

# EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 2 VISIT

## European Social Fund provision in Network Personnel

### Up for Work

### Report of a Call 2 Visit in March 2022



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



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## Context

Network Personnel is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Up for Work European Social Fund (ESF) project. 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 March 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 2 visit to Network Personnel on behalf of DfE to evaluate the capacity of the project promoter to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision. The Call 2 visit was informed by the quality improvement plan which has been scrutinised by ETI.

## Views of participants

At the time of the Call 2 visit, 21 participants<sup>1</sup> were registered on the project.

ETI met and spoke in focus groups with a sample of participants. Furthermore, 48% of the participants completed the online questionnaire. All of the participants reported that they were very well supported by the staff and that being on the programme improved their confidence and self-esteem, and supported them well to address learning and other personal barriers to help them gain employment.

All of the participants spoken with were able to provide a range of examples of skills development, as well as practical and emotional help and support received, including completing job applications, interview preparation and managing their personal finances. They reported that engagement with project staff has improved their confidence, self-esteem and self-belief, helped them to develop new skills and removed barriers to progression to further training, education or employment.

## Focus of the Call 2 Visit

The Call 2 visit focused on evaluating the extent to which the project promoter is able to demonstrate its capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Up for Work ESF project.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

Two of the key areas which the organisation has prioritised for improvement through its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are to:

- further develop the team's ability to support vulnerable participants and those with additional barriers; and
- improve the quality of participant action plans and reviews.

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<sup>1</sup> All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter.

## Key Findings

The Call 2 visit identified the following key findings.

- The curriculum offer for the participants is very good; there are a wide range of relevant level 1 qualifications. A range of projects, including one on leadership, and health and well-being workshops provide the participants with opportunities to develop the skills they need to enable them to move into employment. The offer also includes relevant short online courses leading to vocational qualifications, such as manual handling and cyber security awareness. The participants report that achieving these vocational qualifications boosts their confidence and motivates them to progress to further and more challenging qualifications. The project offer is further enhanced through confidence and team building and 'have a go' taster days, along with creative workshops.
- The comprehensive initial assessment process focuses on identifying the participant's barriers in life, learning and work. As a result, a high quality individualised action plan is developed to address the identified barriers. The actions have clear targets that are well understood by the participants and include the achievement of qualifications. Regular in-depth progress reviews are carried out with the participants, with progress recognised and when necessary, appropriate challenge given to meet the agreed targets.
- An effective on-line Participant Information Management System (PIMS)<sup>2</sup> has been developed. It is used to store all the information for the participants, including for example the results of their initial assessment, their action plan, their engagement log, the qualifications achieved and their employment outcome. This system is well-structured, easily navigated and can produce reports for both individual and groups of participants that summarises their progress.
- The sessions observed are effective and well-planned. Staff are highly skilled, have an in-depth knowledge of each participant and have developed very good working relationships with them based on trust. They provide high levels of effective support for the participants and constantly reinforce how the activities are preparing them for moving into employment. Additional one-to-one support sessions are provided to the participants where appropriate. As a result of the pandemic and the move to remote working and online engagement, a loan scheme was put in place to support those participants without access to appropriate technology.

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<sup>2</sup> The zones within PIMS are based on a Life Zones model developed by [GEMS NI](#).

- All of the outcomes on the project are very positive. Over the four-year period, to date, the target for recruitment has been exceeded; nearly all of the participants have been successfully retained. There are high levels of progression of participants into employment or education and training. The project has been particularly successful in moving the participants into work.
- There is highly effective leadership and management of the project at all levels with well-developed staff working relationships and a clearly evident participant-centred approach taken by all. Effective links have been established with a wide range of external organisations and these are used well to support the provision for care, welfare and support of the participants, for example in accessing mental health and addiction services and counselling. A continuing professional development programme has been put in place to further develop the team's ability to better support vulnerable participants and those with additional barriers. For example, training undertaken has included how to approach sensitive topics, the use of youth appropriate language and how to build resilience, self-esteem and self-advocacy. The project promoter has continued to deliver provision in a most challenging operating environment.
- A comprehensive and well established quality cycle involves all staff and the project promoter has acted on the findings in the previous inspection<sup>3</sup>, including for example, the improved quality of the learning and development sessions. The project promoter places a high priority on quality improvement, and as a consequence the self-evaluation and quality improvement processes are well developed and the resultant quality improvement plan has clear actions with appropriate targets that address well the identified areas for improvement. Regular risk based audits are informed by the participants' most up-to-date information, supplemented with a theme-based monthly sampling exercise. A session observation process is in place to monitor the quality of the sessions and new staff have the opportunity to observe experienced staff.

## Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the Up for Work ESF project reflect current legislation and practice.

## Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 2 visit, and in the areas evaluated, Network Personnel demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of the provision for the Up for Work ESF project.

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<sup>3</sup> [European Social Fund provision in Network Personnel - Up for Work \(etini.gov.uk\)](http://etini.gov.uk)

# APPENDIX

## A. Call 2 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Up for Work	Over the four-year period <sup>4</sup>
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	357 (104%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	180 (275%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	124 (92%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	350 (98%)

## B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this face-to-face and remote visit included: the observation of five sessions of practice (face-to-face and remote); focus group meetings with a sample of eleven participants; discussions with key staff (including the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements); and, the opportunity for participants to complete a confidential questionnaire. Inspectors also scrutinised relevant data and documentation provided by the ESF project promoter.

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%

<sup>4</sup> From April 2018 to December 2021.

## Overall outcome

ETI use one of the following outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the project promoter:

At the time of the Call 2 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 2 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 2 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 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 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the for xx ESF project reflect current legislation and practice.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the Call 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the for 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 2 visit, the arrangements for safeguarding the participants of the for xx ESF project are unsatisfactory. <DN insert detail>.

ETI will return to the provider within six working weeks to monitor progress in addressing the unsatisfactory arrangements for safeguarding.

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