

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
The Cedar Foundation

Inclusion Works

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 Cedar Foundation (Cedar) is a registered charity which provides a regional service supporting people living with disability, autism and brain injury. The charity is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Inclusion Works 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 promoter's Inclusion Works ESF project sits within the organisation's Employability and Inclusion Services directorate and aims to increase the number of people with disabilities in work, while promoting independent living and inclusion. The Inclusion Works teams are aligned to the Health and Social Care Trust (Trusts) areas and are comprised of a Service Manager who leads a team of Case and Training Officers.

This project is part-funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund 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 Cedar 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, 399 participants¹ were registered on the project.

- The ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups. All the participants spoke very positively about the extent to which they are supported within a welcoming and caring environment. They reported that the organisation provides highly valued skills development alongside much needed opportunities to socialise with peers, with similar life experiences and/or similar disabilities, and who provide greatly appreciated mutual support.
- In addition, 27 percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire, with twelve of the respondents providing very positive additional written comments. The latter referenced the positive impact of the project on the development of their employability skills, social inclusion, and preparation for work, with some of them describing the impact as 'life changing' and 'life-saving'.

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 develop further the provision to meet the specific needs of a wider range of participants; and
- to improve the support for the care and welfare of staff to better meet their emotional health and well-being needs.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Key Findings

The Call 3 visit identified the following key findings.

- The curriculum provided is very good and is well-matched to the needs of the participants. It is effectively tailored to support each participant with an individual progression pathway to meet their specific needs, interests, and aspirations. Accredited provision in information and communication technology, life and living skills, travel training and work skills, as well as driving theory, is complemented with an appropriate range of non-accredited programmes and activities, along with mentoring support.
- Following a period of initial engagement and assessment, participants co-produce a personal action plan with their case officer from a menu of interventions to address their personal barriers; they agree short and long-term targets to meet their employability and inclusion goals. The plan dictates the participants' programme duration, the support they will receive and the activities they will undertake in the context of developing their employability skills and/or promoting their inclusion.
- An appropriate in-house information management system is used to record the person-centred action plans, review processes, and ensure that specific needs are met across a diverse group of participants. There is appropriate tracking and monitoring of the participants' development of their employability, inclusion, and transferrable skills. After much research the organisation is also in the process of introducing a more flexible replacement "distance travelled" measurement tool which has already shown the ability to demonstrate more clearly the positive impact the project is having on addressing the range of the participants' barriers to learning, development and progression.

- In order to develop further the provision to meet the specific needs of a wider range of participants, highly bespoke neuro-diversity training has been developed through extensive research, to review and revise existing resources on understanding brain injury and adult autism. The aim is to reflect current best practice and terminology in these fields. A programme “Managing My Autism” has been created in-house, and recently introduced and delivered, to help participants understand and manage better their autism, to develop their general social awareness and interactions and to understand behaviours in the workplace. While at an early stage of development the Job Club provision has been informed and amended by the research. Participants report that as a result of engagement in the programme, they understand more about themselves and can talk about their condition and its impact more clearly and easily. In addition, during Call 3 Cedar has developed its provision to meet the needs of participants who are deaf or hard of hearing. This provision is highly valued by the group of participants who report that it is well planned and delivered and is a “one-stop shop” of skills development, social inclusion and where appropriate employment accessibility support.
- The learning and development, job club engagement and mentoring sessions observed were effective, planned well and characterised by well-targeted support and effective engagement between the staff and participants. The participants receive high levels of support from the staff who know their needs well, and very good working relationships have been developed which are underpinned by trust and confidence that staff have their best interests at heart. An appropriate range of strategies were used to engage the participants, and they have made very good progress in their learning and development in line with their individual targets. When possible and where appropriate, online learning is being used to make the provision more accessible.
- The dedicated and mostly experienced staff provide high levels of care, support, and guidance for the participants. They are highly skilled, caring, committed and enthusiastic in undertaking their respective roles; their skills are well-matched to their job roles. They use online tools to collaborate effectively and to share and store resources. Staff with specialist knowledge and skills have been recruited to fill roles to meet the wide and increasing range of complexity and diversity of need of the participants.
- Within the organisation there is a strong emphasis placed on promoting an inclusive ethos and the welfare of both participants and staff. As a result of a staff survey during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cedar recognised the need to support the emotional health and well-being of its staff, so that they in turn are best placed to meet the needs of the participants. An “Innovation” team has been set up to plan and develop the provision to support the mental wellbeing of staff. This has led initially to the introduction of annual mental health awareness training for all staff, the development of a Mental Health online portal with a wide of range of appropriate resources which are monitored and regularly updated. In addition, the team has facilitated the training of Mental Health First Aiders and monthly staff awareness sessions on themes such as: anxiety, coping strategies, empathy, loneliness, relationships, seasonal

affective disorder and work/life balance. This initiative is highly valued by staff who report that it demonstrates the organisation's responsiveness and commitment to supporting their mental health and well-being, and also removes much of the stigma around talking about mental health.

- The number of participants recruited to the project, to date, has exceeded the overall recruitment target. Many of the referrals to the project come from the Trusts as well as from Jobs and Benefits offices. Almost all of the participants recruited have been retained on the project. Progression to employment to date is at 65% of the target, and progression to further education and/or training is at 84% of the target.
- The project promoter has also set internal targets for: progression towards inclusion activities (79% achieved against the target set); achievement of qualifications at level 1 (111%), level 2 (70%); and support for employers (93%).
- The strategic and operational leadership and management of the project is highly effective. Self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well-embedded in the project and across the organisation. There is a collegial approach to continuous improvement. An appropriate action plan is in place to address the areas for improvement identified, including measurable targets and regular review milestones. Overall, the leadership and management are planning effectively for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of the participants. Planning is in place to ensure that continued support will be available for those participants who need it, for a period of six months following the end of Call 3.
- The very good partnership working involves a wide range of key stakeholders, including not only the Trusts and Jobs and Benefits offices, but also a network of specialised support agencies, employers, and the community and voluntary sectors. There is a strong commitment to providing flexible, participant-centred programmes, and listening to and acting on feedback from both participants and staff, both in the development of the programmes and in the professional development and experiences of the staff.

Safeguarding

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

Overall outcome

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

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Inclusion Works

Since 1 April 2022²

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	634 (147%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	28 (65%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	126(84%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	23 (96%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed six sessions of practice, spoke with participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups, had discussions with key stakeholders, including employers and external agencies and with key staff (including the 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 – 10 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 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 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 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 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 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 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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