

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in Compass Advocacy Network

WE CAN

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

The Compass Advocacy Network (Compass) is a charity based in Ballymoney, with additional premises in Ballymena and Coleraine. It is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the WE CAN 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 offers training and work experience for adults with learning disabilities, mental health issues and autism. Participants learn and develop skills with on-the-job training through a range of social enterprises.

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 Compass 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, 28 participants¹ were registered on the project.

Inspectors met with current and past participants who spoke positively about the wide range of work opportunities and placements afforded to them and the skills they have acquired. They spoke enthusiastically about how they enjoy working in furniture upcycling, recycling, and on the farm, and the training they receive to operate the necessary machinery associated with their work. The participants look forward to attending WE CAN and spoke very positively of the friendships they have established with peers, as well as the good working relationships they enjoy with staff.

A small number of current participants completed the online questionnaire. They all reported that their training programme is interesting, challenging and well managed. They are given regular feedback on how to improve their work and are well informed about how to stay safe and secure.

¹ All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter.

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 increase:

- motivation among participants; and
- internal job sampling opportunities for them.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Key Findings

The Call 3 visit identified the following key findings.

- The participant-centred, work-enablement curriculum provides an appropriate range of accredited short courses in independent living skills, as well as direct access to work experience, training, and job sampling. The short courses include modules such as cooking and meal preparation, time management and work awareness. Participants gain valuable work experience through sustained attendance at purposeful and productive training placements for up to three days a week within a number of Compass social enterprises. These include an established realistic working environment in the Ballymoney premises in “Can Can Recycling” and “Can Can Upcycling” facilities, and in a number of their successful retail shops in Ballymoney, Balllymena and Coleraine.
- Further purposeful training opportunities for participants have been realised since Compass purchased an eleven-acre farm known as Lislagan Farm just over a year ago, to provide more variety in training, such as horticulture and animal care. The additional training opportunities at the farm have included one-to-one and small group sessions, with staff and participants reporting that this change has positively increased motivation among participants as they particularly enjoy attending training there and carrying out the range of horticulture activities available. Funding has been secured to develop a range of projects at the farm involving, for example, beehives, a chicken coup, fruit orchards, a greenhouse, polytunnels and a “Farm to Fork” programme. As activities on the farm develop, attention should continue to be given to health and safety, including signage where appropriate.
- The participants are often furthest from the labour market due to their individual challenges and complexities. The project offers a flexible approach to address and serve the needs of each individual in a positive and impactful manner, and to support and prepare them well for the world of work. Across

the work experience opportunities provided, participants complete training and tasks in cleaning, processing of waste materials, retail and woodworking where they use industry standard machinery. These opportunities are increasing participants' self-confidence and belief in their ability to work successfully, while also playing a vital role as part of a team. Project staff effectively monitor the progress and development of their wider skills and capabilities through regular reviews using a soft skills outcome measurement tool to record, track and monitor the impact of the learning and training experiences. The participants acquire new and transferable skills which support them well in preparation for work, volunteering or further training.

- The one-to-one and group sessions observed were effective. Staff support the participants in an empathetic and non-intrusive manner, with appropriate direction given when required. The participants were developing appropriate industry standard skills in recycling and retail commercial settings to a good level.
- The participants are also offered job sampling with a range of employers in the local community as part of their progression journey which gives them further useful insights into the world of work. Training officers work closely with the participants to match them to a job to suit their strengths and interests. Since Covid restrictions were lifted, vulnerable participants have at times been reluctant to attend job sampling. Compass has been proactive in addressing these concerns by increasing the number of internal paid posts within the social enterprises, such as roles in cleaning and retail.
- There is also the opportunity for individuals to become involved in a wider range of important support services which Compass provides, such as fun and friendship programmes, health projects, signposting to other services and benefits advice. Most of the current participants avail of these Compass services which greatly supports their mental health and wellbeing.
- The recruitment target has been fully met and almost all of the participants have been retained. Progress against the targets for participants moving into education and/or training, and into employment are at 10% and 80% respectively. Staff are confident participants will progress positively at the end of the project.
- The strategic and operational leadership and management of the project is highly effective. The project's self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well embedded. Areas for development are prioritised appropriately in line with the needs of the participants.
- The project promoter works effectively and collaboratively with other service providers including the Northern Trust, jobs and benefits offices and with participants' social workers. This is a multi-disciplinary approach covering the initial referral process through to ongoing participation on the programme to

ensure the participants receive the required level of support and care required. The staff also promote well to employers the important benefits that employing someone with a learning disability, mental health and/or autism can bring, resulting in greater social inclusion for those individuals in their local community.

- The purchase and ambitious development of Lislagan Farm includes plans for six developmental stages and the charity plans to relocate to the farm from their current premises in Ballymoney. The new venture at the farm has enabled the board and management to potentially leverage new sources of funds, such as capital grants to help put foundations in place for future sustainability. They have worked diligently for the benefit of the wider Compass service keeping their members' and participants' welfare at the centre of everything they do. Planning for sustainability also involves working on collaborative bids with four other organisations, Acceptable Enterprises Ltd, Stepping Stones NI, The Appleby Trust, and Triangle.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding participants of the WE CAN ESF project reflects current legislation and practice.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, Compass demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for the WE CAN ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – WE CAN

Since 1 April 2022²

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	44 (100%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	4 (80%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	1 (10%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	3(93%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed two sessions of practice, spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus group meetings, had discussions with employers and with 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%

² 1 April 2022 – 24 January 2023.

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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