

Monitoring Visits

Guidance for supportive monitoring visits in further education, work-based learning and European Social Fund projects (2021)

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



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Introduction

This guidance is intended to provide outline information around supportive monitoring visits across the further education, work-based learning and European Social Fund providers. While the document contains generic guidance around the arrangements for the visits, it is recognised that more flexible arrangements may, at times, be needed to suit the circumstances of individual organisations and their learners¹.

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the monitoring visits will be internally risk-assessed. Full account will also be taken of all the advice and guidance issued to the ETI, further education colleges and non-statutory providers by the Public Health Agency, the Department of Education, the Department for the Economy (Department) and any other relevant commissioning departments. During visits, the ETI will also comply with appropriate health and safety guidelines and those for lateral flow testing and the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) as required.

Purpose of the visit

District Inspectors have maintained contact with their district organisations in order to offer advice and support during the pandemic. All of the further education colleges, work-based learning providers and ESF projects have already submitted their recovery-focused quality improvement plans, which have been scrutinised by ETI. The thematic monitoring visits will provide a supportive model by which District Inspectors will be able to engage more fully with organisations, through an online, face-to-face or hybrid manner.

Organisations and the Department will be informed in advance by ETI that visits will be taking place during the period July to December 2021. The visit will normally be led by the organisation's District Inspector.

Proposed model

The model is based on ETI's current quality improvement planning inspection model. It will be informed by the organisation's most recently-submitted recovery-focused quality improvement plan.

The monitoring visit² will normally be arranged by the organisation's District Inspector. The duration of the visit will be proportionate to the size, scope and geographic spread of the organisation's provision; it will usually last one or two days, typically involving two inspectors. Where feasible, the ETI will deploy Associate Assessors on some of the visits.

The organisation's arrangements for safeguarding will be evaluated and reported on as part of the visits. The organisation should complete the most recent ETI [safeguarding proforma](#) to inform this aspect of the inspection.

¹ The term 'learners' is taken to include students in further education colleges, trainees and apprentices on work-based learning programmes and participants on ESF projects.

² There may be exceptional circumstances in which the Department could request ETI contact with the organisation outside of a monitoring visit, for example, a safeguarding concern.

The visit will comprise **two** parts:

1. The organisation will receive notification through a telephone call from the District Inspector or the Inspection Services Team (IST), around two weeks prior to the visit; soon after this, a short initial meeting (by telephone or video-call) will take place between the District Inspector and the senior leader(s) to make the necessary arrangements and answer any queries.

The District Inspector will: talk through the themes which will underpin the visit; discuss the arrangements for the completion of a confidential online learner questionnaire³ and agree a date for the return of the safeguarding proforma. ETI⁴ will **not** be requesting any other formal documentation to be provided in advance of the visit.

2. The visit to the organisation will normally be carried out over two days; it can be completed through face-to-face meetings, online (virtual) activities or a hybrid approach, in agreement with the organisation.

It is anticipated that the monitoring visit activities will mostly involve discussions with key staff, focus group meetings with learners and other key stakeholders (such as employers, collaborative partners). Where possible, a small sample of sessions will be observed, whether face-to-face or online. Inspectors will also scrutinise any relevant data and documentation that the organisation wishes to provide (within the limits of the time available). Feedback from learners and staff will be an important part of the visit.

The activities around the visit will be carefully planned and agreed in advance with the organisation within current operating constraints.

At the end of the monitoring visit, the organisation will be provided with oral feedback on the main emergent findings. A representative from the Department will be invited to attend this feedback. A short report letter will be issued to the organisation and the Department after the monitoring visit, outlining the key findings and a summary of any areas that the organisation needs to focus on going forward.

Selecting organisations

Organisations are selected for a monitoring visit using an evidence-informed risk-based approach, which includes:

- the outcome of the most recent formal inspection activity, particularly if the organisation was in the follow-up inspection process prior to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- information/evidence gathered by the District Inspector through communication with the organisation during the past two years;
- the outcome of the most recent ETI scrutiny of the quality of the organisation's self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes; or
- specific information, or a request for inclusion, from the Department.

³ A confidential on-line questionnaire will be used to collate learner/participant feedback and inform the work to be carried out during the visit.

⁴ The Department may request information/data from the provider from time to time, which should be supplied separately to it, if requested.

Visit themes

The monitoring visits will be based on the following themes:

- strategies for the continued engagement of learners (particularly vulnerable learners), 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 learners' 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 learners.

Appendix A: Planning outline for the monitoring visit to the organisation

Visit activities may be carried out on a face-to-face/remote/hybrid basis, in agreement with the organisation and taking account of up-to-date guidance.

Day 1	Activity*
9.15 am	ETI arrival (online registration) and introductions. Short ETI team briefing/planning meeting.
Around 9.30 am	Initial meeting with senior leader(s). Short oversight presentation (by senior leader) on the themes. Completed safeguarding proforma provided to the Reporting Inspector. Sharing of timetables to select and agree observations, workplace visits, focus groups and other activities (a suggested plan to be drawn up by the organisation in advance of the visit and agreed and finalised during this meeting). Clarification of any queries.
10.30 am (onwards)	Lesson/session observations (online and face-to-face). Workplace visits, employer interviews. Scrutiny of relevant documentation. Focus group(s) with learners/participants. Meetings with staff, senior and middle leaders, designated staff as required.
Around 4.00 pm	Brief update meeting with the senior leader(s).
Day 2**	Activity
Morning	Brief meeting with senior leader(s) to confirm arrangements for day two. Quality assurance/monitoring visit activities continue.
Afternoon	Short team moderation meeting. Report writing.
Around 4.00 pm	Short oral feedback to a small group of senior/middle leaders and a representative from the governing body/management committee. A representative from the Department will also be invited to attend. (approximately 30 minutes)
Within 2 weeks	Issue of report letter to the organisation and the Department.

** The range of activities should be planned in accordance with the size of the ETI team, the size and scope of the organisation's provision, and the time allocated for the visit. This may include a review of online resources, learning management systems or online lessons, in agreement with the organisation.*

*** Where applicable; some visits may be completed in one day.*

Appendix B: Format of monitoring visit report letter

Introduction

In <month 20XX>, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a monitoring visit. The visit focused on the following key themes:

- strategies for the continued engagement of learners (particularly vulnerable learners), 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 learners' 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 learners.

Key findings

In the areas evaluated, the main findings are:

-

Going forward, the organisation should focus on:

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Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding learners ... <Level>

Appendix C: Thematic lines of enquiry during the monitoring visit

Theme 1: Strategies for the continued engagement of learners (particularly vulnerable learners), 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.

To what extent:

1. Have the individual needs of the learners, particularly those most vulnerable and reluctant learners, been identified and are they being supported effectively to enable them to continue to engage in the learning, teaching and assessment process?
2. Have processes been put in place to monitor and evaluate the levels of engagement, participation and attendance of the learners, and the progress they are making in overcoming any barriers to learning and development going forward?

Theme 2: The impact of Covid-19 on the curriculum, including arrangements for the learners' acquisition and application of practical/occupational skills and the online-based curriculum delivery where appropriate.

To what extent:

1. Have the curriculum planning and assessment processes been reviewed and revised in order to allow all of the learners to continue to access and progress, at an appropriate pace, in their learning and development?
2. Have more flexible delivery arrangements, such as the use of online or blended learning been implemented, and the impact on the quality of learning and training reviewed and evaluated accordingly?
3. Have the learners been supported to develop and apply practical/occupational skills at the required level of their programme, including in the workplace (if appropriate)?

Theme 3: Progress with improvement work.

To what extent:

1. Are the areas for improvement in the most recent inspection activity being addressed?
2. Are the priorities identified for short and longer-term improvement appropriate?
3. Is there evidence of progress and impact from the identified actions for improvement in the most recent quality improvement plan?

Theme 4: The arrangements for safeguarding and the care, welfare and support for staff and learners.

To what extent:

1. Have the arrangements for care and welfare and safeguarding been updated in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Has action been taken to ensure and evaluate that, as far as possible, staff and learners have been cared for and supported and made to feel safe and secure, particularly when working and engaging online and during the periods of lockdown?

Appendix D: Protocols for working online during monitoring visits

Online meetings

To comply with possible data sharing and other confidentiality requirements, ETI would be grateful if attendees would abide by the following protocols for any online aspects of the monitoring visit:

- the preferred online video conferencing platform (e.g. MS Teams, Zoom, Webex, etc.) should be agreed by ETI and the organisation in advance of the meeting;
- the organisation will be asked to invite representatives to the meeting and forward the invitation, but only to those who have been agreed between the lead/reporting inspector and the representative/senior managers (the organisation will be aware of diary commitments before confirming a meeting and will know exactly who will attend when a member of staff has accepted an invitation);
- ETI will chair each meeting;
- ETI, in agreement with the organisation, will reserve the right to control access to the meeting and to bring the meeting to an end in the event of any concerning behaviours;
- ETI inspectors will, where possible, use an official online backdrop during meetings. Other participants should also use appropriate backgrounds during meetings;
- no meeting or any part of it is permitted to be recorded by either party. ETI does **NOT** agree to any recording being made at any time;
- attendees should use their name and organisation as their profile for identification purposes;
- attendees are asked as far as reasonably possible to stay present during the meeting by keeping their camera turned on, unless otherwise directed by the chair;
- attendees should be aware of their surroundings and any background noise or activity;
- all attendees apart from the speakers or facilitators shall be put on mute when necessary;
- attendees are asked to use the 'hand up' function and go through the chair during meetings and respect the right of other participants to speak without interruption;
- attendees are asked to be aware of the appropriate use of the chat function. No personal comments or opinions should be included; further, the live chat stream should only be used during the meeting to note relevant website links and other information with the consent of the chair of the meeting; and
- opportunities for questions and answers will be agreed with the chair at the beginning of the meeting.

Online discussions/focus group meetings with learners

A key part of the monitoring visit will be engagement with learners. Any online meeting with learners should normally last no longer than 25-30 minutes (depending on group size). Two members of ETI will be present for the online discussion/focus group meeting. One inspector will take the lead, particularly in relation to introductions and sharing protocols with the learners (see below) and one inspector will take notes as pre-agreed.

Prior to the online focus group meeting, the lead inspector/reporting inspector will agree with the organisation:

- the date and timing of the online meeting;
- group size (up to a maximum of 12) and the selection of the learners;
- the online platform to be used and who will share the link with the learners; and
- sharing the protocols below with the organisation and asking them to share and discuss them in advance with the learners.

During the focus group meeting and discussion the lead inspector will:

- introduce both inspectors and set a welcoming atmosphere, share a few general comments about meeting online as opposed to face-to-face, and express thanks to the learners for joining the focus group;
- outline to the learners the purpose of the meeting – ‘to collate their views on their experiences in the organisation to allow ETI to share key messages and continue to improve your learning and teaching experiences’;
- remind the learners of the protocols (see below);
- adopt a listening stance to allow learners to answer questions and ensure that all of them have an opportunity to participate; and
- on concluding the discussion thank the learners and ensure that the meeting finishes on time and on a positive note.

Protocols for online engagement with learners:

- at the beginning of the focus group meeting provide an opportunity for learners to introduce themselves (using a first name only);
- ask the learners to keep their camera on if possible and only turn it off if there is a connectivity issue; also ensure that they ‘blur’ their screen or have a ‘neutral’ background (If the learners are not sure about this function, the organisation can provide instruction in advance of the meeting);
- learners should keep their audio on mute unless they are speaking;
- to ask a question learners should use the ‘raise hand’ function (or equivalent);
- emphasise to learners that feedback to the organisation will be general and they will not be directly quoted, except if there is a concern for an individual’s welfare, including a safeguarding disclosure (in these situations the ETI will talk to the learner directly and follow safeguarding procedures); and
- state that the meeting will not be recorded, and that recording by them is not permitted. However a short written note of key points raised will be kept by the inspectors.

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