

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in RCD-4Rs

Active Inclusion

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

RCD-4Rs is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Active Inclusion European Social Fund (ESF) project, as part of a third Call for projects which will run from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. 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 RCD-4Rs 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, 13 participants¹ were registered on the project.

While none of the participants completed the online questionnaire, ETI met and spoke with a sample of them during their learning and development session and also spoke with a number through one-to-one telephone conversations.

The participants reported that they enjoyed the training and their experiences on the project were positive; it was helping them to build their confidence, and they were well supported during their learning and development sessions.

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:

- the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff to support the delivery of the project; and
- a review of the processes in place for the provision of longer-term support for the participants, particularly when they complete the project.

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.

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

- An appropriate curriculum is in place, which matches the learning and development needs of the participants, most of whom present with multiple and often complex barriers to progression. The participants currently have opportunities to undertake an accredited qualification, at either level 1 or 2, in healthy living, mental health awareness, recycling and waste management or vocational training. The project promoter also plans to introduce an entry level qualification in Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
- While the mode of delivery for the project for Call 3 has been reviewed and reduced from 26 to 14 weeks duration, additional time has been allocated for learning and development sessions. The development of the participants' employability and 'soft' skills has been contextualised and embedded within their programme, rather than delivered as a separate element which was previously the case. Project staff report that the revised model facilitates greater flexibility in content delivery to better meet the learning and development, and progression, needs of the participants. The reduced timescale has also resulted in the recruitment of participant groups from a number of outreach centres who would not previously have accessed the project. Management and staff are aware that the shorter duration may not suit the needs of each individual participant and are considering how appropriate support measures can be put in place to help them to complete and achieve, beyond the 14 weeks if required.
- The learning and teaching observed was effective. There was evidence of effective planning and mutually respectful working relationships between the participants and the tutors. The participants engaged well, participating confidently in discussions around issues such as mental health and wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, and anxiety. They responded well to effective questioning to promote further learning and thinking. The participants were well supported both by the tutors and by their mentors who also attend the sessions in the outreach settings.
- The standards of work observed in the participants' portfolios of evidence is good and commensurate with their ability levels, with evidence of appropriate feedback and marking for improvement from the tutors. Appropriate processes are in place to track and monitor the progress the participants are making, including the development of their 'soft' skills. The information collated could be better analysed and quantified to illustrate the impact of the project on their personal and social development, both individually and collectively as a cohort.
- The project staff are well-experienced in working with adults and young people with learning and personal and social development needs. They report that they have good opportunities to undertake continuous professional development. Despite one new tutor being recently appointed, staffing levels on the project have decreased since the start of Call 3 and this is impacting adversely on the delivery of project, particularly on the delivery of vocational and practical workshop training for participants. While management is continuing to advertise job posts, they are finding it increasingly difficult to fill staff vacancies for the project.

- All of the outcomes on the project are positive. Recruitment has been front-loaded resulting in the overall recruitment target having already been achieved. The targets for progression to employment and to education and/or training have been exceeded. Almost all of the participants recruited have been retained on the project.
- It is expected that recruitment levels may reduce over the remainder of the project, however, planning is in place to ensure that all of the participants recruited before Call 3 ends in March 2023 will have achieved their targets. The project management is also currently reviewing how longer-term support can be provided for participants, post-Call 3, if required.
- The project is well-led at both strategic and operational levels. Management have taken appropriate action to address the areas for development identified at the previous ETI monitoring visit in July 2021. They have worked hard to promote and increase recruitment to the project to maintain its sustainability. Good working and mutually respectful relationships exist among management and staff. The training accommodation and physical resources in place to support the delivery of the project are of a good quality.
- The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process is underpinned by a concise evaluation of the quality of the provision, identifying the key strengths and relevant areas for improvement. More effective use could be made of the information collated about the progress of the participants as part of the process. An appropriate action plan has been developed to address the areas for improvement. Overall, the organisation is planning effectively for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants.
- Appropriate links and partnerships have been developed with a range of stakeholders, including statutory agencies and support organisations for referral and recruitment purposes and to support and signpost participants to enable them to overcome their barriers to progression. Participants and staff also have access to a range of services provided by the wider Resource Centre Derry (RCD) organisation, for example, information on welfare rights and care support. Stakeholder feedback about working with the project is positive. For example, a stakeholder organisation reported that they were happy with the way the programme was managed and delivered, that the programme was tailored well to meet the needs of the participants, and that staff were very supportive.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- present the safeguarding information leaflet for participants in a more user-friendly format; and
- ensure, as soon as possible, that the content of the online safeguarding training provided for staff pertains to Northern Ireland legislation.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, RCD-4Rs demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Active Inclusion ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Active Inclusion	Since 1 April 2022 ²
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	52 (104%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	9 (180%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	18 (225%)
Retention – Number of early leavers and % against target	2 (96%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed one learning and development session, spoke with a sample of participants in their learning and development session and through one-to-one telephone conversations, had discussions with key stakeholders, including outreach providers 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%

² 1 April 2022 – 17 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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