

Education and Training Inspectorate

**Report of an Evaluation of
Provision for the Priority Skills Area of
Construction and the Built Environment at Level 3
across the
Six Regional Colleges in Northern Ireland**

November 2010

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. CONTEXT

1.1 This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of the provision at level 3 for the priority skill area of construction and the built environment, in the six area-based colleges of further education. Construction and the built environment includes architecture, building, civil engineering and planning. The further education provision for the priority skill area of construction and the built environment at level 3 comprises of full-time and part-time professional and technical courses to prepare students for employment in, and to up-skill existing employees within, the construction sector of Northern Ireland's economy. At the time of the evaluation three of the six regional colleges are designated Centres of Excellence in construction and the built environment.

1.2 In 1999 the Northern Ireland Skills Task Force identified the construction sector as being as of being of vital importance to the Northern Ireland economy due to its high-skill, high value added content. As a result, construction was designated as a priority skill area.

1.3 Following ten years of growth, the recent economic downturn has had a particularly adverse effect on the Northern Ireland construction industry, which relied heavily on the high value skilled trades occupations. The workers most affected were employed on house building both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Figures from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)¹ indicate that the impact of the downturn on this group continues with a further 1.3% decline in jobs in the most recent quarter while the industry now employs 12.9% less people than it did the previous year. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's² figures also show that since 2008, 12,000 jobs have been lost in construction but this figure could be as high as 20,000 if the self-employed workers are included. In May 2010, there were 13,240 jobseekers claimants from the construction sector, an increase of 137% from 2008.

1.4 Research undertaken by ConstructionSkills³ in October 2009 reveals that 46% of professional services employers have made redundancies of which 15% were technicians (the second highest group) and have cut back on recruitment of newly qualified staff. It is encouraging that 16% of firms indicate that they intended to recruit new staff with different specialisms to enable them to work in new sectors. Although 35% of firms indicated that they had reduced their training spend, 22% had increased training in response to the recession. Northern Ireland firms were more pessimistic than their counterparts in England and Scotland.

1.5 The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey⁴ shows that in quarter two of 2010 there are 62,976 persons of working age in employment in the construction industry; 8.2% of the total number. The construction sector is still the fourth largest employer of males (14.9%) and almost one-quarter (23%) of those classified as self-employed are employed in the construction sector.

¹ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 'Monthly Labour Market Report' July 2010

² Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 'DETI Economic Commentary' June 2010

³ Construction Industry Council (CIC) and ConstructionSkills, 'The Impact of the Recession on Construction Professionals: A view from the front line', October 2009

⁴ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 'Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey: April to June 2010'; August 2010.

1.6 Research published in January 2010 by the Construction Skills Network (CSN)⁵ shows that in Northern Ireland, the total construction output between 2010 and 2014 is only expected to rise by 1.1%; less than the UK average of 1.7%. By 2014, employment in the sector is expected to rise by 2% on current levels in Northern Ireland but overall will be 14% less than the 2007 peak.

1.7 The Forecasting Future Skill Needs in Northern Ireland report by the Department of Employment and Learning (Department)⁶ forecasts that in the future the Northern Ireland economy will require a higher skilled workforce. The percentage of the workforce requiring level 4-8 qualifications is forecasted to increase to 43% and the requirement for low qualifications to fall to 16% by 2020. It anticipates a recovery in the requirement for National Qualifications Framework (NQF) 4-8 qualified graduates in architecture, building and planning by 2014 of 0.15%, the first increase since 2008; approximately 25% of which includes NQF 4-5 qualifications. The forecast suggests that not all demand for skilled workers will be at the graduate end. Up-skilling of the existing workforce with low qualifications to a higher qualification will also be required.

1.8 In the longer term the construction sector will be affected by the issues of climate change, energy security and the drive to a low-carbon/carbon-zero, sustainable economy. The built environment produces almost 50% of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. It is recognised that there is a need to reduce the CO₂ footprint of the built environment through the use of new technologies in new-build and in the maintenance, repair and renovation of existing buildings. ConstructionSkills⁷ predicts that the 'future' skills required to facilitate the shifting focus in construction will require different skills of all occupational levels. These may not be necessarily be new skills but in addition to or an adaption of existing skills. They predict that by 2015, 'future' skills of craft operatives will be required in off-site manufacturing of components, in the use of computers at each stage of the process, and a broader understanding of the wider craft skills other than their own.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 The overall effectiveness of the provision across the sector varies from very good to satisfactory. In one college it is very good; in two it is good; and in three it is satisfactory.

ENROLMENTS

2.2 Although student enrolment levels on full-time national diploma courses have declined over the last three years, all of the colleges provide these courses in their main campus locations.

2.3 The provision of part-time national certificate courses in civil engineering and in construction varies significantly across the sector. Four colleges offer both the national certificate in construction and civil engineering and the remaining two colleges have no provision of these courses.

2.4 There has been a significant decline in the number of students enrolled on part-time level 3 computer aided design (CAD) courses.

2.5 All colleges provide courses for level 3 craft apprentices who have been made unemployed on an infill basis with trainees on the ANI programme.

⁵ 'Labour Market Intelligence', January 2010

⁶ 'Forecasting Future Skill Needs in Northern Ireland: Summary Report', April 2009

⁷ 'Sector Skills Assessment for the Construction Sector', 2009

2.6 Two colleges have developed innovative up-skilling programmes for level 3 craft trainees to meet the needs of employees or industry. One college offers specialist level 3 waste management courses. Two colleges offer innovative bridging courses that enable construction operatives to progress to higher education programmes.

2.7 There are limited opportunities for staff to work together collaboratively across the campuses, to plan and design a coherent and integrated curriculum, promote collegiality and share best practice.

2.8 The overall quality of the leadership and management is variable; it is very good in one college, good in one and satisfactory in four colleges.

2.9 The quality of the self-evaluation reports and improvement planning processes are variable and range from very good to satisfactory. In those colleges where the quality is very good, there is accurate assessment of the provision and specific and appropriate targets are set. In those that are satisfactory, there is inconsistent identification of weaknesses and an overly-optimistic assessment of the provision. In these colleges, action plans lack sufficient detail on the specific actions to be taken and target setting is weak.

2.10 The overall quality of the accommodation and physical resources, including the facilities for embedding information and learning technology (ILT) within the programmes, ranges from outstanding to inadequate but is mostly good or better.

2.11 Four of the colleges deploy their staff efficiently and effectively. Most of the lecturers are well-qualified, enthusiastic and work hard to support the students. In two of the colleges, the full-time lecturers are regularly deployed across too wide a range of provision. In one college they have implemented an outstanding ILT mentoring programme to further develop the lecturers' teaching and learning strategies.

2.12 There are a wide range of progression routes for national diploma students to higher national diplomas and certificates and foundation degrees within the colleges and university degrees courses.

2.13 The quality of the teaching and learning is good or better in the majority of the lessons observed; in 32% it is outstanding to very good, and in 36% it is good. The remaining 32% of the lessons are satisfactory or inadequate.

2.14 In all the colleges, there are appropriate arrangements for assessment and the verification of both the assignments and completed work. Assessments schedules are in place, but in most cases are not communicated well to the students to enable them to plan their work effectively and consequently, they can become overloaded.

2.15 The quality of the work-related learning provision is under-developed in five colleges. In one college, a very good programme of work related learning enhances the students' knowledge and understanding of the world of work.

2.16 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and learner support ranges from very good to good across the colleges, but are mostly good. In all the colleges, additional support can be arranged through the colleges' learning support centre. Most students report that they are supported well in their studies, and receive good one-to-one support outside of timetabled classes.

2.17 The standards achieved by the students range from very good to satisfactory but are mainly good. The standards are particularly good in assignments and project work where students work in teams and are required to complete tasks to industry standards.

2.18 Retention rates for full-time national diploma courses over the last three years vary from satisfactory at (73%) to poor at (29%). The retention rates for part-time national certificate courses over the last three years are higher than those for the national diploma; they range from excellent at (94%) to poor at (52%).

2.19 Achievement rates for full-time national diploma courses over the last three years vary from modest (69%) to poor (24%). The achievement rates for part-time national certificate courses over the last three years are higher than those for the national diploma; they range from good (80%) to poor (52%).

PART 2: MAIN FINDINGS

3. PROVISION

3.1 National diplomas and certificates are well-established technician qualifications, which provide good progression opportunities for students to higher qualifications such as higher national certificates (HNC) and higher national diplomas (HND), foundation degrees and a range of degree programmes. They also provide a pathway for students to progress into direct employment to work as technicians in architectural, civil engineering and surveying practices, in government agencies and on-site for contractors.

3.2 Enrolments on year 1 of national diploma in construction programmes in the colleges have fallen by 21% from 354 in 2007 to 279 in 2009. At the time of the inspection, the total enrolment in the colleges on national diploma in construction programmes was 539. All the colleges have students enrolled on the full-time national diploma in construction in each of their main campuses. One college also offers a unique full-time programme comprising the national certificate in civil engineering with a diploma in extractives and mineral processing.

3.3 Four colleges provide the part-time national certificate in civil engineering and the national certificate in construction. Two colleges do not provide any part-time provision at national certificate level and part-time provision in these colleges is inadequate. Across the colleges, enrolments are low for both programmes and at the time of the inspection, the total enrolment in the colleges on national certificate in construction and civil engineering programmes was only 69 students. As a result, classes are amalgamated for common units or in-filled with national diploma students. Most of the students on national certificate in civil engineering courses are from the public sector. The marketing and timetabling of these certificates is not effective in promoting the qualifications to local industry or increasing enrolments on them.

3.4 Enrolments on part-time level 3 CAD courses have seen a rapid decline in the current academic year. Due to diminishing enrolments, almost all the level 3 CAD courses are in-filled with level 2 students to increase their viability.

3.5 Two of the colleges provide innovative up-skilling programmes for level 3 craft trainees including an experienced workers up-skilling programme for bricklayers and joiners, and a heritage skills stone masonry course. All of the colleges provide in-fill further education places for level 3 craft apprentices who have been made unemployed, but enrolments are low. One college offers a specialist training courses for the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 in Waste Management.

3.6 Two colleges offer innovative bridging courses that enable construction operatives to progress to higher education programmes. A bespoke level 3 programme in one college underpins the HNC Building Services Engineering and Foundation Degree in Building Services and Renewable Energies programmes. Another college delivers a National Award programme to support progression for apprentices and skilled operatives to the HNC in construction.

3.7 Five of the colleges set the entry criteria to the national diploma in construction at four GCSEs at grade C and above. The colleges do not rigorously enforce their set minimum entry criteria, for example in one college only 37% of its students in the 2009-2010 academic year met the minimum entry requirement. Across all colleges only 62% of the students on the national diploma hold GCSE mathematics and English at grade C or above.

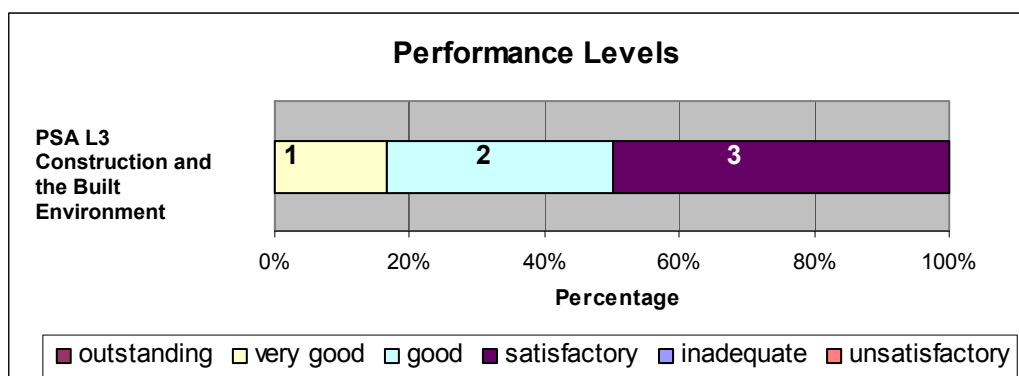
3.8 Through their school links programmes under the Entitlement Framework, most of the colleges deliver the national award or certificate in construction to local post-primary schools. One college has over 100 pupils enrolled on level 3 national award construction programmes. These links enable the colleges to build good relationships with the post-primary schools sector and provide effective marketing of their courses to potential students.

3.9 Female students continue to be under represented on level 3 construction programmes. The proportion of females on level 3 courses across the colleges varies, but is on average 9%. There are exceptions such as the national certificate in construction and civil engineering class in one college in which four of the nine students are female. The colleges recognise that females are under represented but there is little evidence to suggest that any of the colleges have a well-defined strategy to address the issue.

4. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

4.1 The overall quality of provision in the colleges ranges from very good to satisfactory; half of the colleges are satisfactory, two are good and one is very good. Only one of the colleges with a centre of excellence has very good provision. The quality of provision in one centre is satisfactory.

Table 1: Overall Effectiveness of the Provision



4.2 In the college where the overall effectiveness of the provision is very good, it is characterised by a clearly defined management structure with clear roles and responsibilities. Staff expectations for the students are high with very good standards of work. There are very good arrangements for pastoral care and learning support, the teaching and learning is effective, and staff embrace cross-college initiatives to improve quality and raise standards. In the three colleges where the overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory, it is characterised by wide variability in the quality of provision and insufficient collaboration and sharing of good practice across campuses. There are inconsistent teaching and learning practices, and staff and capital resources are not managed effectively.

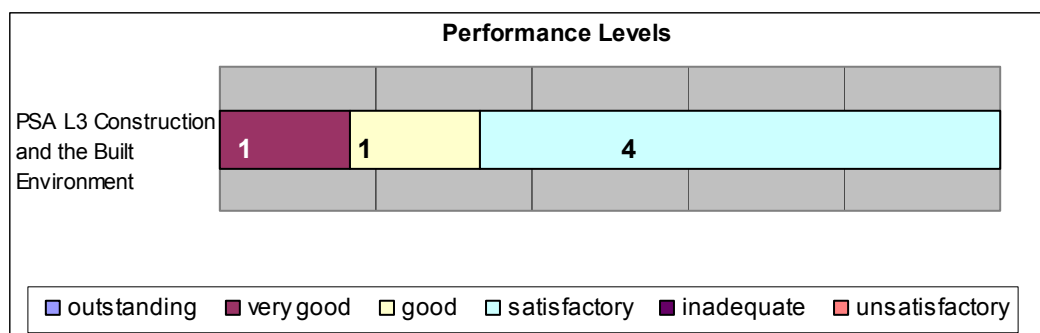
5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

5.1 The quality of leadership and management is variable; it is satisfactory in four colleges, good in one and is very good in one college. Where leadership and management were judged to be very good there is a well-defined management structure with clearly defined roles and responsibility for construction programmes on specified campuses; it is

responsive to the needs of industry through the provision of suitable up-skilling programmes which increase the students' job prospects; and embraces cross college strategies such as those to improve retention and pedagogy. In the four colleges, where the leadership and management is satisfactory there are limited opportunities for course teams, who are delivering the same or similar programmes in different campuses, to meet and collaborate in the design and development of individual programmes. As a consequence, there is a lack of consistency in the quality of the provision and few opportunities to share good practice. In most colleges, collaboration between campuses is limited to the standardisation of paperwork and documentation; innovative practices such as progress tracking and work placement arrangements are not shared across campuses. In contrast, in one college, a cross-campus development day was used well to design common assignments in the vocational programmes.

Table 2: Leadership and Management: How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting students?



ACTION TO PROMOTE IMPROVEMENT

5.2 The quality of the self-evaluation reports and improvement planning processes are variable and range from very good to satisfactory. In those colleges where the quality is very good, there is accurate assessment of the provision; the managers review self-evaluation documents; the actions for improvement are specific and appropriate targets for improvement are set. In the colleges where the self-evaluation is satisfactory, weaknesses in the provision are not always recorded in the reports and the grades awarded in the self-evaluation reports do not accurately reflect the programmes performance levels. Action plans lack sufficient detail on the specific actions to be taken, success criteria, and the setting of interim milestones to review progress.

STAFFING AND CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5.3 Four of the colleges deploy their staff efficiently and effectively. Most of the lecturers are well-qualified, enthusiastic and work hard to support the students. In two of the colleges, the full-time lecturers are regularly deployed across too wide a range of provision including, in-house college programmes, support for industry and an extensive school link provision. As a result, there are few opportunities for them to meet as a team, to design and develop the curriculum; to monitor the students' progress; and to plan activities which enhance the student experience. Both these colleges have also had difficulty in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified full-time lecturers and as a result there is an over-reliance on part-time lecturers to deliver these programmes.

5.4 In two of the colleges, the middle managers spend disproportionate amounts of time travelling between campuses over wide geographical areas and as a result they are over-stretched with a heavy workload.

5.5 There are good opportunities across the colleges for staff to engage in continuous professional development in their vocational area; the staff are able to participate in cross-college staff development including, the use of ILT to enhance teaching and learning, the development of thinking skills and the promotion of entrepreneurship. Staff in three colleges have participated in the Lecturer into Industry initiative, however, there is still a low take-up of lecturers onto the initiative. One college does not have staff trained adequately in three-dimensional CAD and subsequently is unable to meet the needs of local industry. In five colleges, support is provided for new full-time and part-time lecturers through a centralised induction programme and/or through mentorship by experienced lecturers in the construction teams. In one college, the mentoring of new staff is ineffective and, as a result, new staff are unsure how to provide high quality learning experiences which are matched well to the needs, interests and aspirations of the students or monitor effectively class retention and achievement.

Best Practice: ILT Mentorship

In one college lecturers work with an ILT mentor to enhance the teaching and learning environment with a focus on pedagogic practice. The approach used is a step-up model of development with three one-to-one training sessions including the use of ILT tools and technologies, the showcasing of exemplar practice, and the evaluation by the mentor and the students of the mentees progress.

At the time of the inspection, five construction tutors had completed the programme and eight are in training. The staff, including a new part-time lecturer, are very complementary of the support the mentor is providing. The students report that teaching this year has improved over the previous year.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

5.6 The overall quality of the accommodation provided for level 3 technician and craft training ranges from outstanding to inadequate but is mostly good or better. In the three of the colleges, the classrooms are relatively new or have been upgraded to a high standard and contribute effectively to the students' learning. In the two colleges with the outstanding accommodation, most classrooms have an interactive whiteboard (IWB), all have data projectors; and a significant minority of classrooms have at least six networked computers for student use.

5.7 Five colleges have very good facilities for testing materials. In contrast, in one college, the facilities for testing materials and the storage of equipment is inadequate. The colleges have a sufficient range and numbers of surveying equipment. Five of the colleges have purchased sufficient numbers of CAD software licences.

ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

5.8 The quality of the economic engagement across the colleges ranges from outstanding to good and is mostly good.

5.9 The colleges have developed a range of links with industry, Sector Skills Councils, external agencies and act as the secretariat for the Work Force Development Forums. There are few examples where skills gaps identified through the Work Force Development Forum (WDF) influence the provision. In one college, the WDF identified level 3 skills gaps in local industry which resulted in the provision of targeted programmes of learning. In another, a fast-track upskilling programme for experienced workers with no qualifications was developed.

5.10 In all colleges links with industry are also established through other employer liaison forums or more informal employer links. In the best practice, two colleges have developed bespoke qualifications in conjunction with employers, Sector Skills Councils and other stakeholders. In one college, a breakfast meeting was used effectively to enable employers from the public and private sectors to meet college staff to discuss their current and future skills needs.

Best Practice: Innovative Programmes

One college has worked with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the relevant sector skills council, industry and other stakeholders to develop a new and innovative programme, the ConstructionSkills NVQ Level 3 in Heritage Skills Stone Masonry. The programme addresses the skills gap in the master craft of stone masonry.

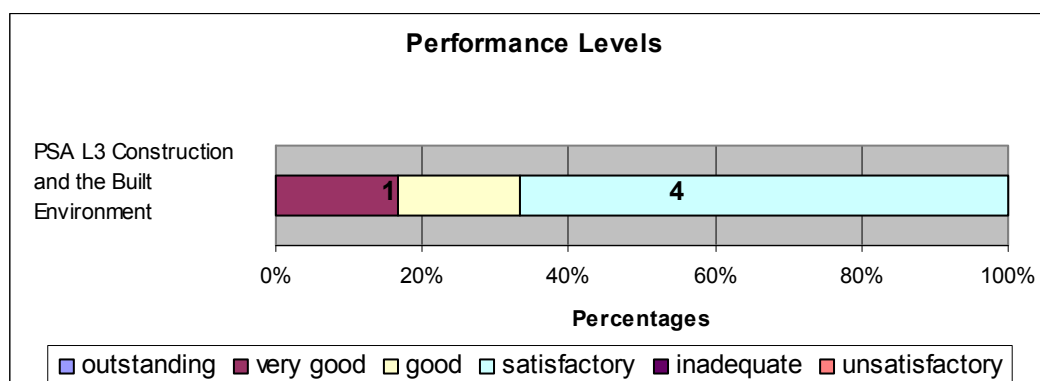
5.11 Two of the six colleges are the lead partners in projects linked to the construction industry funded through the Innovation Fund. There is good cooperation between the project and course teams to develop innovative projects for use in the level 3 curriculum.

6. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRICULUM

6.1 The overall quality of provision for learning varies from very good to satisfactory; the quality of provision is very good in one college, good in one and is satisfactory in four colleges.

Table 3: Quality of Provision for Learning



6.2 In those colleges where the overall effectiveness of the curriculum is satisfactory, it is characterised by wide variability in the quality of provision and insufficient collaboration and sharing of good practice across campuses and inconsistent teaching and learning practices.

6.3 In all of the colleges full-time students have insufficient opportunities to work together in teams to develop case studies of small to medium size building projects. As a result, the use of integrated assignments and project based learning across most of the colleges is underdeveloped. The students, therefore, are unable to mirror the integrated job roles of building professionals such as designers, construction managers, quantity surveyors or land surveyors and do not develop an understanding of the inter-dependence of these roles.

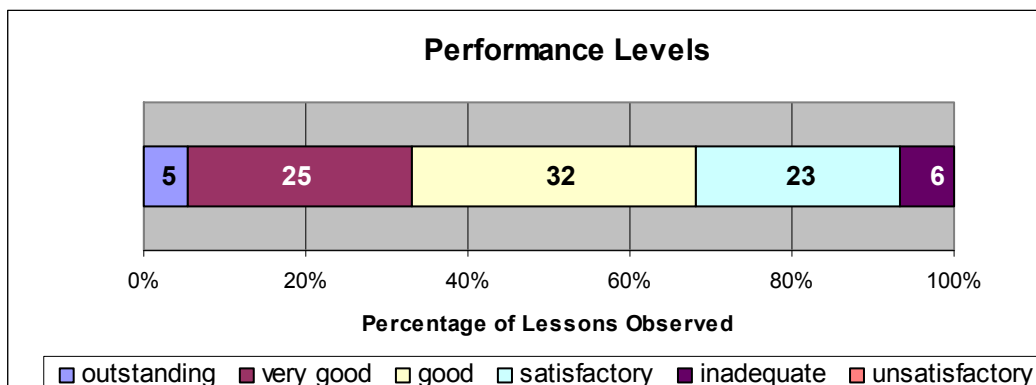
6.4 Four of the six colleges have designed their national diploma programme to include further mathematics and structural mechanics units, which enables the students to progress to university degrees in civil engineering. In one college these units are only available on one campus and in another college they are not offered on any campus.

6.5 The use of additional qualifications to enhance the employability skills of full-time students varies significantly. Two of the colleges offer level 2 and level 3 City and Guilds AutoCAD qualifications to their national diploma students as part of their weekly timetable. These programmes are offered by these colleges to improve the students' opportunities for employment. Most of the remaining colleges offer the level 2 and 3 City and Guilds AutoCAD qualifications on a part-time evening basis. However, only a small number of students enrolled on these programmes.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING, TRAINING AND LEARNING

6.6 The quality of the teaching and learning was good or better in the majority of the lessons observed; in 32% it was outstanding to very good, and in 36% it was good. The remaining 32% of the lessons, were satisfactory or inadequate.

Table 4: Lesson Grades Awarded in PSA Level 3 Construction and the Built Environment



6.7 In the satisfactory and inadequate lessons planning is poor and pace is slow, there is limited interaction with the students, and they are overly tutor led. There is a limited range of teaching approaches employed to challenge and inspire students and activities and exercises are confined to the students solving problems similar to those the lecturer previously demonstrates. There is a lack of opportunities for the student to develop their technical knowledge and skills through the use of case studies and integrated projects. Where group work is employed it is poorly planned and unstructured. Evaluation of the students understanding is measured primarily through the use of limited question and answer strategies; there are few opportunities for the students to produce independent written evaluations. The lessons do not motivate or enthuse the students and they disengage from the teaching and learning.

Best Practice: Use of site visit to enhance theory

In one lesson the lecturer video recorded a site visit to an eco-village designed as a sustainable development. The lecturer played the video in class and used very good question and answer techniques to effectively draw out information about the students' site visit experience. The lecturer effectively reinforced and developed the students' knowledge and understanding of renewable energy sources and sustainable development gleaned from the site visit experience.

6.8 In the best practice lessons are well-planned and incorporate activities that engage the students. Formative and summary assessment of the learning extends beyond traditional question and answer approaches. In these lessons activities enable the students to develop their understanding and there is a high level of challenge and pace.

Best Practice: Development of Independent Learning and Interpersonal skills

In a national diploma class a lecturer effectively uses a range of technology to develop the students' independent learning and interpersonal skills. An excellent interactive presentation is used in preparation for a student group activity where students are expected to research and present their findings. Their presentations are recorded using FLIP video so that the students presentation skills could be reviewed. An excellent on-line quiz is used to assess the students' knowledge and understanding of the energy sources acquired through the individual groups' research. The college VLE is used effectively to deliver the quiz and to share with the class their performance in each question in real-time. This approach enthuses and motivates the students and creates a challenging, engaging and vibrant learning environment.

6.9 In most colleges the use of ILT to enhance teaching and learning is under-developed. In a minority of lessons interactive resources are used effectively to enhance teaching and learning. In the remaining lessons the use of ILT is not well-developed; it is limited to static PowerPoint presentations, incorporating photographs. In four of colleges, the VLE is used as a repository for notes and assignments. In two colleges, the VLE is well populated with notes and presentations, well-designed interactive resources and interactive formative assessment materials. The students in these colleges report that the resources are of a high quality and useful in assisting them with their assignments. In one college, students use effectively 'e-books' available through the 'e-books for FE Project' funded by JISC to research work-related assignments.

Best Practice: Interactive Teaching

In an outstanding lesson observed, a lecturer used a quiz to revisit previous learning. Based on 'who wants to be a millionaire' the quiz challenged the students to debate the topic using logical thinking. All the students engaged fully in the discussion and demonstrated respect for each other through effective team working.

ASSESSMENT

6.10 In all the colleges, there are appropriate arrangements for assessment and the verification of both the assignments and completed work. In almost all courses assignments are returned promptly to the students. Assessments schedules are in place but in most cases are not communicated effectively to the students at the start of the year to enable

them to effectively plan their work. As a result at certain times of the academic year, students are requested to simultaneously submit more than one assignment and re-submit work for re-grading; consequently, they can become overloaded. In all the colleges, there is a lack of a collegiate approach to curriculum development to identify opportunities for the integration of assignments to reduce workloads and rationalise assessment.

CAREERS EDUCATION INFORMATION ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (CEIAG)

6.11 The pre-entry advice and guidance to students at the point of entry to their course is variable and as a result, a minority of students do not understand fully the requirements of the course or the career paths available. In almost all the colleges, tutorial sessions to facilitate the delivery of CEIAG are not formalised and focus mostly on the students' completion of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications. Nearly all students report that they are given good advice about how to apply to university and are well-informed of the requirements for entry.

6.12 The range of work-related learning experiences such as work-placements, site visits and guest speakers are under-developed in the most of the colleges. One college has an extensive programme of site visits, guest speakers and industry-based activities to enhance students' understanding of the world of work. Another college incorporates a block release work-placement period into its full-time level 3 national diploma. The remaining colleges report that they have difficulty in obtaining work-placements in the current economic climate. One college organises an interview skills day for national diploma students. The interview skills day is delivered by an external public relations consultant. The students are very positive about the effect the training has on building their confidence for job interviews.

Best Practice: Effective use of site visit

The students use the very good practice observed on a recent site visit to present their experiences to their peers, tutor and an industry. The industry guest is used effectively to involve the students in the discussions, provide feedback on their presentations and to speak to the students about his role on site in liaising with sub-contractors particularly in relation to health safety and welfare issues, which exposes the students to industry practice.

STUDENT SUPPORT

6.13 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and learner support ranges from very good to good across the colleges, but are mostly good. In all the colleges, additional support can be arranged through the colleges' learning support centres. Most students report that they feel that they are very well-supported in their studies. In four colleges, the students report that lecturers provide very good one-to-one support, outside of timetabled classes, for those who fall behind in their work.

6.14 All the colleges provide a timetabled support tutorial for student groups; these sessions combine the delivery of CEIAG with the progress review of the students. Two of the colleges used an electronic individual learning plan (e-ILP) to provide a good structure for the progress review sessions but in the remainder they lack structure and planning. In two colleges, lecturers have developed bespoke tracking sheets that are very effective in enabling the students to track their own progress and to benchmark their progress against their peers.

Best Practice: Effective use of on-line grade profile tracking sheets

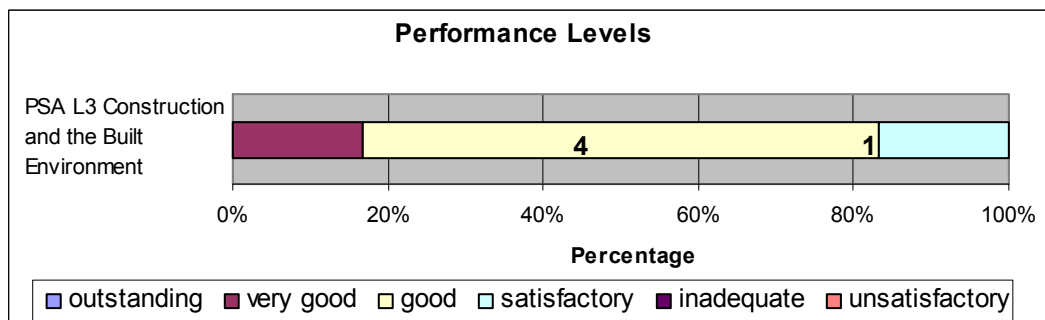
In one college, the course-coordinator has developed an online reporting tool which enables the students to track their progress. Students and tutors use the information very effectively to, set learning goals, manage learning and to make informed career decisions.

7. ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

7.1 The achievements and standards of the students' work across the colleges ranges from very good to satisfactory but are mainly good.

7.2 Most of the students demonstrate very good employability skills and they are able to work well in teams and communicate clearly. In most colleges, students are able to use computer aided design software to a good standard. In one college, very good standards are achieved by the students in the application of the mathematics unit to real structural engineering problems. The high standards of the work achieved by two students in a college have been recognised through regional and national awards; the Farren's Industrial Scholarship and the Institution of Civil Engineers QUEST Technician Scholarship.

Table 5: Achievements and Standards: How well do students develop and achieve?



7.3 The standards of work achieved by most of the students' in their assignments ranges from very good to good; they are given regular and prompt feedback from their lecturers about improvements and corrections.

7.4 The majority of part-time students are highly motivated and demonstrate very good standards of work.

7.5 Most of the students achieve good standards of work in literacy and numeracy. In one college the students are given the opportunity to develop their literacy skills through a well planned programme of mock presentations. The presentations are recorded, reviewed and critiqued by the lecturers and a local industry representative attends the final formal presentations. In another college, numeracy skills are well-developed by good collaboration between the mathematics and vocational tutors to develop a blended scheme of work that contextualises the learning. For example, trigonometry is taught early in the mathematics unit to support land-surveying calculations based on triangulation.

7.6 Retention rates for full-time national diploma courses over the last three years vary from satisfactory at (73%) to poor at (29%). The retention rates for part-time national certificate courses over the last three years are higher than those for the national diploma; they range from excellent (94%) to poor (52%).

7.7 All the colleges are developing retention strategies. In one college, retention improvement strategies include a more thorough induction programme and early identification of those 'at-risk' followed by referral to a dedicated support team. In most colleges, students who achieve the required grades are automatically enrolled on the course; only those students who do not attain the minimum entrance qualifications are interviewed. In one college, very good pre-entry guidance has led to improved retention.

Best Practice: Improving Retention Rates

In a best practice example in one college, very good pre-entry guidance is provided on one campus comprising of a rigorous interview followed by a period of reflection before a final interview. This strategy has proved highly effective in ensuring that the students are enrolled on the correct course, reducing early drop out from the programme and improving retention.

7.8 Achievement rates for full-time national diploma courses over the last three years vary from modest (69%) to poor (24%). The high drop out rate experienced by all the colleges is a major factor in the overall achievement rates.

7.9 The achievement rates for part-time national diploma certificate courses over the last three years are higher than those for the national diploma; they range from good (80%) to poor (52%).

PART 3: CONCLUSIONS AND KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The overall effectiveness of the education provision for the priority skill of construction and the built environment at level 3 is very good in one college, good in two colleges and satisfactory in three colleges.

9. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

9.1 While this report highlights strengths in the provision of construction and the built environment programmes across the colleges it has identified a number of key issues. In order to improve the quality of the provision in the technical and professional area of construction and the built environment the colleges and the Department need to:

- develop a consistent strategy across the further education sector to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- review and monitor retention rates on full-time courses and implement effective improvement strategies;
- develop and implement strategies to provide opportunities for staff to work together collaboratively across the campuses, to plan and design a coherent and integrated curriculum, promote collegiality and share best practice;
- design and promote the part-time national certificate programmes to increase student enrolments;
- further develop innovative up-skilling programmes for students who are already in employment; and
- develop further lecturers' pedagogic skills in the use of ILT and interactive whiteboards.

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