

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE

SUSE+ Proposal to Mid Ulster District Council

1.0 Introduction

Based on the success to date of the Step Up to Sustainable Employment + (SUSE+) programme to date, South West College intends to submit an application in response to the ESF Call 3 for a 1 year extension to the existing SUSE+ funded under Call 2 of the ESF Programme. It is anticipated that this Call will be live from 1st April 2022 and will end on 31st March 2023. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the success of the SUSE+ programme in Mid Ulster area and set out the broad outlines of the proposed new programme.

The SUSE+ Programme is a collaborative employability programme, which support participants entering or moving towards employment across the Mid Ulster and Fermanagh/Omagh District Council Areas. The Programme is led by South West College (SWC) with the support of a range of partners:

- Northern Regional College
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
- Education and Library Boards
- Northern, Southern and Western Trusts Health and Social Care Trusts
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

2.0 SUSE+ Outputs and Outcomes 2018 to 2021

The impacts to date have been significant with 170 or 28% of participants entering sustained employment. Even at the minimum wage this yields wages of over £2 million per annum to the local economy.

The SUSE+ programme is a mentor led initiative with six mentors employed to support participants across the district. Whilst the initiative supports citizens in the urban areas of Magherafelt, Cookstown and Dungannon, assistance for rural dwellers is a key focus of the programme and is reflected in the spread of mentoring resources across the district. To ensure an equal distribution of mentors the College has divided the district into three discrete sectors and allocated two mentors to each sector.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the programme outputs to date by geographic sector:

Table 1: Cumulative programme outputs by area 2018-2021, Mid Ulster Council.

District Sector	Participants Recruited	Outputs		
		Qualifications	Specialist Training	Sustained Employment
Carntogher Moyola Magherafelt	177	232	168	46
Cookstown Torrent	183	255	186	52
Dungannon Clogher Valley	240	347	243	72
Total	600	834	597	170

3.0 Self-Evaluation

At the conclusion of year 2 of the current programme (June, 2020) the SUSE+ Programme team undertook a detailed self-evaluation process, which identified strengths and areas for improvement. A synopsis of the findings is contained in Table 2.

Table 2: SUSE+ Strengths and Areas for Improvement (June 2020)

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
Six dedicated mentors based in MUC area supporting citizens to reach full potential.	Further increase the provision of engineering training to match local employer needs
246 participants recruited in MUDC area in year 2 of the current programme against a target of 200.	Further develop a comprehensive range of Blended provision for Year 3 of the programme which fully meets the care, welfare, personal development and learning needs of participants
Focus on rural outreach with 139 participants recruited from these rural areas in year 2 against a target of 96.	Develop a comprehensive Recruitment and Marketing Strategy for Year 3 of the Programme to take into account remote working model for staff, a remote delivery model for staff and a remote learning model for participants.
76 citizens in the district securing sustainable employment against a target of 44 for year 2.	

The ability of the programme to provide participants with travel, childcare and subsistence allowances to address barriers to participation.	
54 participants progressing to Education and Training against a target of 16 year 2 of the programme.	

4.0 Programme Proposal 2022-2023

South West College intends to apply for a 1 year extension to the current SUSE+ programme in response to the imminent ESF Call 3 which will run from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. The programme will continue to be delivered in its current format and will again be collaborative in its approach and it is envisaged that the partnership which was developed to deliver SUSE+ will be retained to deliver any new programme. It is intended that all current partners including The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will continue to support the programme for a further year in response to Call 3 of the ESF programme.

4.1 Programme Aim and Rationale

To provide a mentor led initiative which supports citizens in the Mid Ulster District Council area move into or towards sustained employment through the provision of a mentor led education, training and development programme.

Table 3: Programme Rationale

Who	Engage 200 unemployed and economically inactive people exhibiting barriers to employment.
Where	Delivery will be provided in the College campuses and via outreaching mentoring support in a range of locations across the region. Partner organisation premises will be utilised for mentoring, work placement and delivery of Step into Employment Programmes.
When	200 participants in the 2022/23 financial year.
What	Mentor led initiative will identify and address barriers to progression into Education, Training & Sustained Employment through mentoring, support, guidance, Essential Skills and qualifications at level one and below along with specialist training. Participants will have access to Specialist Support Services, work placement and Step Into Employment Programmes. Mentors will signpost participants to the provision and support which best meet their needs. All participants will avail of post programme mentoring after they leave provision to ensure the progression to education, training and employment is sustained.
Why	To increase economic performance across the region thus combating poverty; securing sustained employment for 36% of the target group and significantly

	enhancing the employability of the remainder through a structured, partnership based approach which complements existing provision and places employers at the centre of delivery.
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5.0 Opportunities for Mid Ulster Council

South West College intends to make an application to The European Social Fund Managing Authority Call 3 for approximately £634,614 for a further year's funding for the SUSE+ employability programme representing 75% of the total budget required to fund the programme. It is envisaged that the remaining 25% match funding requirement will be realised from the statutory partners that supported the SUSE+ programme. Based on the breakdown of annual funding realised for SUSE+ it is anticipated that the commitment profile for any new programme would be as outlined in Table 4.

Table 3: Annual Funding Profile

Source	Percentage	Amount
DfE/ESF	65%	£543,710.15
DAERA	10.16%	£100,000
MUDC	4.26%	£40,000
FODC	4.26%	£40,000
Radius Housing	2.99%	£25,000
SWC	13.33%	£62,767.01
Total	100%	£836,477.16

In a Mid Ulster specific context the provision of £40,000 per annum in match funding would leverage an additional £464,768 of funding to support citizens in the district. As we enter the development stage of this proposal an opportunity exists for council officials to participate in a range of partner workshops where that application will be developed and aligned with the community plan.

Indicative objectives for the delivery of proposed employability programme in the Mid Ulster Council area

1. 425 Qualifications Achieved at Level 1
2. 35 Essential Skills Level 1 Qualifications to be Achieved (Literacy , Numeracy and a strong focus on ICT)
3. 44 participants or 22% of participants to Enter Employment on Leaving the Programme
4. 44 Participants or 22% of Participants in Employment Six Months After Leaving Programme
5. 16 Leavers From the Programme Join Education or Training Programmes
6. 294 Specialist qualifications attained

APPENDIX 2



**First Steps Women's Centre Application for
ESF Call 3 Match Funding
to Mid Ulster Council**

14th June 2021

Author: Michael McGoldrick, CEO

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Executive Summary

First Steps Women's Centre (FSWC) is a registered charity and Company Limited by Guarantee, based in Dungannon. It was formed in 1998 to provide education, training and support to women. These support services include free onsite creche, minibus transport service to and from the Centre and a Benefit Checker service aimed at assisting women and their families through the complex benefit system. This support alongside the training is vital for the retention and success of the programmes.

Since 2008 FSWC has been a recipient of the European Social Fund (ESF). The remit of applications was to provide training, education that would lead into employment and further education and training.

The main training and education areas are

- **IT** – Ranging from Sage Accounts, Sage Payroll to Microsoft Office and Excel
- **Wellbeing and Lifeskills** – These courses are often the first steps for many women seeking to reengage positively in society. They include programmes such as Assertiveness, Creative Writing, Managing Stress in Lockdown, Building Resilience, Pilates, Yoga Hormone Harmony
- **Lifeskills** - Consists of accredited Numeracy, Literacy and ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages programmes.

At present the Centre employs 2 full time and 16 part time staff. The Centre also hires up to 20 part time tutors every year.

Economic Impact and Track Record

Financial Impact - Since 2015 First Steps Women's Centre has brought in a staggering **£2.5million** into the Mid Ulster Council area. Most of this funding was through our European Social Fund programme, however £479k was for a capital refurbishment programme (2017-18). This capital investment has doubled the size of the Centre and totally transformed the building into a modern Centre with facilities including 4 training rooms and an onsite creche. The Centre is a fully equipped and modern building with WIFI throughout. It has been recently endorsed by CEO of South West College, Michael McAllister and also Adrian McCreesh, CEO of Mid Ulster Council.

Employment - 219 women gained employment since 2015 as a result of attending FSWC. FSWC believes that this has been a very positive boost for the local economy. The additional

development of Wellbeing programmes has created a positive environment for many women to consider employment who had previously been labelled “Economically Inactive”.

ESF Outputs and Outcomes 2015-2021

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Total
Job Creation	63	45	48	35	22	6	219*
Qualifications	108	94	129	138	151	183	803
Number of Courses	41	49	61	51	61	38	301
Participants - places	356	489	763	623	776	259	3,266
Income	£420k	£405k	£394k	£436k	£424k	£424k	£2.5m

***Employment Trends** – The above table indicates a downward trend in employment. There are two main reasons for this. There has been a downward trend in local vacancies and also a number of women who have attended the Centre have other family/caring responsibilities that make it difficult to travel outside the Borough.

Job Fair – FSWC has held two successful Job Fairs with more than 30 employers and over 400 participants attending. These were open to the whole community including schools. FSWC had to cancel a planned Job Fair in March 2020 due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. It is a key aim of ESF Call 3 application is to host a Job Fair in the autumn of 2022.

Local Migrant Population – FSWC has a 15-year successful track record of providing accredited English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training and qualification. Approximately 45% of all participants attending FSWC have been from the migrant community. They come to learn English so that they can gain employment, further their learning and to help integrate within the Mid Ulster community. Testimonials show that it is the manner and way in which FSWC provides the learning that ensures 80% and above retention levels. These include the following:

- **Family Friendly Times** – Courses start at 9.45am or 1.00pm for 2-3 hours,
- **Bi-Lingual Staff** – FSWC has 4 bi-lingual staff operating within its creche,
- **Transport** – This is a big plus for many women who do not have access to transport,
- **Benefit Checker** – Assistance with the numerous forms including Universal Credit has helped bring some financial stability to women and their families.

New ESF Programme

Title of Project: Women Towards Education and Employment

Annual Cost of programme £480k

Match Funding required £168k

Request to MUC £25k

Additional Match Funders identified – see page 5

Wrap Around Project

This proposal will be based at FSWC's own premises. This is a fully equipped, self-contained space with an onsite creche. It is the intention of FSWC to provide the following programmes on an annual basis. Each area of work has its own co-ordinator who will recruit and mentor the women throughout their journey. They will be assisted by a Progression Worker who will help and encourage those attending to apply for higher levels of education and/or seek employment.

Proposed Outputs and Outcomes 2022-23

Interview & CV Skills – FSWC has liaised with Terex to provide Interview Technique training.

1 X Literacy & Numeracy – up to Level 1 for 25 women

12 X IT Courses for 120 women. These courses will range from Level 1 Sage Accounts & Sage Payroll, Microsoft Office, Excel and Beginners IT. There will also be introductory programmes including: iPad & Tablet, Digital Photography.

20 X Health & Wellbeing Programmes for 175 women – These are aimed at building up the soft skills such as Confidence, Resilience, Assertiveness and Communication.

Progression & Mentoring work – FSWC will employ a Progression Worker whose role is to guide women into further education and employment. The Progression Worker will assist women in setting training and employment targets and working towards them

1 X Job Fair – 25 organisations and 200-300 people attending

Outcomes for Women Towards Education & Employment 2022-23

Outcomes	2022-23	Outcomes	2022-23
Job Creation	42	Participants - places	264
Qualifications	145	Job Fair	1 with 200-300 in attendance
Number of Courses	39	Improvement in Soft Skills	225
Income	£480k		

Partnership

FSWC has been a vital cog within the community and voluntary sector of Mid Ulster. Our ESF programme stretches far and wide throughout the Borough and beyond. The Centre has developed many partnerships especially for referrals and for progression beyond FSWC. These include the following:

- **South West College** – regular contact with senior and programme staff. This included College providing a progression route for Literacy class up to a Level 2 qualification. FSWC recently met with CEO and Ciaran McManus to plan a Level 3 programme at FSWC. This partnership will include FSWC providing transport, childcare and a room while the College will provide a tutor. This will be a progression route for 15 of FSWC’s ESF participants.
- **University of Ulster** – This has been through the Community Engagement Office at UU. A new Level 3 course Unlocking Potential will commence in the autumn hosted by FSWC, and run by UU.
- **Terex** – provision of Interview Skills training for participants at FSWC.
- **Surestart Dungannon & Coalisland** – Referrals from Surestart for local and migrant women as well as sharing of best practice by childcare staff.
- **Women’s Aid** – WA has an outreach office with FSWC. They use this to meet with a clients. Some of these clients will be signposted to attend a course at FSWC. FSWC will also provide Benefit Checker assistance and help complete Universal Credit applications as well as providing reception support.
- **Mid Ulster Council** – Through receipt of Strategic Development Grant. MUC has provided funded over the past 5-6 years under the SDG. This has enabled FSWC

provide much needed services for the Centre. Over the past 8-9 months CEO of FSWC has been liaising with MUC regarding future ESF programmes and match funding. MUC has also been supportive of the Community Relations work with local migrant community through guidance and funding.

- **PSNI, Education Authority NI, De Paul Ireland, St Vincent de Paul, Vineyard Church, Probation Board NI, et al** – FSWC works with many statutory, community and voluntary organisations including the those listed.

Funding

Leveraging Additional Funding through Match Funding

The ESF programme makes a 65% contribution to the overall cost of the project. FSWC needs to raise £155k-£170k per annum in order to maximise the outputs and outcomes. The income on page 2 shows the fluctuation on funding. This is down to the difficulty in raising and identifying match funding. If MUC were to provide £35k in Match Funding then this would draw down an additional £65k for the project.

Funding Sources – FSWC has had to apply for Match Funding from multiple sources. It is estimated that this project will cost £480 with a £168k match fund required from FSWC. With £168k FSWC will be able to draw down an additional £312k per annum into the Mid Ulster Council area.

Source of Funding	Amount	Definite (Y/N)
FSWC	£25k	Y
Dept f Communities	£70k	Y
MUC	£25k	TBC
Match Funding to be identified	£48k	

Funding Request to Mid Ulster Council

FSWC understands the current economic situation and the financial situation of Mid Ulster Council. FSWC also recognises that the Council has awarded financial support in the past to other organisations from its Economic Department. However, FSWC had not been offered such support. FSWC believes that an award of £25k is a reasonable request given the proven benefits that it brings to the Council area.

EXPLORING ENTERPRISE PROGRAMME

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To request match funding of £6,250 for 4 Exploring Enterprise Programme courses to be delivered under Call 3 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014-2020 in the period 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Exploring Enterprise Programme (EEP) is a pre-enterprise programme which seeks to support people who are considering self-employment as their route to enter and/or return to the labour market. The programme is a mixture of group training and one to one mentoring support. Participants do not need to have a specific business idea to join; the programme provides an insight into starting a business whilst allowing participants to work towards achieving the OCN endorsed Level 1 qualification in Understanding Business Enterprise. In addition, there will also be an emphasis with regards guiding and assisting individuals into and through the mainstream business support/further education options. Pre-enterprise support is an essential first stage in the continuum of support required to encourage entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland. The EEP will help boost the economy by initiating business start-ups and skilling individuals to become more employable.

EEP flexible design allows participants to receive support which meets their individual needs whilst remaining within the framework of a structured and manageable programme offering.

There are four key areas that we focus on to enhance the self-employability outcomes of participants:

- Participants are provided with knowledge which is underpinned by the OCN Level 1 Understanding Business Enterprise qualification.
- Participants are provided with soft skills and confidence they require to use their knowledge.
- Participants are provided with one-to-one support tailored to their needs from qualified and experienced staff.
- Participants are signposted to additional support which is relevant to them to further enhance their self-employability outcomes.

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Stage 1: Pre-Training Mentoring (6 hours per participant)

The Business Mentor will identify participants unique development requirements and create a personal action plan which provides a framework which ensures that support is focussed on the participants specific needs.

Stage 2: Training (45 hours)

Training is delivered in small groups of 5-10 participants using OCN approved training materials and additional support materials which are specific to the needs of the group. A range of learning experiences are provided including peer-to-peer support and team working which allows softer skills such as networking, problem solving, communication and confidence building to be enhanced.

Participants can work towards achieving the OCN Level 1 Understanding Business Enterprise qualifications which incorporates three mandatory units: Developing a Business Idea, Factors Contributing to being a Successful Entrepreneur and Being Enterprising.

Additional workshops are also delivered which cover the key skills (Business Operations, Introduction to Business Finance, Know your Market, Marketing and Promotion, Pitching an Idea) required to start and run a business.

An Employability workshop is also offered which covers CV development, employability skills and interview techniques aimed at participants who decide that self-employment is no longer their preferred pathway.

Workshops are supplemented by guest speakers from external organisations such as Accountants etc who provide expert advice. Additionally, participants have the opportunity to speak to local entrepreneurs to gain valuable insight on running a small business.

Stage 3: Post Training Mentoring (10 hours per participant)

Personal action plans are reviewed to determine the participants progress following training and any additional areas that need to be addressed are identified. Participants are assisted to determine their preferred progression pathways (self-employment, employment and/or further education or training) and the Business Mentor will identify specific activities for each pathway which may include:

Self-Employment

Developing the business idea, market research, pricing and financial projections, marketing, and legal and regulatory requirements.

Employment

Identifying suitable jobs, job searching, developing a CV, completing application forms and interview preparation.

Further Education or Training

Researching relevant courses, completing application forms, and liaising with education providers.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

We propose to run 4 courses in the Mid Ulster District Council area over the year (1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023). This will allow us to support another 40 people of which 28 will gain a qualification and 18 will have positive immediate outcomes when they complete the programme.

Programme Outputs in the Mid Ulster District Council Area

Outputs	Total
Courses Delivered	4
Participants Enrolled (Receiving Pre-Training Personal Development Plans)	40
Participants receiving OCN Level 1 Understanding Business Enterprise Qualification	28
Participants exiting Into Employment (Including Self-Employment)	15
Participants exiting Into Further Education and Training	3
Participants In Employment 6 months after exit	17

Workspace Enterprises will deliver 1 medium course. Dungannon Enterprise Centre will deliver 2 large courses and they will also 1 small course for participants from the Cookstown area. Due to Covid-19 the programme has been adapted using a blended learning approach with a hybrid of face-to-face (subject to public health guidance) and online delivery. Technology enhanced learning using tools such as Nearpod, Cahoot etc has been incorporated in programme delivery.

Programme Budget in the Mid Ulster District Council Area

Description	£
Total Funding Requirement	£ 43,846.92
Funding from ESF / DfE (65%)	£28,500.50
Funding from Enterprise NI (21%)	£9,096.42
Match Funding Request from Council (14%)	£ 6,250.00

Regional match funding position

Funder	Agreed	Requested	Comments
Department for the Economy - 65%	£298,929.93		
Match funding - 35% (breakdown below)	£160,962.27		
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council		£22,741.31	Going forward to committee in March 2022
Ards & North Down Borough Council		£9,614.50	Pending outcome of competitive process.
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon borough council	£15,049.00		
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	£20,000.00		Agreed at L&D committee in February 2022, to be ratified at full council in March 2022
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council	£2,500.00		
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council		£5,852.31	Pending outcome of competitive process.
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	£17,787.52		
Newry, Mourne & Down District Council	£10,000		
Mid Ulster District Council		£6,250.00	
Total Match Funding	£65,336.52	£44,458.12	
Enterprise NI & LEA contribution	£51,167.63		

IMPACT OF EXPLORING ENTERPRISE TO DATE

The Exploring Enterprise Programme has had a significant impact in the Mid Ulster District Council area. Under the current Letter of Offer 9 courses have been successfully delivered.

92 people have received pre-training mentoring support and 56 went on to receive the CCEA accredited Level 1 Certificate in Understanding Business Enterprise qualification.

43 participants gained employment of which 37 went into self-employment and 6 went into employment. An additional 16 participants went onto training or further education.

The high number of participants who went into self-employment and started their own business in the Mid Ulster District Council area is notable. A wide range of businesses across various sectors were started such as photography, construction, sports massage, interior design etc. During the Covid-19 pandemic the programme continued to be delivered in very challenging circumstances with 9 participants going into self-employment.

The creation of new business within the area also creates employment opportunities for others.

Year 1 - 2018/19	Overall Target	Actual Cookstown	Actual Dungannon	Actual Magherafelt	Total Outcome
Courses Delivered	4	0	2	1	3
Participants enrolled	40	0	23	8	31
Individuals achieving QFCF Level 1 in 'Understanding Business Enterprise'	32	0	15	7	22
Individuals into Employment/Self-Employment on leaving	8	0	10	2	12
Individuals into Employment / Self - Employment after 6 months	11	0	13	4	17
Individuals Into FE & Training	3	0	0	0	0

Year 1 - 2019/20	Overall Target	Actual Cookstown	Actual Dungannon	Actual Magherafelt	Total Outcome
Courses Delivered	5	0	2	2	4
Participants enrolled	49	0	24	16	40
Individuals achieving QFCF Level 1 in 'Understanding Business Enterprise'	39	0	11	13	24
Individuals into Employment/Self-Employment on leaving	10	0	18	5	22
Individuals into Employment / Self - Employment after 6 months	13	0	13	4	17
Individuals Into FE & Training	4	0	0	1	1

Year 1 - 2020/21	Overall Target	Actual Cookstown	Actual Dungannon	Actual Magherafelt	Total Outcome
Courses Delivered	5	0	1	1	2

Participants enrolled	37	0	12	9	21
Individuals achieving QFCF Level 1 in 'Understanding Business Enterprise'	30	0	1	9	10
Individuals into Employment/Self-Employment on leaving	8	0	7	2	9
Individuals into Employment / Self - Employment after 6 months	10	0	TBC	TBC	
Individuals Into FE & Training	4	0	0	2	2

PROGRAMME BENEFITS

We are confident that EEP is an important value-added and complimentary offering in what we refer to as the “continuum of support” for entrepreneurs in the Mid Ulster District Council area and that it plays a vital part in helping us address the entrepreneurial deficit. EEP is often the very first step for someone who believes that self-employment may be their best route back to the labour market, allowing them to understand what it takes to be self-employed and run a business, so they can make an informed decision.

EEP feeds into and supports the success of other mainstream offerings such as the Go for It programme which in turn increases the level of entrepreneurial activity in the Mid Ulster District Council, reduces the levels of unemployment and economic inactivity and helps to re-balance the economy. The programme equips participants with the practical information and skills required to start their business.

PROGRAMME TARGET PARTICIPANTS

To be eligible for EEP you must be:

- Aged 16 or over
- Legally able to reside and work in the UK
- Unemployed or Economically Inactive or want to increase the hours you work per week; and
- Not participating on another ESF programme.

A number of key target groups you identified:

- Long term unemployed or long term economically inactive.
- Living in areas of deprivation.
- Where the number of workless families is high.

- From underrepresented groups such as lone parents, women, ethnic minority groups; prisoners.
- Individuals with no or low education and skill levels.
- From areas suffering from the economic impact as a result of major employer closures and redundancies including significant Covid-19 related job losses.
- Young People (16-30)

Locally, our direct delivery partners have in place established relationships with the key stakeholders in their area and share information about their respective services so as to ensure participants are aware of the programme and of other support available locally to them. Business Mentors have knowledge of existing provision within the council area and at initial meetings will assess the participants individual's needs and requirements. If Exploring Enterprise is not the best fit for the participant, they will be assisted move on to a more suitable offering. At entry level potential participants must confirm they are not currently participants on another ESF programme. This is verified using the ESF database – if the participant is on another ESF programme this will be flagged on the system and the participant cannot be enrolled on EEP.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY STAFF

There will be no staffing implications for Council as the programme will be delivered by Workspace Enterprises and Dungannon Enterprise Centre. Delivery staff are qualified and experienced Business Mentors.

SUMMARY

The Exploring Enterprise Programme will have a significant impact in the Mid Ulster District Council area. We propose to deliver 4 EEP courses targeting 40 people over the year. 28 people (70%) will achieve a recognised qualification which will enhance their CV. Furthermore 18 participants (45%) will have an enhanced outcome from the programme with the creation of 15 new jobs.



NOW Group
ESF Match Funding Proposal – Call 3
2022/23

*European Social Fund
Call 3 2022-2023
Priority 2 - Disability*

NOW Group

NOW Group are an award-winning social enterprise who delivers services across Northern Ireland supporting people with learning difficulties, disabilities and autism into jobs with a future. We are passionate about changing lives and our priority is on outcomes and impact for individuals, their families and the communities who are the most disadvantaged.

Our Employment and Training services focus on supporting people into open employment through our model of individual progression which reaching people who often 'fall through the gaps' and are not currently supported by traditional providers.

NOW Group continually scan workforce trends and the economic and political environments for opportunities for employment, up skilling and social engagement which will increase inclusion and well-being, leading to citizenship development and civic involvement for our participants. Our work is also about social and community inclusion which leads to the people we work with having better health, a better education and a brighter future. Our services are continually evolving as a result of co-design, participant feedback and learning from projects.

NOW Group have delivered programmes under the ESF programme since 2008 and provides training and employment services for people with learning disabilities, difficulties and Autism. Like all previous ESF programmes, our current flagship programme Verve has exceeded all targets set and offers substantial 'value for money' when reviewing investments against results.

Since April 2018 we have supported 337 people into paid employment and 80 participants have maintained voluntary jobs across all council areas. Impressively, from the 337 paid job outcomes since 2018, 83% have sustained their job for more than 6 months. Also, we support progression by providing appropriate life/work experience opportunities and tailored accredited and non-accredited qualifications through intensive academy styled training backed by practical work experience. To date 2,150 training accreditations have been completed by our participant cohort.

NOW Group's project Verve has been recognised as one of the top-six programmes in Europe for promoting the employment of people with disabilities in 2020.

The Employment for All award, which is overseen by an internal jury panel of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), screens the work of around 15,000 initiatives from businesses and support providers across European nations.

Inclusion in the final six candidates of the fourth edition of the award demonstrates Verve's success in providing a model for employment that is viewed as one of the most sustainable. – <https://www.nowgroup.org/post/now-group-one-of-the-best-in-europe>

March 2020 also seen Project Verve awarded the prestigious OCN Provider of the Year Award - <https://www.ocni.org.uk/learner-awards/learner-awards-2020>

Social Enterprise NI held their Annual Awards on Friday 15th October 2021, with NOW Group winning the; Best in Category for: Education, Employment and Training, for the work associated with Project Verve. This is the second time in three years that Project Verve has won this award. –

<https://www.socialenterpriseni.org/post/social-enterprise-ni-awards-2021-winners-announced>

Proposal – Project Verve

Verve, NOW Group's flagship employment and training programme is funded by the European Social Fund and is now into the fourth year of delivery. Verve is targeted at participants with learning difficulties/disabilities and/or neurodiverse conditions who need additional support in order to access sustainable paid employment opportunities or sustained voluntary opportunities. The programme provides participants with opportunities to avail of innovative pre-employment academy training courses, which fall in line with labour market trends. The academy model is a 12-week training programme that consist of both theory and practical learning methodologies. The experiential learning process, along with classroom-based theory allows participants to gain a holistic perspective of the vocation and delivers well trained, qualified participants ready to explore employment opportunities. Other tailored interventions include;

- A dedicated Employment Officer to help participants prepare for employment or volunteering
- Assistance to find the job participants want and support to sustain them in the new position
- Access to a range of training courses to help participants prepare for work, including; CV building, job search techniques, customer services skills, effective communication skills and essential skills
- Tailored career guidance and access to a job club

The Department for Economy (DfE) and the European Commission (ESF) have released a Call 3 for providers. Contract will be agreed through an open call, tender application process.

We are seeking match funding of **£6,250** per annum to support our ESF application for Call 3 2022/23, with a value for of **£312** per participant supported. This proposal can be scaled up depending on the demonstrated need within the council area.

The amount requested will be matched by NOW Group and will allow for the appointment of a full-time staff member, dedicated to the operational delivery of service provision within the Mid Ulster area. The match funding will also allow for a part time Skills Trainer, who will deliver accredited training within the Mid Ulster council area.

Programme Costs

Total Project Costs: Up to £1,301,526.48

Total Programme Funding (ESF & DfE) 65%: Up to £845,992.21

Match funding (35%) £455,534.27 (below)

Funder	£	Status
DfC (Department for Communities)	£175,000	Confirmed
Ards & North Down Council	£25,000	Conditional Offer
Antrim & Newtownabbey Council	£25,000	Conditional Offer
Mid & East Antrim Council	£25,000	Confirmed
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	£25,000	Confirmed
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	£25,000	Conditional Offer
Mid Ulster District Council	£6,250	Conditional offer
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	£10,000	Confirmed
BHSCT	£90,000	Confirmed
Self-Match (NOW)	£49,284	Confirmed
TOTAL	£455,534	

Outcomes

Outcome	Annual Target
Participants Supported	20
Paid Employment Secured (over 10 hours)	5
Voluntary Jobs Secured	5
Jobs sustained over 6 months	4
Participants increasing skills	20
Participants gaining a vocational qualification (Level 1 / Level 2)	16
Participants gaining work experience	16
Local Employers engaged and offering support	45

Our ambitious target against jobs and retention is based on our experience and ability to align individual progression planning, relevant training, job outcome and ability to sustain jobs through Workable (NI). Workable (NI) offers a flexible range of long-term support to help people with disabilities who have barriers to employment to secure and sustain work. Workable (NI) is a 12-month contract for participants and is solely funded by the Department for Communities (DfC).

Strategic Context

The proposal will support the Council's Economic Growth Plan, their Strategic Economic Priorities, the Draft Programme for Government and compliment City Deal Skill Development. The outcomes of the programme will create a culture of enterprise and business with improved employment and skills for the population across the council area. Reducing economic inactivity and offering sustainable opportunities to people who may have been reliant on benefits is a key area of success for the NOW Group.

NOW Group Background

The NOW Group are an award-winning social enterprise who delivers services across Northern Ireland supporting people with learning difficulties, disabilities and autism into jobs with a future. We are passionate about changing lives and our priority is on outcomes and impact for individuals, their families and the communities who are the most disadvantaged.

Our Employment and Training services focus on supporting people into open employment through our model of individual progression which reaching people who often 'fall through the gaps' and are not currently supported by traditional providers.

NOW Group continually scan workforce trends and the economic and political environments for opportunities for employment, up skilling and social engagement which will increase inclusion and well being, leading to citizenship development and civic involvement for our participants. Our work is also about social and community inclusion which leads to the people we work with having better health, a better education and a brighter future. Our services are continually evolving as a result of co-design, participant feedback and learning from projects.

European Social Fund Experience (ESF)

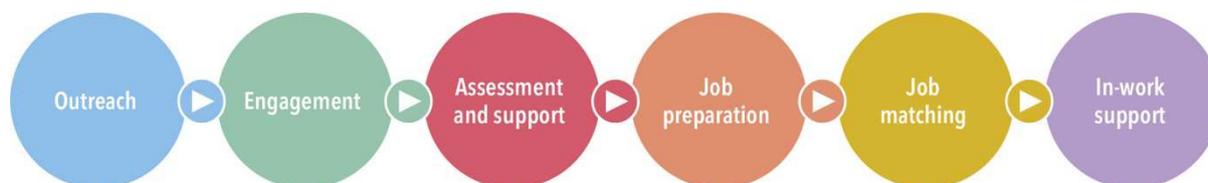
NOW Group have delivered programmes under the ESF programme since 2008 and provides training and employment services for people with learning disabilities, difficulties and Autism. Like all previous ESF programmes, our current flagship programme Verve has exceeded all targets set and offers substantial 'value for money' when reviewing investments against results.

Since April 2018 we have supported 337 people into paid employment and 80 participants have maintained voluntary jobs across all council areas. We support progression by providing appropriate life/work experience opportunities and tailored accredited and non-accredited qualifications through intensive academy styled training backed by practical work experience. To date 2,221 training accreditations have been completed by our participant cohort.

Our Model

NOW Group have tried, tested and refined our progression model to reach maximum impact. The following model of good practice has been designed specifically to

increase progression routes for participant and develop strategic outputs in line with Council economic planning. This model will increase progression routes for participants and map to identified skills gaps across all council. We will deliver on the principles of Supported Employment.



Delivery

- Employment Programme provides one-to-one specialist support to individuals to help them get the job they want and to keep it.
- A range of interventions to build clients capacity to engage in training, work placements, voluntary work and community/social activities.
- Vocational and employability training delivered at appropriate levels.
- In work support to increase sustainability.

NOW Group’s Employment Team have an expert working knowledge of DEL/DES funded programmes. We continually scope for new opportunities or programmes that will cater for our participants. We recognise that one size does not fit all and along with DES, JBO Staff and other providers, we can deliver a suite of complimentary programmes which lead to sustained employment for the ESF participants. Successful programmes map directly to the strategic context and advancement of local government’s key priorities by supporting participants through a continuum of support that is tailored to individual progression as outlined below.

Before Work	Getting into Work	Sustaining Job
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills Training • Vocational academies • NOW services • Transition Services • Volunteering • Training for Success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESF Programmes • Steps to success • WRES (Work Ready Employment Services) • JobStart Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WorkableNI • Access to Work (NI) • Conditional Management Programme

We recognise that working in collaboration with like-minded organisations supports shared expertise, learning and progression for participants. NOW is a member of the Supported Employment Solutions (SES) Consortium, with contracts to deliver NI-wide on the Work Connect, Workable programmes. There are 7 organisations working together to ensure that we job entrants receive the most appropriate in work support. We will work in collaboration with JBO Staff and FE/HE providers to continually seek the best programme fit for progression for our participants. As an organisation we do not wish to duplicate service provision currently on offer and

believe that Project Verve is stand alone within the employability model we have designed and expertise in delivery.

Sustainability and Growth

NOW Group successfully operate social enterprises across the province, with the revenue generated supports our progressive approach when working with people with learning disability, difficulty and neurodiverse condition.

We are also part of a consortium of seven disabilities organisations, SES Partnership, who currently deliver the in-work support programme Workable (NI). This programme works as a continuum for the ESF programme to further support those who gain paid employment to sustain and progress within the job. We currently support 73 people to sustain their employment post their participation on the ESF programme.

Employer Engagement

NOW Group has evolved their activities through co-design and production. A key element of this is to work with participant and potential employers to map learning against need. Employer forums have been established to support this model and this will be introduced within the area. NOW will proactively work in advance with employers to establish working relationships before introducing participants. This method of job match has enabled NOW to maximise opportunities for both employers and employees. At present we are engaged with over 25 employers within the Mid Ulster area. However, with a dedicated staff member, we can strengthen these strategic links and establish further relationships with local employers and businesses.

The success of the JAM Card initiative through the private business, government and council sectors has been a catalyst for employers wanting to contact NOW to discover how else they can support communities. We actively work with business and employers to provide opportunities for career progression, partnership working and to develop social enterprise as an integral part of supply chains. NOW also support business to meet their social corporate responsibilities to add value to an organisation's activities by ensuring they have a positive impact on society, the environment and the economy.

NOW Group ESF Call 3 – Funding

Project Verve	1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023
	£1,301,526
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS (AS PER ANNEX A OF YOUR APPLICATION)	1,301,526
MINUS REVENUE (if applicable)	
ELIGIBLE TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	1,301,526
TOTAL ESF CONTRIBUTION - 50%	650,763
TOTAL DfE CONTRIBUTION - 15%	195,229
TOTAL PUBLIC or PRIVATE (OTHER) MATCH FUNDING CONTRIBUTION - 35%	455,534

DfC (Department for Communities)	£175,000
Ards & North Down	£25,000
Antrim & Newtownabbey	£25,000
Mid & East Antrim	£25,000
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