



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection Southern
Regional College's Further Education
Provision at Level 3 in the Priority Skills of
Construction, Electrical and Electronic
Engineering and Mechanical and
Manufacturing Engineering

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Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE'S FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION AT LEVEL 3 IN THE PRIORITY SKILLS OF CONSTRUCTION, ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING, AND MECHANICAL AND MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING

The evaluation report in May 2010, highlighted strengths including the very good quality of the provision in computing and ICT, the extensive provision of construction and engineering courses in local post-primary schools, the good support provided to industry in computing and ICT, and in engineering, and the standards of work attained by students in the majority of the areas inspected.

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

- the quality of the provision in mechanical and manufacturing engineering which was inadequate;
- to articulate a strategic vision for the college's provision in engineering, particularly to ensure students have access to a relevant curriculum with the required levels of resources to meet their career goals and aspirations;
- more effective curriculum planning in construction and engineering, including the identification and sharing of best practice in curriculum design and in teaching and learning;
- more extensive use of work-related learning across all of the programmes inspected; and
- the quality of the teaching and learning across nearly all of the areas inspected and more consistent and effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning.

In the interval since the evaluation, the following action which affects the work of the college has taken place:

- the high priority given by the senior management team to resource and action improvements in the quality of the provision in construction and engineering since the original evaluation;
- the restructuring in September 2011, of the leadership and management roles for the provision in construction and engineering;
- the strong links that have been established with other colleges of further education in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Europe to identify and share best practice in construction and engineering;
- the more effective deployment of course teams in construction and engineering across the three main campus locations;
- the greater cognisance given to the views of students in curriculum management and in the self-evaluation process through extensive use of student focus groups and class representative forums;
- the plans which are at an advanced stage, for the significant investment of capital resources to support the curriculum and provision in engineering;
- the 23% decline in level 3 enrolments in construction from 208 to 161 students, and the 13% increase in level 3 enrolments in engineering from 158 to 179 students;
- the introduction of a peer lesson observation programme across the college to enhance the quality of teaching and learning; and
- the implementation of strategies to help promote the effective use of ILT in teaching and learning.

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out two interim follow-up visits in January 2011 and May 2011, and a follow-up inspection in November 2011.

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

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

- the quality of the provision in mechanical and manufacturing engineering which is now good;
- the more effective collegial work across the campuses in course planning, curriculum development, assessment strategies and in the sharing of teaching and learning resources;
- the quality of teaching and learning in construction and engineering, which is at least good in all observed lessons, and is very good or outstanding in just under 40% of lessons;
- the more effective and innovative approaches in the use of ILT in teaching and learning, including the use of college virtual learning environment (VLE) to enhance the quality of the students' learning experiences which is now significant in the construction provision; and
- the more extensive use of work-related learning including, site visits and work experience in construction, and practical learning activities in engineering.

The areas which require further development are:

- for senior and middle managers to articulate a clear strategic vision and plan for the provision in engineering to meet the needs of students and industry;
- more consistent approaches to leadership and management in construction and engineering to bring about sustained improvement.

Conclusion

The overall quality of the provision in priority skill areas inspected at level 3 is good. The college has important strengths in most of its provision in these areas. The follow-up inspection has identified some aspects of the areas for improvement still to be addressed but equally the Southern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address these.

SPECIALIST AREA REPORTS

1. Priority Skill Area: Construction

The evaluation report in May 2010, highlighted strengths including the good provision of level 3 full-time and part-time courses in construction, the progression routes available within the college to higher education programmes, the provision of relevant additional qualifications to students, the extensive construction provision delivered in local post-primary schools, and the good standards of most of the students' work.

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

- the satisfactory to inadequate teaching in the majority (71%) of the lessons observed on the Newry campus;
- more effective and innovative use of the interactive whiteboards to enhance the students' learning experiences; and
- more opportunities for staff to work together collaboratively across the campuses, to promote collegiality and share best practice.

In the interval since the evaluation, the following action which affects the work of the college has taken place:

- the review of the management arrangements for the construction provision, which resulted in the creation of the School of Construction and the Built Environment;
- the implementation of regular cross-campus team meetings;
- the development of a programme of peer-observation of lecturers;
- the assignment of a teaching and learning advisor to the School to provide support for lecturers in developing their pedagogic practice;
- the provision of cross-campus staff development events, to develop the lecturers' skills in the delivery of level 3 programmes and to share good practice;
- the development of a programme of events including cross-campus site visits and a range of extra-curricular activities;
- the formation of student focus groups and student representatives forums;
- a new teaching team has been deployed into the Newry campus; and
- the appointment of two new lecturers.

The Inspectorate carried out an interim follow-up visit in January 2011, and a follow-up inspection in November 2011.

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

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

- the better quality of the teaching and learning on the Newry campus;
- the improvement in the lecturers' pedagogic practice through the programme of staff development, and peer observation and support;
- the very good collaborative working between staff across all campuses, including the sharing of resources through the college VLE, the standardisation of assignments, curriculum development, and in the further use of ILT in teaching and learning;
- the enriched and coherent curriculum provided for the students on all campuses through the cross-campus programme of work-related learning, and extra-curricular activities;
- the very good opportunities for full-time level 3 students to participate in appropriate work-experience across the three main campuses;
- the very good opportunities for the students to achieve additional qualifications to improve their employability skills; and
- the very good development of the student focus groups and student representative forums that meet regularly with the course coordinator and the deputy head of school to provide feedback on a range of course related issues.

Conclusion

In construction, the quality of education provided by Southern Regional College is now very good. The college is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the students; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

2. Priority Skill Area: Electrical and Electronic Engineering

The evaluation report in May 2010, highlighted strengths including the breadth of provision for electrical and electronic engineering in Newry and Portadown, the effective links and partnerships with local industry and schools, the good standards of work demonstrated by most students, the excellent electronic engineering resources on the Newry campus, and the good retention and very good success rates across most of the part-time provision.

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

- the over-reliance on part-time and temporary lecturers for the delivery of full-time courses leading to poor attendance and retention;
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- the poor match of the curriculum offer on the Portadown campus to local needs; and
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- the just satisfactory quality of teaching and learning in a majority of lessons on the Portadown campus.

In the interval since the evaluation, the following action which affects the work of the provision in the college has taken place:

- the strong support from the senior management team to resource and action the improvements identified in the recovery plan;
- the college restructuring leading to the creation of a new School of Engineering and Automotive Studies;
- the more effective deployment of full-time lecturers across the college to reduce the need for part-time and temporary cover;
- the strategic review of curriculum based on an external analysis of local industry needs and best practice in other colleges to inform planning;
- the support arrangements put in place to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- the implementation of a strategy to improve communication between managers, lecturers and students across the School; and
- the enhanced reporting to more fully analyse key performance indicators across the full duration of each course.

The Inspectorate carried out an interim follow-up visit in January 2011, and a follow-up inspection in November 2011.

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

The following are the most important improvements since the original evaluation:

- the more effective management of the provision leading to stability in timetables, improved cross-college communication and an enhanced learning experience for most students;
- the enhanced quality of teaching and learning which ranges from good to outstanding and is very good overall;
- the integration of more practical investigation and better use of a wider range of physical resources across the provision to enable students to develop appropriate skills, and to apply engineering principles to solve problems; and
- the mostly good attendance and retention rates for the current cohort of students.

The areas which require further development are:

- the need for a clearly articulated vision and plan for the future development of electrical and electronic engineering across the college, matched to the current and emerging needs of the region, and connected to related technological areas such as renewable energies, software engineering and telecommunications;
- the review of staffing levels and expertise to meet the evolving needs of the revised curriculum offer; and
- the further development of links and partnerships with a wider range of local companies to; inform curriculum planning, develop work related-learning opportunities and expand the provision.

Conclusion

In electrical and electronic engineering the quality of education provided in the Southern Regional College is now good. The college has important strengths in most of its provision in electrical and electronic engineering. 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.

3. Priority Skill Area: Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

The evaluation report in May 2010, highlighted strengths including the effective engagement with local employers to inform future curriculum planning, good partnerships with local schools to improve progression rates to full-time level 3 engineering programmes, particularity in the Newry area, and good retention and excellent success rates on the full-time courses, and consistently excellent retention and success rates on the part-time courses.

The evaluation identified the following key areas for improvement:

- inadequate range of mechanical and manufacturing units provided for the full-time students;
- lack of opportunities for the students to apply and develop their theoretical knowledge through practical work or work-related learning;
- limited deployment and use of specialist equipment and workshops to support the students in their development of technician skills and knowledge;

- the narrow range of teaching approaches used in one- half of the lessons observed; and
- the low recruitment to part-time courses.

In the interval since the evaluation, the following action which affects the work of the provision in the college has taken place:

- the appointment of an additional full-time lecturer and the appropriate redeployment of existing staff with specialist expertise;
- the benchmarking of good practice in other further education colleges within the United Kingdom and in Europe;
- the engagement with employers to inform curriculum development, the requisition of specialist equipment, and staff development;
- the restructuring of the curriculum to meet the needs of students and employers;
- the strong leadership by senior management to secure approval for an extensive upgrading of the specialist facilities and equipment to industry standard;
- the restructuring of the management arrangements in line with curricular needs, leading to the creation of a new School of Engineering and Automotive Studies
- the introduction of supportive peer observation to improve and enhance the quality of the teaching and learning, with a focus on ILT; and
- the revised self-evaluation arrangements to illicit the views of staff and students through regular meetings, forums and questionnaires.

The Inspectorate carried out two interim follow-up inspection visits, in January 2010 and in May 2011.

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

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

- the effective collaborative working across and within campus teams;
- the provision of a coherent curriculum that provides a clear progression pathway from level 1 to level 5 for both work-based learning trainees and further education students;
- the provision of an appropriate range of units for all full-time and part-time students;
- the standards of the students' work, which are now good to very good and aligned well to industry standards;
- the quality of the teaching and learning, including the improved use of practical learning tasks and ILT to support the students' learning, with all of the lessons observed being good or better;

- the deployment of specialist equipment, which is used well to support the students develop industry-relevant skills and knowledge; and
- the improving trend in recruitment patterns.

The areas which require further development are:

- increased opportunities for the full-time students to develop practical and problem solving skills through design and manufacturing projects, including the use of advanced design, manufacturing and measurement technology; and
- the consolidation of the college's vision and development planning of the mechanical and manufacturing engineering provision to sustain continual improvements to meet effectively the future needs of students and employers.

Conclusion

In mechanical and manufacturing engineering the quality of education provided in the Southern Regional College is now good. The college has important strengths in most of its provision in mechanical and manufacturing engineering. 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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