

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
Start 360

Switch onto Employment

Report of a Call 3 Visit in January 2023



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



Contents

Context.....	2
Views of participants	2
Focus of the Call 3 Visit.....	3
Key Findings	3
Safeguarding.....	5
Overall outcome	5
APPENDIX	6
A. Call 3 Performance Data	6
B. Methodology and evidence base.....	6
C. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate.....	6

Context

Start 360 is a registered charity providing support services to young people, adult offenders and families across Northern Ireland. It has offices in Ballymena, Belfast, and Derry/Londonderry, as well as in Hydebank Wood College, and Maghaberry and Magilligan prisons.

Start 360 is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Switch onto Employment 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 aims to support and progress young people who are not currently in employment, education or training to develop the appropriate skills to enable them to live self-supporting lives.

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 Start 360 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.

Those who met with inspectors spoke very positively about how well they are being prepared for progress into employment, education and/or training as a consequence of building their self-belief and self-confidence. They feel highly valued and very much appreciate the safe learning space provided, and the care and support they receive from the staff. The participants who attended the creative writing residential described the powerful impact this experience had.

Fifty-four percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. All of them indicated the induction process was useful and prepared them well for their programme which was interesting, challenging, and well-managed. All received regular feedback on how to improve their work and reported they were making good progress. They indicated the programme was preparing them well to move into employment and education and/or training.

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 meet the changing profile of participants by:

- adapting provision; and
- reviewing progression pathways.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Key Findings

The Call 3 visit identified the following key findings.

- The curriculum provided is appropriately balanced, challenging and engaging for the participants. It includes the opportunity to achieve essential skills in literacy and numeracy, and work-related qualifications in community independence, vocational skills, and youthwork practice, with a complementary employment sampling placement option. Successful methods are used to develop participants' wider skills and dispositions, as well as important employability and vocational skills. At the core is youthwork methodology to promote inclusion and participation using preventative and re-integrative approaches. This has resulted in effective participant engagement and successful transition towards social inclusion and mainstream provision.
- As soon as participants are referred onto the project, they are assigned to a member of the project team who acts as their key worker and plays a crucially important role as the key point of contact throughout. The participants are often the furthest from the labour market, presenting with a range of complex needs including poor mental health, involvement with the justice system, drug and alcohol misuse and lone parent responsibilities. An increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers have been participating on the project and this has presented other challenges, such as language barriers.
- The key worker carries out a detailed initial assessment with the participant, resulting in tailored action and care plans to provide the appropriate support required. This includes completion of qualifications through one-to-one sessions, small group work facilitation, mentoring, coaching, access to specialist therapeutic support (mental health and addiction support), access to complimentary therapies, advocacy of healthy lifestyle choices and the opportunity to attend a creative writing residential experience. The key worker maintains consistent contact, with regular reviews and support as required.

- The sessions observed were highly effective with excellent working relationships between staff and participants, characterised by highly individualised and appropriately challenging learning programmes. Staff motivate participants very well within a nurturing and happy learning environment. The work-related qualifications cover a wide range of topics and tutors facilitate the individual needs of the participants competently and sensitively.
- Through successful partnership building with relevant external agencies and impactful use of peer learning groups, there is highly effective and bespoke support for refugees and asylum seekers. The project has prioritised meeting participants' communication, language and holistic needs in relation to coping with trauma, transitioning to mainstream education and managing transient settlement and/or accommodation challenges.
- The staff have been proactive in reviewing, exploring and developing further relationships with relevant networks to better support the differing needs of the changing client profile. Through the project's person-centred care, they ensure each participant can access what is right for them and their circumstances, to prepare them well for the world of work, for example through job clubs, interview skills training and supported employment organisations.
- The small number of parents who spoke with inspectors appreciate the project's highly inclusive approach to addressing the often-complex needs of participants with additional learning difficulties, enabling them to overcome previous barriers to learning.
- The outcomes of the project are positive. The overall target for recruitment has reached 97%, while targets for progression into employment have been met. Progress against targets set for into education and/or training are good. Almost all of participants have been retained.
- The strategic and operational management is highly effective and is underpinned by clear lines of communication, with well-defined roles and responsibilities. It is notable that staff at all levels are proactively involved in developing, monitoring, and reviewing organisational policies on an ongoing basis.
- Self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well-embedded across the project, with robust data used to inform improvement. Targets are clear and reviewed regularly. A strong values-based culture is evident across the team. Staff are very well supported with ongoing professional development and are they fully committed to and embody the organisation's values which are: to accept and respect; challenge and change; engage and empower; and to deliver.

- The organisation is committed to, and works hard, to build collaborative partnership working to good effect with a range of external partners and agencies. A robust exit strategy is in place to ensure that all of the participants can transition appropriately when Call 3 ends. Planning for sustainability involves Start 360 and six other independent charities (Bytes, Include Youth, The NI Youth Forum, the Prince's Trust, Springboard, and Youth Action) under the Youth Start branding and the exploration of a potential social value partnership.

Safeguarding

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

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, Start 360 demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for the Switch onto Employment ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Switch onto Employment **Since 1 April 2022²**

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	58 (97%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	7 (100%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	14 (67%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	5(91%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed two sessions of practice, spoke with a sample of parents, and with participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus group meetings, had discussions with key stakeholders 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 – 9 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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