

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND CALL 3 VISIT

European Social Fund provision in The Bytes Project

Launch Pad - STEM, Youth Work and Personal Development

Report of a Call 3 Visit in November 2022



Providing Inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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Context

The Bytes Project (Bytes) is a youth work charity contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Launch Pad - STEM¹, Youth Work and Personal Development European Social Fund (ESF) project (the Launch Pad), 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.

Following an initial baseline visit in September 2022, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Call 3 visit in November 2022 to Bytes 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, 5 participants² 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, including a number who have left the project. They all spoke positively about participation on the programme, including for example how it supported the development of friendships, self-confidence, motivation and skills necessary to apply for jobs, such as writing a curriculum vitae, undertaking job searches and completing an application form, as well as improving their mental health.

A small number of current participants completed the online questionnaire. They all indicated that they feel well supported when learning in the organisation, know who to go to if they have a problem or concern and that their participation on the course is preparing them well for their next steps to find a job, or progress onto further education/training programmes.

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:

- continue to monitor closely the recruitment challenges; and
- better meet the progression needs of young people, including through access to other Bytes provision and signposting.

The arrangements for safeguarding were also included.

¹ Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

² 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 Launch Pad ESF project is incorporated within the overall provision of Bytes and the curriculum provided is tailored to support the needs of young people, using an effective youth work approach to improve their personal development and remove barriers to employment. When access to digital equipment is provided, it improves engagement and motivation.
- All participants would benefit from more embedded opportunities to develop their digital and creative media skills and to gain accredited qualifications in these areas. To date, participants have successfully completed accredited level one qualifications in applying for work, progression to employment, and youth work practice.
- Initial assessments are completed using a 'My Journey Document' to help participants identify where they are at the beginning and then at the end of their programme in a wide range of areas, including confidence, resilience, well-being, and digital skills. Developing an action plan with staff enables the young person to set appropriate short-term and long-term goals for personal development, employment and/or training and to clarify potential barriers and acknowledge any progressions. It is recommended that staff increase their monitoring and review of these action plans with participants to better capture the impact of the project.
- The one-to-one and group sessions observed were effective. Staff quickly established good working relationships with the participants; they were well supported, encouraged and engaged in their learning. A suitably tailored approach in the one-to-one sessions matched individual need with interests and aspirations. In the digital and creative session, the participants had opportunities to draw on the expertise of the tutors and engage in hands-on application using industry standard equipment to mix their own music tracks.
- The Bytes premises in Glengormley and in the North-West, in a shared space with a temporary supported accommodation setting in Derry/Londonderry, provide attractive and comfortable safe spaces for young people to attend. The environment, along with the youth work ethos and approach, supports the improvement of the participants' emotional health and well-being and builds their confidence and motivation to address a range of barriers to employment.
- Bytes also has a dedicated space in a temporary supported accommodation setting in Belfast, as well as the facility for provision in local hubs in its additional target areas of Antrim and Kells, and Ballymoney.

- Almost all of the participants have been successfully retained and there has been positive progression of participants into employment, education and/or training to date. There is a commitment to supporting the participants after they have left the project, including through access to other Bytes provision and signposting to other organisations and stakeholders.
- Recruitment has been identified as an area for improvement and is being monitored closely. Overall, just over half of the recruitment target has been realised to date, with the greatest recruitment being in the North-West. It is necessary that the project promoter consider and review as appropriate the overall targets with DfE, and to inform the efficient deployment of staff for the remainder of the project.
- A designated project co-ordinator, and three project managers, are supported by a further nine staff in delivering the project. The team in the North-West is well-established, while the teams in the other geographical target areas are more recently established.
- A strength of the project is that its current staff complement includes four qualified youth workers and two working towards youth work qualifications at degree and postgraduate level. A further five staff hold level two qualifications in youth work. The delivery of digital and creative media skills is by Giga Training, a procured delivery partner and a memorandum of understanding is in place for this delivery. Its staff have lived experiences to draw upon which are relevant to and engage and motivate the participants.
- The project's self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process has been informed by staff feedback; this process needs to be embedded and linked to the organisation's overall strategic plan. The quality improvement plan should be strengthened with more specific and clearly prioritised areas for development and associated actions which are specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic and reflect the delivery in each of the geographical areas. The impact of the actions taken needs to be regularly reviewed and evaluated by staff at all levels and the findings used to inform the development of the provision.
- Overall, the leadership and management is planning for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability and progression of participants. Planning for sustainability involves Bytes and six other independent charities (Include Youth, The NI Youth Forum, the Prince's Trust, Springboard, Start 360 and Youth Action) under the Youth Start branding.
- There are staff with clearly identified responsibility for safeguarding on the project and across Bytes. Established arrangements are in place for reporting on safeguarding by the other organisations. The organisation's board has recently completed a good governance exercise, and consequently has identified roles and responsibilities for board members, including a designated board member for safeguarding.

- The project works with the Education Authority and the Simon Community Northern Ireland. Good relations exist with the staff in the Jobs and Benefits Offices in the North-West. There is a focus on developing further the links and partnerships with the third sector³ and private sector partners. The organisation also undertakes commissioned research work.

Safeguarding

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

The project promoter, however, needs to:

- bring all training up-to-date; and
- continue the process of updating and ratifying its policies, including use of contemporary language and a review of procedures.

Overall outcome

At the time of the Call 3 visit, and in the areas evaluated, Bytes demonstrates capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the quality of provision for the Launch Pad ESF project.

³ The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector.

APPENDIX

A. Call 3 Performance Data

European Social Fund – Launch Pad

Since 1 April 2022⁴

Numbers of enrolments and % against target	75 (54%)
Numbers of participants into employment upon leaving and % against target	9 (45%)
Numbers of participants into education and/or training upon leaving and % against target	27 (48%)
Retention - Numbers and % against target	6 (92%)

B. Methodology and evidence base

The arrangements for this visit included: the observation of four sessions of practice; discussions with participants during their learning and development sessions and in focus groups; discussions with key stakeholders (including a school, management in sheltered accommodation, and a jobs and benefits officer) and with key staff (including the quality improvement and safeguarding arrangements). 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%

⁴ 1 April 2022 – 21 November 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 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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