who has just attained their degree in community youth work. Training in adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed practice has also helped staff to understand better the trainees and to provide appropriate supports.
- Springboard has effective links and partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders including specialist organisations and statutory agencies, which are used well to support the trainees on the programme.
- The placement support officer has worked closely with a number of post-primary schools to promote the training options available at Springboard. There have been school visits, engagement with careers teachers, targeted meetings with pupils and open days. As a consequence, to-date, over 70 pupils have expressed an interest in the HeadStart programme, of which approximately 27 pupils and some parents attended a recent open evening in the organisation's premises.
- The learning environments in the premises of the organisation and its sub-contractor are fit-for-purpose and of a generally good quality. The resources are attractive and contemporary and there is good use digital technology to enhance learning.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees reflect current legislation and practice.

Overall effectiveness

At the time of the inspection, and in the areas evaluated, Springboard demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the trainees.

There are areas for improvement that the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The areas for improvement are to:

- Continue to implement a more sustainable model of delivery for the essential skills.
- Monitor further attendance across all aspects of the trainees' programmes, to ensure that those at risk of not completing and/or achieving their programme are identified and appropriate interventions are put in place.
- Increase access to work-experience placements, through strengthening further the engagement with employers.
- Develop further the quality improvement planning processes, to capture more clearly the actions to address the areas for improvement identified by the organisation.

The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

Appendix 1

A. Programme Registrations

Table 1 – Current registrations by programme

Programme	Number of registrations at entry level	% of total registrations	Number of registrations at level 1	% of total registrations
Skills for Life and Work	-	-	51	100%

Table 2 – Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of trainees	% of total registrations
Customer Service	25	49%
Youth Work Practice	26	51%

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI inspectors observed eight learning, teaching and training sessions, and spoke with 25 trainees during these sessions and in focus group meetings. Inspectors had discussions with two employers/supervisors in the workplace and one by telephone; they also met with key staff. Samples of the trainees' work and personal training plans, and tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans were examined. Trainees and staff had the opportunity to complete a confidential questionnaire. The inspection was also informed by the organisation's quality improvement planning processes and associated documentation, including its self-evaluation report.

ETI's Inspection and [Self-Evaluation Framework for Work-based Learning](#) is available on the ETI website.

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%

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 learners. 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 learners. 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 learners. 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 learners. 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.

Programme(s)/essential skills/P&T area outcomes

The ETI use the following performance levels:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Safeguarding

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the arrangements for safeguarding:

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and/or apprentices reflect current legislation and practice.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and/or apprentices reflect broadly current legislation and practice. The organisation, however, needs to: ...

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and/or apprentices are unsatisfactory. < Insert detail >. The ETI will return to the organisation within six working weeks to monitor and report on progress in addressing the safeguarding issues which have been identified.

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