

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in
Bryson Energy

Step into Employment

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

Bryson Energy is part of the Bryson Charitable Group; the group's focus is on developing and delivering sustainable responses to social needs across Northern Ireland and beyond.

Bryson Energy is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Step into 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. This project is part funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme (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 Bryson Energy 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, 31 participants¹ were registered on the project.

The ETI met and spoke with a sample of participants during their mentoring sessions and in focus groups. Forty-one participants also completed the online questionnaire, including a number who recently left the project.

Almost all of the participants in their questionnaire responses, and all of those in focus group meetings, reported that they were happy with their experiences on the project and that it was preparing them well for their next steps in finding a job or progressing to further education and/or training. Overall, they were positive about the individualised support they received from the employment officers which increased their confidence.

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 demonstrate more clearly the overall impact of the work of the project; and
- to identify and meet better the specific employability and personal needs of individual participants.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

¹ All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter.

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 for the participants is good; it is delivered through a flexible one-to-one mentoring model with an employability officer assigned to each participant on entry to the project. From referral stage through to progression to work or further education and/or training, participants are provided with effective regular one-to-one support.
- The employability officers display good levels of skill and commitment, develop productive working relationships with the participants, who mostly engage well with them, and as a result they are developing appropriate employability skills and personal confidence. The recently introduced initial assessment process is used well to capture individual needs and barriers on entry to the programme. The use of a more structured individual development plan would support better the overall planning for progression for each participant. The plan should capture prioritised key areas for development, contain incremental short-term targets and identify actions to promote progression, which would facilitate more participant-focused skills and personal development.
- Participants undertake a range of activities, which raise appropriately their job-focus aspirations. They regularly compile or update their curriculum vitae, undertake job search activities, complete job applications, and develop their interview skills for both online and face-to-face engagement. A small number of participants would benefit from further advice and guidance in relation to specific skills training and development leading to accreditation. In addition, monthly group sessions are available which focus, for example, on confidence building, as well as developing employability skills. It is important that these group sessions are offered to all participants through a more formal and planned calendar of events.
- All mentoring sessions should be consistently planned to: ensure continuity from one session to the next; promote progression in skills and personal development through short-term targets; and capture and record next steps for progression. The introduction of a soft skills measurement tool would help the organisation demonstrate more clearly the overall impact of the work of project staff, particularly in relation to the personal skills development and distance travelled by the participants.
- Bryson Energy has been proactive in establishing a number of two-week pre-employment opportunities with national companies, across a range of professional and technical areas which include a guaranteed interview on completion of the work placement. External stakeholders would benefit from opportunities to learn more about the Step Into Employment project to ensure that they can refer more appropriately, and better match, the needs of a wider

range of participants, including those for whom English is not their first language. While a good start has been made to inform external stakeholders about relevant, current opportunities through the recently revived project Newsletter, this could be further developed to meet better the wide-ranging needs of participants, and to celebrate successful outcomes.

- At the time of the inspection visit, all of the outcomes on the project are positive; overall recruitment to date is in line with the target set. Most of the participants have been successfully retained to date. Progression to further education and/or training has exceeded the overall target, while progression into employment is high.
- The project is incorporated within the overall Bryson Energy provision, and benefits from the employability links, partnership working and support provided from Bryson Recycling, Adventure Activities, skills division and play resource centre. The senior leadership and management of Bryson Energy are fully supportive and committed to the work of the project; good working relationships exist among the project and senior management team.
- The quality improvement planning process is embedded into the work of the project and is mostly effective. In order to improve the impact of the process, there needs to be more specific identification of the areas for improvement or further development and the associated actions required. It is important that the areas for improvement identified are based on more regular feedback from all stakeholders and staff, and that actions identified are more specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic. The impact of the actions taken needs to be regularly reviewed and evaluated and the findings used more effectively to inform the ongoing provision.
- Overall, the leadership and management is planning well for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants. Bryson Energy is considering the availability of non-ESF progression pathways to support future participants as they move towards the end of Call 3.
- The participants are referred to Bryson Energy by a range of agencies and stakeholders which include the local Jobs and Benefits Offices and other ESF projects, as well as social media. These stakeholders appreciate the support and timely communication with staff about the needs and progression of each participant.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- develop further the external reporting arrangements for both child protection and adult safeguarding, to include contact details for local children's and adults' gateway teams.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, Bryson Energy demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Step into Employment ESF project.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund –Step into Employment

Since 1 April 2022²

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	143 (72%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	35 (83%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	43 (154%)
Number who left early and retention %	29 (80 %)

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed two sessions of practice; spoke with a sample of participants during their mentoring sessions and in two focus groups; had discussions with key stakeholders, including employers and external agencies and with key staff (including those responsible for the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements); and participants had the opportunity 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%

² 1 April 2022 – 26 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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