

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in Access Centre Northern
Ireland Limited

Skills to Succeed 4

Report of a Call 3 Visit in January 2023



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



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Context

Access Centre Northern Ireland Limited (AC-NI) is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Skills to Succeed 4 European Social Fund (ESF) project, as part of a third Call for projects which will run from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The project provides information technology (IT) training for people with a disability and long-term medical conditions and who are unemployed to enable them to develop key digital and employability skills and move closer to the labour market.

This project is part funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme (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 January 2023, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 3 visit to AC-NI on behalf of DfE to evaluate the capacity of the project promoter to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision.

Views of participants

At the time of the Call 3 visit, 29 participants were registered on the project (all performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter).

A small number of participants completed the online questionnaire and ETI also met and spoke with a sample of current and previous participants during their learning and development sessions, by telephone and in a focus group session.

The participants reported that they value the opportunity to access a range of relevant IT courses, delivered either face-to-face or online, which are matched to their needs, abilities, and interests. They particularly value the flexible delivery of the project which meets well their individual needs and barriers to learning. All of the participants reported that their levels of confidence and self-esteem have improved significantly, and that the project is supporting them very well in developing their employability, personal, and social skills. They value greatly the one-to-one support they receive from the staff.

Focus of the Call 3 Visit

During the Call 3 visit, ETI evaluated the effectiveness of the quality improvement planning processes and focused on two of the key areas which the organisation had prioritised for improvement through its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes:

- to formalise the processes used to gather participant feedback; and
- to plan for the sustainability of the project at the end of Call 3, and ensure that all of the participants achieve their individual targets.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Key Findings

The Call 3 visit identified the following key findings which include any areas for improvement to be addressed for the remainder of the third Call.

- The curriculum provided is matched appropriately to the interests, learning and progression needs of the participants; it is delivered in-house or online by experienced staff, including two volunteer IT tutor assistants. The participants complete IT User training with the opportunity to undertake a certificate, an award or individual unit qualifications at level 1 and 2 across a range of software application programmes, including word processing, databases, spreadsheets and project management. They also avail of job search and employability skills development activities, including curriculum vitae (CV) building, as well as one-to-one mentoring and support.
- The sessions observed were effective and well planned, with access to a range of focused and high-quality learning resources for the participants. They engaged well and the individualised support they received from their tutors challenged, encouraged and enabled each of them to make progress in their learning. In their practical training, the participants worked independently and at an appropriate pace matched well to their learning and development needs. The standards of work observed were good or better. They used word processing software effectively to enter and format text and present high quality documents, as well as using the basic and more advanced formulae and software functions of spreadsheet and database software to enter and manipulate data. The participants demonstrated a good understanding of the work being undertaken, what they needed to do to complete and achieve at the required level, and how they could transfer and apply their learning to a range of different scenarios, for example, in their volunteering and community work.
- The management and staff have a good overview of the progress the participants are making in their learning and training. Appropriate processes have been put in place to track and monitor attendance, progress and achievements through the use of a detailed individual learning plan, a weekly diary, and quarterly review meetings. The internal monitoring procedures should be developed further to ensure that all participants have received and understood the induction resources, including the arrangements for safeguarding and complaints.
- Recruitment to the project, to date, is 83% against the overall target; almost all of the participants have been retained on the project. Progression against the targets is low, for both progress to employment (40%) and to education and/or training (10%). As a consequence, the project promoter needs to review, as appropriate, the overall targets with DfE. Processes are being put in place to ensure that all of the participants recruited before Call 3 ends will have achieved their individual targets and that there is an appropriate exit strategy for them.

- The project is managed effectively. Staff are well experienced in the delivery of community-based training. Collegial working relationships and open channels of communication have been developed between management and staff. There is planning being undertaken for the sustainability of the project. Staff are kept well informed and up-to-date about all project matters, including the challenges related to funding and enrolment, through regular meetings.
- The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process provides a good overview and evaluation of the quality of the provision. The key strengths are clearly identified, however, the areas for improvement and subsequent actions to be taken could be more clearly defined. In addition, the procedures in place for collating the views of the participants should be formally integrated into the process. Overall, however, the organisation is planning appropriately for learning and quality improvement, including planning for the progression of participants.
- Appropriate links and partnerships have been developed with a range of stakeholders. These include other community organisations, training providers, jobs and benefits offices, and other statutory and support organisations, both for referral and recruitment purposes and to support and signpost participants, to enable them to overcome their barriers to progression.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding participants of the Skills to Succeed 4 ESF project reflect broadly current legislation and practice.

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- update the safeguarding policy to reflect current terminology and tailor the content more specifically to the needs of the organisation and the participants; and
- develop further the external reporting arrangements for both child protection and adult safeguarding, to include the contact details for local child and adult gateway teams.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, AC-NI demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Skills to Succeed 4 ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Skills to Succeed 4 **Since 1 April 2022**
(1 April 2022-18 January 2023)

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	29 (83%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	2 (40%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	1 (10%)
Retention – Number of early leavers and % against target	1 (97%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed two face-to-face learning and development sessions, spoke with a sample of current and previous participants in their learning and development sessions, through one-to-one telephone conversations, and in a focus group, and had discussions with the volunteer IT tutor assistants and key staff (to include quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements). Participants had the opportunity to complete a confidential questionnaire. Inspectors also scrutinised relevant data and documentation.

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%

Overall outcome

ETI use one of the following outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the project promoter:

At the time of the Call 3 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 the xx ESF project.

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, xxxx demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the xx ESF project.

At the time of the Call 3 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 the xx ESF project. ETI will continue to monitor how the project promoter brings about improvement and the Department for the Economy 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 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the xx ESF project reflect current legislation and practice.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the 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 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the xx ESF project are unsatisfactory. <DN insert detail>.

ETI will return to the project promoter within six working weeks to monitor and report on progress in addressing the safeguarding issues which have been identified.

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