

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
Enterprise Northern Ireland

Exploring Enterprise Programme

Report of a Call 3 Visit in October 2022



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



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Context

Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI) is a 'Not-for-Profit' organisation, with a socio-economic purpose; it is the representative organisation for Northern Ireland's 28 Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) which span 66 locations and cover the region's 11 council areas.

ENI is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Exploring Enterprise Programme 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 ENI works in partnership with the LEAs to deliver the project across Northern Ireland.

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 October 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 3 visit to ENI 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, 97 participants¹ were registered on the project.

Thirty-six percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. All reported that the programme is well managed, and they find it both interesting and challenging. They receive accurate and timely updates about their programme.

During the visit inspectors also spoke with participants in focus groups and individually during their mentoring and training sessions. They have found the project informative and interesting, and they spoke about the mentors and tutors being supportive and flexible in accommodating sessions to suit their needs. As a result of participating on the programme, they feel they are becoming better prepared for going forward with their business venture or employment aspiration.

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 across its delivery partners:

- to improve and facilitate further collaboration by staff in delivery of the provision; and
- to have more standardised assessment strategies.

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

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 good; its structure is standardised across all of the LEAs, as are the resources used in its delivery. Participants complete three level 1 Understanding Business Enterprise units, along with three business support workshops which are selected to meet the needs of the group. In particular, the participants spoke about how much they valued the business support workshops. They spoke about how they have benefited from guest speakers including professionals and those who have set up their own business, sharing their knowledge and entrepreneurial experiences.
- Relevant one-to-one or group mentoring is provided to support the participants as they explore the feasibility of their business idea. They are also provided with effective teamworking opportunities to develop their confidence and employability skills. They are signposted to relevant training and support from other organisations where appropriate, for example in developing their English Language skills and essential skills. Additionally, and if appropriate, participants who complete the project can be signposted to the ['Go For It' Programme](#) which gives them the opportunity to complete a business plan, along with leads to sources of initial funding.
- All the mentoring and training sessions observed were effective. The mentoring sessions were well-focused on the individual aspirations and interests of the participants. In the more effective training sessions, a good range of strategies were used to engage the participants in their learning.
- The project operational management team has oversight of the delivery of the project. A management information system is used well to track and monitor the progress of the participants across the region. Overall, nearly half of the recruitment target has been realised to date. The strategies used by the project staff to recruit participants include referrals from a range of services offered by the LEAs, links with the Job and Benefits Offices, social media, and attendance at job fairs. Most of the participants recruited have been retained on the project. At the time of the inspection visit, while the number of participants progressing to education and/or training is 77% against the target, the number of participants progressing to employment is low at 31%. As a consequence, the project promoter should consider and review the targets with DfE.
- Through its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes, priority areas for improvement have been identified. The strategic leadership and management of the organisation is focused on the delivery of consistent experiences for participants. An area prioritised for improvement is to facilitate

further collaboration by staff in delivery of the provision. The delivery staff spoken to during the visit are suitably qualified and experienced to provide mentoring and training. They all feel well supported and reported that there is effective communication with the project management staff.

- While it can be challenging to get a full uptake across the LEAs, the provision of training for assessment strategies has started. This further area prioritised for improvement is focused on the implementation of a more standardised approach across the delivery partners; it is intended that this will support the streamlining of internal verification processes. The staff report that this training has been helpful and has resulted in more clarity around the assessment requirements.
- Overall, the organisation is planning appropriately for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants. The leadership are actively seeking to source alternative funding opportunities to continue delivering key elements of the project through the LEAs after March 2023. There is a commitment to ensure that all participants, including any further that are recruited, have the opportunity to complete their programme before the end of Call 3.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding participants of the Exploring Enterprise Programme ESF project reflect broadly current legislation and practice.

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- ensure that all delivery partner organisations have appropriate safeguarding policies for the protection of children and adults at risk, and which include clear reporting procedures that reflect those laid out in the ENI policies.

Overall outcome

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

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Exploring Enterprise Programme Since 1 April 2022²

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	180 (47%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	28 (31%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	17 (77%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	142 (79%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed five training and mentoring sessions, spoke with participants in two focus group meetings and had discussions with key staff (including those responsible for the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements). There was engagement with eight delivery partners, the LEAs were: Antrim Enterprise Agency (Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council); the Ards Business Hub (Ards and North Down District Council); the Armagh Business Centre and Banbridge Enterprise Centre (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council); Down Business Centre (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council); Dungannon Enterprise Centre (Mid Ulster District Council); and, Enterprise Causeway and Roe Valley Enterprises (Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council). 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 – 21 October 2022.

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 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 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 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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