



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in  
Customized Training Services

Community Family Support  
Programme

Report of an Inspection in  
March 2018

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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



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## **1. Context**

Customized Training Services (Customized) is a company limited by guarantee which is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Community Family Support Programme (CFSP) European Social Fund Project (ESF). The aim of the Community Family Support Programme is to support families with a high level of need to develop their capacity to reach their full potential by addressing the employment, educational, training, health, social and economic issues that impact on their daily lives. The main focus of the project is on employability with a family support dimension. The project targets families with 16 + year olds, who are not in education, training, employed or who are working under 16 hours per week. Typically, a family with multiple needs to be addressed signs up on a voluntary basis to engage with the programme in order to develop their capacity to improve their lives.

Customized is the lead contractor for the project and delivers the project in the Fermanagh and Omagh and Derry City and Strabane district council contract areas. It sub-contracts the Mid Ulster and Causeway Coast and Glens district council contract areas to Network Personnel. The project is managed by the strategic manager, who has overarching responsibility for the project, and is supported by the Customized project co-ordinator and Network Personnel's project manager who is also supported by an assistant manager.

The project operates out of premises in Coleraine, Cookstown, Enniskillen, Omagh, Londonderry, and Strabane and is delivered by a team of seven family liaison officers, seven employment engagement officers, one officer who has a combined role as both a family liaison officer and employment engagement officer, along with one full-time group facilitator and seven part-time facilitators.

At the time of the inspection, 76 participants<sup>1</sup> were registered on the project. The participants stay on the project between four and six months, although a small number of them have been on the programme for longer; weekly attendance varies depending on the level of need and the extent of their participation in programmes and courses.

## **2. Views of participants**

The inspection team met with a sample of participants across the project locations, individually and in small groups. The participants report that they have gained significantly through engagement with the programme, and in particular, they report that it has raised their confidence and self-esteem, improved their communication skills and, where appropriate, helped them to gain employment. They also commended the high levels of support they receive from the committed staff to address their various barriers to progression, which includes social isolation and exclusion, homelessness, depression and other mental health issues. They welcome the opportunity to undertake short level 1 accredited courses which enhance their employability skills and a range of other activities that help them to socialise with other people and make new friends.

## **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.

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<sup>1</sup> All performance data in this report was provided by the ESF project promoter at the time of the inspection.

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Very good
<b>Quality of provision</b>	Very good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Very good

#### KEY FINDINGS

##### 5. Outcomes for learners

Customized has developed effective relationships with a wide range of referral agencies, and a significant proportion of the participants also report that they heard about the programme from the project's social media site or by word of mouth. At the time of the inspection, the project had exceeded its target recruitment of participants to the project, with 1221 participants recruited against a target of 1109 (110%). The project has been highly successful in progressing participants into employment, exceeding its target with some 168 participants securing employment against a target of 69 (243%). A further 298 participants have progressed into education and training against a target set of 146 (204%). Over the period, the participants also attained 2,292 qualifications.

The flexibility of the project in best meeting the participants' needs, including home visits for those who for reasons of rural location, social isolation and/or caring responsibilities cannot attend the mentoring or training sessions, is a key strength of the provision. A further initiative to address rural isolation is the provision of driving theory workshops. As a result of the flexibility and participant-centred approach taken, over the three years of the project the retention rate of participants on the project is outstanding (86%).

Most of the participants are highly motivated, enthusiastic and engage fully in their learning and development activities. Most of them also aspire to improve their life chances by re-engaging in education, training and employment. They are encouraged to participate in non-accredited courses to help them to develop and apply strategies to cope with their complex needs and to progress to short accredited courses that enhance their employability and improve their wider skills and dispositions. As a result, almost all of the participants are making very good progress in addressing effectively their complex barriers. The project promoter has established effective collaborative links with the regional further education colleges and other training providers that ensure a good range of progression pathways to education and training programmes and to other funded projects. The project promoter and the sub-contractor also use their wide range of other funded and training programmes to steer or direct the participants to the right provision and to ensure that a range of progression pathways are available to them to meet their individual needs.

##### 6. Quality of provision

The curriculum offered on the project is wide, varied and tailored to good effect to meet the individual needs of the participants. All of them undergo an effective initial assessment interview to identify their specific key barriers to progression and employment. A detailed assessment framework is used by the family liaison officer to guide the interview and to sensitively explore issues such as physical health and emotional well-being, family relationships, home life and money, social and community inclusion and other barriers that the participant experiences. In some instances, where the participant is socially isolated, the

employment engagement and family liaison officers conduct the initial assessment in the participant's home. A tailored programme of individualised support is created and the resultant action plan becomes a working document that is amended regularly and appropriately as the participant progresses on the programme. Evidence from the case files demonstrate clearly the individual journeys and progress of the participants, the action plans are clear and detailed contact logs are kept. The contact logs track the often extensive mentoring and encouragement which the employment engagement and family liaison officers provide; the extensive range of courses, programmes and activities they use to help the participants re-engage well in community, social and family life. The signposting of almost three-fifths of the participants to external specialist provision such as mental health services, addition services and counselling demonstrates the complexity of the barriers they have to plan for. While the progress made by the participants is largely tracked well, the capturing and use of the distance travelled data could be developed further to better demonstrate the impact that the project has on, for example, the participants' health and well-being, development of their wider skills and dispositions skills and the impact on their family life. There are high levels of partnership working by the employment engagement and family liaison officers and their differing skills sets are used to excellent effect to provide high quality provision for the participants.

Appropriate one-to-one mentoring support and advice is provided across a range of issues, including mental health and well-being, parenting and family relationships. The strong and trusting relationships developed through these sessions provide essential personal and social support, and are effective in building the participants' confidence, motivation, and self-esteem; consequently, many of the participants report that families are empowered to make life changes. There is very good signposting to a range of external specialist support agencies such as, counselling providers, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and Advice NI to support the participants to address their complex issues.

Where appropriate, short accredited courses are delivered; these include courses that improve the participants' employability such as customer service, children's care, learning and development, first aid, food hygiene and health and social care. The courses are available in group sessions or in one-to-one timetabled e-learning sessions. The e-learning courses also facilitate well distance learning where the participants can make progress at a pace suited to their needs. The participants have good access to job search activities, including interview skills training and curriculum vitae building. The project staff continually evaluate and reflect critically on the provision, leading to the development of new approaches to engaging the participants. The project has for example, introduced recently information sessions on energy efficiency, money management and car and household maintenance.

The quality of the learning and development group sessions, and one-to-one sessions, observed was good or better. In the most effective practice in the learning and development sessions, the sessions are well-planned and structured, a wide range of active learning and teaching strategies are used, including the effective use of ILT to engage the participants and enrich the learning and fun activities are used well to enhance the learning. In the one-to-one mentoring sessions, the employment engagement and family liaison officers develop strong trustful relationships with the participants which they use well to provide appropriate levels of challenge to encourage them to take ownership of their own development and progression. In the less effective practice, there are missed opportunities to set and agree individualised and specific targets for progression with the participants.

Care and welfare impacts positively on learning and outcomes for participants. The employment engagement and family liaison officers provide high levels of care and support for the participants and demonstrate commitment to their progression and development. The project staff strongly advocate for the participants, for example, in dealing with housing authorities for those who find themselves homeless, supporting them to access benefits advice and to complete the application process for college courses. The project promoter also places an appropriate emphasis on ensuring that the participants have access to a range of health and well-being information and training sessions. Where appropriate, the project also provides transport costs, interview clothes and other crisis intervention assistance for the participants. Support for the participants continues after they have completed the project. The employment engagement and family liaison officers, for example, retain contact and continue to support them in accessing services and to update and enhance their curriculum vitae. The care and welfare of the project staff is also a high priority for senior managers and a policy and procedure for lone-working is in place; the staff have been provided with personal alarms. In the bi-monthly one-to-one support and supervision meetings, the care and welfare of the staff is discussed, including the impact of lone-working and their personal safety. The meetings provide an appropriate forum for the staff to discuss their concerns and, if required, referrals are made to specialist services.

## **7. Leadership and management**

The project promoter's management team have a well-developed vision for the development of the programme. The project promoter is also highly committed to the development and sharing of best practice in the interests of the participants and is an active participant in the Northern Ireland Community Family Support Programme forum. The strategic manager provides regular updates on the progress of the project to the management team. The operations director updates to good effect the board of directors, who have a very clear role in the oversight and governance of the organisation on the performance management of the project. Bi-monthly partnership meetings are held to discuss the performance of the project and to set direction. Standardisation of the processes and procedures across all the offices has been implemented to good effect and audits of the processes and procedures, including safeguarding and all other documentation, across all the offices are undertaken on a bi-annual basis by the strategic manager. The quality monitoring process is robust with appropriate action plans for improvement in cases of non-compliance.

The staff are encouraged to become active members of regional hubs and fora to promote multi-agency cooperation, for example, membership of the Enniskillen Action for Children Family Support Hub. Communication between the staff across each of the offices in Customized Training Services and Network Personnel is facilitated effectively through the use of team messaging and other online tools for the sharing of resources, information and best practice approaches. The two organisations, however, use different tools and consideration should be given to the establishment of a shared, common platform to promote increased cooperation and peer sharing of best practice. In the last year, increased collaborative working has been introduced across the project promoter and the sub-contractor's staff including, peer shadowing across the offices and sharing of best practice days. This has informed better the forward planning of the project and promoted consistency in the quality of the provision across the two organisations. In the bi-monthly support and supervision meetings, the performance of the staff is reviewed, including what is going well and what could be improved; key performance indicators are also reviewed on a monthly basis and revised targets are agreed.

The staff are well qualified and experienced in a wide range of appropriate professions, including those with a social work, adult health and social care, nursing and allied fields, mental health, psychology and psychotherapy, and careers guidance backgrounds. The continuing professional development of staff is a priority. Consequently, they are supported well with an extensive range of relevant development opportunities to enhance the support that they can provide for participants, and in the most effective approaches to learning, teaching and training. The skills and talents of individual staff are used well to further develop many aspects of the provision. For example, an employer engagement officer with a background in graphic design developed the project's social media presence and corporate branding. This increased the awareness of the aims and objectives of the project by the public and resulted in an increase in the number of referrals to the project. The specialist skills of the project staff, however, could be exploited further to build the capacity of the staff across the contract. The facilities, accommodation and resources provided for the project are good to very good.

A project self-evaluation process and quality cycle is well-established. Over the three years of the project, the project team has improved the collection, collation and evaluation of data. An appropriate range of approaches has been used to gather feedback from all key stakeholders which is starting to inform better the self-evaluation and quality improvement process. There is a high focus on self-evaluation and staff are encouraged to continually self-reflect in the bi-monthly team meetings and to familiarise themselves with the specifics of the self-evaluation prompts and process. The quality improvement plan needs to be developed further, however, to provide sharper detail on the actions to be taken and to use more specific and measurable interim targets for improvement.

## **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**

The Customized Training Services Community Family Support Programme project demonstrates a high level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the participants. The area for improvement is:

- to capture fully the distance travelled by the participants and to demonstrate more clearly the impact the project has on their soft skills, family life and progression.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

**A. Project registrations**

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
European Social Fund Community Family Support Programme 2015/2016	269	52%
European Social Fund Community Family Support Programme 2016/2017	536	77%
European Social Fund Community Family Support Programme 2017/2018	416 (to date)	59%

**B. Partnership arrangements**

The project promoter, Customized Training Services, works in partnership with Network Personnel to deliver the Community Family Support Programme.

**C. Inspection methodology and evidence base**

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk).

Two ETI inspectors and one associate assessor observed 16 participants in a range of settings, including mentoring, learning and development sessions and focus groups. Discussions were held with the Customized Training Services management team, partner project manager and assistant manager, employment engagement officers, family liaison officers and key stakeholders. The management information system, including the tracking and monitoring system, samples of the participants' work and family and employment action plans and planning documents were examined. The project promoter's self-evaluation report, quality improvement plan and other relevant documentation were also 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 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	
<b>Retention</b>	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
<b>Achievement</b>	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
<b>Progression</b>	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.

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