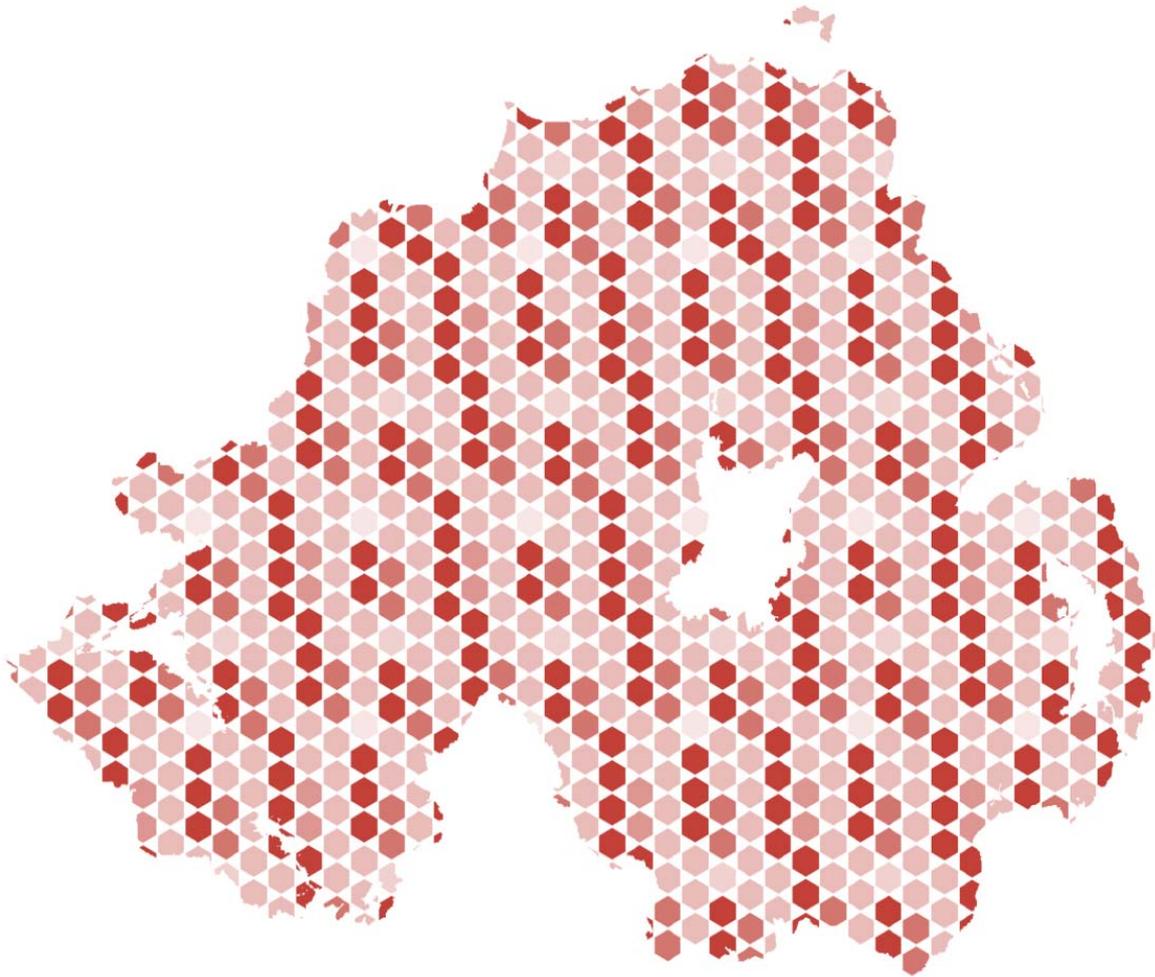


TRAINING INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision
Food and Drink Sector Skills

Report of an Inspection
in March 2010



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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	- almost/nearly all
75%-90%	- most
50%-74%	- a majority
30%-49%	- a significant minority
10%-29%	- a minority
Less than 10%	- very few/a small minority

The statistics used in this report have been supplied and verified by Food and Drink Sector Skills.

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate use the following performance levels (grades) in reports:

Performance Level	Grade	Descriptor
Outstanding	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	2	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	3	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which the organisation has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

PART ONE

SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

1.1 The Food and Drink Sector Skills is a company limited by guarantee, with charitable status. It was established in 1991 as the Food and Drink Training Council for Northern Ireland but in 2008 rebranded as the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Sector Skills. It is a regional partner of Improve Limited, the Sector Skills Council for food and drink manufacturing across the United Kingdom.

1.2 The Food and Drink Sector Skill's premises are located in the Belfast Mills, Percy Street, Belfast where they currently employ three full-time and eight part-time staff. The overall leadership and contract management for Food and Drink Sector Skills is the responsibility of the Business Development Manager, who is supported by a training adviser and an office administrator. The part-time staff include a company secretary, three essential skills tutors and four associate tutors.

1.3 A major priority for the Food and Drink Sector Skills is to improve the workforce skills in food and drink manufacturing, in order to meet employer demand and industry needs. The organisation reports that while the food processing industry is the largest manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland, it is currently facing several key challenges including: a high labour turnover; difficulties in recruiting skilled workers in butchery and bakery; profit margin pressure; and increased energy costs.

2. PROVISION

2.1 The Food and Drink Sector Skills is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) to provide the ApprenticeshipsNI programme at level 2 in food manufacture across ten different pathways: bakery processing, butchery retail, craft bakery, distribution, facilities support, livestock droving, meat and poultry processing, production control, production improvement, and retail and service support. The organisation is also contracted to deliver the level 3 programme in the following areas: craft bakery; meat and poultry; and management.

2.2 At the time of the inspection, 312 apprentices from across Northern Ireland were registered with Food and Drink Sector Skills. This marks a considerable increase in apprentice recruitment over the last three years, from 32 in 2007 rising to 196 in 2009. All of the apprentices recruited were existing employees when they commenced their apprenticeships and were working in a variety of settings. The apprentices have a range of job roles and responsibilities, and are targeting qualifications at level 2 and/or level 3 in food manufacture. The vast majority (90%) of the apprentices were following the apprenticeship programme at level 2, with the remainder at level 3.

2.3 Based on the information provided by Food and Drink Sector Skills, the majority (67%) of the apprentices have no formal qualifications on entry to their training programme. A minority (14%) of them have achieved four or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grades A* to C, with a further 19% having achieved four or more GCSEs at grades D-G. A minority of the apprentices have either English (21%) or mathematics (20%) at GCSE grade C or above. A small number (5%) of the apprentices are graduates and just over one-quarter of them are migrant workers.

2.4 According to statistics provided by Food and Drink Sector Skills, of the 312 apprentices registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, around 80% of them require essential skills provision in both literacy and numeracy, to meet the requirements of the qualification framework. The remainder of the apprentices are exempt from the essential skills as a result of prior achievements. At the time of the inspection, only a minority (13%) of the apprentices had commenced the essential skills provision in literacy and the essential skill provision for numeracy had not started. Only a very small number (3%) of the apprentices had commenced training for the technical certificate, as required by the qualification framework, which is unsatisfactory.

2.5 Food and Drink Sector Skills has sub-contracted all of its workplace assessments and apprentice reviews to the Scottish Meat Training Federation, the Scottish Association of Master Bakers, the Belfast Metropolitan College and to employer-based training assessors. These sub-contractors co-ordinate and carry out all the necessary work-based assessment of the apprentices' occupational competences for the achievement of the relevant national vocational qualification (NVQ) in food manufacture, across Northern Ireland. Food and Drink Sector Skills is responsible solely for the provision of the apprentices' directed training for essential skills and for the technical certificate required for the ApprenticeshipsNI qualification.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a longitudinal inspection of the quality of the provision for both directed and work-based training and learning provided by Food and Drink Sector Skills, across the ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. The first phase of the inspection occurred in October 2009, and the second phase in March 2010. The provision for apprentice support, careers education, information, advice and guidance, pastoral care and the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, and the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, was also inspected.

3.2 During the inspection, a team of four inspectors, supported by a professional associate, observed 12 apprentices in two directed training sessions, and observed and interviewed 86 apprentices in the workplace. Extended discussions were held with the Business Development Manager, the training adviser and tutors. In addition, 21 employers and workplace supervisors/mentors were interviewed by the inspection team. The team also examined samples of apprentices' work, portfolios of evidence, personal training plans (PTPs), internal and external verifier reports, the organisation's self-evaluation report, and other relevant documentation.

3.3 The inspection of the arrangements for pastoral care and the safeguarding of vulnerable adults included the opportunity for the apprentices to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. In addition, discussions were held with apprentices across the programmes inspected. One hundred and twenty questionnaires were issued to apprentices, 31 (26%) of which were returned to the Inspectorate. Of these, three contained additional written comments. The returns from the questionnaires and written comments indicate that the apprentices' experiences of workplace training are very good. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with apprentices to the Business Development Manager.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Food and Drink Sector Skills is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in leadership and management, the provision for learning, and achievements and standards, which need to be addressed

urgently if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all of the apprentices. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-18 month period.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- good standards of occupational skills demonstrated by most of the apprentices in the workplace; and
- good quality of the training opportunities that exist for the apprentices in the workplace.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- unsatisfactory strategic leadership and management of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, including the inadequate quality assurance and development planning processes to bring about improvement;
- insufficient capacity and resources to manage and deliver the requirements of the full apprenticeship training programme, including inadequate directed training provision for the delivery of the essential skills and the technical certificate; and
- inadequate progression of the apprentices towards the achievement of the full framework.

Performance Levels

Overall performance level (grade)	Inadequate (5)
Contributory performance levels (grades)	
Leadership and Management	Unsatisfactory (6)
Achievements and Standards	Satisfactory (4)
Quality of Provision for Learning	Inadequate (5)

PART TWO

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of the leadership and management of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme by Food and Drink Sector Skills is unsatisfactory. At both strategic and operational levels there is insufficient planning, reviewing and monitoring to ensure that all the apprentices have access to a coherent and well-structured training programme. While regular meetings take place between Food and Drink Sector Skills staff, associate and essential skills tutors to plan and review provision, the management team has a poor strategic overview and understanding of the full requirements of the apprenticeship programme. The leadership and management are not effective in integrating the good opportunities that exist within most of the apprentices' workplace training with the directed training, and as a result, the apprentices are making slow and insufficient progress towards the achievement of their training programme. It is unsatisfactory that there are large numbers of apprentices at present who do not have access to all of the necessary elements of the ApprenticeshipsNI framework.

5.2 The Food and Drink Sector Skills has developed good links with a large number of companies across Northern Ireland and have been particularly successful in promoting the apprenticeship programme in butchery retail. This offers good opportunities for employees to gain nationally recognised training and qualifications in an area where traditionally there was little formal training available. The ApprenticeshipsNI programme provided by Food and Drink Sector Skills is, however, poorly planned and resourced. The time allocated to the programmes is inadequate, for example; approximately 60 hours or less are currently allocated to most apprentices for the delivery and assessment of the full framework .

5.3 The quality of the self-evaluation and improvement planning process in Food and Drink Sector Skills is inadequate. The current quality assurance procedures are not sufficiently well-developed and are not effective in identifying and implementing the actions necessary for improvement. The improvement plan does not include sufficiently measurable actions and too little thought has been given to the prioritisation of the actions required for improvement. The analysis and use of the quality indicators and management information to review the provision lacks rigour and does not accurately identify the main areas for improvement.

5.4 Communication between Food and Drink Sector Skills staff, apprentices, employers and the sub-contractors is ineffective. The employers are not informed adequately about the requirements of the apprenticeship programme, including the essential skills and technical certificate elements, and they are not sufficiently engaged in the setting of training targets. In addition, the current arrangements for reviewing and monitoring the apprentices' progress are unsatisfactory with reviews lacking purpose and direction, and poorly recorded.

5.5 Given the significant increase in the number of apprentices recruited, the Food and Drink Sector Skills currently does not have the capacity to manage and deliver the full requirements of ApprenticeshipsNI programme. In addition, the range of learning resources and materials, including on-line resources available to enhance training and learning is inadequate. As a result, the apprentices are being unnecessarily disadvantaged and the rates of achievement and progression are poor.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 Almost all of the apprentices are experienced employees in the food manufacturing industry and, as a result, they make good progress through the competency-based NVQ element of their apprenticeship framework. A minority of the current apprentices (26%), for example, have completed their NVQ qualification. A small number of them have progressed from level 2 to level 3, however, without completing all elements of the level 2 framework. The overall achievement and progression rates of the apprentices are very poor; it is unsatisfactory that, over the past three years, none of the apprentices have successfully completed their full framework requirements, including the essential skills and technical certificate.

6.2 The occupational standards achieved by most of the apprentices in the workplace are good or better. They are developing the relevant occupational and transferable skills and capabilities to meet the needs of the food manufacturing industry, including team-working, good interpersonal skills, flexibility and initiative. Most of the apprentices inspected are highly motivated and enthusiastic about their work-based experiences and report that their confidence has increased significantly during their training programme. A small number of the apprentices have been promoted recently, and they report that this is largely due to their participation in the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

6.3 The standard of the spoken communication skills of most of the apprentices is satisfactory or better and almost all are able to engage effectively with colleagues in the workplace. They are able to discuss production and process requirements of their work role with confidence and are aware of their health, safety and food hygiene duty by law. The standard of most of the apprentices' written work, however, is poor with little evidence of marking for improvement. In addition, the apprentices have too few opportunities to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills, including on-line research and the contextualised use of word processing or spreadsheet software. In most instances, the apprentices are well-supported in the workplace by their employers to develop appropriate employability skills.

6.4 Over the past three years, for the period 2007 to 2010, the average retention rate for the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is good at 82%. The average success rate for the same period is unsatisfactory, with none of the apprentices who entered the programme since April 2007 having achieved the full qualification framework.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 The planning for the design and delivery of the training on the apprenticeship programme is inadequate and is ineffective in promoting a coherent and cohesive training experience for all of the apprentices. The procedures for induction are inadequate. The apprentices are not informed adequately, at the start of their training, about the essential skills and technical certificate elements of their programme. The outcomes of the initial assessments are not used well to plan individual programmes of learning or to ensure that apprentices are working at the appropriate level.

7.2 In the training sessions observed, the quality of the training and learning was satisfactory. While the associate tutors have good relevant specialist knowledge and experience, they use only a limited range of training and learning strategies to engage and challenge the apprentices in their learning. Insufficient use is made of the apprentices' knowledge and understanding of their respective work roles and work-based activities to enhance and support the learning.

7.3 The quality of the workplace training is mostly good and supports well the apprentices' assessment needs to achieve the relevant NVQ. Most employers set and expect appropriate standards of work for the apprentices. They provide them with good opportunities to develop a wide range of occupational skills and competences that are well matched to their current and future roles and responsibilities within the workplace. In a few instances, there are good examples of apprentices, who are employed in larger food and drink companies, being moved around the workplace to allow them to undertake a more complex range of tasks which will enable them to develop further their skills and meet fully the requirements of their NVQ assessment. For a minority of the apprentices employed in butchery units, however, the workplace training provides too narrow a range of training and assessment opportunities, which hinders their development and demonstration of the occupational skills necessary for their NVQ.

7.4 There are good opportunities within the larger food and drink companies for the apprentices to gain additional units and qualifications. One processing unit, for example, includes effective communication, coaching skills, health and safety and intermediate food hygiene, as well as, knife safety, chemical handling and quality control training for their apprentices.

7.5 The provision for the essential skills of literacy and numeracy in Food and Drink Sector Skills is inadequate. The provision lacks coherence and is ineffective in supporting learners in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. The current staffing complement to meet the needs of apprentices is also inadequate.

7.6 The quality of the personal training plans is inadequate. The apprentices' personal and social barriers to learning are not adequately identified, and there is no initial record or tracking of their progress in acquiring important transferable skills such as problem-solving and working with others. In addition, the apprentices' knowledge and understanding of occupational topics are not recorded adequately. As a result, the apprentices are not involved in agreeing and setting short-term training targets with their NVQ assessors or employers. Nearly all of the apprentices interviewed were unaware of their personal training plans or the milestones contained within them.

7.7 The provision for careers education information advice and guidance is inadequate. As a result, the apprentices are not fully aware of the career progression pathways available to them.

7.8 While the arrangements for the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, Food and Drink Sector Skills should give consideration to the provision of training in this important area to their staff.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Food and Drink Sector Skills is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in leadership and management, the provision for learning, and achievements and standards, which need to be addressed urgently if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all of the apprentices. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-18 month period.

PART THREE

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Food and Drink Sector Skills needs to revise its annual development plan to take account of the following key priorities:

- the strategic leadership and management to provide support and resources for the effective delivery of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme;
- the quality assurance processes, at all levels, to ensure the training provision is of good quality to meet the needs of all the apprentices;
- the provision of good quality directed training to support the apprentices in achieving the full qualification framework for their apprenticeship; and
- the overall achievement and progression rates.

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