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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

A Report on

The Programme Area of Information and Communication Technology in Jobskills

2006-2007

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small minority

SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

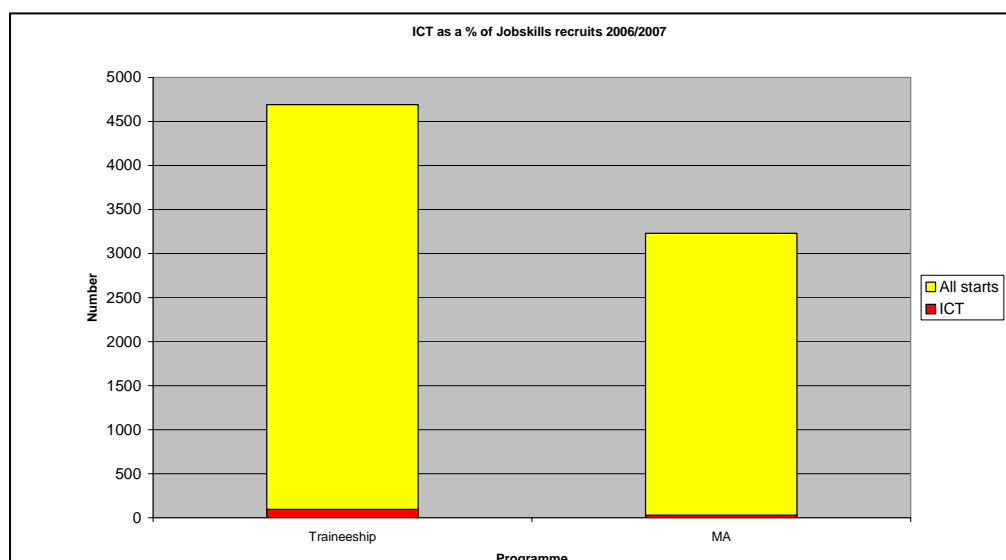
1.1 During 2006-2007, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) undertook a survey to evaluate the quality of provision and outcomes for trainees registered on Access, Traineeship and Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) on the Jobskills Training Programme.

1.2 The two main ICT qualifications within Jobskills are the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) for IT (Information Technology) Practitioners and the NVQ for IT Users. Trainees who hope to gain employment in an ICT role in the IT industry or in a non IT company follow the IT Practitioners' route and those who want to work as a general ICT user undertake the NVQ for IT Users. In 2006/2007 all registered trainees at Access level were on the IT Users programme as were 62% of those on the Traineeship programme. The remainder of the trainees at Traineeship level were on the IT Practitioners programme. At MA level, the majority (61%) of trainees registered in the professional and technical area of ICT were on the IT Practitioners programme, 26% were on the NVQ for Contact Centre Professionals (suitable for call centre employees) and the remainder were on the IT Users programme. At both Traineeship and MA level, trainees undertake the NVQ qualification, a technical certificate and the essential skills as prescribed within their Jobskills framework.

2. PROVISION

2.1 Although ICT is one of the priority skills areas that were identified by the Northern Ireland (NI) Skills Taskforce in 2001, recruitment to relevant NVQs on the Jobskills training programme is low and accounts for a very small part of the total Jobskills registrations. In 2006/2007, recruitment to ICT at Traineeship level accounted for just 2% of the total number of trainees starting a Jobskills Traineeship programme and for just 1% of the total number of MAs (Figure 1).

Figure 1



2.2 Traineeship registrations in ICT have declined steadily and significantly from 400 in 2000/2001 to just 95 in 2006/2007. Numbers have always been low on the MA programme; they peaked at 74 in 2000/2001 but over the last three years have declined steadily to the current level of just 31 new registrations in 2006/2007 (Table 1).

Number of Trainees registering on ICT Programmes at Traineeship and MA level

COHORT	TRAINEESHIP			MODERN APPRENTICESHIP		
Year	ICT Practitioners	ICT Users	Total	ICT Practitioners	ICT Users	Total
1999/2000	167	224	391	28	3	31
2000/2001	129	271	400	58	16	74
2001/2002	84	219	303	41	26	67
2002/2003	65	181	246	48	22	70
2003/2004	53	129	182	47	10	57
2004/2005	58	90	148	46	5	51
2005/2006	34	98	132	35	7	42
2006/2007	36	59	95	27	4	31

Table 1

2.3 The number of training providers offering ICT NVQs within Jobskills has also declined. There are currently 19 providers with trainees registered on ICT programmes. Over half (58%) of these have less than 10 trainees and only one-fifth have more than 20. In addition, a minority of these providers, faced with declining numbers, have decided to no longer recruit into this professional and technical area after current trainees have finished their programme.

3. THE SURVEY

3.1 At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 222 trainees registered in ICT across the three strands of the Jobskills programme. These included new registrations and trainees who had registered in previous years and were completing their programme. Forty trainees (18%) were registered on Access following an NVQ at level 1, 112 (50%) were registered on the Traineeship programme following an NVQ at level 2 and 70 (32%) were registered on the MA programme following an NVQ at level 3. A total of six training providers were visited, including the two largest who between them have approximately one half of the total registered trainees.

3.2 During the survey, two inspectors observed 49 trainees in 12 directed training sessions and visited 29 trainees in the workplace. Discussions were held with the training managers, programme co-ordinators, professional and technical and essential skills tutors, employers, trainees and representatives from the Sector Skills Council, e-skills UK.

3.3 This report is based on an inspection of the work of trainees on both the NVQ for IT Users and the NVQ for IT Practitioners across all three strands of Jobskills.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 The main strengths are the:

- good occupational skills demonstrated by most trainees in the workplace;
- good and excellent success rates across the Access, Traineeship and MA programmes at 88%, 94% and 100% respectively, for trainees who completed their programme and gained the full award;
- good quality of most of the directed training sessions; and
- high levels of support provided by most professional and technical tutors.

4.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- low levels of recruitment to ICT programmes across all three strands of Jobskills, particularly to the MA programmes;
- poor and modest retention rates on the MA and Traineeship programmes at 57% and 64% respectively. Out of the 171 trainees who started both these programmes, only 73 have completed and 69 have achieved their qualification. A further 28 are still on their training programme;
- poor rate of progression to employment, further education or training from the Traineeship programme at 44% and the modest progression rate from the MA and Access programmes at 67%;
- quality of the workplace training for a significant minority of trainees; and
- provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance to trainees.

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

5.1 Most trainees are well motivated and demonstrate satisfactory or better attendance and time-keeping in both directed and workplace training. A minority of Access trainees, however, have significant barriers to learning and require high levels of support to enable them to develop appropriate employability skills prior to commencing workplace training.

5.2 The majority of trainees on the IT Users programme achieve good standards in directed training and in the workplace. They are competent in using general office applications and can input data accurately into bespoke software systems. The majority of trainees on the IT Practitioners programme can carry out a range of IT support tasks effectively including configuring computer systems, installing hardware and software components, carrying out diagnostic tests and simple networking. Across both programmes, a minority of trainees have low level ICT skills and require high levels of support to perform a range of basic ICT or general office tasks.

5.3 Most trainees have good oral communication skills. They establish good working relationships with their colleagues in the workplace and in directed training and work effectively as team members. In contrast, a significant minority of trainees have poor written communication skills.

5.4 Over the last three years, across the training providers inspected, 38 trainees commenced the Access programme, 17 completed their training and 15 gained the full award. Taking into account the 13 trainees still on the training programme, this represents a satisfactory retention rate of 79% and a good success rate of 88%, for trainees who completed their training and achieved the award.

5.5 Over the same period, 148 trainees commenced the Traineeship programme, 67 completed training and 63 gained the full award. Taking into account the 28 trainees still on the programme, this represents a modest retention rate of 64% and an excellent success rate of 94%, for trainees who completed their training and achieved the award.

5.6 Over the same period, 23 trainees commenced the MA programme, six completed training and six gained the full award. Taking into account the seven trainees still on the programme, this represents a poor retention rate of 57% and an excellent success rate of 100%.

5.7 During the same period, progression to further education, training or relevant employment for those who successfully complete their training programmes is modest on the Access and MA programmes at 67% and poor on the Traineeship programmes at 44%.

6. TRAINING AND LEARNING

6.1 Most trainees undergo initial assessment of their essential and professional and technical skills on entry to their programme. In most training providers, initial assessment is used well to plan an appropriate programme of learning for individual trainees.

6.2 Across the programmes inspected, the quality of directed training ranges from satisfactory to good and is mostly good. In most of the sessions observed, tutors use an appropriate range of training strategies including demonstration, exposition and one to one support. They provide good opportunities for trainees to develop a wide range of ICT skills and appropriate underpinning knowledge. The majority of tutors match the directed training well to the workplace experiences and use the flexibility within the NVQ for IT Users (ITQ) to mix and match units at different levels as appropriate.

6.3 The quality of workplace training is variable. At Access and Traineeship level, the majority of trainees on the Using IT programme are placed in small businesses where they perform general office duties in addition to inputting data into computer systems. They have good opportunities to develop skills in administration as well as basic ICT skills. The majority of trainees on the IT Practitioners programme are placed with small businesses where they develop an appropriate range of ICT technical skills working as part of a small team. A significant minority of trainees have work placements in the community and voluntary sector. Many of these employers provide caring and supportive environments for the trainees to develop not only their ICT skills but their confidence and self-esteem. A small minority of these organisations also provide good opportunities for trainees to acquire additional qualifications including CompTIA A+ Certification. However, the majority of trainees placed in community or voluntary organisations have few opportunities to progress to sustained employment. At MA level, a minority of trainees are employed by a large company providing technical support to users and they have excellent opportunities to develop their skills and expertise. It is unsatisfactory, however, that these trainees do not have adequate opportunity to complete the technical certificate and therefore the full framework requirements of their training programme. Across both programmes, a minority of trainees do not yet have a work placement and are completing tasks or projects for the training providers. These tasks are not sufficiently challenging and the trainees do not experience working under the normal pressures of the workplace.

6.4 The quality of assessment is mostly good. Trainees are assessed at regular intervals in directed training and in the workplace and are given good feedback on their performance.

6.5 The quality of essential skills training is satisfactory or better. Essential skills tutors use a range of strategies including the use of materials relevant to their professional and technical area to engage trainees and help them make progress in their learning.

6.6 Most trainees are provided with good support from both their professional and technical tutors in directed training and from their employers in the workplace. A minority of trainees, however, who are placed in the community and voluntary sector would benefit from being moved to more challenging work placements after they have developed their confidence and self-esteem.

6.7 Trainees have access to good ICT resources. Most computer suites have high specification computers and the majority of tutors make good use of fixed data projection equipment for demonstration and exposition. In a minority of training providers, however, the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to enhance the quality of training and learning is underdeveloped.

7. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

7.1 The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory to good. In most organisations, there is good strategic and operational planning to integrate effectively all elements of the training programmes.

7.2 The arrangements for reviewing and monitoring trainee progress are mostly good. Trainees are visited at regular intervals in the workplace and are provided with good information regarding their progress. Most employers are well informed about the short and long term targets set for trainees.

7.3 Most staff are appropriately qualified and work hard to update and develop further their ICT skills.

7.4 The majority of trainees do not receive sufficient advice and guidance regarding possible progression routes available to them on completion of their programme. The number of trainees progressing to employment on completion of their Traineeship programme is low and most are unaware of how they can progress to appropriate further education or training programmes. The need to improve careers education, information, advice and guidance regarding careers in the IT industry is a key objective contained within the recently published Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) for IT 2007-2010.

7.5 Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory across most of the training providers inspected. Good use is made of data relating to retention and success in reviewing and evaluating the quality of provision but insufficient attention is paid to the poor rate of progression into employment.

7.6 The majority of training providers work hard to establish links with local employers. However, a significant minority have difficulty in sourcing work placements with a range of employers who would provide the trainees with a wide range of experiences and the opportunity to progress to sustained employment. Links with the Sector Skills Council and other agencies are weak.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The research contained within the SSA predicts that the IT industry in NI will grow at a rate of 2.4% per year from 2006 to 2021 which is over three times the rate of overall employment growth in NI. Against this backdrop, the number of trainees entering Jobskills ICT training is declining, by approximately 70% over the last eight years. The reasons for the decline can be attributed to several factors. As the SSA indicates, employers in NI prefer to recruit graduates into ICT roles. The research quoted within the Agreement states that only 9% of employers who recruited in the last year, appointed school or college leavers with A-level equivalent education across the UK. Many training providers offering NVQs in ICT find it difficult to source appropriate work placements for trainees. They find it easier to place trainees in companies where they perform general office duties. As there is considerable similarity in the content of the IT Users programme and the NVQ in

administration, training providers report that many trainees choose to follow a programme in administration rather than ICT. In addition, the majority of providers, aware of the difficulties in sourcing specialist ICT work placements, offer the IT Users programme only and they feel this is often less attractive to potential applicants, particularly young males, who would prefer to work with computer hardware.

8.2 As a consequence of the poor progression to employment, further education or training, it will be important that the SSC work closely with the Department to review the content of the Training for Success apprenticeship frameworks in ICT to ensure that they meet more effectively the needs of ICT employers.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Recruitment to the work-based learning programmes in ICT.
- Review the framework requirements for ICT programmes to ensure they equip trainees with the skills and knowledge required by the IT industry and provide trainees with real opportunities to gain sustained employment.
- Develop stronger links with a wider range of employers to ensure trainees gain an appropriate range of workplace experiences.
- Provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance in ICT.
- Ensure all employers have a clear understanding of the MA framework requirements in ICT.

Jobskills Access Table

	Completed 4 weeks	Retention Rate	Success Rate	Progressed to Traineeship	Progressed to relevant employment
Total/Average over the last three years	38	79%	88%	67%	0%

Jobskills Traineeship Table

	Completed 4 weeks	Retention Rate	Success Rate	Progressed to Modern Apprenticeship	Progressed to relevant employment
Total/Average over the last three years	148	64%	94%	14%	30%

Jobskills Modern Apprenticeship Table

	Completed 4 weeks	Retention Rate	Success Rate	Progressed to relevant employment
Total/Average over the last three years	23	57%	100%	67%

DETAILS OF TRAINING PROVIDERS INSPECTED

East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education
Impact Training
North City Training
Rutledge Joblink Londonderry
Rutledge Joblink Strabane
Springvale Learning

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