

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
The Appleby Trust

Employment Preparation Service

Report of a Call 2 Visit in March 2022



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Context

The Appleby Trust is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Employment Preparation Service 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 March 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 2 visit to The Appleby Trust 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, 29 participants¹ were registered on the project.

ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants in a focus group. All of the participants reported that they were very well supported by the staff and commented on their patience and dedication. They were positive about their learning experiences, developing new skills in the “Print It” social enterprise workshops. They were appreciative of the support received to enable them to enter the workplace and work placements. They also valued the opportunities to develop their social skills and relationships with others and reported that, their self-esteem and confidence has improved as a result.

Forty-one percent of participants completed the online questionnaire. All of the respondents indicated that the project is well managed, they find it both interesting and challenging, are making good progress and it is preparing them well for their next steps.

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 Employment Preparation Service 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 the participants’ wider skills by providing opportunities for the them to interact with customers and promote the services through social media; and
- tailor the work and social skills assessment to be more specific to individual participants.

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 provided for the participants is good and has been revised as the project has developed to better match the learning, development and progression needs of the participants. After appropriate baseline assessments, the participants are either supported to gain employment through relevant work experience opportunities, or to develop commercial and industry relevant skills in the project promoter's "Print It" workshops.
- In the "Print It" workshops, there is a calm work environment, with individualised work schedules that provide clear routines for the participants. They have good opportunities to develop a range of skills including: making booklets and wedding invitations; embellishing cards; sorting leaflets; using a laminator; and, word processing. They were observed tri-folding leaflets, folding order of services, batching and using counting boards. They engaged well and demonstrated a good standard of work. The staff provide high levels of enabling support to meet the complex needs of the participants, with a particular focus on their personal and social development to help them become more independent, develop their confidence and raise their aspirations.
- Revised processes have been put in place to provide opportunities for the participants to develop their wider skills by interacting with customers, including greeting them in person, telephoning them and handing over orders. The participants' work is valued which improves their self-esteem. For example, each order has a customer information card indicating which participants worked on the order and the role they played. In addition, the participants have been involved in promoting the "Print It" service through social media, uploading examples of their work.
- The project promoter has acted on the findings in the previous inspection², including, for example, refinement of the assessment process to ensure that it identifies more clearly the key areas for development for each participant and informs better the incremental targets to promote progression. The process has been further developed so that generic skill areas can be adapted and tailored to include additional individualised skill areas for development where appropriate. For example, the personal action plans of participants with limited oral or written communication skills include how alternative communication methods will be used to help them to better communicate with other people, including their tutors and peers. The skills assessments are regularly reviewed with the results being presented graphically and shared with the participants to demonstrate and discuss the progress they have made over time. The participants report that this process helps to improve their confidence and motivation.

² [European Social Fund provision in Appleby Trust - Employment Preparation Service \(etini.gov.uk\)](https://www.etini.gov.uk)

- Nearly all of the outcomes on the project are positive. Over the four-year period, to date, the target for recruitment has been exceeded; almost all of the participants have been successfully retained. There are high levels of progression of participants into employment which is well above the target. While the target for progression to further education and training has not been met, there are good opportunities for the participants to move into voluntary work as an alternative.
- There is effective leadership and management of the project. During lockdowns due to the pandemic, the staff worked effectively to continue to engage with the participants and kept in regular contact by telephone, video technology and doorstep calls. Learning, work and social activities were developed for the participants. The management established comprehensive measures to safely resume the face-to-face service as soon as possible within the guidelines for their participants, all of whom have complex needs and/or underlying health conditions.
- The project promoter has developed self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes with both staff and participants being involved in the process. The participants' input to the process is recognised by a leaflet that summarises the feedback they provided and the actions that have been taken place as a result. The quality improvement plan could be further improved with more specific and measurable targets to allow the progress and the impact of the actions taken to promote improvement to be more fully measured and evaluated.
- The project promoter has well-established links with the local Health Trust and these are used well to support recruitment to the project and to underpin the provision for care, welfare and support, for example dealing with mental health and anxiety issues. For those participants on work experience placements, effective links have been established with the employers to support both staff and participants to make the placement a positive experience.

Safeguarding

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

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, The Appleby Trust demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Employment Preparation Service ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Employment Preparation Service	Over the four-year period ³
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	128 (102%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	13 (1300%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	23 (32%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	115 (90%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this face-to-face visit included: the observation of three sessions of practice (face-to-face); a visit to a workplace; a focus group meeting with a sample of participants; discussions with key staff (including the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements) and employers; and, the opportunity for 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%

³ 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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