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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



## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Follow-Up Inspection**

**following an**

**Inspection of the Further Education and Work-Based  
Learning provision in**

**Northern Regional College**

**October 2014**

## **FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF THE NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

The original inspection in November 2012 highlighted strengths in the College's provision, including: the quality of the provision for further education and the Entitlement Framework; the good quality of most of the teaching, training, and learning; and the effective care, guidance, and support provided to the learners. The inspection also identified the need for improvements in key areas across the College, particularly the inadequate provision for work-based learning.

The inspection identified the need for whole-College improvement in the following key areas:

- the need to establish more robust strategic quality improvement planning processes to inform more effectively curriculum planning across the College;
- the quality of the provision for the essential skills across the College, with a particular focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and standards and outcomes in this area;
- the implementation of an effective quality improvement planning process to address learners' underachievement, which is underpinned by accurate and reliable data and informed by a more effective process of self-evaluation; and
- the need to build on the particularly good practice which exists in engineering, and a few other professional and technical areas, in order to broaden further the extent and impact of economic engagement and community involvement across the College.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the Northern Regional College have taken place:

- a new Principal has been recently appointed;
- a review of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes has been carried out across the College, which has helped inform the academic schools' curriculum development plans;
- a collaborative link has been established with another regional college to develop more effective systems for the management and analysis of data across the College;
- a range of key strategic performance indicators (KPIs) has been developed to help support improvements in performance management across the College;
- a learning and teaching committee has been established with a clear remit to identify and promote improvement in the quality of teaching and learning across the College;
- a significant number of lesson observations has been carried out across both the work-based learning and further education provision to support improvements in teaching, training and learning and achievements and standards; and
- levels of engagement with industry and community groups have been further developed across the College.

The improvement plan produced by the Northern Regional College in response to the inspection findings was evaluated by the ETI as being adequate. The ETI carried out two interim follow-up visits in May 2013 and December 2013, and a follow-up inspection in October 2014.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the improved performance management system, through the learning and teaching committee, which has identified and supported those courses with low levels of achievement;
- the better understanding and use of strategic KPIs by management and staff, with appropriate action taken to address under achievement;
- the improved processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning resulting in a much closer alignment between self-evaluation and curriculum planning at school level;
- the development of school curriculum plans, although the quality of these are variable and they are in need of further development;
- the quality of the essential skills provision in further education and work-based learning which is now good;
- the enhancements of links with industry across most professional and technical areas; and
- the much improved links with community groups in areas with high levels of social deprivation.

The area which requires further development is:

- the need to further develop the strategic curriculum planning processes across the College to ensure the curriculum meets more effectively the needs of all of the learners and of industry.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the overall quality of education and training provided by the Northern Regional College is now good, the quality of the work-based learning provision is satisfactory. The ETI will undertake a follow-up inspection process for the work-based learning aspect of the provision.

## **WORK-BASED LEARNING PROVISION**

In November 2012, the work-based learning provision in the College was evaluated as inadequate. The original inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the overall inadequate quality of the provision;
- to review the curriculum for the Training for Success provision in work-based learning to address the significant areas for improvement in the curriculum offer and outcomes, for a majority of the Programme-Led Apprentices;
- the inadequate leadership and management and overall standards and achievements in the work-based learning provision, particularly the low outcomes on the Training for Success programme; and
- the satisfactory or inadequate quality of the provision for brickwork, electrical installation, plumbing and wood occupations;

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work-based learning provision in the College have taken place:

- a multi-disciplinary work-based learning committee has been established to support improvement in the overall quality of the provision;
- a review of the curriculum offer for the work-based learning provision has been carried out resulting in a rationalisation of the provision across a number of the College campuses;
- a decision has been made to cease the delivery of the College's provision for electro-technical services as part of the Training for Success programme;
- the more effective processes established to inform the Governing Body about the provision for work-based learning; and
- work has been undertaken by the College management to support course teams in the development of a better understanding of the use of performance data to more effectively monitor and track the overall progress of the trainees and apprentices.

The most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection are the:

- effective monitoring and tracking systems implemented to record the overall progress and key outcomes for the trainees and apprentices, including full-framework achievement;
- significant increase in the work placement rate for the trainees on the Training for Success programme, at 97% for the 2013/14 year;
- better working relationships within course teams in work-based learning, including the multi-disciplinary team working with the training support officers, essential skills tutors and the careers staff;

- better integration of the essential skills within the professional and technical areas in work-based learning;
- improved provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance for the trainees on work-based learning programmes, including the pre-entry advice and guidance developed for the trainees and apprentices;
- better outcomes across all strands of the Training for Success programme; and
- improved overall quality of the provision in plumbing which is now good, and in brickwork and wood occupations which are now satisfactory.

The areas which require further development are:

- the need to develop a clearly articulated strategic plan for the future development of the work-based learning provision, particularly for electro-technical services, to meet more effectively the needs of trainees, apprentices and employers across the region;
- to continue to improve overall outcomes in work-based learning which remain too low; and
- to further improve the overall quality of the provision in wood occupations and trowel occupations (brickwork).

## **CONCLUSION**

The overall quality of the provision for work-based learning is now satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The College has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement in leadership and management and achievements and standards remain to be addressed if the needs of all of the trainees and apprentices are to be met effectively. The ETI will monitor and report on the progress made by the Northern Regional College in addressing the remaining areas for improvement in the work-based learning provision.

## **PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION REPORTS**

### **ESSENTIAL SKILLS**

The original inspection in November 2012 identified strengths in the College's provision, including the: commitment of the Head of Faculty, and the operational management team, to the improvement of the essential skills provision; good or better quality of the teaching, training and learning in all of the adult and community provision inspected; appropriate start made to addressing the identified areas of weakness in the further education provision; improving trends in overall achievements, and, in particular, in the essential skill of information and communication technology (ICT); and substantial number of learners who were targeting level 2 in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

The inspection also identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes, which lacked rigour and appropriate target-setting for improvement;
- the strengthening of the role of the Heads of School in driving quality improvement planning, and in monitoring progression in standards and achievements;
- the variable quality of the teaching and learning in the further education provision where 42% of the teaching and learning in the lessons observed was satisfactory or below; and
- the inadequate or satisfactory achievement rates in further education.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- more relevant performance data has been generated to support the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes and bring about improvements in the provision;
- stronger collaborative working relationships have been developed between the essential skills tutors and managers and their professional and technical course teams, to support the more effective management and monitoring of the provision;
- the planning for the essential skills provision has improved, including the use of technology enhanced learning and mobile technologies to support teaching, training and learning;
- better coherence in the planning for the provision at level 2 and the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) provision in English and mathematics; and
- the revised processes introduced to monitor performance and improve outcomes.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the improved self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes which make use of a wider range of relevant data to inform judgements on quality and performance across the provision;
- the improved monitoring and communication processes which are in place at all levels between the essential skills staff and the professional and technical area course teams;
- the improved quality of the teaching, training and learning in both further education and work-based learning, where 76% of the teaching and learning was good or better; and
- the improvement in achievements, which have increased by up to 20% in each of the essential skills.

The areas which require further improvement are:

- to continue to improve achievement and success rates in line with sector benchmarking data; and
- the close monitoring of timetabling arrangements, and the impact of new models of delivery, to ensure they meet the needs of all of the learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the essential skills, the quality of training provided by the Northern Regional College is now good. The College has important strengths in its provision for the essential skills. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The ETI will monitor the Northern Regional College's progress on the areas for improvement.

## **WORK-BASED LEARNING CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMMES IN TROWEL OCCUPATIONS (BRICKWORK), MECHANICAL ENGINEERING SERVICES (PLUMBING) AND WOOD OCCUPATIONS**

The original inspection in November 2012 highlighted strengths in the provision, including the: good or better retention and achievement rates on the level 2 ApprenticeshipsNI programme in plumbing; good or better achievement rates on the Skills for Work and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in wood occupations; good quality of most of the teaching, training and learning and the work placements; good quality of the personal training plans and progress reviews; and positive climate in the practical sessions that was conducive to learning.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the overall outcomes in construction programmes which were too low;
- the insufficient use and analysis of data to inform the self-evaluation process in order to identify weaknesses and raise achievement and standards across all three professional and technical areas; and
- the insufficient curriculum offer, across all three professional and technical areas, for the significant minority of the Training for Success trainees not in a work placement, to develop their occupational skills and knowledge.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- the course teams have demonstrated a collective responsibility and commitment to improve and enhance the overall quality of the construction provision;
- a more coherent curriculum offer has been developed for the minority of the trainees not in a work placement, including a range of well-planned activities to develop and enhance their practical skills;
- a revised recruitment strategy has been implemented which includes improved pre-entry advice and guidance and induction arrangements for new trainees;
- the trainees and apprentices have participated and achieved success in internal and external competitions which has enhanced the quality of the provision in the individual professional and technical areas;
- a range of guest speakers and industrial visits has been used to promote employer engagement, raise awareness of career progression pathways and motivate the trainees and apprentices; and
- the staffing levels have been reduced to address the contraction in the overall provision across these professional and technical areas, which match more effectively the existing skill needs of the construction industry in the region.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:



- the implementation of a more effective management information system across the provision, to track and monitor the trainees' and apprentices' progress across their full training frameworks;
- the revised curriculum offer for the Training for Success programme in plumbing, wood occupations and brickwork to support those trainees not in a work placement;
- the higher levels of economic engagement in plumbing which ensures the curriculum reflects and incorporates modern industry standard methods, techniques and technologies;
- an increase in the proportion of trainees, across the three professional and technical areas, who are now in a work placement;
- the improved overall achievement rates which now stand at 82% in wood occupations, 84% in brickwork, and 93% in plumbing;
- the improved overall retention rate in plumbing;
- the progression rate of almost one-quarter of the plumbing trainees from the level 2 Skills for Work strand of Training for Success to the level 2 ApprenticeshipsNI programme; and
- the more effective use of data, particularly in plumbing, to inform the self-evaluation process.

The areas which require further development are:

- the more effective use of qualitative and quantitative data in brickwork and wood occupations, in order to make reliable, incisive and evidence-based judgements on the quality of the provision;
- the ongoing low rates of retention in brickwork and wood occupations;
- further engagement with employers and industry, particularly in brickwork and wood occupations, to inform curriculum development, raise the awareness of the trainees and apprentices of the range of career progression pathways, and to further motivate them to perform to their full potential; and
- the setting of meaningful, measurable targets to support the further improvement in the provision for plumbing.

## **CONCLUSION**

In plumbing, the quality of education and training provided by Northern Regional College is now good. The College has important strengths in most of its training provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The ETI will monitor Northern Regional College's progress on the areas for improvement in plumbing.

In wood occupations and brickwork, the quality of training provided by the Northern Regional College is now satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The College has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement in leadership and management and achievements and standards remain to be addressed if the needs of all of the trainees and apprentices are to be met effectively. The ETI will monitor and report on the progress made by the Northern Regional College in addressing the remaining areas for improvement in wood occupations and brickwork.

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