

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in Workforce Training Services

Get Connected Project

Report of a Call 3 Visit in December 2022



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



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Context

Workforce Training Services (Workforce) is a registered charity which provides vocational training and education for young people and adults in Belfast. The charity is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Get Connected 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 targeted at young people aged 16 to 24, who are not in education, training, or employment.

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 December 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 3 visit to Workforce 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, 5 participants¹ were registered on the project.

The ETI met and spoke with a sample of past participants during their learning and development sessions and in a focus group. They reported that they enjoy their experiences with Workforce. They spoke articulately about their enjoyment of the project, in particular the recreational activities, field trips and for those who attended, the residential. They spoke highly of the new friendships they formed as a result, of the increase in their self-confidence and the development of team-building skills. They valued how the experiences, including the job sampling opportunities prepared them well to progress. They also value the high expectations set for them to attend, be punctual and succeed; they reported the organisation's clear guidance and rules about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours while they are learning are fair. They find the organisation welcoming and they all know who to go to if they have a problem or concern and feel well supported.

Fifty-six percent (66) of the current and past participants completed the online questionnaire. They all reported that the programme is well managed, interesting and challenging and they are kept up-to-date with how they are progressing. All of them are able to complete any required practical training in the organisation or in the workplace if appropriate.

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 enhance further the provision and support through the ongoing implementation and further development of the Reach App; and
- to keep under review the curriculum offer to ensure it continues to meet the needs of participants, employers, and the local community.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Key Findings

The Call 3 visit identified the following key findings.

- The curriculum provided is well-conceived, with positive and supportive working relationships established with the participants and as appropriate, their parents/carers which is particularly significant as some have had previously negative experiences in education. It is kept under review to ensure it continues to meet the needs of participants, employers, and the local community.
- Employability sessions focus on building a curriculum vitae and interview skills. A core component of the curriculum is job sampling in a range of vocational areas. Participants are also given the opportunity to undertake work experience in a business or voluntary setting as matched to their individual needs. For example, a participant in the workplace emphasised how much he valued the opportunity to have work with the firm allocated and the support he receives which motivates him to progress further.
- Participants can attain level one qualifications in employability, first aid and personal development, as well as construction skills register (CSR) and manual handling. Non-accredited personal development, healthy living sports and health awareness sessions, as well as recreational activities are also provided. One hundred and sixty-two level one introductory award qualifications in personal and social skills and employability skills have been achieved to date by project participants. Additionally, development awards have been given to participants through successful application to the Prince's Trust.
- Delivery of the curriculum is underpinned by the staff's high aspirations and expectations for the participants, along with a significant emphasis on holistic development to promote progression. Highly effective one-to-one mentoring is central to the provision and supports well the personal, social and learning

needs of the participants. There is the provision of a designated 'Free to be me' space which can be used by participants for time out if needed when attending learning and training sessions. Disability support is available to participants where appropriate, for learning, training and progression to employment.

- The learning and development and mentoring sessions observed during the visit were highly effective, characterised by; person-centred delivery, targeted questioning; high levels of pastoral care; and, sound industry knowledge. The respectful and trusted relationships which the participants have with their tutors and mentors were clearly evident. For example, there was agreement of realistic work-related and personal short-term targets to progress individual action plans and participants were willing to discuss openly and maturely their attitudes and behaviour with respect to mental health and wellbeing. The staff bring a good range of skills to their work, including training in complementary therapies and counselling and business acumen which they use well to challenge, support and progress the participants.
- The core recruitment and delivery period for the project has been over a twelve- week period from June 2022 to the end of August 2022. The well-targeted, high-quality care and welfare provided by the staff has positively impacted on the learning, teaching and training outcomes for the participants. The targets for progression to employment and education and/or training have been exceeded. For the past participants ETI met with during the visit, the provision of job sampling through the project clearly prepared them well to make informed choices for their next steps. Almost all have now progressed to vocational training on the Skills for Life and Work programme provided by Workforce Training Services and to date, they are all very satisfied with their chosen vocational area. They are also working towards achieving their essential skills qualifications where applicable.
- In conjunction with a developer, past participants developed a Workforce Reach App which is a supportive tool for the participants to reflect on their health and well-being and is used by the young people to access support when needed as well as financial discounts from local businesses. Its use is being integrated into delivery of the personal development curriculum and further development of the App is being explored.
- The provision includes follow-on support for participants who have successfully completed the project. These activities, sessions and workshops delivered and/or planned have been informed by participant feedback and identified need. The in-house and facilitated sessions and workshops include: a gambling prevention workshop, a make-up masterclass; resilience and wellbeing sessions and a stranger danger workshop. As part of their experience some of the young people access a fitness programme at a local gym, supported by the staff and they are encouraged to understand the benefits of physical exercise and diet to the emotional health and well-being.

- While there were a small number of participants at the time of the visit, to date, the overall target for enrolment is 99% and almost all have been retained. Project recruitment has in part been targeted specifically at participants who have experienced previous exclusion from mainstream education. Workforce mentors have established working partnerships with Education Welfare Officers and a number of schools across Belfast who make referrals to the Belfast City Council Youth Support Programme² (the programme) about young people disengaging from school or at risk. Workforce collaborates with Belfast City Council in delivery of the programme, with provision of taster vocational workshop sessions and links established with the mentors. The staff report that those taking part in the programme benefit from observing the progress of others in the workshops and the flexible and fun activities; this has led to a positive progression pathway, through recruitment to the Get Connected ESF project.
- The strategic leadership and management of the project is highly effective at all levels, with a well-embedded process of self-evaluation and planning for quality improvement. The ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review of the high-quality provision is informed by feedback from participants, parents/carers, employers and staff, as well as session observations. There is a commitment to continuing to engage with all participants after their completion date, ensuring their needs continue to be met. Overall, the leadership and management is planning effectively for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants. The leadership and management is actively seeking to achieve a positive legacy from the project by securing funding for a replacement summer intervention programme that will ready young people at risk for positive progression.
- Staff are experienced and notably include a number who themselves successfully progressed as learners at Workforce. The staff complement is a project manager, a recruitment officer, a family liaison officer, two training and employability mentors and a health and wellbeing mentor. They are well supported by the wider organisational leadership and management, including the board. Significantly priority has been given to the appointment of a Learning and Digital Development Leader. Continuing professional development provided has included a focus on e-learning on an agreed platform, including developing online staff and learner support areas and addressing safeguarding considerations for delivering and learning online. Additionally, there has been training provided by a range of stakeholders, for staff and participants. An identified area for development to address an emerging need of participants is to upskill staff to deliver English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life.

² [Belfast Youth Support Programme](#)

- The experienced welfare team, supported by Workforce's board members, have clearly identified responsibilities for safeguarding on the project and across Workforce. Processes are well-established, including engagement with statutory agencies and participation in case conferences as required. Their commitment to the well-being of participants is evident. There is a clear focus on protecting and respecting the dignity of the individuals, while providing practical support when needed, including for example starter training packs, hygiene packs and interview clothing.
- There are well-considered and strategically established links and collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders and external bodies, including employers, schools, other local community-based youth organisations and statutory services, local sports clubs and other key stakeholders. Employers spoke highly of the mutually beneficial relationships, the training and the support and the swift response from Workforce if issues arise with participants. Other stakeholder representatives and external agencies spoke of how the links and partnerships are used to very good effect to ensure that the project and wider training provision of the organisation not only meets well the identified needs of the participants but also improves social inclusion in the area. They spoke of the strength of the organisation's reputation and how the provision of the project and the wider Workforce programmes become the young people's 'backbone', delivered with passion, compassion, and purposefully high expectations.

Safeguarding

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

Overall outcome

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

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Get Connected

Since 1 April 2022³

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	119 (99%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	21 (150%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	90 (125%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	114 (96%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed six sessions of practice, spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development and mentoring sessions and a focus group meeting, and had discussions with key stakeholders, including employers and statutory agencies, sporting organisations, local counselling services and a parent 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%

³ 1 April 2022 - 27 September 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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