

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
Belfast Active Communities Network

Generating Opportunities and Learning
Through Sport Plus (GOALS Plus)

Report of a Call 2 Visit in February 2022



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



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Context

Belfast Active Communities Network is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Generating Opportunities and Learning Through Sport Plus (GOALS Plus) European Social Fund (ESF) project. 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 February 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 2 visit to Belfast Active Communities Network 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, 50 participants¹ were registered on the project.

While none of the participants completed the online questionnaire, ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development and mentoring sessions and in a focus group meeting.

Feedback from these participants is very positive; they all reported that they have enjoyed and benefitted from their experiences on the project. They reported that they are listened to and that their views and ideas are acted upon by management and staff; for example, they help to shape the curriculum through the identification of issues that are of interest or impacting on them. They have found staff to be very helpful and supportive, with the provision matched well to their personal and social development and individual learning and progression needs.

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 GOALS Plus 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:

- ensure that the curriculum offer is current and fit-for-purpose in meeting the needs of the participants; and
- provide relevant professional development and learning for staff to support curriculum delivery.

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

Key Findings

The Call 2 visit identified the following key findings.

- The curriculum offer for the participants is very good. A very well-planned programme of accredited and non-accredited training and tailored mentoring support is in place; including beauty therapy, barbering, health and fitness, construction industry register (CSR), and security industry training. The curriculum provided is improving the participants' chances of progressing to: a work placement; into employment, including self-employment through the development of a social enterprise model; and into further education or training. The project focuses on meeting the individual personal, social and learning development needs, and getting the best outcomes, particularly for those participants who are most socially excluded. Participants are encouraged to give something back to their community or wider society by undertaking volunteering opportunities with social action projects. It is of note that the project promoter aims to avoid duplication in provision with other local training organisations.
- Throughout the lockdowns, the delivery of provision continued with a strong focus on emotional and physical health and wellbeing. For example there were "garden gate" visits and emergency mentoring sessions for participants negatively impacted by the isolation of lockdown. With the easing of restrictions, governance decisions were taken by the project promoter to extend the unit space available to the project by sixty percent to allow for social distancing and get participants physically back into the project.
- The learning and development and mentoring sessions observed were effective. They were planned well and characterised by: an excellent rapport between the staff and the participants; an effective range of learning and training strategies and activities; and staff who work well together when peer teaching. Group discussions, debates and skills-based sessions engaged the participants in enjoyable learning experiences. The mentoring sessions provided for the participants are supportive and enabling.
- A particular strength of the provision is the 'wraparound' support service in place for the participants to access the project promoter's wider suite of funded programmes and initiatives. An ethos of positivity exists, with participants reporting that they are actively encouraged to avail of as much training and skills development as possible during their time on the project. The service supports the participants before, during, or after their time on the project; for example, to gain qualifications such as essential skills through the Belfast Active Communities Network (ACN) education hub, or to participate in a range of sporting, leisure and social activities. Over the four-year period, to date, all of the outcomes on the project are very positive; the overall target for recruitment has been met, and the targets for the progression of participants into employment or education and training have been exceeded. Almost all of the participants have been successfully retained on the project.

- Very high levels of support are in place for the participants, underpinned by the staff's knowledge of their backgrounds and life experiences. Through well-considered advice, guidance and relevant signposting the participants are developing well their social dispositions and attitudes for progression and input to wider society. The inclusive environment created by the project promoter enables the participants from a range of backgrounds across Belfast to learn with and from one another. The participants demonstrate understanding and sensitivity towards one another, both in the formal learning and development sessions and in their informal interactions.
- The leadership and management of the project, at all levels, is very effective. All of the areas for development identified in the baseline visit in April 2019 have been addressed. The actions taken have informed the strategic development of the project and also the ACN throughout the United Kingdom (UK). The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes of Belfast ACN have been further developed and identify clearly the key strengths and areas for development in the provision. To improve these further, the targets set in the quality improvement plan should be better quantified to allow the progress and the impact of the actions taken to promote improvement to be more fully measured and evaluated.
- There are appropriate systems in place to track and monitor the progress of the participants on the project. Since the baseline visit, an effective system has been implemented to track and monitor the development of the participants' soft skills, informed by research carried out by the Ulster University. Going forward, the collated information should be used within the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process to evaluate the impact the project is having on improving their life chances.
- The managers are focused on reflective practice and addressing inequality through the implementation of the ACN eight-point progression pathway methodology. Staff are highly experienced and have a sound knowledge in their areas of delivery. They are provided with good opportunities to undertake continuing professional development and learning, including for example in the areas of restorative justice and trauma informed practice.
- A key strength of the provision are the links and partnerships established with a wide range of key stakeholders, including statutory agencies, support agencies, industry, universities, community groups, charitable organisations, post-primary schools and other training providers. The stakeholders interviewed were positive about their experiences working with the project and the support and quality of the provision for the participants. The relationships built by the staff with the participants were cited as paramount, with the project referred to as a "last stop" for some of the young people. The link with the ACN across the UK benefits the project promoter in the delivery of the project and the participants; for example, they have opportunities to engage with other young people through the ACN UK Youth Committee.

Safeguarding

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

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, Belfast Active Communities Network demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for the GOALS Plus ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – GOALS Plus	Over the four-year period ²
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	602 (100%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	141 (118%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	350 (117%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	572 (95%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this face-to-face visit included: observation of five sessions of practice (face-to-face); speaking with a sample of participants (16) during their learning and development and mentoring sessions and in a focus group meeting; face-to-face and online discussions with key stakeholders (trustees, employers, and other partner training organisations) 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%

² 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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