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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Training for Success

VT Training

2008

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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

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) is using a new 6-point grading scale to replace the original 4-point scale as set out below. Where grades are recorded in this report, the grade is given on both the old and the revised scales.

ORIGINAL GRADE	REVISED GRADE	DESCRIPTOR
1	1	Outstanding
1	2	Very good
2	3	Good
2	4	Satisfactory
3	5	Inadequate
4	6	Unsatisfactory

1. **CONTEXT**

1.1 VT Training (VTT) is one of the largest work based learning providers in the United Kingdom, providing training for over 19,300 apprentices, 5% of all provision nationally, and working with over 6,000 employers. VT Training has 42 offices throughout the United Kingdom and employs over 1,000 staff.

1.2 Since September 2007, VTT has been contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department), to supply training under the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, in Hospitality and Retail at level 2 only, and at both levels 2 and 3 in Customer Service. VT Training provides training in the Belfast, Lisburn, North Down, Castlereagh, Londonderry, Limavady, Magherafelt, Coleraine, Ballymoney, Ballymena, and Carrickfergus areas.

2. **PROVISION**

2.1 VT Training operates a model of work-based training, in which support and assessment are provided for apprentices in their work- places by vocational coaches. In its first year of operation in Northern Ireland, VTT provided training for a total of approximately 270 apprentices, aged between 16 and 50 years. The apprentices work in a variety of settings, from small to medium sized hospitality or retail enterprises, to large national companies, household names in the hospitality and retail sectors. The apprentices' job-roles include: receptionists; sales assistants; supervisors; assistant managers and a wide variety of work roles in the food and drink industry. Most of the of apprentices are registered on ApprenticeshipsNI level 2 programmes in the priority skill area of hospitality and catering. Apprentices are registered across five strands of the provision; front office, multi-skilled, hospitality, food-processing and cooking, professional cookery and food and drink service.

2.2 At the time of the inspection, VTT was providing training for 230 apprentices, aged between 16-50 years. Of these, 185 were following apprenticeships in hospitality, 39 in retail, and four in customer service at level 2. Two apprentices were being trained on customer service apprenticeship programmes at level 3. Approximately half of the apprentices are based in Belfast and the majority (62%) are female. VT Training operates a rolling programme of enrolment, and, at the time of the inspection, only 12 apprentices had completed the full 52 weeks of their programme.

2.3 Fifty (22%) of the apprentices had achieved at least five General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grades A*-C on entry to the programme; 20 (9%) hold at least three GCSEs and 45 (20%) hold no formal qualifications. Seventy apprentices (30%) have achieved at least a grade C in English and 50 (22%) in mathematics. A small number (2%) of the apprentices had advised VTT that they have learning difficulties, specifically, dyslexia. At the time of the inspection, VTT had recruited 22 apprentices for whom English is not a first language.

2.4 The frameworks for the level 2 apprenticeships in hospitality and retail require apprentices to acquire knowledge of employment rights and responsibilities and achieve a relevant National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), in addition to the essential skills of communication and application of number (AON) at level 1. Apprentices on retail programmes are also required to gain a relevant technical certificate at level 2.

2.5 There are currently 12 staff working in the Northern Ireland (NI) VTT regional office. Within NI, overall contract management and programme delivery is the responsibility of the regional executive. She is supported by a local regional manager and a vocational coach co-ordinator, who co-ordinates vocational coach delivery, monitors apprentice progress and has responsibility for internal verification. The apprentices are visited in the workplace, on a monthly basis. Directed training and assessment are provided by one of six vocational coaches, specialists in hospitality or retail, who provide on and off-the-job coaching and assessment.

2.6 The provision for the essential skills of communication and AON for the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is currently supplied for VTT by three full-time and one part-time essential skills tutors, who also work on a peripatetic basis.

2.7 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for 80 apprentices to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as interviews with individuals and groups of apprentices across the contract areas. Sixty-six questionnaires (29%) were returned to the Inspectorate and 19 (29%) contained additional written comments, indicating that most of the apprentices enjoy their training with VTT. In their interviews, most apprentices talked enthusiastically about the support provided by their vocational coaches and tutors and from the discussions it is clear that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their care and well-being.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 The extended inspection was in two parts and focused on the quality of training and standards achieved by the participants on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. The first phase of the inspection took place in April 2008, when VTT had been operating in NI for only eight months. At the end of the first phase, the inspection team shared findings with the organisation. Across the two phases of the inspection, discussions were held with senior managers from VTT nationally and locally including: the managing director; support services executive; regional executive; regional quality assurance manager; resource development manager; vocational coach co-ordinator; vocational training manager; workplace supervisors; vocational coaches; internal verifiers; and apprentices. The inspection was designed to ensure that all of the vocational coaches and essential skills tutors were inspected during the extended inspection. A team of inspectors from the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) observed approximately a quarter of the apprentices in off-the-job directed training, or during training sessions in the workplace. Samples of the apprentices' written work, including vocational portfolios, and the learning materials supplied by VTT to supplement the work of the vocational coaches, were also examined.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of the education/ training provided by the organisation is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational 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:

- very good leadership and management, which is effective in implementing rigorous quality improvement arrangements across the ApprenticeshipNI programmes;
- enthusiasm and commitment of staff at all levels in the organisation to the promotion of improvement;
- retention rate, which is good at just over 80%;
- good or better occupational skills of most of the apprentices;
- arrangements for supporting, monitoring and assessing the apprentices in the workplace; and
- high level of employer engagement in the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- further development of a wide range of training, learning and assessment strategies to meet the needs of all of the learners, in relation to essential skills; and
- further development of opportunities for peer and group learning, supported, where appropriate, by the use of information and learning technology.

Overall grade	3
Contributory grades:	
Leadership and Management	2
Achievements and Standards	3
Quality of Provision for Learning	3

ApprenticeshipsNI programme	Number registered	Grade
Hospitality level 2	185	3
Retail level 2	39	2

Preparation for Life and Work	230	3
Learner Support	All	2
Essential skills: literacy	210	4
Essential skills: numeracy	210	4
Careers education information, advice and guidance	All	3

PART TWO

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The ApprenticeshipsNI programme in VTT is very well managed. VT Training, at a national level, has developed robust policies and procedures, including very good induction procedures, which are implemented effectively and ensure that apprentices are provided with a coherent and standardised training experience. The local manager receives excellent support and advice from national managers with specific areas of expertise in, for example, quality management. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and planning to ensure good flows of information within and across the organisation is well developed. As a result, relationships amongst staff, apprentices and employers are characterised by mutual respect.

5.2 The vocational coaches are enthusiastic, well organised and very committed to helping the apprentices progress in their vocational programmes. They hold relevant qualifications and have extensive experience of working in retail and hospitality settings. Regular engagement with a wide range of employers gives them good opportunities for updating and developing their technical expertise and knowledge of current industrial practice.

5.3 The apprentices are visited regularly in the workplace to plan their learning, review their progress and observe their performance. There are very good relationships with most of the employers and they are involved well in the monitoring of apprentices' progress. The employers receive very clear information about the training at the commencement of the training programme, which ensures optimum integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

5.4 VT Training provides staff with very good opportunities to meet together regularly to plan directed training, increase vocational coaches' understanding of essential skills, and standardise assessment. The co-ordination of the apprenticeship programmes is carried out effectively and efficiently. There is good involvement of all sections of VTT management in the training process, in terms of the support and auditing of the progress of apprentices. Each vocational coach has a set of targets that include apprentice case loads, levels of achievement, learner progression and visits to the work place.

5.5 The internal verification procedures are rigorous and effective, and provide the vocational coaches with constructive feedback about assessment decisions. The regional manager and the vocational coach co-ordinator implement a rigorous schedule of staff appraisal. Vocational coaches and essential skills tutors report that they find this process both supportive and developmental.

5.6 VT Training has in place appropriate policies and procedures in relation to the protection of Young People and Vulnerable Adults, including a very comprehensive staff handbook which delineates clearly the procedures staff must follow in the event of a disclosure.

5.7 The procedures for self-assessment and improvement planning, which include direct observation of teaching, training and learning and regular and systematic processes for obtaining feedback from both apprentices and employers, are effective in implementing rigorous quality improvement arrangements across the organisation. With the exception of one vocational area, where the grade was raised by the Inspectorate, the grades which VTT had allocated to provision within its development plan were confirmed through the inspection process.

5.8 The performance of the organisation is monitored and evaluated systematically and rigorously by both vocational coaches and managers, against specific performance indicators, including apprentice retention, success and progression rates. The outcomes of the evaluations are used effectively to identify and address areas in which improvement is required.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 Almost all of the apprentices display high levels of motivation and enthusiasm for their training. Most achieve good or better occupational standards in the workplace, and employers report that their motivation and commitment to their jobs have increased as a result of their involvement in the apprenticeship programme. Almost all of the apprentices demonstrate a good or better standard of oral communication.

6.2 In hospitality and catering, most apprentices display good standards of knowledge and understanding. They are articulate and are able to discuss service processes and requirements, as well as their health and safety duty by law. The effective use of visual aids on the learning wall, help apprentices to have a clear understanding of the overall number of units required to complete the NVQ award, as well as those already achieved. There is a need, however, for increased opportunities for the apprentices to undertake extended writing, to maximise their potential for career progression.

6.3 Apprentices on the retail programme are highly motivated and the standards of work in their portfolios are very good. Although some of the provision is covering the trainees' retailing skills and expertise achieved prior to commencing the programme, the apprentices have been able to enhance their knowledge and understanding of important elements of retailing, including, consumer legislation, the importance of customer service, and merchandising techniques. The pace of the work is matched well to the needs of the learners and good procedures are in place to allow apprentices to progress quickly through the programme, where appropriate. Almost all of the retail apprentices are exempt from essential skills training. There is, however, a need to strengthen the planning to meet the additional support requirements for the minority of learners who are less able or who have additional learning needs.

6.4 Almost all of the apprentices work well with others, respond well to direction and use their initiative appropriately. They are developing well their skills in managing their own learning. In essential skills, the standards of communication of almost all of the apprentices are good.

6.5 The apprentices are developing a good understanding of the opportunities for progression to further education or employment. VT Training does not have a contract to provide ApprenticeshipsNI at level 3 in hospitality or retail but the regional executive and regional manager are working hard to develop working relationships with other providers to offer relevant opportunities for progression for those apprentices for whom it would be appropriate.

6.6 Since the commencement of the programme in September 2007, VTT has recruited approximately 270 apprentices; the retention rate is good at 83%. To date, only 12 apprentices have completed the full 52 weeks of their programme. Of these, five have achieved the full framework, and seven have achieved all of the components, with the exception of the essential skills.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 The relationships between vocational coaches and essential skills tutors and apprentices are very good. The staff team of VTT is strongly committed to the welfare and personal development of the apprentices. Vocational coaches and essential skills tutors work together effectively to integrate the apprenticeship training, in the majority of cases.

7.2 The processes for the design, delivery, and evaluation of training and learning and for the provision of care, support and guidance are effective in promoting good training experiences for most of the apprentices. The trainees undergo a thorough induction, which is effective in providing them with a good understanding of the demands of their training. Most of the apprentices have a clear understanding of the structure of their specific training programme, and the assessment requirements of the full framework of their Apprenticeship. The personal training plans are comprehensive, and extensive materials are available to support learning in employment rights and responsibilities, diversity and discrimination. There is, however, a need to review and adapt these materials to take more effective account of the needs of the minority of apprentices whose literacy skills require considerable development, including those for whom English is not the first language.

7.3 Vocational training for almost all of the apprentices is undertaken on a one-to-one basis within the workplace, and employers report that they welcome the flexibility provided by this approach. The quality of the on-the-job training provided for apprentices is generally good, and in retail it is very good. The training sessions in retail are very well planned and the vocational coach uses a range of training approaches flexibly to match the ability, motivation and prior learning and achievement of the apprentices. A minority of the vocational coaches have begun to develop group learning sessions, which are effective in enabling apprentices to learn from each other, and there is a need for this practice to be extended to increase the opportunities for peer and group learning, supported, where appropriate, by the use of information and learning technology.

7.4 In essential skills VTT has made a good start to enabling apprentices to work beyond the level required by the framework, where appropriate. Provision for apprentices with essential skills needs is delivered on a one-to-one basis, and, at the time of the inspection, no group work or group learning sessions were taking place. VT Training needs to continue to work towards the implementation of group learning sessions to ensure breadth in the

apprentices' learning experiences in essential skills. In addition, there is a need for the refinement of initial and diagnostic testing and use of subsequent results to ensure that the learning needs of all the apprentices, including those for whom English is not a first language, are being met.

7.5 VT Training has recently developed a virtual learning environment (VLE), entitled The Knowledge. The VLE will provide opportunities for apprentices to access additional learning materials in their chosen vocational area, or in essential skills. It will be important for VTT to implement effective procedures to promote and monitor the uptake of this provision to encourage apprentices to extend their knowledge and understanding beyond the confines of their current work roles.

7.6 The quality of the work-based training is very good. VT Training has well developed relationships with a wide range of major employers and almost all are supportive and provide good quality training. Most of the apprentices are in job roles that provide them with good opportunities to develop appropriate occupational skills and competences in line with the demands and requirements of the industry, as well as in developing their personal skills including working effectively as a member of a team. A significant minority of the apprentices have good opportunities to undertake additional training in the workplace, including food safety, food legislation, health & safety, customer care, and conflict management, and to avoid duplication and repetition these additional training experiences are mapped effectively by the vocational coaches to the NVQ.

7.7 The arrangements for monitoring, reviewing and assessing apprentices' progress and achievements are very good. The employers are informed well about the requirements of the apprenticeship programmes and are well engaged in the setting of short-term training targets across the training periods. The apprentices are visited in their workplace regularly by the vocational coaches, who review their progress and complete workplace assessments. All vocational coaches maintain detailed records of the progress of their apprentices. The assessment procedures are appropriately paced and rigorous; the apprentices are well prepared for assessment and the vocational coaches provide informative and constructive feedback on progress.

PART THREE

AREA OF LEARNING REPORTS

8. HOSPITALITY AND CATERING

Programmes inspected: ApprenticeshipsNI Level 2

8.1 In the area inspected, the quality of the education/ training provided by the organisation is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational 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.

The main strengths are the:

- good quality of the opportunities provided in workplace training;
- good involvement of employers in the training process;
- effective quality assurance procedures; and
- hard-working and highly committed vocational coaches.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- structured opportunities for collaborative and peer learning; and
- development of learning strategies to meet individual learning needs.

9. RETAIL

Programmes inspected: ApprenticeshipsNI Level 2

In the area inspected, the quality of the education/ training provided by the organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

The main strengths are the:

- expertise and commitment of the vocational coaches;
- very good quality of training, both one to one and group sessions;
- high levels of commitment and motivation of the learners;

- good progress in the learning and pace of assessment for almost all of the learners, taking account of their individual needs; and
- quality of the work places which provide the apprentices with very good opportunities to develop appropriate occupational competences.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- further development of a programme of planned and structured opportunities for group learning, to extend and develop further the training provision; and
- need for training opportunities at level 3 in retail, to reflect more effectively the job roles of apprentices working in supervisory roles.

KEY PRIORITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

The implementation of group- based approaches to training and learning across all aspects of provision, including essential skills, to meet the needs of all learners.

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