



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Association for Real Change,
Northern Ireland

OPTIO Project

Report of an Inspection in
February 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Contents

| Section | Page |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Context | 1 |
| 2. Focus of the inspection | 1 |
| 3. Overall findings of the inspection | 1 |
| 4. Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| 5. Quality of provision | 2 |
| 6. Leadership and management | 3 |
| 7. Overall effectiveness | 4 |

Appendix

- A. Project registrations
- B. Partnership arrangements
- C. Inspection methodology and evidence base
- D. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

1. Context

The project promoter, Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI), is a registered charity, limited by guarantee and contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the OPTIO European Social Fund (ESF) project. Currently, ARC NI has a membership of 38 learning disability service providers across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors and delivers the project in partnership with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and East Belfast Enterprise¹. The OPTIO project aims to support people with a learning disability to engage in a two stage training provision to increase their employability skills and to promote choice and aspiration for economic activity. Stage 1 comprises 10 weekly four-hour sessions to raise the participants' self-confidence and develop their personal capabilities, particularly in relation to enterprise and customer service. Stage 2 comprises 13 weekly four-hour sessions to facilitate the participants in exploring, planning and running a one-day enterprise event. The participants have the opportunity to complete an accredited unit/s or award at entry level or level 1 in vocational skills or a non-accredited ARC NI certificate.

ARC NI is managed by a director who is supported by a UK-wide board of trustees and a locally based chairperson responsible for the NI division. The OPTIO project is managed by a project co-ordinator, supported by three administrative and training staff and an enterprise facilitator from East Belfast Enterprise.

At the time of the inspection, 18 participants² were registered on the OPTIO project. Their training is hosted and supported by Camphill Communities Glengraig for eight of the participants, Edgumbe Training and Resource Centre for six, and Inspire for four.

2. 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;
- effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- quality of provision for learning and development; and
- quality of the leadership and management.

3. Overall findings of the inspection

| Overall effectiveness | Capacity to identify and bring about improvement |
|---------------------------|--|
| Outcomes for learners | Good |
| Quality of provision | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |

¹ Details of the partnership arrangement are provided in Appendix B.

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

KEY FINDINGS

4. Outcomes for learners

ARC NI in partnership the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust are very effective in identifying and registering participants from the target group. In 2015/16, the project promoter recruited 28 participants, significantly exceeding the target of 13, which consequently presented challenges to positive progression at the end of training. To date for 2016/17, 23 participants against a target of 24 have been recruited. Retention rates in year 1 were outstanding; all of the participants across the two cohorts completed stage 1 and stage 2 of the training. To date in year 2, most (78%) of the participants have completed or are still on training. It is a notable strength that in year 1 of the project, all of the participants completed an enterprise challenge to at least a good standard. In addition, nearly all (89%) of them achieved a vocational skills qualification at either entry level or level 1; 57% were at level 1. Across the skills areas, the standards of participants' work are mostly good.

During the first year of the project, ARC NI has been particularly successful in progressing six participants into voluntary work which exceeds the project target of three; and three into further training which is in line with the target. No participants, however, progressed into employment, further education or self-employment, which had targets of three, two and one respectively. Although, the project promoter is reviewing the progression targets with the ESF Managing Authority, particularly in relation to self-employment, overall positive progression rate for year 1 was below the project target at 32% and is an area for improvement.

In discussions with the inspection team, all of the participants reported that they enjoyed their training and, particularly through the enterprise events, had increased their self-confidence, personal capabilities and motivation to engage in further social enterprise events, training or voluntary work. This is particularly evident for a small number of past participants who have continued to develop their social enterprise skills through further opportunities to create and sell handmade greeting cards facilitated by their learning disability service provider. The project promoter is also able to demonstrate clearly, through a robust participant outcome tool which captures and analyses progress data, that the participants are increasing their self-confidence; improving the quality of their social interactions and planning and organisational skills; and raising their awareness and capabilities in relation to social enterprise projects.

5. Quality of provision

The OPTIO curriculum model is innovative and provides the participants, most of whom have significant barriers to progression, with good opportunities to develop their employability skills and personal capabilities. For example, the project promoter, drawing on the expertise of East Belfast Enterprise, facilitates effectively the application and consolidation of the participants' enterprise and customer service skills through the planning and implementation of an enterprise challenge. To date, the project promoter has successfully facilitated the targeted number of three enterprise challenges, which have included pop-up stalls to sell hand-made crafts and made-to-order confectionary. Through the well-considered enterprise challenges, the participants have good opportunities to develop and enhance a pertinent range of key personal capabilities which include team working, researching, planning, negotiating, costing, presentation and interpersonal skills.

On entry to the project, ARC NI diligently assesses each participant's learning needs, particularly in relation to their specific barriers to progress, in order to inform individual training plans with appropriate targets and goals. Regular monitoring and reviewing arrangements systematically measure and track the progress of each participant against appropriate personal development indicators. While long term social and economic goals are clearly established for each participant, the project promoter needs to develop more effective strategies that promote and underpin successful progression opportunities to further education, training or employment, where possible.

The quality of the directed training observed is good. The trainer is supported well in the delivery by a co-facilitator and additional support is provided effectively by the participants' key workers. The training resources have been appropriately adapted to suit the needs of the group and a variety of teaching strategies have been embedded to engage the participants. However, the overall planning for progression, linked to targeted qualification levels, requires further development.

The care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their learning and development. There is an inclusive, caring ethos fostered by the project promoter and the supporting partnership organisations. The staff maintain very effective working relationships with the participants which underpin their good progress in building self-confidence and self-advocacy capabilities. The project promoter links well with learning disability service providers who contribute significantly to the participants' additional support needs, including signposting to external support. ARC NI, however, needs to ensure similar support is accessible for self-referred participants who are not associated with a learning disability service provider.

6. Leadership and management

ARC NI, in conjunction with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, has a clear strategic vision to promote and enable the sustainable delivery of enterprise training and opportunities for people with learning disabilities. The project promoter is highly committed to the success of the OPTIO project in the short term and to the future embedding of the delivery model across the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. At all levels within ARC NI, the staff work systematically to build effective partnerships with learning disability service providers to promote and deliver the project's aims and goals. While there are clear and open channels of communication with all of the partnership organisations to ensure delivery is well-planned, the support workers and other key personnel associated learning disability service providers would benefit from further training and development in relation to the enterprise challenges, particularly the sharing of effective practice.

All of the staff are highly motivated and well-informed regarding the needs of and opportunities for people with learning disabilities, and the trainer is on the waiting list to commence the Certificate in Teaching. The quality of the learning facilities and resources to support the delivery of the project is good. A key strength of the provision is the attention given to providing learning materials in an appropriate format to meet the learning needs of the participants.

The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are effective. Through regular and well-documented staff meetings, quarterly meetings with the project partners, and review meetings with the host learning disability service providers, the project promoter reflects thoroughly on the effectiveness of the project and adjusts accordingly its planning to improve the provision. This includes, for example, a considerable review and improvement to the recording, tracking and analysis of the participants' progress in developing their social and employability skills. The project promoter has a basic management information system in place and systematically collects, and is responsive to, feedback from key stakeholders,

including areas for improvement identified by the ETI on previous visits. While the project promoter collates data and feedback relating to the project, it is not used clearly enough in the self-evaluation report to underpin the evaluations and to inform fully actions, measures and targets within the quality improvement plan. Although there is regular monitoring of the quality improvement plan, the evaluation of the impact of the actions and measures need to be documented in a clearer and more formal manner. The quality assurance processes, including internal verification and peer observations, are developing well, but would benefit from a formalised annual quality cycle to structure and guide the processes, incorporating well-informed partner involvement.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding participants reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department. However, the project provider needs to:

- review the arrangements for informing participants, where appropriate, of ARC NI's safeguarding arrangements, particularly for self-referred participants not attached to the host learning disability service provider; and
- extend ARC NI's existing arrangements to promote the responsible and safe use of digital media to include all participants and staff engaged on the OPTIO project.

7. Overall effectiveness

ARC NI demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the participants. There are areas for improvement that the project promoter has demonstrated the capacity to address and these include the need to:

- develop well-targeted strategies to identify and build appropriate progression pathways for each participant beyond the life of the project; and
- make more effective use of available data to inform a comprehensive self-evaluation of the project and to set sharper targets against which quality improvement can be measured.

The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

| Programme | Numbers of enrolments | % against target |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| European Social Fund OPTIO Project, 2015/2016 | 28 | 215% |
| European Social Fund OPTIO Project, 2016/2017 | 23 | 96% |

B. Partnership arrangements

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust part fund the OPTIO project, and promote and facilitate delivery of project through its network of learning disability service providers within the statutory sector. East Belfast Enterprise acts as a co-facilitator with the project promoter to deliver the training, planning and implementation of participants' enterprise events. The project promoter establishes short term partnerships with learning disability service providers, through ARC NI's membership, in the private and voluntary sector to further promote and facilitate the delivery of the project. To date, two statutory and three voluntary learning disability service providers have partnered with the project promoter to refer participants and to support and host the delivery of the OPTIO project.

C. 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 12 participants, which includes four past participants, in one learning and development session and two focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the OPTIO management team, East Belfast Enterprise and two learning disability service providers. The tracking and monitoring arrangements, action plans, and planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

D. 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 organisation:

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