



Education and Training
Inspectorate

European Social Fund provision in
Customized Training Services

Pathways for Urban Learners to
Succeed in Employment (PULSE)

Report of an Inspection in
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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
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EXCELLENCE



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1. Context

Customized Training Services (Customized) is a social enterprise organisation and a company limited by guarantee; it is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Pathways for Urban Learners to Succeed in Employment (PULSE) European Social Fund (ESF) project. The main aims of the project are to help young people aged 16-24 years who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) to: re-engage through the medium of music and digital technologies; to develop the appropriate employability and life skills; and gain level 1 qualifications. It is hoped that the young people will progress into further education, training and/ or employment.

The PULSE project operates out of two offices, located in Strabane and Londonderry (Derry). It is governed by a board of directors and a senior management team, who in turn support the project delivery team, which is comprised of a project manager, a project coordinator and two professionally skilled music educators. At the time of the inspection, 26 participants^[1] were registered on the project. The participants typically engage for a minimum of six hours each week up to a maximum of six months; this is dependent on their individual needs and interests. All of the participants, however, are encouraged to progress within an eight week timeframe, if possible. It is of note that the participants receive continuous support and guidance by mentors during their time on the programme.

2. Views of participants

The small number of participants interviewed during the one-to-one sessions, learning and development activities and in the focus group discussions reported positively on their engagement in the PULSE project. They felt there was an appropriate range of qualifications offered, valued the project's flexibility, and the supportive, helpful and caring staff. A few of them reported an appreciation of the opportunity to record and produce their own music without incurring costs.

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

^[1] 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 majority of the participants demonstrate good standards of work in their learning and development activities. In the learning and training sessions observed, they engaged well, showed a good understanding of course content and worked independently at an appropriate pace to complete the tasks set. The participants' oral communication skills are mostly very good, they are articulate and communicate well the benefits and impact the PULSE project has had on their personal development. Examples of formative assessments and completed work, however, are overly limited and although there is an overall summative assessment sheet, the project promoter needs to demonstrate better the progress the participants are making in the training and learning sessions.

The PULSE project has well-established links with a range of referral agencies which has supported high levels of recruitment to the project, with 98% of its overall recruitment target already met; over the duration of the project, 192 participants recruited against a target of 195. Whilst the retention rate was low in years one and two, at 62% and 52% respectively, the project promoter has taken appropriate action to remedy this. As a consequence, retention has improved significantly and is currently outstanding at 98%.

The project has exceeded the overall 15% target set for progression into employment at 18% (35/192), but it is currently well below the overall, and challenging, 80% target set for progression into further education or training at just 45%. The project promoter has identified this as an ongoing area for improvement.

Whilst the participants have access to a good range of accredited and non-accredited training at level 1 and below, the percentage achieving the target of at least two qualifications is low at 33% (63/192). However, the project promoter had previously identified this as an area for improvement as part of their quality assurance processes and introduced a suite of online qualifications that can be delivered flexibly to meet the individual needs of the participants. This has significantly supported an improvement in outcomes in year three of the project, sitting at 74% to date. Appropriately, it remains an ongoing area for improvement in the project promoter's quality improvement plan.

It is an important strength of the project that a majority of participants are enhancing their overall personal, social and employability skills. All of the participants interviewed, for example, commented on the noticeable improvements in their confidence, self-esteem and wider communication skills as a result of their participation on the project. In addition, a small number of them stated that the project had enabled them to re-engage appropriately in education and to participate more fully in society.

6. Quality of provision

An appropriate and adaptable curriculum is in place which offers the participants a good range of relevant practical and theory-based activities using music technology; this includes good opportunities for them to perform, produce, write and record music and videos. Participants have opportunities to undertake creative art and digital technology qualifications along with a range of industry-related short courses which support them to gain and sustain employment. They also avail of CV building, interview skills, job search support and one-to-one mentoring to enhance employability. In addition, good links and partnerships have been established with a range of organisations to provide specialist qualifications and training such as the construction skills register and manual handling certification.

Although an induction process exists for the PULSE project, it is not sufficiently formalised or structured. Through the self-evaluation process, the team had identified the need to further develop this and design and establish a more bespoke programme to meet the individual and specific needs of the participants. The initial assessments are good and capture well the strengths and development needs of the participants. Tailored individual training and action plans are in place which document clearly the participants' qualifications and personal and social development needs using realistic and measurable targets. These are reviewed appropriately on a monthly basis to inform progress. Overall, the participant files are detailed, accurate, up-to-date and capture well the background information needed to support the participants as they progress.

The project promoter tracks the soft skills outcomes using an appropriate assessment tool, although the assessments could be carried out more frequently and the outcomes used more effectively to demonstrate better the impact the project is having on the participants' lives. In addition, the data should be used more effectively to compare and contrast the quality and impact of the provision across the two offices.

The quality of the one-to-one mentoring, job search and learning and development activities observed was mostly good. The most effective practice was characterised by strong levels of rapport with, and support from, the project staff and high levels of engagement by the participants. An appropriate range of learning, teaching and training strategies were used. The learning resources were of a high quality, the sessions were well planned and questioning and discussion were used effectively to support the participants' knowledge and understanding and to further develop their communication and wider oracy skills. It is a strength that peer mentoring from past participants is used well to support current participants to develop videos and sound recordings. Whilst careers advice and guidance is available, it could be further enhanced to signpost better the possible range of progression routes for participants to further education and/ or other training at level 2 or above.

The care and welfare provided for the participants impacts positively on their personal and social development. Effective links and partnerships have been established with a range of specialist support agencies to support the work of the project. This includes for example, signposting to counselling, mental health support, and welfare advice, where applicable. In addition, the participants' basic care and welfare needs are met well through availability of monthly gym membership and support with travel when the participants are performing at local events. An annual celebration and prize-giving event provides good opportunities for the participants to perform their music in front of their families and peers, and they also have opportunities to compete in local music competitions.

7. Leadership and management

The project is managed effectively at both strategic and operational levels. The roles and responsibilities for staff at all levels, are clear and the project team meet regularly to review and discuss the participants' performance, progress and other key challenges arising. The senior management team are also effective at utilising staff from their other funded projects to support the PULSE provision, and at using their other internal training programmes as potential progression routes for the participants. A small number of them, for example, have enrolled on PULSE after disengaging from the Training for Success (TfS) programme. Appropriately, there are also examples of participants progressing to TfS provision on completion of the PULSE programme.

The management team is also effective at sourcing and using alternative funding opportunities to support progression within the music industry for example, to provide appropriate bursaries for participants to buy instruments and pay for the production of music videos. The quality of accommodation, including the equipment and resources are very good and of industry-standard.

An appropriate management information system is in place, which tracks well progress by the project against recruitment, achievement and progression targets. The project promoter recognises, however, the need to use an electronic data management system to more effectively collate, analyse and evaluate the project's key targets and outcomes.

Staff are committed and enthusiastic about the project, most of them are practising musicians and as a consequence have good contacts in the music industry; they also maintain good working knowledge of all key aspects of the music industry, both locally and nationally. Whilst the staff team are well experienced both musically and in the delivery of learning and training programmes, management should consider offering them an opportunity to undertake a formal teaching qualification to further improve the quality of the teaching and learning.

It is a strength that the project promoter has developed strong links and partnerships with a good range of referral agencies to support recruitment to the project. The small number of referral agencies contacted during inspection commented positively on the tailored programme of training and development for the participants and the effective two-way lines of communication with key project staff. The project promoter is developing well its outreach activities through the provision of 'driving theory' classes in rural areas to further engage with those participants hardest to reach in order to enhance accessibility for further training and/or employment.

Although the project promoter has established and exceeded its target for engaging with employers, these links could be further strengthened to include more direct employer involvement with participants in order to better develop their work-related skills and provide advice and guidance in relation to CVs and mock interviews. The provision would also benefit from a schedule of industry visits and guest speakers to help participants further explore potential career or training pathways.

The project promoter is committed to continuous quality improvement as demonstrated by an effective quality cycle with regular opportunities to collate a range of participant and stakeholder feedback. While appropriate self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are in place, the self-evaluation report could be further developed to include a more effective use of the project's key performance data to better support the evidence around the key strengths and areas for improvement identified. The quality improvement plan could also be strengthened through the more consistent use of measurable and incremental targets to support continuous improvement in 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

The Customized Training Services PULSE project 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.

The areas for improvement are to:

- improve the overall outcomes in line with the targets set;
- further develop the induction process and provide more evidence of the formative assessment and work of the participants; and
- strengthen the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning.

The ETI will monitor how the project promoter sustains improvement.

A. Project registrations

Programme	Numbers of enrolments	% against target
PULSE ESF project 2015/2016	61	94%
PULSE ESF project 2016/2017	33	51%
PULSE ESF project 2017/2018	98	151%

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 and one associate assessor observed five participants, including some past participants, in a range of settings; this included one-to-one mentoring, learning and development sessions and focus groups. Discussions were held with the project manager, the project coordinator, three music educators and two referral agencies. The management information system, including the tracking and monitoring system, samples of the participants' work and personal training plans, and the educators' 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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