

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in Action Mental Health

Working It Out

Report of a Call 2 Visit in April 2022



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



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Context

Action Mental Health (AMH) is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Working It Out European Social Fund (ESF) project across Northern Ireland (NI). This project is part-funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014-2020 and DfE. The strategic aim of the Programme is to: combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity; and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce. It is aligned to the European Union 2020 Strategy for Jobs and Growth.

In April 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 2 visit to AMH on behalf of DfE to evaluate the capacity of the project promoter to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision. The Call 2 visit was informed by the quality improvement plan which has been scrutinised by ETI.

Views of participants

At the time of the Call 2 visit, 666 participants¹ were registered on the project.

ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups across NI. In addition, forty percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire, with almost half of the respondents providing very positive additional written comments.

All of the participants reported very positively about the extent to which they are supported within a very welcoming, caring and nurturing environment. They value highly the kindness, commitment and enthusiasm of staff to meeting their individual needs, through bespoke provision which matches very well their interests and aspirations. They reported that they are helped to gain, or regain, the confidence and the skills to deal with their often complex personal circumstances, in order to move back into family life and society successfully, at a pace that is appropriate for them. Many of the participants stated that the organisation had been a lifeline to them during the lockdowns and had provided crucial regular contact, combating loneliness during a very difficult time. Digital devices were provided for a number of the participants which they found invaluable.

The programme has provided a vital routine, structure, purpose and social support for the participants. All of the participants were positive about the impact the programme is having on their emotional and mental health and wellbeing, providing them with opportunities to move forward constructively. This has facilitated their engagement in an expansive range of activities and for many of them to progress to employment, further education or training, or volunteering.

¹ All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter.

Focus of the Call 2 Visit

The Call 2 visit focused on evaluating the extent to which the project promoter is able to demonstrate its capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Working It Out ESF project.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Two of the key areas which the organisation has prioritised for improvement through its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are to:

- address the impact of social isolation and support the re-engagement of participants in the community; and
- provide employment officers with the knowledge, skills and resources to meet the changing needs of the external environment.

Key Findings

The Call 2 visit identified the following key findings.

- The curriculum provided for the participants is very good. It is broad, balanced and flexible and is used appropriately to tailor the programme to meet the individual participant's needs, aspirations and recovery requirements. There are excellent opportunities to develop both employability and personal skills through a comprehensive range of accredited and non-accredited training courses. Accreditation is available, in for example, business administration, health and social care, retail, healthy living, digital skills, gardening, disc jockey, carpentry and joinery, mental health awareness, drug awareness, stress management techniques and skills for garden horticulture. In addition to the wide range of accredited provision, the project also delivers an extensive range of non-accredited activity which encompasses, social and recreation activities, health and wellbeing, independent living and wider community engagement. The curriculum is designed in consultation with participants, and reviewed regularly, to ensure that it meets their needs, and supports the recovery of those with mental ill-health needs. AMH managers have also developed productive relationships with almost all of the local regional colleges to ensure that there is appropriate access for participants to engage in essential skills provision each academic year.
- Training schedules in each local office are developed to take account of the skills set of staff and the needs and preferences of participants. This has contributed to the development of effective specialist provision for adults with mental health needs, for example, there are four youth programmes for 18-25 year olds and one for participants who also are on the autistic spectrum. The learning, teaching and mentoring sessions observed were very effective in supporting positive learning and progression in very well-resourced environments. Attention is given to the accessibility of all materials, for example, through adaptations and translations for participant groups who

have additional learning needs, and for newcomers. Skills coaches have developed good relationships with the participants who engage well in their learning and are developing appropriate employability, personal and vocational skills. In the well-planned sessions observed, participants enjoyed the creative aspects of the tasks set which helped to encourage them to contribute to the sessions and enhanced their personal well-being. Individual support was provided sensitively and very effectively.

- The participants are referred to the project by a range of mental health practitioners, from the mental health teams of the five health trusts, and work coaches from the Jobs and Benefits offices. Excellent relationships, professional trust and collaborative partnership working exists with these referral agencies; they report the impact of the AMH service on those who are referred as being very positive. All of the outcomes on the project are very positive and are in line with the cumulative and challenging targets set, including: overall enrolments, progression to further education or training, and into employment. AMH have exceeded their target for the number of single and full qualifications achieved by their participants. Retention on the programme is outstanding. With Call 2 closing, any participant who is exiting Call 2 and enrolling on Call 3 will be recorded with an outcome of into education or training².
- The well-structured induction process for participants which takes place one morning a week over a six week period, focuses on building self-confidence and self-esteem, and results in an accredited outcome. An initial baseline assessment is used well to inform provision for the individual participant ensuring that it is tailored to their individual needs and interests, and is agreed by the participant and their designated key worker. The process informs well the participant's first action plan which outlines their employment and personal well-being goals, with achievable and realistic targets, reflecting their needs and preferences under the three project strands of personal development, vocational skills and employability. The progress of each participant is reviewed regularly with the relevant staff, and targets are appropriately amended and updated.
- Senior management in AMH responded very quickly to the onset of the pandemic and put very effective systems and processes in place to deliver an adapted provision for participants, with ongoing support for them and staff. During the first lockdown, AMH implemented a comprehensive one-to-one key worker support system in order to reduce social isolation. A strong commitment to the effective use of technology has facilitated the implementation of blended learning approaches and the further development of hybrid learning, in order to effectively adapt to the new learning environment. This is evidenced by a significant investment in a company-wide information technology infrastructure project.

² As per DfE European Social Fund Information Memo 09/22 – Performance monitoring – updating participant data.

- The AMH management information system is fit-for-purpose and supports well the tracking and monitoring of participant progress. There is an appropriate reporting system that identifies easily the number of participant interactions and interventions, both at a local and regional level, informing well management at each location of progress and outcomes. During the pandemic the system was skilfully adapted to include a tracking system to effectively collect and analyse data on participant contact and engagement.
- Through the provision of a suite of accredited training and non-accredited wellbeing activities delivered remotely to participants, AMH has supported them to stay engaged and benefit from group interaction while physically isolated. As the lockdowns eased and participants were permitted to return to face-to-face classes, the project promoter continued to offer a broad, balanced range of support to include both virtual and face-to-face interactions to meet the preferences and needs of the participants. From June 2021, participants have been encouraged to engage safely in outdoor activities such as walking groups, digital photography and gardening in order to address social isolation, and to promote emotional wellbeing and re-engagement in the community.
- Responding to the changing employment context caused by the pandemic and evidenced by detailed analysis of labour market information, AMH conducted a review of their employment service in November 2020. The objective was to ascertain the levels of confidence staff had in engaging with employers in the changed employment environment. The results led to the design and delivery of a package of support for employment officers including training in communicating confidently in the context of the pandemic; disability employment awareness sessions for employer-facing staff; and motivational interviewing techniques. With the creation of a working group, systems, processes and documentation were standardised, new promotional materials were developed and new employer partnerships successfully initiated. The change process and the positive impact of the work, resulting in more participants gaining employment, work placements and volunteering opportunities, has been monitored on an ongoing basis and staff views are highly valued and actioned.
- The strategic leadership and management is highly effective and a strong participant-centred culture and ethos is embedded across the organisation. The staff at all levels are highly skilled, committed and enthusiastic in undertaking their respective roles. They are empathetic and sensitive to the needs of the participants and place an appropriate focus on establishing positive relationships with participants, in which trust and confidence is developed at a pace and level which is appropriate for the participants. Since the last inspection in March 2018³, there has been a continued focus on developing and extending further effective quality assurance processes to support ongoing improvements of all aspects of project delivery. In addition, the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes have been strengthened effectively to include more incisive evaluations around core business areas such as the quality of learning, teaching and training and the impact of middle leadership.

³ [European Social Fund provision in Action Mental Health - Working it Out \(etini.gov.uk\)](https://www.etini.gov.uk)

- There are effective systems within AMH to encourage and enable participants to have their voices heard, both within and external to the organisation, through membership of the Client Local Advisory Group (CLAG), which informs, and has representation on the Client Regional Forum. Participant consultation groups meet regularly at a local level, and views are shared, recorded and actioned in a systematic manner. In addition, participants contribute to organisational policy review and are also included in external consultations at a regional level for example inputting to the recent Mental Health Strategy, and the Department for the Communities Disability Strategy. The AMH strategy for 2022-25 has been co-produced with participants and supported by staff at all levels in the organisation. It sets out the strategic priorities and objectives to deliver and develop quality mental health and wellbeing services and support, in light of significant societal changes due to the pandemic.
- Targeted training opportunities further empower participants in areas such as employment rights and assertiveness. A well-established weekly newsletter is produced and shared with participants across the region, facilitating excellent opportunities to share personal successes, showcase events and to further promote practical support and self-help strategies.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants in the Working It Out ESF project reflect current legislation and practice.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, AMH demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for the Working It Out ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Working It Out	Over the four-year period ⁴
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	2107 (98%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	226 (105%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	210 (100%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	280 (87%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this face-to-face and on-line visit included: the observation of 16 sessions of practice (face-to-face); discussions with a sample of participants (154) during their learning and development sessions and in focus group meetings; discussions with employers and external referral agencies and with key staff (including the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements); and, the opportunity for all participants to complete a confidential questionnaire. Inspectors also scrutinised relevant data and documentation provided by the ESF project promoter.

ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework 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%

⁴ From April 2018 to December 2021.

Overall outcome

ETI use one of the following outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the project promoter:

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, xxxx demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for xx ESF project.

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, xxxx demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for xx ESF project.

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, xxxx has not demonstrated sufficient capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for xx ESF project. ETI will continue to monitor how the project promoter brings about improvement and the Department may consider further action.

Safeguarding outcome

ETI use one of the following outcomes when evaluating the project promoter's arrangements for safeguarding the participants:

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the for xx ESF project reflect current legislation and practice.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the for xx ESF project reflect broadly current legislation and practice.

The project promoter, however, needs to:

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the for xx ESF project are unsatisfactory. <DN insert detail>.

ETI will return to the provider within six working weeks to monitor progress in addressing the unsatisfactory arrangements for safeguarding.

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