

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in The Conservation Volunteers in Northern Ireland

Training for Employment

Report of a Call 3 Visit in October 2022



Providing Inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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Context

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) works with people across the United Kingdom to create healthier and happier communities.

The TCV in Northern Ireland is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Training for 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. 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 TCV 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, 49 participants¹ were registered on the project.

The ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions. They spoke about the high levels of support they receive, and the good opportunities to participate in community development and volunteering activities. They value how the project helps them to gain employability skills and reduce their social isolation.

Eight percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. They all reported that: their programme is well managed; they are well informed about how to feel safe and secure in the organisation; and they know who to go to if they have a problem or concern.

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:

- the number of participants recruited to the project; and
- participant progression into employment, education and/or training upon leaving.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

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

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; a range of qualifications available to participants help them to realise their progression aspirations. For example, participants can complete a level 1 qualification in practical horticulture. In addition, a range of accredited short courses related to the employment aspirations of the participants are available. These include Adult Safeguarding; Basic Food Hygiene; Child Protection; Control of Substances Hazardous to Health; Fire Safety; Manual Handling; and, Working at Height. The participants also undertake employability activities, including building a curriculum vitae and completing job searches. There are also good opportunities for volunteering which further assists with developing participants' skills for employment and improves their social inclusion.
- All the training and development sessions observed were effective. During the sessions, there was an appropriate focus by the training and employment officers on the individual needs of the participants. The participants are making good progress in developing skills in areas such as preparing a seed bed; plant propagation; plant identification; weeding; fencing and pruning. Attendance at the sessions visited was variable. The organisation should apply more rigour to: monitoring attendance to identify at an early-stage participants who are at risk of not achieving their individual targets; and tracking their progress in order to improve the progression outcomes.
- Recruitment has appropriately been identified as an area for improvement; the number of participants recruited to the project, to date, is 39% of the overall target. While continuing to seek to improve recruitment to the project, it is necessary that the project promoter also considers and reviews overall targets with DfE.
- There are, however, strategies being employed to boost the recruitment numbers. These include working with community groups to identify potential participants, the appointment of an additional employment officer in the Coleraine area, and an increased use of social media and local radio to increase awareness of the provision. Planning is in place to complete targeted recruitment in a timely manner in order to ensure that all the participants have completed their programme and met their targets before the completion of Call 3 in March 2023. The project promoter has indicated a commitment to the continued provision of support for those participants who require it, post-March 2023.
- The progression to employment, education and/or training has also been appropriately identified as an area for improvement and associated actions are being taken. To improve the progression into employment, the project promoter has worked with Ards and North Down Borough Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Belfast City Council,

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, and Derry City and Strabane District Council to recruit to 12-week training programmes that includes the level 1 practical horticulture qualification and 2 short courses matched to participants' employment potential. Delivery of these training programmes is planned to start shortly. A weekly job-club is ongoing at the TCV Belfast and Derry/Londonderry offices.

- The strategic leadership and management of the project is effective. The senior management team is well-established, and a recent positive development has been the appointment of a Northern Ireland-based assistant operations director. There have been some further recent changes to staffing at an operational level including the recruitment of a project officer and training officer in September 2022 to fill vacant posts. However, some difficulty has been experienced in recruiting staff, resulting in the post of a senior operations leader yet to be filled. As a consequence, there has been no regionally based deputy designated person for safeguarding since May 2022. All of the staff ETI met with reported that they feel well supported and work well together.
- Overall, the leadership and management is planning appropriately for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants. The review of the previous quality improvement action plan at monthly operational management meetings has informed the identification of areas for improvement and associated actions to address these in the current plan. These should be a clearer focus on prioritising those areas and actions which will be most impactful and better meet the targets set for the project.
- The TCV in Northern Ireland works with a range of stakeholders, including community groups to recruit participants, provide work experience opportunities, and reduce a wide variety of barriers to employment. The stakeholders that ETI met with reported that the project promoter has a caring ethos and a flexible approach to delivery to meet the individual needs of the participants.

Safeguarding

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

- The project promoter, however, needs to:
 - arrange appropriate training as soon as possible for the local member of staff identified to undertake the deputy designated person role; and
 - include details of the arrangements for safeguarding in the participant induction resources.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, TCV demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Training for Employment ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Training for Employment

Since 1 April 2022²

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	83 (39%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	14 (40%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	4 (30%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	77 (93%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed seven sessions, met with key stakeholders and had discussions with key staff (including 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 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 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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