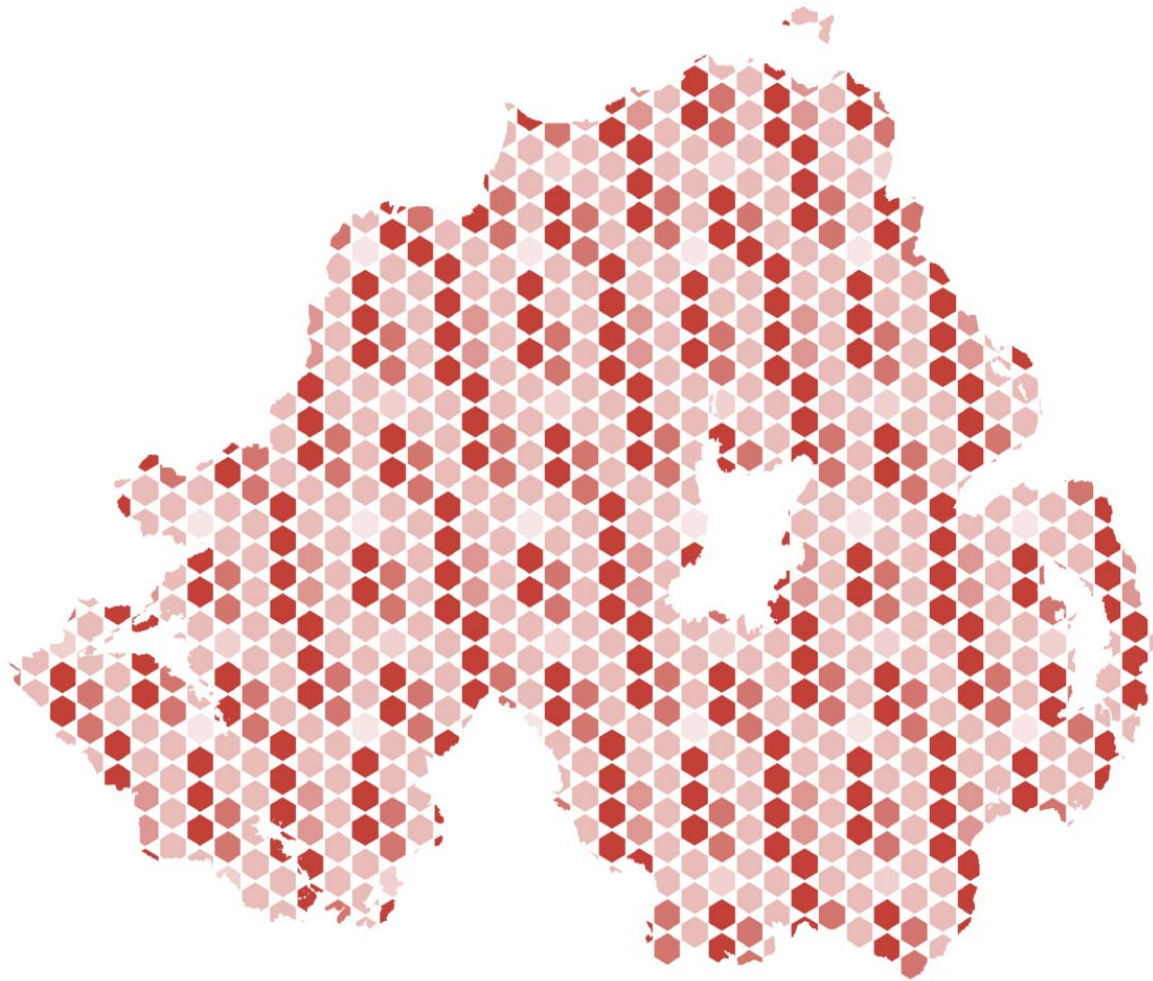


TRAINING INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision
Bolton College

Report of an Inspection
in April 2010

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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

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by Bolton College.

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate use the following performance levels (grades) in reports:

Performance Level	Grade	Descriptor
Outstanding	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	2	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	3	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which organisation has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

PART ONE

SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

1.1 The contract for the provision of Water Utility Operations training under the ApprenticeshipsNI programme was originally awarded, in March 2009, to Training Tomorrows Engineers, an organisation which is part of a water skills training partnership called Watertrain, which also includes Bolton College and Utilise. The contract was subsequently transferred, with the Department for Employment and Learning's (the Department's) approval, to Bolton Community College. The college has recently changed its name to Bolton College.

1.2 Bolton College has been engaged by water companies for over 15 years, across the United Kingdom, to deliver accredited and non-accredited training to their employees. The organisation reports that it is currently delivering water engineering training to over 75% of the United Kingdom's water utility industry.

1.3 The provision is managed by the Curriculum Leader for water engineering in Bolton College who reports to the Head of External Contracts in the college.

2. PROVISION

2.1 At the time of the inspection, Bolton College was providing level 3 training for 20 Northern Ireland Water apprentices. The apprenticeship framework provides opportunities to complete different National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). Six apprentices were completing an NVQ in leakage control, seven apprentices were completing an NVQ in Controlling Process Operations (Sewage Treatment) and seven apprentices were completing an NVQ in Controlling Process Operations (Sewerage Network). All of the apprentices work for Northern Ireland Water. Ten of the apprentices were recruited as new employees in 2009 and a further ten existing employees were recruited to the all-age apprenticeship programme.

2.2 Bolton College staff are responsible for the delivery of the level 3 Diploma in Water Engineering. The Diploma is delivered in a block release format and the apprentices attend directed training for four consecutive days every six weeks.

2.3 Bolton College use Northern Ireland Water staff to deliver the level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). Northern Ireland Water and Bolton College share the delivery of the level 3 apprenticeship programme, with each organisation being responsible for ten apprentices.

2.4 A majority (65%) of the apprentices have four or more General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grade C or better, including English and mathematics. This includes all of the new apprentices, who are well-qualified. Of the remaining apprentices, approximately one-half of them have no formal qualifications.

2.5 Eight of the apprentices who do not have an appropriate level 2 qualification in English or mathematics are required to complete essential skills qualifications as part of the apprenticeship framework. The essential skills are delivered in Northern Ireland Water's Training Centre by Belfast Metropolitan College.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 The inspection took place over two phases and focused on leadership and management, achievements and standards and quality of provision for learning. The first phase of the inspection took place in October 2009, when Bolton College had been operating in Northern Ireland for approximately ten months; the second phase took place in April 2010.

3.2 A team of inspectors observed the apprentices in both directed training and in the workplace. Discussions were held with the Principal of Bolton College, the Director of Quality, the Head of Student Services, the Head of External Contracts, the Curriculum Leader for water engineering, tutors, NVQ assessors, the Head of Organisational Development for Northern Ireland Water, a representative from the Sector Skills Council, the Director of Learning and Development for Watertrain, the apprentices and their supervisors. The inspection team also examined samples of apprentices' work, portfolios of evidence, their personal training plans (PTPs) and other relevant documentation.

3.3 The inspection of the arrangements for pastoral care and the safeguarding of vulnerable adults included the opportunity for the apprentices to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. In addition, discussions were held with apprentices across the programmes inspected. Twenty questionnaires were issued to apprentices, 18 (90%) of which were returned to the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate); of these, two contained additional written comments. The returns from the questionnaires and written comments indicate that the apprentices' experiences of workplace training are very good. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with the apprentices to the senior managers from Bolton College.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Bolton College is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- excellent retention rate (95%) and the apprentices' progress towards achieving the full apprenticeship framework;
- very good standards of oral communication and numeracy skills demonstrated by the apprentices;
- good occupational competence and experience of the tutors who provide effective support to the apprentices;
- good or better quality of most of the training and learning observed; and
- broad curriculum that meets the needs of the apprentices and the industry and which goes beyond the requirements of the framework.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- improved management of the provision to ensure more coherent learning experiences for the apprentices;
- better planning for the essential skills provision; and
- inadequate quality of the apprentices' personal training plans and the progress reviews.

Table of Performance Levels (Grades)

Overall performance level (grade)	Good (3)
Contributory performance levels (grades)	
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory (4)
Achievements and Standards	Very Good (2)
Quality of Provision for Learning	Good (3)

PART TWO

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The leadership and management of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in Bolton College is satisfactory. The senior managers of Bolton College have a good strategic vision for the development of the provision and have captured a significant share of the United Kingdom's water utility services training. The college has worked effectively with the relevant Sector Skills Council, and Watertrain, to introduce this provision into Northern Ireland. The programme is effectively managed by the Curriculum Leader for water engineering who is based in Bolton, but visits Northern Ireland frequently.

5.2 The Director of Quality at Bolton College provides good support for the self-evaluation process, which is inclusive and involves relevant staff from Northern Ireland Water. Bolton College has produced a self-evaluation and quality improvement plan which evaluates effectively the quality of training and learning provided for the apprentices, making good use of the available data. All of the identified areas for improvement in the self-evaluation report are addressed and appropriately cross-referenced in the improvement plan. More use needs to be made, however, of feedback from supervisors and the apprentices to inform the self-evaluation process. All of the apprentices work for Northern Ireland Water and there is good communication between the NVQ assessors and the apprentices' workplace supervisors.

5.3 The tutors from Bolton College who deliver the level 3 Diploma in Water Engineering are well-qualified and have good occupational competences and relevant industrial experience. The Northern Ireland Water staff, delivering the level 2 NVQ, also have appropriate qualifications and experience. It is appropriate that local capacity is being developed through good quality mentoring which is provided to the Northern Ireland Water trainers and assessors by experienced staff engaged by Bolton College. The college has established very good links with Energy & Utility Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the sector, in order to further develop the provision and the curriculum.

5.4 All of the directed training is delivered in the Northern Ireland Water Training Centre where very good facilities are available, including classrooms, information and communication technology (ICT) suites and well-equipped workshops.

5.5 The curriculum provision lacks coherence with insufficient interaction and communication between Bolton College and the other partners to integrate effectively the essential skills, the NVQ and the Diploma within the apprentices' framework. In addition, the system in place for managing the essential skills provision is unnecessarily bureaucratic and has led to unacceptable delays in providing essential skills classes. There is poor communication between the occupational and the essential skills tutors, resulting in a lack of integration or coherence in the provision. It is inappropriate that no Service Level Agreements are in place between Bolton College and the partner organisations delivering the essential skills and the NVQ qualifications, resulting in a lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and duties.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 All of the apprentices are making very good progress towards the achievement of the NVQ qualification at level 2 and the level 3 Diploma in Water Engineering. All of their level 2 portfolios are completed to a good standard and are awaiting external verification. The apprentices have achieved very good results in the Diploma units, with 22% of them

achieving distinctions, 49% merits and the remainder achieving passes. In the essential skills, after a very late start, all of the apprentices required to achieve a level 2 qualification in application of number have also made good progress. They have all passed the desk-top task and all the action-based activities have been completed to a good standard and are awaiting external verification. The essential skill literacy classes have just recently commenced.

6.2 The occupational standards achieved by the apprentices are very good. They are well-motivated and enthusiastic about their vocational training. During the inspection, apprentices were observed carrying out effectively a wide range of operations, including downloading data from a water main meter logger, viewing online water flow graphs which are transmitted to a central source by telemetry, and surveying manhole constructions using closed circuit television. The apprentices were able to monitor successfully the control systems in waste water treatment works.

6.3 The standards of the apprentices' oral communication skills range from good to excellent; they are able to communicate effectively in the workplace. The standards of numeracy demonstrated by almost all of the apprentices are also very good. Within the professional and technical aspect of the training, the apprentices are able to complete complex calculations relevant to their workplace setting.

6.4 The retention rate of the first cohort of apprentices is excellent at 95%. Since the beginning of the apprenticeship programmes in March 2009, only one apprentice has left.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 Most of the teaching, training and learning observed is good or better. The planning for learning is mostly good. The tutors delivering the Diploma units plan well for the sessions, building on previous work and detailing clearly the learning objectives being covered. Good use is made of results from formative assessments to inform the learning process. The delivery of each Diploma unit is well-planned in an appropriate order, with the summative assessments for each unit taking place when the unit is completed. The apprentices are provided with high quality resource materials to support their Diploma in water engineering work. All of the tutors delivering the programmes make good use of their industrial experience and relate very well the theory work to relevant practical contexts, which the apprentices have good opportunities to apply in their on-the-job training.

7.2 In the essential skill of application of number, insufficient use is made of the apprentices' professional and technical area to provide them with suitable opportunities to develop and apply their numeracy skills in meaningful contexts. The literacy tutor works hard to use relevant contexts, but requires more support and co-operation from the Diploma and NVQ tutors to develop and integrate these contexts further.

7.3 The curriculum provided meets well the needs of the apprentices and the water utility industry and goes beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship framework, through the inclusion of the level 3 technical certificate in water engineering. The quality of the on-the-job training provided by Northern Ireland Water is very good. The apprentices gain relevant experience and skills in using industry-standard modern technology in the water industry and most of them have acquired good problem-solving skills through the analysis and interpretation of data to identify faults in the networks.

7.4 Nearly all of the apprentices are well-supported in their learning by the tutors and are provided with additional support where necessary. Good use is made of e-mail by the apprentices and tutors to facilitate communication. The college has well-developed

materials on the virtual learning environment; it is inadequate, however, that due to technical difficulties the apprentices in Northern Ireland are unable to access the system. In the interim, they have been issued with pen drives containing all the course materials.

7.5 The quality of the personal training plans (PTPs) is inadequate. The plans are not effective in identifying the training needs of each apprentice, particularly for the essential skills. This has had a de-motivating impact on a minority of apprentices who were not aware, at the start of the programme, that they were required to complete essential skills. Most of the apprentices do not understand the significance of the essential skills qualifications and their equivalence with other qualifications. In addition, it is inadequate that they do not understand the progression opportunities within their professional and technical area, which are available on their completion of the programme.

7.6 The mechanisms for reviewing and monitoring the apprentices' progress across the full framework are ineffective. The reviews do not adequately review the apprentices' progress in each element of the framework and do not set appropriate individual targets for the next period of training.

7.7 The College promotes effectively the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. The arrangements for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007. Although staff are provided with appropriate training on safeguarding issues there was no identified local contact for the referral of any safeguarding issues. The Principal should ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding continue to be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

PART THREE

CONCLUSION AND KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Bolton College is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

9. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

9.1 Bolton College needs to revise the annual development plan to take account of the following key priorities:

- improved management of the provision to provide a coherent learning experience for the apprentices, particularly the provision for the essential skills; and
- the quality of the personal training plans and the progress reviews.

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