

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in TRIAX

Skills North West

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

TRIAx is a registered charity contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Skills North West 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 is delivered through nine partner community hubs¹ (the hubs) to ensure the project is accessible to participants in all of the district electoral areas within the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.

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 TRIAX 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, 254 participants² were registered on the project.

One participant availed of the opportunity to complete the online questionnaire and ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during a focus group session.

They reported that: staff are very accessible and support them well while on the project; they are encouraged to investigate a variety of career pathways and are signposted to undertake qualifications, at various levels, that are relevant to their career aspirations; the project has helped them to develop their confidence and employability skills and has made them more aware of the range of progression opportunities and career pathways available to them.

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 development of an employer engagement pilot programme; and
- planning for the sustainability of the project at the end of Call 3 and ensuring an appropriate exit strategy is in place for participants.

¹ Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership, Dove House Community Trust, Greater Shantallow Area Partnership, Glen Development Initiative, Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership, Churchtown Community Association, Diamond Centre Claudy, Lettershadoney and District Development Group, Strabane Community Project.

² All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter.

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.

- The curriculum provided has been appropriately designed and tailored to match the individual learning and progression needs of the participants; it is aligned to local needs and employment opportunities across the wider Derry and Strabane District Council area.
- Participants have access to a broad range of non-accredited, accredited and industry specific training, which is delivered by a small number of external training providers, in areas such as autism awareness, construction skills register (CSR), customer service, domiciliary care, farm health and safety, first aid, food hygiene, health and safety, and paediatric and mental health first aid. They mainly undertake qualifications at level one and below, however, in a small number of vocational areas such as health and safety, the project promoter utilises alternative sources of funding to allow participants to progress to higher level training, if required, in order to enhance further their learning and progression opportunities.
- The employment and mentoring officers ETI met with are well experienced and passionate about helping the participants to identify and overcome their barriers to learning and progression. They also actively profile the work of the project to local employers in order to improve employment outcomes for the participants and help develop further employment engagement in the community.
- An employer engagement pilot programme has been developed with a small number of local employers to provide bespoke training leading to a guaranteed interview for participants for identified job roles within the organisations. The training and interview processes are planned well by the project promoter and the employer and have been tailored to better match the skills levels and abilities of the participants. Upon securing employment, additional support and upskilling is also provided for participants, if required, to help them carry out their job roles. To date, as part of the pilot programme, 12 participants have secured employment in health and safety roles with one employer, and a second employer-led programme is currently being finalised for delivery. One employer reported that the programme not only allows participants to progress to employment, but it also supports the organisation's recruitment process, it allows training to be identified and developed for specific job roles going forward, and that working with the project enables the organisation to develop links across the community in which it operates.

- In the hubs visited, appropriate processes are in place to regularly track and monitor the progress of the participants, including their skills development during their time on the project. Initial assessment and the monitoring of distance travelled by the participants in overcoming their barriers to progression informs a well-rounded individualised personal action planning process. The standards of work in the participants' portfolios of evidence were good. There is evidence of appropriate and constructive feedback being given by the tutors to support on-going improvement and development.
- All of the outcomes on the project are positive. The targets for progression to employment and to education and/or training have been well exceeded. Almost all of the participants recruited have been retained on the project. Management is currently planning for the sustainability of the project at the end of Call 3 and ensuring an appropriate exit strategy is in place for participants. It is also reviewing how longer-term support can be provided for participants, at the end of the Call if required.
- The project is managed effectively. Appropriate systems and processes have been put in place by the project promoter to not only review the progress of the participants, but also to provide an overview of performance of the hubs in the delivery of the project. The hubs visited reported that good channels of communication and effective working relationships have been developed, and that they are updated regularly and kept informed about operational matters. While examples of effective staff working practices exist in the hubs visited, there is a need for the project promoter to develop more structured arrangements for the sharing of best practice with project staff across all of the hubs.
- The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process in place provides a good overview and evaluation of the quality of the provision, identifying key strengths and relevant areas for improvement for the project. The quality improvement plan clearly identifies the actions to be taken to address the areas for improvement and support on-going improvement. Overall, the organisation is planning appropriately for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants.
- The project promoter has well-established links with a broad range of employers across the local communities in which it delivers the project. These are used effectively to provide work experience and employment opportunities for the participants. Good links have also been developed with a range of other stakeholders including statutory agencies, support organisations and other community and voluntary organisations for referral and recruitment purposes, and to signpost participants to more specialised support, if required, to enable them to overcome their barriers to progression.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- ensure that any outstanding refresher training for staff is completed as soon as possible; and
- revise the arrangements currently in place for reviewing the safeguarding policies and procedures across the partner community hubs.

Overall outcome

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

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Skills North West	Since 1 April 2022 ³
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	845 (156%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	99 (122%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	43 (154%)
Retention – Number of early leavers and % against target	15 (98%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI spoke with a sample of participants in a focus group session and had discussions with key stakeholders, including employers, and key staff (to include quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements). There was engagement with representatives from two of the partner community hubs. 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%

³ 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 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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