

# EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

## European Social Fund provision in Disability Action

### Job Match

### Report of a Call 2 Visit in March 2022



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



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## Context

Disability Action is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Job Match European Social Fund (ESF) project. The project promoter does not provide directed training as the intervention provided through the project is intentionally short-term, a maximum of six to nine months, and appropriately focused on progressing participants quickly to employment. 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 March 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 2 visit to Disability Action 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, 44 participants<sup>1</sup> were registered on the project.

ETI met and spoke with a small number of participants in a focus group. Fifty-five percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. They all indicated that the programme is well managed, and is preparing them well for their next steps. They feel confident to contact their support officer when they have a query, and they reported that the arrangements put in place to help keep them safe from COVID-19 when in the organisation or workplace are clear and consistent.

## 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 Job Match 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:

- maintain and develop further effective engagement with employers and participants throughout the pandemic; and
- adapt to hybrid working using an online repository for resources for the team and participants, and as a means of stimulating collaboration between the team.

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<sup>1</sup> All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter.

## Key Findings

The Call 2 visit identified the following key findings.

- Participants can access very good personalised support, including mentoring and coaching from the supported employment officers (SEOs) or external support from a Directory of Services<sup>2</sup> to meet their identified needs which are recorded in personalised action plans. As a consequence of the pandemic, Disability Action has developed effective flexible hybrid working, balancing well the advantages of using technology with the need for in-person meetings to identify and support mental health and wellbeing needs. An increased focus on mental health and well-being has been further strengthened by the recruitment of a mental health counsellor.
- Over the four-year period, to date, all of the outcomes of the project are high; the overall targets for into employment have been exceeded and almost all of the participants have been retained on the project. High levels of sustained employment have been achieved through maintaining effective contact and providing ongoing pastoral support for the participants, and progression to the Workable NI programme<sup>3</sup>. A particular challenge for the project throughout the pandemic in terms of recruitment, has been the large proportion of potential participants who were shielding due to their risk-profile.
- The SEOs have excellent links with their local communities and they use them well to provide access to supported employment within the participants' own locality. The participants have been successful in progressing into a range of job roles including retail, engineering, child care, production and IT. The project promoter raises awareness with employers and government departments about the available talent pool leading to positive, sustained employment outcomes.
- Effective structures are in place for the strategic management and development of the project with an appropriate focus on meeting the specific needs of the participants. The staffing complement includes employees who themselves have disabilities and direct experience of the challenges and support required in the workplace. The organisation has a well-established, data-informed quality improvement planning process, which has been enhanced with the recent introduction of an online collaboration tool to effectively manage action planning within the team. Appropriate actions have been taken to address the areas for development identified during the ETI inspection of June 2017<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> A spreadsheet listing local training and support services locally available to participants.

<sup>3</sup> Workable (NI) is delivered by three providers contracted by the Department for Communities (DfC), including Disability Action, to provide a flexible range of long-term support to help people with disabilities to find and keep work.

<sup>4</sup> [European Social Fund provision in Disability Action - Job Match \(etini.gov.uk\)](https://etini.gov.uk)

- There is evidence of many success stories and achievements celebrated by participants though these are not currently captured consistently. There is an opportunity for the project promoter to more widely disseminate success stories through the use of the website and social media, to showcase the positive impacts of the project on participants who have entered employment, education or training. It is appropriate that in-house expertise in the use of social media to promote the work of the project is being developed further for Call 3.
- The SEO team collaborate well through regular meetings, effective peer support and the use of an online repository to share resources. Hybrid working provides an effective way to work flexibly, with SEOs supporting each other to meet targets. Peer reflective practice and very good internal development sessions, are led by SEOs using appropriate strategies to stimulate discussion and thinking to improve practice. The SEOs use the Vocational Profile<sup>5</sup> effectively to identify the capabilities and support needs of the participants.
- The project promoter identified as an area for improvement the need to further increase employer engagement and as a consequence has recruited two employer engagement officers. Their remit is to manage employer relations, organise “Meet the Employer” events and support the SEOs in finding suitable employment opportunities for participants.
- A safeguarding group was established in August 2021 with an appropriate emphasis on developing good practice, maintaining a safe environment during COVID-19, leading to a cross-organisational review and implementation of an effective “matrix” clearly defining roles, responsibilities and training.
- There are well-established links between the project and a wide range of agencies, government departments and support organisations including the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment, with an emphasis on advocating for and supporting the rights of people of all ages and abilities.

## Safeguarding

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

## Overall outcome

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

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<sup>5</sup> A proforma used in the initial assessment of participants to consistently capture information on the participants qualifications, routine, physical, sensory and emotional support needs, career goals, nature of disability, existing skills, et cetera.

# APPENDIX

## A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Job Match	Over the four-year period <sup>6</sup>
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	591 (97%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	260 (183%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	185 (96%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	585 (99%)

## B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this online visit included: an online focus group with a small number of participants; discussions with an employer, external 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%

<sup>6</sup> 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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