

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
Ashton Community Trust

Creating Opportunities and Real Experiences (CORE)

Report of a Call 3 Visit in September 2022



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



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Context

Ashton Community Trust is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Creating Opportunities and Real Experiences (CORE) European Social Fund (ESF) project, as part of a third Call for projects which will run from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. 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 September 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 3 visit to Ashton Community Trust 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, 90 participants¹ were registered on the project.

The ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups. They spoke positively about the benefits of the project, valuing how the staff help them to progress with a programme tailored to address their individual needs and aspirations.

Twenty percent of the participants completed the online questionnaire. They all reported that they receive accurate, timely updates and information about their programme. They also reported that: their programme is well managed; they feel confident to contact their mentors/tutors when they do not understand or have a query about something; and they are well informed about how to stay safe and feel safe and secure in the organisation.

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 promote a holistic approach to learning, health and wellbeing, personal development and employability; and
- to implement digital record keeping and on-line tracking systems that will effectively monitor the progress of individual participants across all aspects of their programme.

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 which include any areas for improvement to be addressed for the remainder of the third Call.

- The curriculum provided is participant-centred with three strands: employability skills; health and wellbeing; and training. There are opportunities to engage in activities such as gym taster sessions and themed workshops such as food poverty, individual benefits calculator sessions and gardening for wellbeing. Participants have attended and successfully completed external training in the areas of construction skills register, driver theory, eyelash training and forklift skills. They are made aware of possible progression pathways and signposted to further training and/or employment.
- A focused initial needs barrier assessment is undertaken by a mentor with the participant. This informs an action plan, with wrap-around, holistic support matched well to the individual participant's development needs, interests and aspirations. The mentors work well together to address the wide range of needs of individual participants, promote their well-being and develop their employability skills through responsive, tailored one-to-one sessions. The project promoter has prioritised a wellbeing pilot with wellness drop-in support sessions.
- Sessions are delivered in-house or online by experienced staff. The sessions observed were effective, well planned, and well-paced, with participants supported and encouraged effectively by the tutors. There was good engagement by participants using focused learning resources.
- There is also the facilitation of joint sessions and sharing of practice between the project promoter's CORE ESF project and the Belfast Works project.
- The participant files scrutinised documented well their learning and development needs, with evidence of detailed communication between staff and participants, and regular reviews and updates. The implementation of digital record keeping and online tracking systems to record information and track the participants' progress in the individual aspects of the programme need to be integrated, to better support the overall analysis of the distance travelled by the participants and to better inform the ongoing quality improvement planning process.
- There is a good range of marketing materials to support recruitment and ongoing monitoring of the project's social media reach. Overall recruitment to date is aligned to the targets set. There has been positive progression of participants into employment or education and training to date. Most of the participants have been successfully retained at the time of the visit.

- Staff are well experienced in delivering community-based programmes. They work well as a team and have good opportunities for continuing professional development. A majority of the organisation's staff are based in the geographical area the CORE ESF project serves, with lived experience drawn upon to help address the needs of participants.
- Overall, the leadership and management is planning effectively 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 plan. There are identified key challenges for which there are mitigations: financial stability and growth; organisational relevance; organisational resilience; and organisational sustainability. For example, tendering for high social impact projects and consultancy work allows the organisation to invest in delivery. There is an awareness that recruitment must be managed, with planning for exit and ongoing progression of participants.
- There are established links and partnerships with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies to support participants, and those spoken with were positive about the work of the project. Partnership work is ongoing with a further education college and the local universities, including to identify appropriate progression routes for the participants.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- update the policies and procedures for child protection and safeguarding young people and adults at risk, to include the various mediums of engagement used by staff and participants, and written information for participants during induction; and
- fill the vacant deputy designated person post.

Overall outcome

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

Appendix

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – CORE	Since 1 April 2022 ²
Numbers of enrolments and % against target	192 (62%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	29 (49%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	34 (58%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	150 (78%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed three sessions of practice, spoke with a sample of participants during focus group meetings, had discussions with key stakeholders, including employers and representatives of a local temporary supported accommodation setting and a social enterprise/ registered charity and key staff (to include quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements). All 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 - <DN Insert date of visit>.

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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