



Education and Training
Inspectorate

North Down Training Limited

Report of an Inspection
in October 2010

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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

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by North Down Training.

Note: In this report the word 'trainee' is used as an inclusive term to refer to: young people on the Training for Success Programme, known as participants in the Operational Guidelines; those on Programme-Led Apprenticeships; and employees in training on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

Performance Levels

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 North Down Training Limited (North Down Training) is a charitable organisation limited by guarantee. The organisation was established in June 1982, to provide training for disadvantaged and marginalized young people from the Ards, Castlereagh and North Down Borough Council areas, many of whom have complex learning difficulties and disabilities.

1.2 North Down Training is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) to supply training both under the Training for Success (TfS) and ApprenticeshipsNI programme, at level 2. The organisation's premises are located at Regent Street in Newtownards, where 24 staff are currently employed. A further two staff are employed at a satellite centre in Datalink Reprographics in Dundonald.

1.3 The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2010 indicates that, of the 26 council districts in Northern Ireland, the Ards, Castlereagh and North Down Borough Council areas are ranked 18th, 21st and 24th respectively on the deprivation index, and 19th, 25th and 26th respectively on the employment rate deprivation index.

1.4 Over the past three years, there has been a significant increase in the number of trainees recruited onto the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in North Down Training, from 37 trainees in March 2007 to 125 trainees at the time of the inspection.

2. PROVISION

2.1 At the time of the inspection, North Down Training was providing training for 125 trainees. They are undertaking a range of professional and technical programmes in business administration, customer service, hospitality and catering, retail skills, and storage and warehousing skills.

2.2 Of the trainees currently in training, 25 (20%) are on the Skills for Your Life programme; 58 (46%) on the Skills for Work strand; 32 (25%) on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme; and ten (8%) on ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. Five of the ten trainees recruited to the ApprenticeshipsNI programme are working in customer service; three are in hospitality and catering; and one each in retail and storage and warehousing. Of the 32 trainees on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme, ten (31%) are following a level 2 programme in business administration, five (16%) in hospitality and catering, and 17 (53%) in retail skills.

2.3 The trainees enter the training programmes from a diverse range of backgrounds. Most of the trainees (75%) on the Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work strands, and a minority (25%) on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme present with moderate or severe learning needs.

2.4 There is considerable variation in the academic qualifications and prior experience in the workplace of the trainees on entry to the programmes. Of the 125 trainees currently in training, 80 (64%) had no formal qualifications on entry; seven (6%) had four General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications or equivalent at grades A*-C and a further 38 (30%) had achieved GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades D-G. Only a small minority (2%) of the trainees and programme-led apprentices have achieved a GCSE at grade C or better, and a minority (29%) have achieved a grade D to G in English and mathematics. A significant minority (40%) of trainees on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme held GCSE passes at grade C or better in both English and mathematics. It is noteworthy that 70 (56%) of the trainees have recognised additional learning and/or medical needs.

2.5 Almost all (94%) of the trainees are undertaking an essential skills qualification in literacy and a significant minority (45%) of them are also undertaking numeracy.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 On the basis of the information available to the Department, including recent Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) reports, North Down Training was identified as a supplier organisation with a good record for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning. The organisation is recognised as having the capacity for sustained self-improvement, and was selected as a suitable organisation for a short inspection.

3.2 In October 2010, the Inspectorate carried out a short inspection of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in North Down Training. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the accuracy and reliability of North Down Training's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes and to determine whether their evaluations of the quality of the provision match the findings of the Inspectorate. A team of four inspectors, supported by an associate assessor, observed a total of 17 training sessions and interviewed 100 trainees in both directed and workplace training. Extended discussions were held with senior managers, tutors and trainees. In addition, nine employers and workplace supervisors were interviewed by the inspection team. The team also examined samples of the trainees' work, portfolios of evidence, personal training plans (PTPs) and reviews. The organisation's self-evaluation report, development plan and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

3.3 The arrangements for the inspection of care, guidance and support and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups include the opportunity for trainees to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings by the inspection team with groups of the trainees across the provision. One hundred and forty questionnaires were issued to trainees, 110 (79%) of which were returned to the Inspectorate; 16 of them contained additional written comments. The returns show that most of the trainees enjoy being at North Down Training. In particular, they appreciate the high levels of care and support they receive from the staff, and comment on the very good experiences that they have in the organisation. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with trainees to the senior managers.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by North Down Training is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its 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 in addressing the areas for improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good leadership and management of the organisation, at all levels, and the excellent success rates at 100% for those trainees who successfully complete their programmes;
- effective partnership links with a range of appropriate organisations, including employers, specialist support agencies and feeder schools;

- good opportunities for the trainees to acquire and apply appropriate occupational skills, both in directed training and in the workplace;
- good or better quality of teaching, training and learning in the majority of the directed training sessions observed;
- very good arrangements for the care, guidance and support of the trainees, characterised by good relationships and effective learning support in directed training and in the workplace; and
- appropriate curriculum on offer, which is matched well to the needs and abilities of the trainees, and the participation by them in a good range of suitable enrichment activities.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are:

- the use of a broader range of training and learning strategies to meet the needs of all of the trainees;
- actions to address the variable rates of retention; and
- insufficient use of information and learning technology to support and enhance teaching, training and learning.

Table of Performance Levels

Overall performance level	Good
Contributory performance levels	
Leadership and Management	Very Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Quality of Provision for Learning	Good

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of the leadership and management in North Down Training is very good. The Board of Directors and the senior management team provide strong strategic leadership of the training programme and articulate a clear vision for the achievement of high quality training, care and support for the trainees, many of whom present with multiple barriers and impediments to their learning. The ethos, mission and core values of the organisation are well-established and clearly conveyed to trainees, parents, employers and other key stakeholders, and are implicit throughout all of the activities and operations of the organisation.

5.2 The caring ethos of the organisation is reflected in the strong commitment of the manager and all of the staff to the overall care and welfare of the trainees. Excellent relationships, characterised by mutual respect, have been developed with staff from a wide range of external organisations, including a number of local schools, support groups and statutory agencies. The links provided through these collaborative arrangements contribute significantly to the provision of appropriate levels of specialised support for trainees. North Down Training has a clear and appropriate focus on developing the work-readiness skills of the trainees and has worked hard to establish a good bank of sympathetic and empathetic employers who provide suitable work placement opportunities. It is a significant achievement that 75% of the trainees currently eligible, are on work placement.

5.3 Internal communication within North Down Training is very effective and staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The organisation has developed systematic procedures to review regularly the trainees' performance and progress; the outcomes of the weekly and monthly meetings contribute effectively to the on-going review of the quality of training and learning across the provision.

5.4 The quality assurance and improvement planning processes in North Down Training are sufficiently well-developed to ensure that good quality training and learning is achieved and maintained across the provision. There are well-developed and systematic processes for obtaining regular feedback from trainees and employers and very good use is made of these findings to inform planning for improvement. Whilst data is collated and analysed regularly, senior management need to use this information more effectively, for example, in monitoring the outcomes of the essential skills provision. The quality assurance procedures include the observation of teaching, training and learning. There is however, a need for management to develop these procedures further by sharing the best practice across the provision.

5.5 Across the provision, the staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. While continuous professional development is well-supported by management, an increased emphasis is required to support staff further in developing a broader range of more innovative and challenging training and learning strategies, including the further embedding of information and learning technology (ILT) to enhance the training and learning.

5.6 Most of the accommodation in North Down Training is of good quality; it is bright, clean and welcoming. To meet the needs of all the trainees and to enable effective teaching, training and learning, further work is required to ensure that all of the accommodation is adequate and fit for purpose, and that an appropriate range of good quality learning resources, including specialist equipment to industry standards, is made available to the trainees.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 Most of the trainees are well-motivated and keen to progress in their learning and training. They are extremely well-supported, both in directed training and in the workplace. Most of the trainees develop and apply good work readiness skills. Almost all of the tutors and employers report noticeable improvements in the trainees' confidence and self-esteem as they progress through their programmes. The tutors and senior managers set high expectations with regard to the trainees' attendance, behaviour and achievement. Attendance at directed training and in the workplace is well-monitored and mostly good.

6.2 The trainees are provided with good opportunities to develop and apply good occupational skills across the professional and technical areas. A significant and appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of their essential skills in literacy and numeracy. Their progress and overall level of readiness for the workplace is closely monitored and they only engage in placements when they have developed the necessary competence to undertake the duties required. Most of the trainees acquire relevant occupational skills and use them to good effect in the workplace. The trainees' participation and progress are sensitively and carefully managed and the minority who require it are provided with appropriate and effective learning support while in the workplace.

6.3 Over the past three years, for the period 2007-2010, the average retention rate for the trainees across the provision ranges from good at 88% to poor at 45%; overall, it is modest at 67%. This represents a significant achievement, however, given the many and often complex barriers to learning experienced by the majority of the trainees when they commenced their training programmes. Over the same period, the success rate for those participants who completed their programmes is excellent at 100%. In the past year, just over one-half of the trainees achieved an essential skill qualification in literacy and two-thirds of them achieved an essential skill qualification in numeracy, all at a level commensurate with their levels of ability. Whilst the learning difficulties experienced by a significant minority of the trainees present real challenges in terms of the retention of knowledge and information, North Down Training recognises the need to improve on the outcomes in essential skills and is taking appropriate action to achieve this. It is, however, commendable that almost 15% of the trainees are working towards an essential skills level above that required by their framework.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 North Down Training has identified a clear and coherent curriculum entitlement for trainees across all of the programmes on offer. The trainees are following appropriate and challenging programmes which, considering the barriers to learning and employment most present on entry, are effective in enabling most of them to grow in confidence and develop their personal and occupational skills through well-structured directed training, work sampling or work-based training. The programmes are planned well to meet the individual needs of the trainees and to allow for progression in learning as they move through their training programmes.

7.2 The quality of the overall provision is good, with an appropriate focus on the development of personal, social and life-skills, as well as a range of literacy, numeracy and occupational skills. Almost all of the trainees benefit from the opportunity to achieve additional qualifications, such as food safety and health and safety. They can also participate in a good range of suitable enrichment activities, including residentials, drama, art and crafts, sport, and enterprise and citizenship projects which have a community-based and charitable focus. Overall, the trainees are provided with appropriate levels of challenge.

7.3 The quality of teaching, training and learning is good. In the majority (70%) of the training sessions observed, the quality was good or better; a minority (18%) of the sessions were very good. In the best practice, the sessions were well-paced and built on previous learning. The main features of the good or better sessions included effective planning and learning approaches which matched well the different ability levels of the trainees, and the use of a wide range of training strategies. As a result, the trainees were well-engaged and enjoying their learning. In a significant minority (30%) of training sessions observed, however, the quality of teaching, training and learning was satisfactory. In this practice, there was over-direction by the tutors, too little evidence of differentiation and an over-use of closed questioning. In addition, there was insufficient access to information and learning technology resources to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

7.4 All the staff in North Down Training provide very good support to the essential skills tutors. They work closely with them to reinforce the essential skills and further consolidate the trainees' literacy and numeracy skills during all professional and technical training sessions. Examples include the use of word banks for the professional and technical vocabularies and these are built up by the trainees as they progress through their programmes. There is consistent evidence, in the trainees' work, of marking for improvement by most of the tutors.

7.5 The quality of the workplace training is consistently good or better for the trainees visited during the inspection. Employers are very supportive of North Down Training and their trainees. Several employers visited reported that they had employed former trainees from the organisation. The trainees have good opportunities to develop a suitable range of occupational skills. Appropriate strategies are in place to support the trainees in work and these are effective in ensuring that they receive the requisite level of support required to maintain and develop their work placements.

7.6 The care, support and guidance provided by North Down Training is very good and is characterised by good relationships and effective learning support in directed training and in the workplace. Appropriate procedures are in place for involving parents/carers in decisions relating to the trainees' programmes. The senior management and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the overall pastoral care of the trainees and have developed appropriate policies and procedures to support them. The staff ensure that trainees are on the programme which matches most closely their needs, capabilities and aspirations. The trainees are prepared well for the workplace in terms of appropriate dress, attitude and behaviour, and for life through programmes that focus on money management and personal development.

7.7 North Down Training is very effective in providing additional learning support for those trainees who present with cognitive, physical or emotional barriers to learning. Trainees have good access to an appropriate range of personal and social services, including, Disability Action, Cedar Foundation and counselling services. Initial assessment is used well to determine and plan for individual additional support needs.

7.8 The provision for careers information, advice and guidance is very good and is an integral part of the provision for all trainees. The organisation makes effective use of the Careers Service to provide impartial advice and guidance and to help trainees make appropriate and informed choices.

7.9 While the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, the organisation needs to provide additional training in this area for the designated member of the Management Committee and the Deputy Designated Officer.

PART THREE

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by North Down Training is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its 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 in addressing the areas for improvement.

9. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

9.1 North Down Training needs to revise its annual improvement plan to take account of the following key priorities and further improve the quality of the training provision:

- the development of strategies to improve retention rates across the provision;
- the use of a broader range of training and learning strategies to meet the needs of all of the trainees; and
- the more effective use of ILT to support teaching, training and learning.

*Overall Summary Table 2007-2010

Programme	Started (completed 4 weeks)	Retention Rate %	Success Rate %	Progressed to FE/other training	Progressed to relevant employment
Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI 2007-2008	36	61	100	5	5
Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI 2009-2009	50	68	100	20	3
Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI 2009-2010	98	67	100	2	2
Overall Totals	184	67	100	27	10

* Data provided by North Down Training

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