



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
South West College

Step Up To Sustainable Employment
(SUSE+)

Report of an Inspection in
November 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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CSE



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1. Context

South West College (SWC) is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Step Up To Sustainable Employment (SUSE+) European Social Fund Project (ESF). The College operates in partnership with a variety of organisations (the Northern, Southern and Western Health & Social Care Trusts, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and both the Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh District Councils) to deliver a project aimed at promoting employment and progression towards employment for unemployed and economically inactive participants through a model of social innovation.

The project is a mentor-led programme and all of the participants are assigned a mentor for the duration of the project, and for a maximum of 12 months after leaving the project. The provision includes job search, work-experience placements and accredited level one qualifications. For example participants can choose from a range of qualifications including nine accredited level 1 professional and technical qualifications including children's care learning and development and retail and customer service; they also have the option of essential skills qualifications in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT and can choose from an additional 14 specialist short qualifications including: first aid training, the construction skills register (CSR) and abrasive wheels.

The project operates out of all four SWC campus sites in Omagh, Dungannon, Cookstown and Enniskillen and from the Northern Regional College's Magherafelt campus. The project is led by the college's head of industry and training, managed at an operational level by a dedicated programme development co-ordinator and supported by a full-time team of three lead mentors, six mentors and one finance administrator. At the time of the inspection, 109 participants^[1] were registered on the SUSE+ project. The programme duration ranges from six to twelve weeks depending on the assessed needs and interests of each participant. The participants generally attend for two to three full days per week. Fifteen participants (14%) are currently in a suitable work-experience placement.

2. Views of participants

All of the participants interviewed reported positively about their participation on the SUSE+ project and stated that it had significantly improved their level of confidence. The opportunity to re-engage in a flexible and tailored programme, gain qualifications and develop social networks were also cited as strengths of the project. The participants report that they are receiving good quality support and guidance from the project staff, and are at various stages of identifying what their progression pathway will be. The delivery of the project within the community outreach centres, was also cited as a strength by those participants in the hardest to reach more rural areas.

3. 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;
- quality of provision; and
- effectiveness of the leadership and management.

^[1] All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter at the time of the inspection.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Outstanding

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

The majority of participants are demonstrating good to very good standards of work. They are developing an appropriate range of literacy and numeracy skills, and are developing well their communication and oracy skills in the sessions observed. Almost all of the employers interviewed report that the participants employed or on a work-experience placement demonstrate good to very good standards of work including the effective use of literacy and numeracy skills in their work roles.

The project has exceeded the achievement targets set for the total number of level 1 qualifications by almost 60% and the number of specialist qualifications by 40%. It is also on track to meet the target set of 65% of participants gaining a level one employability and personal development qualification, at 59% to date and 91% for the level one Essential Skills qualifications in Literacy, Numeracy & ICT.

There are well-established links with up to 50 referral agencies and as a result the project has been highly effective at recruiting participants from the target group over the last three years. In year one, the target was exceeded, 113%, and in year two 456 participants were recruited against a target of 468. The project is on track to meet its final year's recruitment target with 353 participants recruited in 2017/18 against a target of 468, resulting in 93% of the target number of participants being recruited to date.

Most of the participants are progressing well in their learning and development. Retention has been consistently outstanding at 100% in each year of the project, and remains outstanding in year three to date. The project has been successful in progressing 28% of participants into employment, well above the 20% target set. The progress against the target of 22% for participants sustaining employment six months after leaving the project is also in-line with the target set at 21% to date.

The high into employment success has had an impact on the proportion of participants progressing into further education or training which is below the 40% target set at 18% to date. It is of note that 60% of participants enter the project with the aim of securing employment as their main short to medium term goal. Whilst the number of current participants in a work-experience placement is low (14%), this is appropriate to the participants' early stage on the programme. Overall, the project is on track to meet the 50% into work-experience placement, with 45% of participants completing this aspect of the project to date.

The one-to-one mentoring system is a strength of this project and it has been a key factor in achieving and sustaining the 100% retention on the project to date. It has also enabled the effective development of the participants' personal, social and emotional skills with the target of 85% for soft skills development exceeded, to date, at 93%. It is also a strength of the project that participants can continue to access support, for a maximum of 12 months, through the mentoring provision upon completion of the project.

6. Quality of provision

The SUSE+ project has devised a comprehensive and flexible curriculum offer structured around a three step incremental approach of personal development, qualifications and progression. The participants are all required to complete a mandatory employability and personal development qualification and can choose from an appropriate range of nine level one (NVQ) competence-based professional and technical qualifications. It is a strength of the project that participants also have the option to address any literacy, numeracy or ICT barriers by completing an essential skills qualification and to complete short courses in a range of specialist areas.

The curriculum offer is effectively supported by a good range of short courses and workshops offered through the partnerships organisations, for example the health and wellbeing and resilience workshops offered through the partnership working with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. As a result, these courses enable participants to access work-experience roles more quickly.

The pre-entry advice and guidance and induction is effectively tailored, planned and supplemented by a detailed and user-friendly initial assessment tool, the Employment Readiness Scale (ERS). The mentoring team are highly skilled at supporting the participants to make informed choices based on the ERS assessment and identifying the key areas for development which are recorded well on individual action plans with progress measured against incremental targets. The individual action plans sampled capture well the key barriers of each participant. It is a strength of the project that the participant, the employer and all project staff contribute to the review process to ensure that all parties are aware of the targets and can monitor the progress made. The reviews on progress mostly take place on a monthly basis and can be more frequent dependent on the needs of each participant.

The quality of the provision for learning and development, including the one-to-one mentoring sessions and directed training ranges from having important areas for improvement to very good, and is mostly good. In all of the sessions observed there was a very good rapport between staff and participants that enabled learning. In the most effective practice, the training sessions were characterised by effective planning and active learning, and questioning strategies that stretched and challenged the participants. In the small number of less effective sessions there is a need to further develop the planning to include structured opportunities and questioning strategies which allow participants' time to think, to record their learning and to respond appropriately. The learning outcomes set at the start of each session could be strengthened to link more effectively to the participants' stage on the programme, and to incorporate a greater range of strategies to engage the quieter and more reticent participants.

The processes for care and welfare are well-embedded across the provision and impact positively on the development of the participants' holistic needs. There are strong and mutually respectful working relationships between management, project staff and participants. There is an appropriate focus on improving the health and wellbeing of the participants through the in-house provision of counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and mindfulness sessions. Social integration is promoted by providing meal vouchers for participants to use in the college canteens enabling them to eat and socialise with other students during lunch breaks, and childcare and travel costs are also met where applicable. There are also bi-annual celebration of success events, and other informal events, in recognition of the participants' progress and distance travelled.

7. Leadership and management

The college's senior management team and partnership-led steering committee have a clear strategic vision for the project and collaborate effectively to ensure the provision continues to meet the wider social and economic needs of the area. The curriculum has been well designed to match employers' needs; for example the project is currently experiencing a high level of demand for the level one Welding qualification to meet the need for welders in the engineering companies in the Mid Ulster area. Strategic links and partnerships are strong and all of the stakeholders interviewed value highly the SUSE+ programme and the responsiveness of the project staff. The high quality partnership working is a key strength of the provision and the steering committee meet regularly to discuss the project's performance and any key issues. The project has exceeded DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation target of 40% (currently at 61%) and has met the Mid Ulster District Council's community engagement target both of which evidence well the wider impact of the SUSE+ project.

The roles and responsibilities of all project staff are well defined and support well the participants' needs. A social enterprise coffee station 'The Daily Grind', in operation since December 2016, is an innovative learning environment, within the Enniskillen Technology and Skills centre, allowing the participants to gain work-experience, grow in confidence and develop their Barista skills. The quality of accommodation and resources across all of the project's delivery sites ranges from very good to outstanding and includes access to well-equipped professional and technical workshops, classrooms and dedicated mentoring rooms and IT suites.

The project promoter also demonstrates a commitment to the continuing professional development of the project mentors and it was apparent that this additional up-skilling was highly valued by all staff.

There are extensive links with a range of appropriate referral agencies in both the Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council areas. Furthermore, the mentors' frequent presence at the partners' staff and team meetings has been instrumental in sustaining the high level of recruitment to the project to date. The project team are in constant communication with the agencies to ensure participants are signposted appropriately to the correct provision. The project also provides internships that enable participants to progress to paid roles within the wider college services.

The links with employers to provide work-experience placements and employment is a significant strength of this provision. The college has worked hard to develop strong working partnerships with a range of small to medium sized businesses. For example, there is currently a partnership with a major high street retailer to provide two week placements and guaranteed employment at the end. The links with these employers are also used effectively to provide work place visits and to facilitate the mock interview element of the employability qualification. Employers' value and report effective working relationships with the SWC which is underpinned by clear communication from the mentors about referrals and participants with the majority of participants well-matched to the job/work-experience roles. Overall communication, contact and the responsiveness of the project staff is very good.

There is a well-developed management information system, which effectively records and tracks the progress for each of the participants. This system is updated weekly and facilitates the monitoring and tracking for all of the qualifications completed; it also holds electronic copies for all certificates gained. Information on key performance data is also monitored and analysed across each of the sites and discussed at the appropriate meetings.

There are robust self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes which include the strong use and analysis of key performance data along with a wide range of stakeholder feedback to make effective evaluations. However, the partners and project staff could be more involved in this process and the self-evaluation report would benefit from further evaluations on the quality of the teaching and learning and mentoring processes to continue to promote improvement and consistency in and across the provision.

8. Safeguarding

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:

- review and update the safeguarding policy and procedures, including the code of conduct for staff, with a consistent use of terminology to ensure that they reflect current best practice.

9. Overall effectiveness

The South West College demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
SUSE+ ESF project 2015/2016	369	113%
SUSE+ ESF project 2016/2017	456	97%
SUSE+ ESF project 2017/2018	353	75%

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 and an associate assessor observed 46 participants in a range of settings including seven directed training sessions, five focus group meetings and individual meetings. Discussions were held with four members of the senior management team, nine mentors, eight tutors, 17 employers, 14 referral agencies, and three partner organisations and the project's administrator. The management information system, including the tracking and monitoring systems, individual action plans, progress reviews, participant files and relevant planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other related 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 project promoter:

The project promoter has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.
The project promoter demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.
The project promoter needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor and report on the project promoter's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The project promoter 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 project promoter'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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