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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

The Bytes Project Belfast

Inspected: March 2007

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1. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

1.1 The Bytes Project was established in 1993 and is aimed at re-engaging unemployed 16-25 year olds with learning and education through the creative use of information and communication technology (ICT).

1.2 The current strategic direction of the Bytes Project provides young people from recognised socially deprived areas who are not in full-time education, training or employment with personal development and ICT skills to assist with their progression to further and higher education or employment.

1.3 The Bytes Project received £263,000 from both the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning in 2006. Additional funding for specific programmes was received from a range of organisations including, The Cross Border Programme, The Community Relations Council, The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. The Bytes Project also works with and supports a wide range of organisations and in a small number of cases there are formal partnership agreements.

1.4 At the time of the inspection there were ten Bytes centres, nine in the greater Belfast area and one in Derry city. Over 60% of users have little or no recognised qualifications when they attend for the first time and many have poor literacy and numeracy skills. The Derry Bytes Project is based in the Strand Foyer accommodation project and the Bytes Project staff are developing links with the Belfast Foyer.

1.5 The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees (Trustees) and in total there are 18 full-time staff including, a project director, project manager, three senior development officers, a cross-community worker and 14 development officers.

1.6 The Trustees meet on a regular basis and there are appropriate systems in place for the management of staff. The Project has a strategic and operational plan which is evaluated by the staff and the Trustees.

1.7 A cross-border worker is employed through Peace II funding and there are links between young people from the Derry Bytes Project and young people from the Inishowen peninsula. The links include the development of dance music tracks using special software programs and a Workers Educational Association facilitated course entitled 'Us and Them Too' involving 40 young people from either side of the border.

1.8 The Bytes Project delivered 10 single identity projects and two cross-community projects in 2006; at the time of inspection the community relations worker was not in post.

1.9 According to figures supplied by the organisation from the total number of young people who attended the project in 2006, 114 progressed to a training organisation, 28 to further education, 280 gained employment and 193 received further qualifications.

1.10 Qualifications listed by the organisation and achieved by the users included 72 Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) recognised courses in ICT basic skills and job-seeking skills, seven Youth Achievement and 26 Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. The Project offers a range of personal development programmes and those observed by members of the Education and

Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) included drugs awareness, job-search skills, web development and music development. The Inspectorate also observed individual support for a range of personal and social issues including communication skills, confidence building and conflict resolution. A total of 954 achievements or recognised qualifications are listed by the organisation as having been completed by all users in 2006.

1.11 The Bytes Project offers free unlimited access to Internet, e-mail and ICT facilities to all users.

1.12 The Bytes Project has appropriate child protection procedures in place and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are a recently reviewed and updated child protection policy and the completion of child protection training by all staff; the few areas for improvement identified include the need to develop a drugs and alcohol policy and the need to ensure that there are sufficient staff levels in some of the individual projects.

2. EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 The Inspectorate observed 30 hours of practice during 12 different sessions, visited seven centres and made a cross-border visit. Pre-meetings were held with the project director, project manager, members of the management team and Trustees. Discussions took place with representatives from other organisations and a wide range of documentation was examined. The Inspectorate also examined some individual portfolios and records of achievements of users.

2.2 As part of the inspection process the procedures for pastoral care and child protection were examined and almost all of the 54 young people interviewed stated they felt safe and were treated fairly by staff. Almost all were aware of procedures in relation to child protection and signed a contract as part of safe Internet usage.

3. STRENGTHS OF THE PROVISION

3.1 The strengths of the provision include:

- the good quality of relationships and mutual respect between staff and the young people and the positive learning climate created by the staff;
- the ability of students to work independently and with a sense of enjoyment in spite of poor levels of academic achievement;
- the commitment to curriculum development that provides programmes tailored to the needs and abilities of individuals and the appropriate methods of engagement and recognition of each student as an individual with independent learning needs;
- the development of ICT skills for almost all of the young people including improved keyboard skills, helping to develop appropriate Internet searches and the use of the Adobe Photoshop programme;

- the variety of activities and experiences that increase the development of interpersonal skills including self-esteem, confidence building, communication skills and the ability to work with others. The young people reported that the outward bound experiences including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Irish Football Association coaching and employment placements including one with the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade were most beneficial;
- the continuing development of the Bytes cross-border Project and the planning, preparation and delivery of sessions that include the promotion of the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence;
- the good outcomes of the community relations work that many young people reported had made a difference in their opinions and attitudes to members of other communities;
- the commitment and dedication of the whole staff team who work together sharing skills and supporting each other in the achievement of the organisation's main aims;
- the clear, coherent leadership by the project director, the good communication between the management team and the individual centres and the support of the Trustees;
- the capacity of the individual Bytes projects to attract young people from disadvantaged areas who have left formal education with few qualifications and the contribution that the Project makes in increasing the employability of those young people;
- the clear levels of progression by users, as evidenced by the completion of accredited courses and by those young people who have benefited from the Bytes Project in the past; and
- the good range of links with external partners and in particular the example of the collaboration between Derry Foyer and the Bytes Project.

4. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

4.1 Areas for development include the need to:

- continue to encourage the users of the Bytes Project to set appropriate and challenging goals that are reviewed regularly and include a form of assessment agreed and understood by the individual user;
- identify and promote clearly its unique contribution;
- formalise the relationships with some of the external partners to ensure better clarity of roles and avoid possible duplication; and

- give young people a role in the development and management of the Project by involvement in governance.

5. **CONCLUSION**

5.1 In the areas under focus, the organisation has major strengths in its educational and training provision. The inspection has identified no significant areas for improvement. The educational and training needs of the learners are being well met. The community can have confidence in the organisation's capacity for continuous improvement in meeting its economic and workforce needs, and in achieving national and international standards of best practice in most areas.

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