

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in Workforce Training Services

Path 2 Employment

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 Path 2 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. The project is aimed at improving the employability skills of participants who are aged eighteen and over, and supporting them to progress to meaningful employment, further education and/or training.

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, 37 participants¹ were registered on the project.

The ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development session and in focus groups. They reported that they value greatly the wraparound support they receive from their tutors and mentors, both during and after their time on the project. They spoke appreciatively about how well they are supported to build their confidence and self-esteem and overcome their barriers to learning and progression.

Forty-six percent of the current and past participants completed the online questionnaire. They all indicated that: the project is well managed, and they find it both interesting and challenging; they are making good progress and are confident to contact their tutor/mentor when they don't understand or have a query about something; they know who to contact if they have a problem or concern; and are well informed about how to stay safe and feel secure in the organisation. Overall, they are happy with their experiences on the project.

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 continue to develop external training and employment links; and
- to extend the range of employment academy options for participants.

¹ 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.

- A well-designed and flexible curriculum has been put in place informed by the project promoter's good overview of local and regional industry needs. Participants are provided with the opportunity to undertake accredited and non-accredited training, both online and face-to-face, in a range of areas including: construction skills register (CSR); control of substance hazardous to health (COSHH); curriculum vitae (CV) building; first aid, manual handling and food Safety training at level 1; job application support and interview techniques; and soft skills development. They can also complete level 1 award qualifications in introduction to children and young people, employability skills and personal and social skills, introduction to health and social care, and warehousing and storage. The training accommodation and physical resources in place to support the delivery of the project are of a high quality.
- A key element of the project is the role of Workforce as a delivery agent for Belfast City Council's employment academies. Workforce is currently contracted to deliver two academies: customer skills (hospitality, leisure, tourism, and retail) and practical skills (transport, construction, the green economy and manufacturing). The academies provide an opportunity for the participants to complete training and attend a guaranteed interview with an employer. They have been designed to maximise progression opportunities for the participants and are integrated well into the curriculum delivery. For example, in addition to completing Class 2 HGV or PCV bus driving licences as part of the transport academy, the participants can undertake a level 1 award in warehousing and storage and a level 1 food safety qualification, as well as completing employability training. Going forward the organisation hopes to offer participants an extended range of options as part of the customer skills academy, including housekeeping, takeaway and leisure academies.
- The commitment of the organisation to the well-being of participants is evident. Project staff are passionate and committed and have a clear understanding of the participants' needs, interests and aspirations. 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 external and statutory agencies.
- The project is delivered flexibly and empathetically to meet the learning and development needs of the participants and provide support and encourage and promote progression. There is a clear focus on protecting and respecting the dignity of the individuals, while providing practical support when needed, including for example with travel, starter training packs and interview clothing.

The staff continue to engage with participants after completion of the project to further support them to progress to or sustain employment or signpost them to additional training or support to improve their life chances. It is of note that all of the participants interviewed stated that they wished to acknowledge and compliment the work of the staff and organisation during their time on the project.

- The needs and progress of the participants are recorded effectively by the staff. An appropriate initial assessment process, including a strengths, needs, opportunities and barriers (SNOB) analysis is in place. Regular reviews are carried out and an engagement log is used effectively to record communication and follow-up activities with the participants. Appropriate tracking and monitoring of the development of the participants' soft skills and distance travelled is also carried out.
- The learning and development and mentoring sessions observed were highly effective. They were characterised by well-planned opportunities for practical learning and assessment, open discussion and debate, peer learning and one-to-one support when required, and supportive relationships between the participants and the tutor.
- The number of participants recruited to the project, to date, is 81% against the overall target; almost all of the participants recruited have been retained on the project. The number of participants progressing to education and/or training has significantly exceeded the target; the number progressing to employment has also exceeded the target.
- The organisation is committed to ensuring that all of the participants recruited, and who remain on the project when Call 3 ends, complete and achieve their individual targets. Management is also currently reviewing how longer-term support can be provided for participants, if required.
- The project is well led at both strategic and operational levels. Very effective collegial working relationships exist among the project team who are supported well by management. A process of self-evaluation and planning for quality improvement is well-embedded. The documentation provides a detailed evaluation of the quality of the provision and identifies clearly key strengths and relevant areas for improvement. An appropriate action plan has been developed to address the areas for improvement with clear and measurable actions identified. Overall, the leadership and management is planning effectively for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants.
- Significantly, priority has been given to the appointment of a Learning and Digital Development Leader within the organisation. Continuing professional development provided for staff 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.

- There are well-considered and strategically established links and partnerships with a range of stakeholders, including statutory agencies, community organisations, employers, support organisations, and other key stakeholders across a range of sectors. The links and partnerships are used well for referral and recruitment purposes and to support and signpost participants to enable them to overcome their barriers to progression. The organisation has identified the need to continue to be proactive in seeking out new opportunities for training/employment based on the needs and interests of the participants and the changing marketplace and training landscape.
- The stakeholders interviewed spoke highly of the mutually beneficial and strategic relationship with Workforce, particularly, the staff's knowledge and understanding of their businesses to ensure participants are well informed and matched to the range of roles on offer. Staff have organised a range of networking events to showcase the range of projects on offer at Workforce, for example, the delivery of self-care workshops by learners on the level 2 hairdressing and barbering programmes.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 3 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding participants of the Path 2 Employment 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 provision for the Path 2 Employment ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Path 2 Employment

Since 1 April 2022²

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	114 (81%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	36 (103%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	40 (333%)
Retention – Number of early leavers and % against target	10 (91%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed one learning and development session and one mentoring session, spoke with a sample of participants in the sessions, online, and in face-to-face focus groups, had discussions with employers, employment agencies, Belfast City Council and Jobs and Benefits Office staff 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 – 5 December 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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