



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Bryson FutureSkills

Young Persons Employment Initiative

Report of an Inspection in
November 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



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1. Context

Bryson FutureSkills is a provider of vocational training and employment programmes. It is one of six social business units within the wider Bryson Charitable Group, which is the largest social enterprise in Northern Ireland. It is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Young Persons Employment Initiative (YPEI) European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aim of the project is to progress young unemployed people, between the age of 16 and 24, towards sustainable employment through targeted employability skills training.

The programme is a blend of in-house directed training and work-based activities, which includes access to accredited level one employability qualifications, one-to-one support, job search techniques and signposting to further education and training progression pathways.

The project is led by a project manager and supported by an employment officer. The employability and professional and technical training is provided by tutors from the project promoter's other programmes¹. The project operates out of three office sites, two in the Greater Belfast area and one in Newtownabbey; satellite offices are also available in East and South Belfast. The programme duration ranges from a minimum of one week to a maximum of ten weeks, and the participants generally attend for 30 hours depending on their needs. At the time of the inspection, 10 participants² were registered on the YPEI project and nine of them are currently in a work-experience placement.

2. Views of participants

All of the participants commented on the very good levels of support they received from the employment coach and felt that they were more work ready as a result of their participation in both the programme and their work-experience placements. Overall, they felt more motivated and prepared to gain employment.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all participants, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for participants;
- quality of provision; and
- effectiveness of the leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Good
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

¹ Training for Success and ApprenticeshipNI programmes.

² All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter at the time of the inspection.

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

The project promoter has developed effective relationships with a range of referral agencies to support recruitment from the target group over the last three years. Whilst recruitment has been slow in year three at 66% (35/53), the project promoter is currently on track to meet its overall recruitment target with 186 participants recruited against a target of 213 (87%) to date. The project promoter has recognised that it is below the overall target set for the attainment of level one employability qualifications at 41% (19/46) and has appropriately identified this an area for development on their quality improvement plan. The achievement target has been negatively impacted by the high number of early leavers and completers moving into employment. In the small number of sessions observed, the participants were demonstrating good to very good standards of work. The employers interviewed also commented on the good work-readiness skills with one employer noting participants were developing and taking responsibility well.

Whilst retention was outstanding in year one of the project, at 100%, it dropped to 48% in year two and is currently 100% in year three to date. However out of the 37 participants that left the programme early in year two, it is of note that just over half (51%) of these leavers moved into positive destinations of employment (30%) or further training (19%) with no change in circumstances for the remainder. It is a significant strength that the project promoter has exceeded the overall 15% target set for leavers progressing into employment at 28% (59/213). The project is currently below the 35% target set for progression into further education and training at 20% (42/213).

All of the participants interviewed are making appropriate progress in reducing their barriers to employment and are developing well their overall employability skills through the provision of well-matched work-experience placements. The project promoter has identified tracking of personal and social skills as an area for improvement and is in the process of introducing an outcome based accountability for participants to better demonstrate the distance travelled in relation to these skills.

6. Quality of provision

Whilst there is a narrow accredited curriculum offer consisting of a level one employability qualification, one-to-one mentoring and job search activities, it is enabling participants to access appropriate work-experience and employment opportunities. One-to-one meetings are effectively tailored to suit the participants' needs. The wide range of work-experience placements and the current high placement rate is developing well the participants' employability skills and supporting the high into employment rates on the programme to date. Participants can also access relevant specialist short industry courses through Bryson's wider programmes.

The induction and initial assessment process effectively details the entry profile of the participants and their previous work-experience. These processes are strengthened by good quality self- assessments which review and track the participants' progression according to whether they have low, medium or high barriers. The self-assessment results are used well to inform appropriate and measurable actions in the personal development plans (PDP). The PDPs effectively monitor and track progress and are reviewed on a detailed mentoring log at meetings between the participants and the employment coach. It is a strength of this process that the reviews are informed by appropriate comments on progress from the participant, employer and employment coach.

The quality of the directed training and the learning development sessions in the small sample observed was very good. The participants were well engaged in the learning and development session and Information Learning Technology was used effectively to support their employability skills. There was a very good rapport between the participants and project staff and the job search sessions provided a high level of support and included the use of effective resources, linked to 'live' job vacancies.

The processes for care and welfare are impacting positively on the learning and development needs of the participants and all of them, where applicable, receive a weekly subsistence and travel allowance. In addition to the provision of an in-house counsellor, the project promoter also has developed effective links with a range of external agencies to support the varied individual learning needs. It is also a strength of the provision that those completers who did not progress into employment or further training, can continue to attend the weekly job search activities. Good news and participant success stories are also shared well in the project promoter's internal newsletter and this has effectively helped to build the confidence of the participants.

7. Leadership and management

The Executive Director, management team and board of directors for Bryson FutureSkills are committed to improving the employment opportunities for all of the participants. There is a clear strategic vision for the project and the project promoter effectively utilises resources from the Bryson Charitable Group's wider resources to source job opportunities. For example, in the first year of the programme participants were able to avail of a pre-employment programme, through Bryson Recycling, which offered a wide range of job roles.

The project team is small and therefore lines of communication and support are very good. There are frequent opportunities for staff to meet and discuss progress; there is also a cycle of regular, quarterly, meetings. The roles and responsibilities of all staff are clearly defined and staff reported positively on the appropriate continuing professional development opportunities they can access. The overall quality of the training environment is very good and includes access to well-resourced IT suites and one-to-one mentoring rooms.

There is a basic management information system which tracks the project's progress against performance targets and also monitors the recruitment patterns across the catchment area. The project promoter has identified the need to develop their systems to track data on the wider social value impact of the project. In addition, it has developed a bespoke database to identify the reasons for low progression to further education or training. It has also recognised the need to increase the uptake on the level one qualifications and has enhanced the initial assessment process to encourage participants in raising their employability through structured training with an enhanced focus on barriers that may restrict them from gaining a qualification.

There are effective links and partnerships with a range of referral agencies, including the local jobs and benefits office, which is supporting good levels of recruitment to the project to date. There are also well developed links with a range of private and public employers, for example Belfast City Council and several housing association projects, to provide high quality work-experience and employment opportunities to continue to match the participants' aspirations. All of the employers interviewed reported positively on their engagement with the project promoter.

Whilst the processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement are well-embedded and include appropriate systems for observing the quality of the learning and development provision, there is a need for the more effective use and analysis of data to better inform evaluations in the self-evaluation report. In addition, the quality improvement plan could be further strengthened to include a more consistent use of specific and measurable actions to further promote improvement across the provision.

8. Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

9. Overall effectiveness

Bryson FutureSkills Young Persons Employment Initiative demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
YPEI ESF project 2015/2016	80	100%
YPEI ESF project 2016/2017	71	89%
YPEI ESF project 2017/2018	35	66%

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website www.etini.gov.uk.

Two ETI inspectors observed six participants in a range of settings including one learning and development session and a focus group meeting. Discussions were held with the project's management team, the employment coach, employability tutor and three employers. The management information systems, including the tracking and monitoring systems, samples of the participants' work, personal development plans, and the trainers' and employment coaches' planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

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%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on Outcomes for learners, Quality of Provision and on Leadership and Management.

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

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

The project promoter has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.
The project promoter demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.
The project promoter needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor and report on the project promoter's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The project promoter needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the participants. The ETI will monitor and report on the project promoter's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
Achievement	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.

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