

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
The Royal National Institute of Blind People

Eye Work Too

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

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Eye Work Too 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 RNIB 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, 27 participants¹ were registered on the project.

ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions, in a focus group meeting and by telephone. Fifty-six percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire, with nearly half of the respondents providing additional written comments.

All of the participants responded very positively about the support they receive on the project and feel that their engagement with project staff has improved their confidence, self-esteem and self-belief, helped them to develop new skills and removed barriers to progression to further training, education or employment. All of the participants who ETI spoke with were able to provide a range of examples of skills development, practical and emotional help and support, including reasonable adjustments and social activities, which have considerably improved the quality of their lives.

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 Eye Work Too 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:

- develop the programme and capacity building for staff; and
- improve the participants' progress and outcomes through the further development of key transferable skills.

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. Since the introduction of the mostly remote delivery model as a consequence of the pandemic, the curriculum has become more holistic and flexible and better matched to the needs of people who are blind or partially sighted. The project promoter has developed the capacity of staff and participants to successfully deliver and engage in the programme using a remote delivery model, including one-to-one and group sessions. This model has improved the accessibility and flexibility of the programme, particularly for participants from rural areas.
- There is an appropriate focus on development of their personal and social development, alongside their employability skills. The programme has been developed further to include, for example, opportunities for the participants to: engage socially in a range of group activities; volunteer and co-facilitate in training sessions; take part in an employee discussion panel which includes former participants who have successfully progressed into employment; and the development of realistic remote mock interview panels. As a result, participants' aspirations are raised and they become more independent and motivated. Further development of employability resources is continuing, including the use of podcasts and videos of a range of interview scenarios.
- The one-to-one and group sessions observed were well-planned, met the participants' needs and engaged them well so that they made good progress in their learning and development. All of the outcomes on the project are positive. Over the four-year period, to date, the target for recruitment has been exceeded and almost all of the participants have been successfully retained. There are high levels of progression of participants into employment or education and training.
- A comprehensive baseline assessment toolkit has been developed that is used well to inform participant action plans which are comprehensive and tailored to individual need. The individualised plan informs well the programme for each participant, with quarterly reviews against appropriate targets. In addition, management review the progress of each participant with the relevant staff every six weeks and any issues are identified and addressed at an early stage.
- The use of information technology (IT) assistive technologies, and reasonable adjustments, are targeted and used well to meet the individual development and progression needs of each participant. A loan scheme for IT equipment and software has been introduced to support participants who do not have access to appropriate resources. The participants receive high levels of support to get them online, including training on using the equipment and the use of assistive technologies.

- There is highly effective leadership and management of the project. The challenges presented by the pandemic have resulted in proactive development of new, creative and effective methods of programme delivery, with staff supported well through the transition. There are effective quality improvement planning processes which result in identification of appropriate actions to further improve the provision for the participants. The project promoter places a high priority on quality improvement and has acted on the areas for development identified in the previous inspection², including for example improved use of targets in their quality improvement plan to demonstrate impact. Its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes identified the need at a strategic level to build employer capacity to better understand and facilitate employment opportunities for the blind and partially sighted. As a result they have engaged well with employers and have developed an e-learning resource that they can access.
- The project promoter offers expert advice and support to all participants on disclosing disability when seeking employment, including preparing a statement and guidance on how to do this effectively to a potential employer. The staff display high levels of skill, commitment and enthusiasm, providing effective levels of support to meet the complex needs of participants and to promote progression.
- Staff use well the wide range of services within RNIB to meet and support the wider needs of the participants, for example, the Sight Loss Advice service, RNIB Connect support networks, and Counselling Services and Technology for Life. In addition, good links have been established with a wide range of external organisations and these are used well to support recruitment to the project; they underpin the provision for care, welfare and support, for example dealing with mental health issues, and enable the participants to make progress in their learning and skills development.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- update its safeguarding policy to reflect better the local and current definition of adult safeguarding and associated reporting arrangements.

² [European Social Fund provision in The Royal National Institute of Blind People - Eye Work Too project \(etini.gov.uk\)](https://www.etini.gov.uk)

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, the Royal National Institute of Blind People demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Eye Work Too ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Eye Work Too	Over the four-year period ³
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	79 (101%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	24 (80%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	18 (80%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	75 (95%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this remote visit included: the observation of three sessions of practice (online); speaking with a sample participants (seven) during their learning and development sessions, in a focus group meeting and by telephone; discussions with key staff (including the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements); 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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