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The Education and Training Inspectorate -

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Department of Education
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

of

Further Education Provision at Level 3 in Priority Skill Areas of Construction and Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

in

Belfast Metropolitan College

May 2012

FOLLOW-UP TO THE ORIGINAL FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION OF BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE'S FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION AT LEVEL 3 IN THE PRIORITY SKILL AREAS OF CONSTRUCTION AND MECHANICAL AND MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING

The original follow-up inspection in May 2011 highlighted the following improvements in the College's level 3 provision in the priority skills areas of computing and ICT, construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering:

- the significant improvement in the overall effectiveness in the quality of the provision in computing and ICT, which was very good;
- evidence of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and in the use of information and learning technology (ILT), particularly in computing and ICT and construction; and
- more opportunities for the students to participate in work-related learning activities, which were particularly strong in computing and ICT.

The areas which required further development were:

- the leadership and management of the provision in construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering, particularly more effective collegial work in curriculum planning and course delivery, the sharing of information and best practice, and quality improvement strategies based on rigorous and evidence-based self-evaluation in order to raise standards to meet the needs of the students;
- more effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements in construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering in order to track the progress of students in their professional and technical units; and
- to strengthen admissions, pre-entry advice and guidance and the arrangements for induction in construction and in mechanical and manufacturing engineering to ensure that students enrolled on these programmes have the relevant aptitudes and interests for these priority skill areas.

Since the first follow-up inspection, the following actions which affect the College's provision in construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering have taken place:

- the further restructuring of management at all levels in the College, as part of the whole College efficiency review;
- the introduction of a regular curriculum performance review process to identify key strengths and areas for improvement within these curricular areas;
- the scheduling of combined meetings between construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering staff to develop a sense of collegiality and to share best practice;
- the introduction of an information night for the parents/guardians of level 3 students in construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering;
- the significant internal staff training, particularly in strategies for teaching and learning and thinking skills provided for the lecturers;

- the introduction of a peer observation process for lecturers; and
- advanced planning for structured pre-enrolment information sessions in guidance and counselling for students applying to the Extended Diploma courses in these priority skill areas.

The improvement plan produced by the College in response to the first follow-up inspection was of good quality and was adjusted appropriately in light of feedback given by the Inspectorate during the monitoring visit.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out an interim follow-up visit in October 2011, and a follow-up inspection in May 2012.

The following are the most important improvements since the original follow-up inspection:

- the good support provided to the teaching teams by a proactive senior management team who demonstrate a clear commitment to sustainable quality improvement;
- the effective combined meetings of lecturing staff from construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering to review programmes and share examples of best practice;
- the good staff development provided for lecturers to improve the standard of teaching and learning;
- the improved student attendance rates; and
- the better careers education, information, advice and guidance provided for the students.

The areas which require further development are:

- the rigorous implementation of the planned and appropriate pre-entry advice and guidance procedures;
- the strengthening of the student tutorial and review processes, particularly to record attendance and track systematically the students' progress through their qualifications; and
- the continued monitoring and reviewing by the senior management team of the progress made against the agreed action plan.

Conclusion

In construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering, the quality of education and training provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is now good. The College has important strengths in most of its education and training provision in these priority skills areas. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

Priority Skill Area: Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

The original follow-up inspection in May 2011 highlighted improvements in the College's level 3 provision in the priority skills areas of mechanical and manufacturing engineering including:

- the improved retention rate on the full-time provision; and
- the increased enrolments on the welding evening class.

The areas which required further development were:

- the need to strengthen curriculum planning of the Extended Diploma, particularly the recruitment and induction arrangements, the assessment strategies and the student support and guidance arrangements;
- the standards of the work of the full-time students, as exemplified in their poor attendance, slow pace of work, and the insufficient development of their literacy skills to achieve beyond the minimum grade in the professional and technical assignments; and
- the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements in order to bring about sustainable improvements in the overall quality of the provision.

Since the first follow-up inspection, the following actions which affect the provision in mechanical and manufacturing engineering have taken place:

- the restructuring of the senior and middle management teams;
- the scheduling of combined meetings between construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering staff;
- the appointment of a mechanical sciences lecturer;
- the provision of staff development in teaching and learning and thinking skills training for the course team;
- the introduction of a peer observation process for lecturers;
- the benchmarking of good practice through a visit by the course co-ordinator to a college in the Netherlands;
- the development of a policy for recruitment and pre-entry guidance; and
- the development of a recovery plan for mechanical and manufacturing engineering.

The following are the most important improvements since the follow-up inspection:

- the good support from senior managers for the implementation of the recovery plan;

- the development of a well-balanced range of practical and theory units incorporating a range of appropriately challenging and well-planned practical project work for the students;
- the combined meetings between construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering lecturers which have underpinned the good collegiality evident and enabled the sharing of best practice;
- the improved attendance and retention rates, particularly the retention rate for the first year students;
- the better careers education, information, advice and guidance activities for the students, including appropriate visits to industry; and
- the improved standards of the students' work.

The areas which require further development are:

- the full implementation of the planned pre-entry guidance procedures;
- the strengthening of the student tutorial and review processes, in particular to exploit fully the good start made in recording and tracking the students' progress across their full qualification; and
- the development of more detailed operational action plans, with clear success measures and monitoring arrangements, to support and sustain the ongoing improvements.

Conclusion

In mechanical and manufacturing engineering, the quality of education and training provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is now good. The College has important strengths in most of its education and training provision in this priority skill area. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

Priority Skill Area: Construction

The first follow-up inspection in May 2011 highlighted improvements in the College's level 3 provision in the priority skill areas of construction, including:

- the successful introduction of an integrated assignment for the first year students in the Extended Diploma course;
- the good range of guest speakers invited to speak to the level 3 construction students;
- the provision of a base room on the Millfield campus for level 3 construction students; and
- the design and validation of new higher education programmes to provide additional progression routes for the level 3 students.

The areas which required further development were:

- the retention rates on the Extended Diploma course;
- the monitoring and management of the students' attendance and progress, across their full programme; and
- more collegiality and team-working between members of the level 3 construction teaching teams.

Since the first follow-up inspection, the following actions which affect the provision in construction have taken place:

- the deployment of a new management structure to guide and support the curriculum provision in this area;
- the combined meetings between construction and mechanical and manufacturing engineering staff which have underpinned the good collegiality evident and enabled the sharing of best practice;
- the introduction of a construction employers' forum event;
- the provision of staff development in teaching and learning and thinking skills training for the course team;
- the introduction of a peer observation process for lecturers; and
- the planning of structured and appropriate pre-enrolment information sessions to guide and counsel students applying to the Extended Diploma course.

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

- the scheduling of combined meetings between construction, and mechanical and manufacturing engineering lecturers, which is leading to a better sharing of good practice between staff in these priority skill areas;

- the good quality of course information provided for parents/guardians;
- the good range of guest speakers invited to speak to the level 3 construction students;
- the good connections made with local building contractors and design professionals through the employers' forum;
- the improved retention rates;
- the good staff development provided for lecturers to improve the quality of the teaching and learning; and
- the positive impact of the programme of peer observation of lecturers on the quality of the teaching and learning.

The areas which require further development are:

- the full implementation of the planned pre-entry guidance procedures;
- the redesign of the assessment schedule to better spread the assignment workload for the students across the year; and
- the improved attendance by the first year students.

Conclusion

In construction, the quality of education and training provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is now good. The College has important strengths in most of its education and training provision in this priority skill area. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

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