

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
South West College

College Connect

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

South West College is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver and lead the College Connect European Social Fund (ESF) project across the six colleges of Further Education. 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 South West College 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, 129 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. In the focus group meetings, the participants were positive about their experiences on the project, and commented particularly on the range of provision and progression pathways available to them, and the mentors and staff who support them well across all aspects of the project.

Forty-four percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. Although a small number of the respondents indicated they did not feel confident contributing to discussions or talking while in the classroom, workshop or in the workplace, they all reported that they feel confident to contact their mentor and tutors when they do not understand or have a query. They also highlighted the well taught face-to-face learning and development and mentoring sessions delivered across the colleges.

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 College Connect 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 further:

- develop a wider range of Level 1 and below qualifications to meet the needs of participants; and
- strengthen the performance monitoring and quality assurance of the project.

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.

- Overall, the curriculum offer across the six colleges is very good; it is well-planned, designed and differentiated appropriately. Across the colleges the offer is participant-centred and is aligned well to the demographic profile of each and to the needs of the local and regional economy. Delivery is flexible, with the mentors and staff ensuring that the curriculum experiences are matched well to the participants' individual interests, personal and social development and well-being needs and aspirations. To extend further the range of level 1 qualifications offered to participants, additional qualifications are being cascaded across the colleges including sports, first aid, coaching, along with the online delivery of the World Host programme that will enable all of the participants to access the associated qualification. The colleges have also developed working relationships with a wide range of external organisations and specialist agencies which are used to good effect to support the learning and development needs of the participants.
- The learning and development and mentoring sessions observed were good or very good; a significant minority were very good. The key features of the more effective practice include: the development of the participants' thinking and ideas to extend their oral and written responses through effective questioning; peer support; a range of stimuli, including the effective use of information learning technology; active purposeful learning; and, enabling participants to have the confidence to ask questions to clarify understanding.
- The colleges have placed a strong emphasis on and invested in the provision of the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, including providing the participants with the opportunity to progress to higher levels. The participants recognise the value of achieving essential skills qualifications and understand how important they are in enabling them to access the wider curriculum and progress to further or higher education, training and employment. Most of the participants demonstrated good oral communication skills and engaged well and positively in the focus group discussions. Overall, the project outcomes are positive. The project has met its overall enrolment target for Call 2 and most of the participants have been successfully retained. Into employment and progression to further education and training targets have been exceeded. The variability in recruitment across the colleges has been identified as an area for improvement and is being addressed through implementation of a participant recruitment strategy.
- Overall, the wide range of vocational taster sessions and enhancement activities, such as industrial visits and guest speakers, provide the participants with a wide range of experiences to support and underpin their progression and career decision-making. The participants are well informed of the progression pathways available to them and are encouraged appropriately to

identify the career pathway that best meets their needs. In order to enhance career planning further, the colleges, through their quality improvement planning processes, have identified the need to continue to increase the opportunities for all of the participants to engage in work-experience placements.

- During the lockdowns, while the provision of work-experience placements was severely impacted, industry talks continued online which facilitated increased access and shared experiences for the participants across the colleges. The staff report that there are currently challenges with employers' indemnity and insurances which is affecting the availability of work-experience placements.
- Across the colleges, a wide range of courses and enrichment activities are offered to meet the participants' personal and social development needs and improve their confidence, motivation and resilience. For example, they are provided with opportunities to: focus on emotional health and well-being through the provision of relationship and sexuality education; or develop their independent travel skills. The participants' wider skills and dispositions are also developed throughout the programme including team-working, leadership and enterprise skills along with life skills such as personal finance. Alongside the mentors and staff, external agencies and organisations are used very effectively to support delivery.
- The provision for care, support and guidance is of a high quality. The project participation is diverse, but is delivered across the colleges, through an ethos of positivity and inclusivity. The mentors provide high levels of support and challenge to the participants and also work closely with the colleges' student support services and safeguarding teams to provide tailored, effective support for the participants to address and overcome a range of often complex barriers to progression. Through the high quality mentorship provided, the participants report that they feel well cared for and supported.
- There is tracking of the participants' soft skills development using a self-assessment toolkit, along with a cumulative annual survey which is used to evaluate the impact of the mentoring, and learning and teaching as part of the quality improvement planning process. This tracking is well informed by the ongoing and regular review of the participants' progress during mentoring support sessions.
- Across the colleges, senior managers have a clear strategic vision and commitment to the work of the project. They have invested significant staffing and physical resources to support the effective delivery of the project, for example, in some colleges through the provision of dedicated base rooms, meditation and time-out spaces. Staff have been recruited with the necessary skills and dispositions to meet well the needs of the participants. A wide range of professional development training is available across the colleges to support the staff in their work, including Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma Informed Practice, coaching and mentoring qualifications.

- Positive working relationships developed among the project coordinators and mentors have resulted in high levels of operational collaboration and a strong focus on the sharing of practice and resources. The mentors across the colleges meet regularly to share and develop effective practice. The collaborative working utilises effectively the staff's knowledge and expertise in delivering social inclusion projects to benefit the delivery of the College Connect project across the colleges.
- Appropriate actions have been taken to address the areas for development identified during the baseline visit in May 2019. Effective action was implemented to improve the overall retention rate from year 2 to year 4. Other actions taken included the implementation of: an initial assessment process to ensure that the project meets sufficiently the learning and development needs of the participants recruited; and, the enhanced provision for the essentials skills. The implementation of performance monitoring by the overall project coordinator, quality assuring in association with each individual college coordinator, has led to improved standardisation and consistency in the quality of the provision across the six colleges.
- The lead college successfully implemented an online portal to support the planning and organisation of all aspects of the provision across the six colleges, including the standardisation of processes such as tracking and monitoring, curriculum planning, and internal verification and the storage of centralised resources. The portal provides the colleges with a range of reports which are used effectively to inform quality improvement planning and curriculum development.

Safeguarding

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

Overall outcome

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

APPENDIX

A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – College Connect	Over the four-year period ²
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	683 (100%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	113 (188%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	315 (306%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	572 (84%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this face-to-face visit included: observation of 19 sessions of practice (face-to-face); speaking with a sample of participants (76) during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups; discussions with key stakeholders (including employers, and project partners) 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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