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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 of the
provision for Priority Skills Area Level 2 Programmes

in

Northern Regional College

November 2010

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF PRIORITY SKILLS AREA LEVEL 2 PROGRAMMES IN NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

The focused inspection in May 2009 highlighted strengths in the college's quality assurance and quality improvement planning process, the quality of the teaching and learning, the standards of students' work, the professional development opportunities for staff, the quality of the provision in engineering and hospitality and tourism, the strong links with post-primary schools and area learning communities, and the progression rates to further education, training or employment for students in computing and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), engineering, and hospitality and tourism.

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

- the need for leadership and management of the priority skills area level 2 programmes to address the limited opportunities for curriculum teams to share good practice, and to plan and develop the curriculum on a whole college basis;
- the insufficient focus on employability skills and links with industry across most of the priority skills areas provision at level 2;
- the poor use of information and learning technologies (ILT) to enhance teaching and learning and to support the development of students' independent learning skills through the use of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE);
- the lack of clearly defined careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in all curriculum areas, including the focused use of electronic-Individual Student Learner Agreements (e-ISLA) to engage students more effectively in their own learning and inform them about their progress;
- the inadequate impact of the college's pastoral care policies on a minority of students;
- the poor level of support provided by a small number of staff members for some students;
- the wide variation in the quality and maintenance of the accommodation and learning resources across the college, including access to specialist resources;
- the satisfactory quality of the overall provision in computing and ICT and essential skills;
- the poor success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy; and
- the lack of a further education curriculum offer at level 2 in the priority skill area of construction.

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

- the completion of the restructuring process for all professional and technical areas, learning resource and education support staff;
- the appointment of a facilities manager and health and safety co-ordinator;

- the establishment of a range of cross-college, multi-disciplinary teams including one to oversee the development of curriculum provision within level 2 programmes and essential skills;
- the development and implementation of policies to increase retention and attendance, and improve the tutorial provision for students;
- the extension of the self-evaluation process to all of the college's support services;
- the overall review of the college's curriculum offer;
- the strategic review of essential skills at Head of Faculty and Head of School level;
- the review of the management and provision for computing and ICT programmes;
- the delivery of a revised programme of staff training and development to support learning and teaching including ILT, and to enhance the college's pastoral care provision;
- the development of a student council and a range of mechanisms to respond to and report on student feedback;
- the roll-out of the electronic Individual Learning Plan (e-ILP) across the college;
- the implementation of a new VLE to support the on-going development of ILT across the college; and
- the provision of additional accommodation including the opening of a new skills centre in the Newtownabbey campus and two new ICT rooms in the Farm Lodge and Magherafelt campuses.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) carried out one interim follow-up visit in January 2010 and a follow-up inspection in November 2010.

The action plan produced by the college in response to the inspection findings was of good quality and was adjusted appropriately in light of feedback given by the Inspectorate during the interim follow-up visit.

The college's development plan has been adjusted in light of the inspection findings. The development plan meets the requirements of the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department).

The following are the most important improvements since the focused inspection:

- the improved leadership and management of the provision for priority skills programmes at level 2, including the good opportunities provided for increased collaboration and sharing of good practice between course teams across the college;
- the development of a very good on-line programme for careers, education, information, advice and guidance to support staff in their delivery of the tutorial system, and assist the development of the students' independent learning skills;

- the improved impact of the college's pastoral care policies on the students' well-being;
- the good improvement in the leadership and management of the essential skills provision, including the revised timetabling arrangements and the improvements in outcomes in literacy and numeracy; and
- the well improved provision for computing and ICT, including the development of more appropriate industry links.

CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of the education and training provided by the Northern Regional College is now good. The college has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The follow-up inspection has identified some aspects of the areas for improvement still to be addressed but equally the college has demonstrated the capacity to address these.

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