

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in Training for Women
Network Ltd

Pathways

Report of a Call 3 Visit in October 2022



Providing Inspection services for:
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Context

Training for Women's Network Ltd (TWN) is a network for the promotion of women's training and development throughout Northern Ireland, through policy, training, and education.

TWN is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Pathways 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 Pathways Project is an employability initiative aimed at women who are classified as unemployed/economically inactive. The objectives of the project are to: reduce economic inactivity among women; support women to transition from community-based education to further education; provide an accessible liaison service for women and the employment sector; support women to access employment through skills acquisition, training, and networking; and to increase women's employability through qualifications gained and a range of transferrable skills.

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.

Following an initial baseline visit, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 3 visit in October 2022 to TWN 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, 60 participants¹ were registered on the project, including a group of participants yet to begin the programme.

The ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups. The participants spoke of the benefits they gained from the structured personal development course, which had raised their self-esteem and self-belief and helped them to develop the confidence to progress into employment or further education after significant time away from the labour market and/or education.

Five percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. They reported that: the project is well managed; they are making good progress and are well informed about how to stay safe; and, they feel secure when in the organisation or engaging online. They know who to go to when they have a problem or concern.

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 improve further the systems used to track and monitor the progress of the participants; and
- to keep the recruitment of participants under review during the remainder of Call 3.

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.

- At the time of the visit, project delivery for TWN participants was on-site at its premises in Belfast, as well as at satellite centres of the Tullyally Women's Group and Black Mountain. The referrals to date for the project have come mainly through identification of participants who previously completed other TWN programmes.
- The participant-centred curriculum has been co-designed. Through a phased approach, the project aims to support the participants' personal development, enhance their employability skills, and provide a range of training pathways. A range of appropriate training options have been developed in areas such as business administration, childcare, hospitality, and retail. Additionally, participants can undertake independent or supported training through a number of online non-accredited training courses including British sign language, child psychology and mental health, dyslexia awareness, first aid for mental health, gardening, special educational needs and United Kingdom paralegal training for beginners. They can also undertake volunteering opportunities. Where required, there is signposting of participants to a range of community, statutory and support organisations to enable them to overcome their barriers to progression.
- The project promoter's digital learning environment is in the process of being updated to provide better access to programme content using mobile technologies. The reviewed online suite of available courses is being added to and updated, for example, with the introduction of training on more contemporary Information Technology applications, mental health, mentoring, wellbeing and safeguarding. Support in accessing and using the digital learning environment is provided to participants.

- In the group sessions observed there was effective learning and development. The tutors develop constructive working relationships with the participants who enthusiastically engage in their learning, completing online courses at an individual pace and developing appropriate employability skills, for example, in building a curriculum vitae and preparing for interviews. The project importantly has provided the opportunity for participants from across communities to come together and they have fostered new friendships, as well as establishing working relationships.
- Appropriately, there has been a necessary emphasis on establishing a more consistent induction process within TWN (and across partner organisations) led by core TWN staff. The induction process is now more clearly focused on developing a fuller understanding of participants' prior educational attainment, work experiences and previous programmes, to better inform their training needs analysis and identification of potential progression opportunities. Additionally, the systems in place for tracking and monitoring delivery and participant progression, including the development of their soft skills, are being updated. The intent is to better capture in a timely manner the participants' prior attainment and barriers, as well as the ongoing impact the project is having on improving their life chances.
- At the time of the visit, the number of participants recruited to the project is 51% against the overall recruitment target. Therefore, the continued review of recruitment methods is an appropriately identified area of improvement. Engagement is underway with a series of identified organisations that the project promoter has worked with previously. Where an agreement is reached to undertake procured delivery with any of these organisations, it has been indicated that further service level agreements will be put in place.
- The number of participants progressing to employment and to education and/or training is low, at 17% and 36% against the respective targets. A strategic meeting is planned for mid-December 2022 to review delivery and progress against targets at that point and for the remainder of the project. This will be a critical point at which if necessary to consider overall targets with DfE.
- All of the participants recruited have been retained on the project. There is planning for exit and progression of participants, with the management committed to ensuring that every participant recruited to the project can complete with appropriate support mechanisms for those who require these at the end of Call 3.
- The TWN staff benefit from training in the access and use of the digital learning environment. The staffing complement includes those who work across this project and another ESF project delivered by TWN. There are staff with clearly identified responsibilities for safeguarding, including a Safeguarding Champion.

- Overall, there is sufficient evidence that the leadership and management is planning for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants. The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process has been informed by a review of the previous quality improvement plan. However there needs to be robust and rigorous analysis and use of available data and information to better evaluate the impact of the project.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- develop further the code of conduct, to reflect more fully the operational roles and responsibilities of the project staff and ensure all policies are ratified.

Overall outcome

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

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Pathways	Since 1 April 2022 ²
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	60 (51%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	4 (17%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	19 (36%)
Retention – Number of early leavers and % against target	0 (100%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed two learning and development sessions, spoke with a sample of participants in their learning and development sessions and in focus groups, had discussions with key stakeholders 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 – 26 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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