



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy



Department of
Education
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Dear Ms Hillen

MONITORING VISIT TO STEPPING STONES NI

On 20 and 21 July 2021, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a monitoring visit to the Stepping Stones NI European Social Fund projects (Stepping Stones Youth Service and Stepping Stones to Employment). The visit focused on the following key themes:

- strategies for the continued engagement of participants (particularly vulnerable participants), identification of their learning support needs, their levels of engagement and participation in the learning, teaching and assessment process and the monitoring and evaluation of their progress;
- the impact of Covid-19 on the curriculum, including arrangements for the participants' acquisition and application of practical/occupational skills and the online-based curriculum delivery where appropriate;
- progress with improvement work; and
- the arrangements for safeguarding and the care, welfare and support for staff and participants.

The inspectors have already provided feedback to you and Department for the Economy (Department) representatives at the end of the monitoring visit. A summary note of the key findings from the monitoring visit is outlined below and a copy of this letter has been shared with the Department.



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Key findings

In the areas evaluated, the main findings are:

- the clear identification of the individual needs of the participants, through the use of a skills scan, and the provision of tailored support and training to enable them to engage and progress at an appropriately targeted pace;
- the robust and well-planned tracking processes, which are used effectively to monitor the participants' attendance, levels of engagement and progress in their learning and training, including online/remote learning;
- the well-planned curriculum offer, which has been adapted appropriately and is delivered well through a range of online platforms and blended learning approaches;
- the good recognition of the extent of the impact of Covid-19, which has informed curriculum planning and delivery; this includes the introduction of creative writing sessions and other activities such as movie and book clubs, and the development of a training academy to offer short accredited courses, to maintain engagement and better meet the diverse and changing needs of the participants;
- the well-considered range of strategies that have been implemented effectively to reflect the changing needs of staff and participants and engage them in highly creative and supportive learning and training activities, including the use of social media and innovative podcasts on a range of relevant topics;
- the good or better quality of the learning, teaching and training observed on both projects;
- the appropriate and regular review and evaluation of the impact of the blended delivery model on the quality of the learning and training, including a well-planned session observation schedule, the outworking of which is used to good effect to inform the project promoter's quality improvement planning processes;
- the high levels of support in place for the participants to enable them to develop and apply the occupational and employability skills needed throughout their client journey, commensurate with their assessed ability level, with a particular focus on progression to the workplace;
- the comprehensive actions taken to address the areas for improvement identified in the most recent inspection reports, in particular the systematic development and embedding of appropriate changes to the safeguarding arrangements and associated policies and procedures; and

- the relevant actions taken by the project promoter, including the provision of targeted staff training, to ensure that staff and participants have been cared for, supported and made to feel safe and secure, especially in relation to learning, training and engaging online.

Going forward, Stepping Stones should:

- increase the number of employability services (disability) participants undertaking accredited training courses; and
- broaden the focus of the session observation schedule to include, for example, peer observations in order to further support improvement in the quality of the learning, teaching and training.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the monitoring visit the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect the current legislation and practice.

The monitoring visit process is a supportive one and the findings will provide the organisation with the opportunity to reflect on current provision and to implement actions to address any areas identified for improvement.

Your District Inspector will continue to monitor and support the organisation.

Yours sincerely



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Inspection Services Team

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