

Education and Training Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in **Engineering Training Council** Northern Ireland (Engineering **Training Services**)

Report of an Inspection in September 2010



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





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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all - more than 90%

Most - 75% - 90%

A majority - 50% - 74%

A significant minority - 30% - 49%

A minority - 10% - 29%

Very few/a small number - less than 10%

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by Engineering Training Services.

Grading System

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

Performance Level		
Outstanding		
Very Good		
Good		
Satisfactory		
Inadequate		
Unsatisfactory		

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1. **CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The Engineering Training Council Northern Ireland (ETCNI) is an employer-led body representing the engineering industry in Northern Ireland. It is also the local representative of the United Kingdom (UK) Sector Skills Council Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA). Through a subsidiary company, Engineering Training Services, Northern Ireland Limited (ETS), ETCNI is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) to supply training for the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, at level 2, in the professional and technical area of engineering, across Northern Ireland. Engineering Training Services is located within the Engineering Training Council's office in Belfast. The staffing complement includes a senior operations manager, a training manager, and four training assessors. Engineering Training Services has partnership links with around 50 engineering and manufacturing companies across Northern Ireland to provide them with recruitment, selection and training services for their engineering apprenticeship programmes. There are also service level agreements with five of the further education colleges, who provide the directed training for the technical certificates relating to the apprenticeship frameworks.
- 1.2 The majority of the apprentices progress directly to Engineering Training Services from post-primary schools, with a minority progressing from the further education colleges. Most (70%) of the apprentices have achieved level 2 qualifications in literacy and in numeracy prior to commencing their apprenticeship, with a further 15% having achieved a level 1 qualification. Almost all (98%) of the apprentices are male.

2. **PROVISION**

- Engineering Training Services, in conjunction with their partner employers across 2.1 Northern Ireland, offer apprenticeships in a wide range of specialist engineering disciplines, which include electrical and electronic engineering, fabrication and welding engineering, maintenance engineering, manufacturing engineering, and telecommunications engineering. Over the last three years, recruitment has fluctuated slightly, with an average of approximately 65 new apprentices recruited each year. At the time of the inspection, a total of 96 apprentices were registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. Approximately 62% of them are following a mechanical and manufacturing engineering pathway, and the remaining 38% following an electrical and electronic engineering pathway. All of the apprentices undertake a level 2 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), and a relevant technical certificate that is matched to their prior educational achievement and workplace training. Most of the apprentices who commence their apprenticeship without level 2 qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT), literacy or numeracy, undertake a level 2 essential skills qualification in these areas, which is a level above that required by their apprenticeship framework.
- 2.2 The apprentices' training programme comprises on-the-job practical training on their employer's premises and directed training at a further education college or in an employers' training centre. Most (80%) of the apprentices attend directed training one day each week to complete their technical certificate, and the remainder attend concentrated blocks of directed training to complete their technical certificate. A significant minority of the apprentices also benefit from specialist practical training provided by their employer, or an external specialist training provider. The apprentices' ICT essential skills training is provided by the essential skills co-ordinator, and their literacy and numeracy training is provided by part-time tutors who are contracted to deliver the training in short concentrated blocks. The training assessors, in conjunction with employer-based assessors, monitor and assess the apprentices' progress and NVQ achievements in the workplace.

3. THE INSPECTION

- 3.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) carried out an inspection of Engineering Training Service's ApprenticeshipsNI programme in September 2010. A team of three inspectors and one associate assessor observed 45 apprentices in 15 directed training sessions, and visited 19 apprentices in their workplace training. Discussions were held with the senior operations manger, training manager, essential skills co-ordinator, careers guidance and pastoral care co-ordinator, the further education college curriculum managers, lecturers, apprentices and workplace supervisors. The inspection team also examined samples of the apprentices' work, their personal training plans (PTPs), the organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation.
- 3.2 The arrangements for the inspection of care, guidance and support and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups includes the opportunity for the apprentices to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings by the inspection team with groups of apprentices. Questionnaires were issued to all of the apprentices, 25 (20%) of which were returned to the Inspectorate; one of these contained additional written comments. The returns show that the apprentices' training experiences provided through Engineering Training Services are at least good. They report that they are supported well in their training and have good opportunities to learn in different ways. A minority of the apprentices, however, report that they are unsure of the progression opportunities to higher training and education programmes available to them. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with apprentices to the senior operations manager and the training manager.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Engineering Training Services is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- excellent links and partnerships established with employers and the further education colleges to provide apprenticeships that meet well the employers' training needs;
- very good range of specialist technical certificates provided for the apprentices that are matched well to their prior educational achievement and workplace training;
- very good to excellent standards of work demonstrated by most of the apprentices;
- excellent success and progression rates at 100%, and the improving retention rate at 87%;
- very good quality of the workplace training provided for most of the apprentices;
 and
- good or better quality of directed training provided for the apprentices.

- 4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:
 - better use of Personal Training Plans to record and track the apprentices' progress in the development of their occupational and essential skills;
 - quality of the co-ordination of the directed training for a few of the apprentices;
 - further embedding of the quality assurance processes across all areas of the provision, but particularly in the essential skills provision.

Table of Grades

		Performance Level
OVERALL		Good
Contributory Areas: Leadership and Management Achievements and Standards Quality of Provision for Learning		Good Very Good Good
Professional and Technical Area:	Number of Apprentices	Performance Level
Electrical and Electronic Engineering Essential Skills Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering	37 36 59	Good Good Very Good

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

- 5.1 The overall quality of the leadership and management is good. Engineering Training Service's management board and the senior management team are committed to continual improvement of the apprenticeships they provide. Recent organisational changes, which include the appointment of a senior operations manager and additional training assessors, has increased significantly the organisation's capacity and capability to provide good quality engineering apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are provided for a wide range of engineering employers across Northern Ireland, ranging from small local companies with less than five employees to large international companies with over 1,000 employees. Training Services respond well to employers' requirements for tailored apprenticeships to meet their business needs, which include a bespoke apprenticeship for telecommunications engineers and a pilot apprenticeship for digital communications installers. They have also responded well in meeting the need for specialist apprenticeships in engineering maintenance, fabrication and welding, and in manufacturing engineering. As a result, the apprenticeships offered are well-structured and provide the apprentices with very good opportunities to develop industry standard practical skills, a sound knowledge and understanding of related engineering principles and technologies, and a good range of employability skills.
- The quality assurance processes and procedures are mostly good. A good range of qualitative and quantitative data is collected through regular monitoring and review meetings with the apprentices and their employers, and with curriculum managers in the further education colleges. Engineering Training Services use this data effectively to inform their self-evaluation process. Most of the self-evaluation reviews and judgements, across the range of apprenticeships, match well the findings of the inspection. On a few occasions, however, the self-evaluation review judgements are inaccurate, resulting in areas for improvement that are not identified clearly enough. This is particularly the case for the essential skills provision. For the most part, the areas for improvement identified through the self-evaluation process are managed well through an action register and balance score card, which are monitored and updated at weekly and monthly operational planning meetings. While there are regular meetings with the further education colleges to review and monitor the quality of the directed training they provide, the formal recording and reporting of each college's progress in addressing key areas for improvement in the quality of the directed training are insufficient. Progress against agreed targets is not sufficiently integrated within Engineering Training Service's action register, nor is it subsequently shared with college curriculum managers.
- 5.3 Engineering Training Service's staffing complement is good. There is a good range of appropriately qualified and experienced training assessors to facilitate the monitoring and assessment of the apprentices' progress and achievement of occupational skills in the workplace. There are also dedicated training assessors for essential skills and for careers education, information, advice and guidance provision. The training assessors have well-defined roles and responsibilities and work hard to meet the individual training needs of the apprentices. The lecturers delivering the directed training are also well-qualified and experienced, across the range of specialist areas. Most of the apprentices benefit from experienced workplace mentors who also provide them with valuable support and guidance.
- 5.4 The quality of the accommodation and physical resources for the apprentices' training ranges from good to excellent, and is mostly very good. Most of the apprentices have access to bright and suitably equipped training rooms, ICT suites, industry standard workshops, and well-resourced libraries. The workshops are equipped with industry standard equipment for practical training in telecommunications, digital communication

equipment installation, electrical engineering, hydraulics and pneumatics, fabrication and welding, and computer-aided manufacturing. A number of the employers and the further education colleges have invested in high specification computer-numerical-control (CNC) machining centres to provide the apprentices with excellent off-the-job practical training in the machining of high-precision engineering components. The apprentices also have good access to the further education colleges' virtual learning environments to support them in their learning. The use of information and learning technologies (ILT) by Engineering Training Services to support the apprentices in their training, assessment, and care, support and guidance is, however, just satisfactory. While Engineering Training Services provide the apprentices with key basic information through their website, the opportunity to use ILT further to provide additional learning materials, careers information, health and well-being guidance, record and track achievements, and to provide pastoral support is currently under-exploited.

- 5.5 There are well-established and effective links and partnerships with engineering employers in the eastern part of Northern Ireland, which ensures there is a good range of engineering apprenticeships in this region. While there is a limited range of links with employers in the western part of Northern Ireland, this is recognised by Engineering Training Services. As a result they have deployed a dedicated development officer in this region to improve partnerships with employers. A good start has been made in recruiting apprentices in this region. There are effective arrangements in place with the partner further education colleges to provide appropriate directed training for the apprentices, to complete their technical certificate. There are also further arrangements in place with two of these colleges to facilitate a seamless progression for the apprentices to the level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI framework offered by the colleges.
- 5.6 Although Engineering Training Services promote actively career opportunities in engineering through apprenticeships for both males and females, particularly through its careers education programme in schools and its partnership with Women into Science and Engineering (WISE), there remains, however, a significant gender imbalance in the recruitment of apprentices. Very few females are being recruited, and more needs to be done by the organisation to address this imbalance.

6. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

- 6.1 Almost all of the apprentices achieve very good or better standards of work. In the workplace, they are able to carry out an appropriate range of practical tasks and activities, which they perform effectively and efficiently, with minimal supervision. These practical tasks include: the manufacture of metallic components to a suitable degree of accuracy and surface finish using CNC machining centres; the repair and routine maintenance of complex production machinery; the installation, testing and verification of electrical plant and equipment; the installation, maintenance and repair of telecommunication systems; and the fabrication and welding of complex steel assemblies.
- 6.2 The standards of most of the apprentices' technical knowledge and understanding are good or better. They demonstrate a good understanding of the engineering principles and the technology relating to their specialist engineering area. In the workplace, they are able to apply and use this knowledge to solve problems and complete a wide range of practical tasks. Examples observed include apprentices reading and interpreting engineering drawings to write CNC programmes, and design and fault-find on complex electronic systems.

- 6.3 The standards of the apprentices' literacy and numeracy skills are mostly good. Most of them are able to read and understand complex written instructions, and quickly and confidently interpret drawings and schematic diagrams. Drawings and short descriptions of work undertaken are recorded neatly and accurately in the apprentices' logbooks. Their verbal communication skills are also well-developed; they are able to articulate clearly ideas and solutions when working as part of a team or reporting to their line manager. The apprentices' numeracy skills are good; they are able to estimate and calculate dimensions and quantities with appropriate accuracy. They also develop and demonstrate high levels of fluency in the use of measurement tools and meters.
- 6.4 The standards of most of the apprentices' ICT skills are very good. They are able to use a range of proprietary engineering software to prepare engineering drawings or schematics. They can also use to good effect internet browsers to retrieve technical information from appropriate sources, and word-processing software to complete written assignments.
- 6.5 Most of the apprentices demonstrate good patterns of attendance and timekeeping. Most also develop good employability skills; they are reliable, have good problem-solving skills, are well-motivated, and are able to maintain effective working relationships in the workplace.
- 6.6 Over the past three years, success rates are excellent; during this period, of the 192 apprentices who started an apprenticeship programme, 81 completed the programme and all of these apprentices gained the full award. Of the remaining apprentices, 65 of them were still in training at the time of the inspection, representing an overall satisfactory retention rate of 76%. It is noteworthy that retention rates are improving, from modest (62%) in 2007/08 to good (88%) in 2009/10. The progression rate to level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes is excellent at 100%.

7. QUALITY OF THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

- 7.1 The curriculum provision for mechanical and manufacturing engineering is very good. It is designed well to meet the individual needs of the apprentices and their employers. There is a coherent and well-balanced programme of directed training that is matched well to the apprentices' workplace training and to their prior educational achievements. As a result, the apprentices complete a relevant technical certificate at the most appropriate level to ensure good progression in their learning, which includes technical certificates at level 2 to level 5. Across the five colleges involved in partnership with Engineering Training Services, there is a good range of specialist technical certificates, which meet well the diverse nature of the employers' businesses. This enables the apprentices to follow a career pathway as a craft engineer or as a technician engineer in a specialist engineering discipline, with good progression opportunities to higher training and education. A few of the apprentices are, however, not following the most appropriate technical certificate to support their workplace training. They do not have a sufficient range of specialist units incorporated within their technical certificate to support their development of the specialist engineering skills they use in the workplace.
- 7.2 In electrical and electronic engineering, the curriculum provision is mainly satisfactory. Overall, there is a good range of electrical and electronic engineering technical certificates provided for the apprentices. These include electrical maintenance, telecommunications and digital installation, which match well the apprentices' workplace training. In telecommunications, however, the technical certificate is only provided to level 2, resulting in insufficient progression in learning for the minority of the apprentices who already hold level 3 or higher qualifications on entry. The curriculum design of the digital installers'

technical certificate provides insufficient opportunities for the apprentices to apply and develop their knowledge and understanding of principles in the workplace. It is unduly focused on assessment and accreditation, within a short and concentrated period. In addition, the progression opportunities to higher training and educational programmes from the telecommunications and digital installation apprenticeships are under-developed.

- 7.3 A significant minority of the apprentices are provided with additional specialist practical training. This is off-the-job training for the apprentices to develop their competency in the use of specialist machinery and tools. The range of this practical training includes CNC machining, telecommunications installation and repair, manual handling, welding techniques, and electrical faultfinding. There is a need, however, for Engineering Training Services to improve further the opportunities for practical skills training to ensure all apprentices have access to specialist practical training, particularly those who are employed in small businesses.
- 7.4 The quality of the planning and co-ordination of the apprentices' training ranges from inadequate to very good; it is mostly good. For most apprentices, the directed training is planned and co-ordinated well. For a minority (10%), the planning and sharing of information by Engineering Training Services with training providers, employers and apprentices is inadequate. As a result, there is undue disruption to the apprentices' directed training and assessment arrangements.
- 7.5 The quality of the apprentices' Personal Training Plans is satisfactory. The plans contain only the minimum information to satisfy the Department's funding arrangements. They are not used well to record detailed information on how each apprentice develops their occupational skills, employability skills or essential skills. In addition, the Personal Training Plans are not used effectively to plan and provide additional learning support for those apprentices with additional learning needs.
- 7.6 The quality of the directed training for engineering theory is good. The lecturers deploy a good range of training and learning strategies, which stimulate the apprentices' interest and promote active learning. These strategies include group discussions, effective questioning, independent research and presentations, practical tasks, and appropriate extended projects. The lecturers also draw to good effect on the apprentices' experiences in the workplace to contextualise and consolidate their learning. The quality of the practical workshop training, where provided, is very good; the apprentices have very good opportunities to develop their practical skills in the use of basic and advanced tools and equipment. This practical training develops the apprentices' key occupational skills to enable them to carry out their workplace tasks competently and safely.
- 7.7 The quality of most of the apprentices' workplace training is very good or outstanding. They are provided with good opportunities to use and develop their occupational skills to industry standards. Most of the apprentices are supported well by workplace mentors or supervisors who provide good on-the-job training and guidance to enable them to complete their tasks successfully. The quality of the monitoring and reviewing of the apprentices' workplace training by the training assessors is good. The apprentices' progress and achievements are tracked and recorded systematically, and appropriate training and assessment targets are set, which are shared and agreed with the apprentice's supervisor.
- 7.8 The quality of the apprentices' essential skills provision is good. All of the apprentices are afforded the opportunity, where appropriate, to achieve level 2 qualifications in literacy, ICT and numeracy, which is above the minimum required for their apprenticeship framework. While initial assessment is used to inform the level of the qualification targeted by the apprentices, it is not used adequately to tailor the directed training to meet the specific

needs of the apprentices. The quality of the directed training provided to develop their essential skills is good. The good opportunities that exist within the apprentices' workplace, and in the training for their technical certificate, to develop and apply their essential skills are, however, under-exploited. This is particularly the case for literacy, where the apprentices' assignments and logbook entries are not marked for improvement in spelling and grammar. As a result, the apprentices are not receiving regular feedback on how to improve further their literacy skills in the workplace and in directed training.

- 7.9 The assessment arrangements are good. Most of the apprentices are assessed regularly and provided with constructive feedback on how to improve their work. In the apprentices' logbooks, achievements in their NVQ are recorded neatly and countersigned by an expert witness or a qualified workplace assessor. The apprentices' achievements in their technical certificate and essential skills are also recorded and tracked well by their respective lecturers and tutors, and reported regularly to Engineering Training Services. There is, however, a need to record all these achievements centrally and consistently in the apprentices' Personal Training Plans in order to improve further the tracking and monitoring of apprentices' progress and achievements.
- 7.10 The pastoral support provided for almost all of the apprentices is very good. Most of them are provided with a good induction; they are well-informed of the apprenticeship framework, including the directed training and assessment arrangements. The apprentices are assigned a personal training assessor who meets with them regularly to provide support and encouragement, and to alleviate any barriers that may hinder progress.
- 7.11 While the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, the following areas need to be addressed: annual reporting on safeguarding activities and complaints to the management board; and appropriate training for the Director and members of the management board.
- 7.12 The provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance to the apprentices is good. Most apprentices are provided with detailed information on the educational and training progression pathways available to them within their engineering specialism. This is supported well by the apprentices' informal discussions with their lecturers, workplace mentors and training assessors. While most apprentices have a sound knowledge of possible career pathways and professional development opportunities, a few are unsure of the most appropriate progression pathway available to them on completion of their level 2 apprenticeship.

PART THREE: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREA REPORTS

8. ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING

8.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by the Engineering Training Services is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

8.2 The main strengths are the:

- effective links and partnerships with employers, leading to the provision of specialist apprenticeship programmes matched well to local needs;
- good arrangements in place with the further education colleges to provide appropriate directed training;
- very good training resources and equipment provided by most employers for apprentice training;
- very good standards of work demonstrated by most of the apprentices;
- good or better quality of the directed training and learning in the sessions observed; and
- good levels of support provided by Electrical Training Services for almost all of the apprentices, across the provision.

8.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- ineffective planning for the digital installers programme, leading to delays in delivery, poor initial outcomes and additional costs for the employers;
- insufficiently robust electronic portfolios used by most apprentices, which lack functionality, including safe backup, and verification and tracking tools; and
- ineffective use of the Personal Training Plans to meet the different needs of individual apprentices.

Performance Level Awarded	Total No of Apprentices
Good	37

9. ESSENTIAL SKILLS

9.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by the Engineering Training Services is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

9.2 The main strengths are the:

- commitment demonstrated by senior management to develop and improve the apprentices' essential skills provision;
- good or better standards of the apprentices' essential skills of ICT, literacy and numeracy;
- excellent success rate (100%) over the last three years in ICT, and the good success rates in literacy (83%) and numeracy (89%) over the same period;
- high proportion (88%) of the apprentices achieving the ICT essential skill beyond the minimum requirement of the framework; and
- good opportunities afforded to the apprentices to achieve their essential skills at a level above the minimum required by the apprenticeship framework.

9.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- more effective use of the initial assessment processes to inform the training and assessment strategies for individual apprentices;
- planning for better use of the good opportunities that exist within the apprentices'
 workplace training and in their technical certificate training to support the
 development of their literacy and numeracy skills; and
- insufficient quality of the self-evaluation and development planning processes of the essential skills provision.

Performance Level Awarded	Total No of Apprentices
Good	36

10. MECHANICAL AND MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING

10.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Engineering Training Services is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the training and pastoral needs of the apprentices; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

10.2 The main strengths are the:

- excellent links and partnerships established with employers, which lead to tailored and flexible programmes to meet well both the employers' and apprentices' training needs;
- very good range of technical certificates offered to the apprentices that are matched well to their workplace training and prior educational achievement;
- very good to excellent standards of work achieved by most of the apprentices;
- very good quality of the workplace training provided for most of the apprentices;

- good or better quality of the directed training, particularly the very good additional specialist practical training; and
- very good to excellent quality of the specialist workshops and equipment available for training apprentices in manufacturing engineering.

10.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- ineffective use of the apprentices' Personal Training Plans to record and track their progress in the development of occupational and employability skills; and
- insufficient use of ILT to enhance and support the apprentices' learning experiences.

Performance Level	Total No of Apprentices
Very Good	59

PART FOUR

11. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- 11.1 Engineering Training Services has a good development plan, which addresses most of the areas for development identified by the inspection. There is, however, a need for Engineering Training Services to revise its development plan to take account of the following key priorities for development:
 - the development of a robust communication strategy between Engineering Training Services, apprentices and their employers, and the training providers to improve the planning and co-ordination of directed training, particularly for new programmes;
 - the use of the apprentices' Personal Training Plans to record and track progress and achievements in the development of their occupational skills, employability skills and essential skills; and
 - the further embedding of the self-evaluation and development planning processes across all aspects of the directed training provision.

APPENDIX

OVERALL SUMMARY TABLE - 2007-2010

Year	Started (completed four weeks)	Retention Rate	Success Rate	Progressed to Level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI
2007 -2008	50	62%	100%	100%
2008-2009	86	77%	100%	100%
2009-2010	56	88%	100%	100%
Overall totals		76%	100%	100%

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