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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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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

Priority Skills Provision at Level 2 North West Regional College

Inspected: January 2009

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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 number

The quantitative data used in this report was provided by the college.

PART ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The North West Regional College (NWRC) was formed in August 2007, following the merger of the former North West Institute of Further and Higher Education and Limavady College. The NWRC's largest campus is in the Strand Road complex in Londonderry. Its other main sites are the City Factory, Springtown and Maydown campuses in Londonderry, the town centre and the Greystone Road campuses in Limavady, and Strabane.

1.2 In 2007-08, the NWRC had a total enrolment of 2,523 full-time and 11,121 part-time students funded under the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) Further Education Grant. The college had a total enrolment of 3,731 students in those vocational areas that the Department has designated as priority skills areas (PSA). The PSA enrolments in 2007-08, accounted for 24.1% of the funded learning units under the Further Education Grant. The college also provides a significant amount of PSA training under the Department's Jobskills, Training for Success (TfS) and Apprenticeships Northern Ireland (ANI) programmes in its Springtown, Maydown and Greystone campuses.

1.3 The NWRC serves a wide catchment area across the North West region of Northern Ireland. Most of the students are from the three District Council Areas (DCAs), Derry, Limavady and Strabane. A minority of the students reside in the Donegal hinterland adjacent to Londonderry. The North West region has higher levels of economic deprivation than the rest of Northern Ireland, with lower levels of economic growth, and employment. According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry, December 2008 'Monthly Labour Market Report,' the Strabane (5.3%), Derry (5%), and Limavady (4.8%) DCAs have the highest claimant counts in Northern Ireland, and are significantly above the Northern Ireland unadjusted claimant count rate of 3.1%. Employment prospects in the area have deteriorated over the last 12 months. In the year to November 2008, for example, Limavady had the highest level of confirmed redundancies (779) for any DCA in Northern Ireland. In addition, the region has suffered from having high levels of economic inactivity, which are well above the Northern Ireland average.

1.4 The inspection focused on the NWRC's full-time and part-time provision in the PSAs at level 2 on the national qualifications framework, which is equivalent to General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) at grade C or above. The main areas inspected were computing, information and communication technology (ICT), construction and the built environment (construction), engineering (electrical, electronic, and manufacturing), tourism and hospitality, and the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. The NWRC's provision of PSA training funded by the Department's Jobskills, TfS and ANI programmes were not inspected. According to data supplied by the NWRC, there were 544 students enrolled on level 2 PSA technician and craft courses in 2008-09. The inspection team was joined by a professional associate from the hospitality industry to evaluate the NWRC's industrial links and resources in tourism and hospitality. Prior to the inspection, students were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire to ascertain their experiences in the NWRC. Members of the inspection team also interviewed groups of students during the inspection. The

inspection team met members of the senior management team, the head of department for further education, heads of school, course teams, managers in the NWRC with cross college responsibilities, and employers. A total of 35 lessons were observed. The inspection team reviewed PSA self-evaluation reports, minutes of course team meetings, and quality assurance documentation.

1.5 'Circular FE 11/08', required the six colleges in Northern Ireland, to submit to the Department, a self-evaluation report for their PSA level 2 provision, and a Whole College Quality Improvement Plan, along with their College Development Plans for 2008-11. They were also required to include in their submission, statistical information on student enrolments and levels of achievement for each PSA at level 2. This information was used by the inspection team, to compare the performance of the NWRC in each PSA, against the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

1.6 The NWRC has a good provision of PSA level 2 technician and craft courses. It provides full-time courses in each of the vocational areas that were inspected. These include the Edexcel First Diploma courses in construction, information technology (IT) practitioners, manufacturing engineering, and travel and tourism with hospitality units. It also provides the full-time National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in professional cookery. Although most of this provision is in the NWRC's main campuses in Derry, the college also provides the First Diploma courses for IT practitioners, and manufacturing engineering in Limavady. There is, however, no provision of full-time PSA courses in Strabane. Most of the students enrolled on full-time courses are school leavers who enter the college with poor levels of educational attainment. The students mostly have achieved GCSE grades D to G, including English and mathematics. The NWRC offers good progression opportunities in further education and training for students in each vocational area, from level 3 through to higher education. The NWRC, consequently, offers students with poor levels of attainment, a good second chance to progress to further and higher education, and/or employment. The NWRC also provides a satisfactory or better range of part-time technician and/or craft courses in each PSA; most of this is in Londonderry and Limavady.

PART TWO

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

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

2.2 The main strengths are:

- the good or better quality of teaching and learning in most (86%) of the lessons observed; just under half of the lessons were very good or outstanding;
- the very good arrangements for the pastoral care of the students, including the excellent arrangements to promote the health and well being of the students;
- the good range of PSA level 2 technician and craft courses, and the progression opportunities within the NWRC, to PSA level 3 and higher education courses;
- the effective use of internally managed projects to promote curriculum development across the NWRC;
- the collation and interpretation of management information by the senior management team and heads of school to aid strategic and operational planning;
- management and co-ordination of nearly all of the level 2 PSA courses, particularly the collegial work and the design of innovative programmes to meet the needs of students and the wider community;
- the well-qualified staff and in nearly all PSAs, their participation in vocationally relevant curriculum and staff development programmes;
- the quality of provision in construction, engineering, computing and ICT, and hospitality and catering;
- in most PSAs, the quality of the accommodation and specialist resources, including information and learning technology (ILT) resources;
- in most PSAs, the good range of industrial links, particularly in hospitality and catering;
- the standards of work achieved by the students in nearly all the PSAs; and
- the good links established with local primary and post-primary schools, and the range of PSA courses provided to post-primary schools under the vocational enhancement programme (VEP).

2.3 The main areas for improvement are:

- the need for urgent and significant improvements in the quality of provision in travel and tourism, including levels of achievement;
- the quality of resources in some vocational areas, including the Maydown campus and the need to upgrade ILT resources in the Springtown campus, including the provision of a learning support centre;
- the need to deploy curriculum managers to support the work of the heads of school;
- the need for essential skills and vocational course teams, to improve the co-ordination and planning of the NWRCs' provision in essential skills;
- action to improve the outcomes and levels of attainment in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy;
- further development of self-evaluation arrangements across course and programme areas, including ongoing staff development for course teams, and their access to management information on student enrolments, student progress, and levels of student achievement;
- more consistent use of ILT in teaching and learning, across most of the vocational areas;
- more effective embedding of careers education, information advice and guidance (CEIAG) across most of the vocational areas; and
- the need for managers and tutors to implement effectively the NWRC policies for Student Support.

3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 At the time of the inspection, most of the tiers of management had been established across the NWRC, including, the senior management team, the heads of department, the heads of school, and staff with responsibility for key cross college functions, including student services, ILT, and careers advice and guidance. The NWRC has yet to appoint a business development manager to develop and enhance links with industry across the NWRC. In construction, engineering, and in essential skills, there are shortfalls in the deployment of curriculum senior lecturers to support the work of the heads of school.

3.2 The arrangements for self-evaluation for PSA programmes at level 2, and quality improvement planning are mostly satisfactory. The senior management team prioritised appropriately the need to improve quality assurance arrangements in the college, and good progress has been made in developing targets for achievement, particularly retention rates across the college. Effective arrangements are in place for the senior management team and the heads of school to collate and interpret management information to aid strategic and operational planning. The sharing of this information with course teams to aid self-evaluation, is however, underdeveloped.

3.3 At the time of the inspection, action had been taken to revise and streamline quality assurance arrangements for all further education courses, and this is a welcome development. More work is needed by the senior management team, however, in providing course teams with continual professional development in self-evaluation, particularly to make informed and evidence based judgments on the quality of provision, particularly in computing and ICT construction, and engineering. A good start has been made in eliciting the views of students at key stages of their learning, and this has been followed up by action to address, areas of concern, including the provision of careers advice in the NWRC. The whole NWRC quality assurance arrangements, have not articulated a planning cycle for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, and the use of effective use of strategic targets for improvement, is underdeveloped.

3.4 Most of the PSA courses inspected are well managed. The heads of school work effectively with course teams, providing good leadership, including the innovative design of programmes to meet the needs of students and local employers, and schools, particularly in construction, engineering and in hospitality and catering. In most of the areas inspected, the course teams work effectively and collegially, and have made a good start to sharing good practice across the main campuses.

3.5 During the week of the inspection, a minority of the lecturers, reported concerns about the need to improve working relationships between themselves and the senior management team. This is in part due to the lengthy period in resolving the lecturers' industrial action, and changes in post-merger working practices, including the allocation of remitted time for course administration, and internal verification. With few exceptions, however, these challenges have not had an adverse affect on the quality of the teaching and learning and support provided by the lecturers, across the PSAs inspected.

3.6 The NWRC has introduced a range of internally managed curriculum development projects to support innovative developments in teaching and learning. These have been effective in the majority of the PSAs, particularly in engineering.

3.7 The quality of the accommodation and specialist resources to support students in their work are very good in most of the areas inspected, particularly in the Strand Road and Limavady campuses. The quality of accommodation has improved significantly over recent years in the Strand Road, Springtown, and Limavady campuses. Most of the course teams have worked effectively to provide a welcoming learning environment for their students. One feature is the effective use of art work to provide a creative learning environment for students in construction on the Strand Road campus. Although students in computing have good access to ICT resources, the specialist teaching rooms in Strand Road are uninspiring, with little use of wall displays to present a positive image of the PSA. In addition, the students do not have access to a dedicated hardware laboratory to build and reconfigure computers, or to set up servers. Students in the Springtown campus have poor access to networked computers, and a learning resource centre to support their work effectively. There are significant shortfalls in the accommodation in Maydown. The catering arrangements for students in the afternoon are inadequate, and the toilets in the electrical section of the building are in need of refurbishment.

3.8 The lecturers are well-qualified and experienced across nearly all of the PSAs. Many of them have participated in effective staff and curriculum development programmes. This is

particularly strong in construction, engineering and in hospitality and catering. In hospitality and catering, for example, the lecturers have benefitted from participation in the Lecturers into Industry scheme in leading restaurants across the United Kingdom, or through ongoing continuous part-time employment in the industry to enhance and update their professional expertise. The course teams are effectively supported by well-qualified specialist technicians in most of the PSAs.

3.9 The NWRC director has shown effective leadership in supporting the work of the North West Workforce Development Forum (NWWDF). This is a cross border arrangement, with involvement from key stakeholders, including local employers, local and central government agencies, and the three further and higher education institutions in the region. The NWWDF is chaired by the managing director of a leading local employer, and the secretariat is serviced jointly by the college, and Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), the national training and employment authority in the Republic of Ireland. The forum has liaised with a range of Sector Skills Councils to help the college plan its provision, particularly for those in employment. At the time of the inspection, the impact of work of the forum and PSA level 2 courses provided by the NWRC has been limited.

3.10 The NWRC has responded effectively to recent adverse trading conditions in the local economy. Members of staff provided guidance and support to workers facing redundancy, to help them identify their further training needs, following the announcement of the closure of the Seagate factory in Limavady in 2008. A number of ex-employees, who were entitled to a training allowance from their former employer, are now enrolled on a range of PSA level 2 courses, including part-time NVQs in wall and floor tiling, and in hospitality and catering. Although the NWRC has undertaken a detailed review of the support provided to the ex-employees, it has not ascertained how many progressed to education and training programmes in the college.

3.11 The NWRC has developed a range of PSA level 2 programmes to meet the needs of industry, and employees. These include an innovative programme in engineering, where the NWRC has provided an up-skilling programme for 57 employees in the Seagate factory in Londonderry, who have a unit of the First Diploma in engineering. In construction, the course teams have designed innovative full and part-time courses, offering opportunities for significant number of students to retrain or to be up-skilled.

3.12 Most of the heads of school have developed effective links with industry, professional bodies and with local schools. A good start has been made by the heads of school in developing links with local employers. Each school is in the process of establishing employer fora to plan and review their curriculum provision. Although this process has only started, these links are well established in a number of schools, particularly in hospitality and catering.

3.13 The NWRC has strong links with schools in the North West region. It has worked with a large number of local primary schools to promote careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), including civil engineering, and renewable energies. It also provides a wide range of applied courses to pupils from local post-primary schools under the VEP in Derry and Limavady. Good work is under way in ensuring an appropriate range of courses is re-established on the Strabane campus. A significant proportion of the

courses under the VEP, are in the PSAs at level 1 and level 2. A feature of good practice is the Edexcel First Certificate in electronic and electrical engineering, which is provided as a twilight course to year 11 pupils from four schools. The outcomes of the programme to date have been excellent, with all of the pupils from the initial two cohorts attaining a distinction grade.

3.14 The NWRC has not undertaken a self-evaluation of the whole college provision for VEP. Consequently, there is little strategic overview on the range and spread of provision on VEP level 2 programmes across the three area learning communities covered by the NWRC. In addition, while the NWRC management information system has accessible data on the number of pupils who participate in level 2 VEP provision, it is not analysed to identify the numbers who progress onto full-time provision at either level 2 or 3 in the NWRC.

4. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

4.1 The standards of work achieved by most of the students in nearly all the PSA level 2 courses inspected are good. They are well-motivated and are enthusiastic about their work. Full-time students, for example, in construction and engineering, participated in a 'Climate Change' conference that was hosted by the college, and the lecturers work effectively to recognise their achievements through special awards. The students in most PSAs, achieve good work-related technical and practical skills. They have appropriate opportunities to work independently and in teams with other students. With the exception of the First Diploma for IT Practitioners, most of the students have a good understanding of career progression routes. The standards of work for students on the First Diploma in travel and tourism are mostly weak; the students are making slow progress, and are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop the work-related skills required for the industry.

4.2 The standards of the students' written work are variable, ranging from poor to good and are mostly satisfactory. They are good for most students in computing, ICT, construction, engineering, and in hospitality and catering. They are poor on the First Diploma in travel and tourism. The standards in numeracy are mostly satisfactory, and are good in engineering.

4.3 The average rate of achievement over the last three years in the areas inspected is 64%, which is just above the average (61%) for all Northern Ireland colleges. The average achievement rate in computing and ICT is 64%, which is well above the average (56%) for all colleges. Achievement rates in construction (63%) and engineering (69%) are close to or on the average for Northern Ireland colleges at 66% and 69% respectively. The figures for tourism and hospitality are only 52%, which is well below the average for all colleges (64%); most of this is due to poor levels of attainment on the First Diploma in travel and tourism, with only 36% of students enrolled achieving the qualification.

4.4 The levels of achievement in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are poor in most of the vocational areas inspected. They are particularly weak on the First Diploma for IT practitioners.

5. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1 The quality of teaching and learning is a feature of most of the lessons; 86% of the lessons were good or better, 49% were very good or outstanding, and 11% were outstanding. A minority (14%) of the lessons were barely satisfactory or inadequate. The quality of teaching and learning is particularly strong in construction, engineering and in hospitality and catering, where lessons are well-planned making effective use of a range of teaching and learning strategies, which are matched to the abilities and interests of the students. In essential skills, and a minority of lessons in computing and ICT, little use is made of differentiated learning approaches to meet the specific needs of individual students. The quality of the students' learning experiences in travel and tourism is poor; they are narrow and do not challenge the students sufficiently.

5.2 The NWRC has invested significantly in improving the quality and accessibility of ILT resources. The use of ILT in teaching and learning, however, is inconsistent, across the PSAs. Although there are examples of good practice in most PSAs, particularly in the use of the college virtual learning environment (VLE), more action is needed to implement more use of ILT across the NWRC. The creative and effective use of ILT by lecturers in hospitality and catering is well-developed.

5.3 Assessment in most of the vocational areas is well planned. The lecturers make effective use of an appropriate range of assessment strategies, and marking for improvement is particularly effective in construction, engineering, and hospitality and catering. Although assessment is sound in computing and ICT, the use of work related projects is underdeveloped. The quality of assessment in travel and tourism is mostly inadequate.

5.4 Students have good access to careers advice and guidance from qualified staff in the NWRC, and from the Department's careers service. The careers advisors in the NWRC, for example, provided motivational workshops for full-time students on PSA level 2 courses to help them address barriers to completing their studies in the NWRC. Although the NWRC has in place a detailed careers policy, more action is needed to embed careers advice and guidance as part of the students' main education and training programme, through, for example, timetabled tutorials. With the exception of hospitality and catering, there is insufficient use of vocationally relevant careers resources to inform students of the range of pathways into employment and further education. Good use is made of work-based learning approaches in hospitality and catering, though it is underdeveloped across all of the other PSAs.

5.5 A total of 20 students enrolled on level 2 PSA courses were registered for learning support in the NWRC. These students receive good support in their work, from a wide range of external agencies and from staff in the NWRC. The student services provision is staffed by well-qualified and experienced student support co-ordinators. Although, the NWRC has developed a policy for student services, the referral arrangements by the Curriculum Learning Support Co-ordinators and course teams is not sufficiently systematic to provide support for all students with special learning needs. The inspection team, observed three students, who required additional support that had not been provided by the NWRC. Although the job roles of Learning Support Co-ordinators are clearly defined, they have received insufficient support and guidance in their work.

5.6 The students' responses to the pastoral care interviews in most instances report high levels of satisfaction on their experiences of the NWRC. The key features highlighted by nearly all of the students include their feeling safe and secure in the NWRC, the quality of the learning environment, the supportive staff, the harmonious staff/student relationships, high staff expectations and the students being well informed about the required standards in their courses. They enjoy being at the NWRC and would recommend their course to a friend. Only just over half of the students, however, identified the links in their course and work experience, and a minority of the students reported concerns about their lack of access to a learning resource centre, and the range of extra curricular activities.

5.7 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the NWRC is very good. The main features in the NWRC's pastoral care include:

- the inclusive and supportive ethos for most students; the leadership, commitment and professionalism of the college, Health, Welfare and Child Protection Officer;
- the students' participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities;
- the policy and procedures for addressing and encouraging good relations, including cultural diversity;
- student access to specialist counselling services, particularly for full-time students;
- the creative and effective use of wall displays to inform students of the full range of support available, both by the NWRC and by a range of external agencies;
- the high priority given to the emotional health and well-being of the students; and
- the effective communication and working alongside other agencies.

5.8 The NWRC has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

PART 3: REPORTS ON CURRICULAR AREAS

6. CURRICULUM AREA: COMPUTING, AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The NWRC offers an appropriate range of full-time and part-time professional and technical courses in computing, and ICT at level 2, across its campuses in Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane. The full-time provision is the Edexcel First Diploma for IT practitioners, which is currently being offered for the first time in the Limavady campus. The part-time provision consists of a range of courses including the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), CISCO networking courses and the City & Guilds e-Qual in Website Design. The ECDL programme is offered by a number of schools across the NWRC campuses, and in the community. Student enrolments on full-time courses are very good, with 47 enrolled in 2008-2009. The students have good progression opportunities at level 3, including a range of Edexcel National Diploma programmes, and courses in website design or further professional CISCO courses.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

6.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- good leadership and management of the programmes at level 2, including good coherence in the provision for the First Diploma across the NWRC campuses;
- mostly good quality of teaching and learning, and the good standards of work achieved by most of the students;
- good quality of assessment, including the good feedback by the lecturers to promote improvement; and
- good ICT resources including the capability for wireless connectivity by the students.

6.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need to provide a more formal careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) programme by the course team, to promote more effectively the progression opportunities for students on the First Diploma for IT practitioners;
- development of work-based projects to enhance the learning experiences of the students on the First Diploma for IT practitioners; and
- need for a small number of lecturers to develop more on-line learning materials and the more effective use of ILT to support teaching and learning.

6.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the level 2 programmes in computing, and ICT are good and the programmes are effective. The lecturers are well-qualified and are deployed appropriately. The quality of resources on both campuses is good, including the capability for wireless connectivity by the students on both the Londonderry and Limavady campuses. There is, however, no dedicated resource to facilitate the delivery of units which require the assembly, installation and configuration of hardware components. On the First Diploma for IT practitioners programme there is good coherence between the provision in the Londonderry and Limavady campuses, and all the students are supported well in their learning. There is, however, a need for staff on this programme, to develop a more formal careers programme, to highlight the progression opportunities available for these students. The majority of the students have a poor knowledge of the available progression and careers opportunities which are available to them.

6.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most of the students achieve good standards of work. They are working at an appropriate level, have a good knowledge of computing principles and are competent in the use of a range of software packages and operating systems. The students are well-motivated and are making good progress in their learning, including the development of skills and understanding. The average retention rate over the last three years for the level 2 programmes is excellent at 93%, and the average success rate over the same period is satisfactory at 70%. Over the last three years, a total of 254 students out of a total enrolment of 390 students achieved their qualification. This is an achievement rate of 65% which is above the average (56%) for colleges in Northern Ireland. The progression rate to further education or training for those students on the First Diploma is low at 38%.

6.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning is good or better in most of the lessons observed. The lecturers are well-prepared and use a range of teaching approaches including group work, discussion and practical sessions. The quality of their teaching and learning materials is good. Most of the lecturers made good use of ILT to support their teaching and learning and have developed a good range of resources on the college VLE. A small number of the lecturers make little use of on-line learning materials and ILT to support their teaching and learning. In addition, in a small number of lessons, the quality of teaching and learning is inadequate, and does not challenge or motivate the students sufficiently. The quality of assessment is good, it is at an appropriate level and the lecturers provide good feedback and support to promote improvement. On the First Diploma course, there is insufficient use of industrial links and work-based projects, which would further enhance the assessment process and the learning experiences of the students.

6.6 CONCLUSION

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

7. CURRICULUM AREA: CONSTRUCTION AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The NWRC, in its Centre of Excellence in Construction and the Built Environment, provides a wide range of technician and craft training programmes at level 2. The training is delivered at the Strand Road, Springtown and the Greystone Road campuses. The programmes include the Edexcel First Diploma in construction, and technical certificates and NVQs in wall and floor tiling, carpentry and joinery, plumbing and brickwork. The provision meets well the needs of students and employers in the region, and is designed to respond flexibly to changes in the local and regional economy. The students are recruited to the programmes from the North West region and County Donegal and their ages range from 16 to over 50. Following a period of sustained growth in the region, there is currently a downturn in the construction industry. The NWRC, however, during the downturn, has been successful in maintaining enrolments figures, particularly in craft training programmes.

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS

7.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- good quality of teaching and learning, which is well-matched to the individual needs, interests and aspirations of the students;
- well-motivated students, who develop good employability skills;
- good standards of work achieved in written assignments and practical exercises;
- innovative design of programmes to meet the needs of students and develop the skills required by employers; and
- good staff development opportunities for staff, to build capacity within the NWRC to meet present and future needs.

7.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- inadequate access to ILT resources in the Springtown campus and the need to develop a learning resource centre in the Springtown campus;
- poor success rate on a minority of the programmes; and
- need to deploy a senior lecturer to lead and manage the Centre of Excellence in Construction and the Built Environment, and to support the head of school.

7.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The head of school of construction and engineering sciences (CES), and the head of school of craft services (CS) provide good strategic leadership for the level 2 provision in construction and the built environment. They have developed good links with industry, schools and professional bodies. Lecturers in technician and craft programmes have good working relationships; they interact well and are committed to the students. The course teams, with the support of the heads of school, have designed innovative full-time and part-time programmes to meet the needs of students, and develop the skills required by employers. As a result, the programmes provide good opportunities for a significant number of students to retrain or be up-skilled, during the current period of economic downturn. There is no learning resource centre in the Springtown campus, and as a result, there is poor access to ILT, which restricts students' opportunities to learn independently through the VLE. There is a need for a specialist senior lecturer, in the Centre of Excellence in Construction and the Built Environment, to support the two heads of school.

7.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The average retention rates and success rates over the last three years for level 2 construction programmes are good at 89% and satisfactory at 71% respectively. A total of 293 students achieved their qualification from 466 students enrolled and this is an average achievement rate of 63% which is just below the average (66%) for all colleges in Northern Ireland. The standards of student work on the First Diploma in construction and the craft training programmes are good. The assignment work in the First Diploma in construction is well presented, and the students reach good standards in manual drafting and written assignments. The majority of students on the First Diploma progress to further education, and a small number of past students have progressed to higher education courses in Civil Engineering. The students on the craft programmes are well motivated and enthusiastic about their training programmes, and as a result develop good employability skills. There are insufficient opportunities for the vocational and the essential skills lecturers, to plan and review the essential skills programmes for full-time students.

7.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of most of the teaching, training and learning ranges from good to excellent. In the First Diploma in construction, the needs of the students are being well met in a programme which is designed to facilitate their part-time hours of work outside the NWRC. The academic level of students entering the first diploma in construction is low, and consequently the referral procedure for students to additional student support and the timetabled assignment workshop, should be improved to ensure the students' needs are fully met. A good start has been made to populating the VLE, with technical certificate online materials and practice tests, for plumbing craft students. The assessment of the technical certificate in carpentry and joinery and the NVQ in wall and floor tiling is planned effectively, and the students make good progress through their theory and practical assessments. Craft students, who attend the college only one day per week, need to be more regularly informed about the well- developed counselling facilities in the NWRC.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In the area inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the college is good. The college has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the NWRC has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the NWRC's progress on the areas for improvement.

8. CURRICULUM AREA: ENGINEERING (ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC, AND MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The NWRC provides a good range of technician and craft courses in engineering. The level of student enrolments has grown by 39% over the past three years with the largest growth in the craft areas.

The NWRC provides two full-time Edexcel First Diploma courses: engineering in Limavady and manufacturing engineering in the Strand Road campus. The first diploma is delivered over four days per week and includes an appropriate balance of mechanical and electrical units. In 2006, the college introduced the Edexcel First Certificate in electronics under the VEP with a selective post-primary school in Derry. This provision has grown steadily and now includes four post-primary schools.

The NWRC provides a range of part-time electrical installation, fabrication and welding craft programmes across the Limavady, Maydown and Springtown campuses. Most of the electrical students attend NWRC one day per week for two or more years, have relevant employment and progress successfully to level 3. The fabrication and welding programmes are part-time evening courses delivered on the Limavady and Springtown campus sites over three hours, for those adult students interested in welding as a recreational pursuit, and a number of motor vehicle students who want to widen their skill base in this area.

The NWRC also provides a range of short specialised courses at level 2 to meet local needs, including, the recent up-skilling programme for Seagate staff and a range of short electrical courses.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

8.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- innovative strategies used to develop the curriculum to meet local educational and training needs, and to celebrate student achievement;
- effective partnership with local schools to develop and deliver a successful programme in the priority skill area of electronics;
- good range and quality of physical resources to support teaching and learning;

- high standards of practical work and technical knowledge demonstrated by almost all of the students; and
- good quality of teaching and learning, which is matched well to the needs of students.

8.2.2 The main areas for improvement are:

- the need for a more systematic and rigorous self-evaluation approaches, to include a more evidence based review of the quality of provision, and an assessment of the changing economic environment;
- further development of the curriculum to embed the outcomes of curriculum projects and to meet better the current and future skills needs of students; and
- the need fore more effective use of ILT to support teaching and learning.

8.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The schools of CES and CS have established effective links with local employers, schools and other key stakeholders to ensure their provision meets local needs. Innovative developments include an up-skilling programme for Seagate employees, the involvement of Level 2 students in the climate change conference hosted by the NWRC in December 2008 and the recognition of First Diploma student achievements. The lecturers are encouraged to participate in innovative internal curriculum development projects, including, electrical control systems, and the use of ILT in engineering. Regular team meetings are held at both school and programme levels with appropriate actions recorded. Each programme team reviewed their provision which informed the overall electrical and manufacturing self-evaluation report. However, the review process at both school and programme levels are not sufficiently rigorous and evidence based to identify key areas for improvement, for example, the use of ILT in teaching and learning. Resources across almost all of the provision are good and well-managed. Almost all of the workshops are well-equipped with industry standard tools and equipment and the NWRC has allocated significant resource to the development of the Electronics Production and Innovation Centre (EPIC) and renewable energies. However, some student resources at the Maydown campus need to be improved. The use of ILT to assist course management is inconsistent, including the effective use of electronic registers, online student progress tracking sheets, and shared learning resources.

8.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most students are well-motivated and demonstrate good practical skills corresponding to the level they are working towards including, the ability to interpret drawings, recognise and select components or materials, make accurate measurements, and to produce work to a specification. Almost all students can apply effectively their knowledge of engineering principles in their practical work and demonstrate good standards of written work, numeracy and oral communication. Most students can evaluate the quality of their own practical work through the basic application of testing techniques. There are insufficient opportunities,

however, for students to develop their ICT skills in their work across the provision. The average retention over the last three years in engineering is excellent at 91%, and the average success rate is satisfactory at 76%. Over this period, 320 students from a total of 464 students enrolled achieved their qualifications, and this is an achievement rate of 69%, which is just below the average (71%) for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

8.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning ranges from good to outstanding. Almost all of the lessons are well-planned, and include a broad range of teaching strategies at an appropriate pace with good opportunities to assess student performance. The use of ILT to support teaching and learning, however, is underdeveloped, particularly the use of the NWRC VLE. Students are assessed regularly and given timely and effective feedback to help them improve their performance. Although good progress has been made to review the curriculum offer, more action is needed, including the embedding of curriculum development projects, and the need to align the curriculum to the changing external environment, particularly the increased unemployment rate across the region. Arrangements for assessing student support need to be refined to ensure that appropriate support is provided early in the programme.

8.6 CONCLUSION

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

9. CURRICULUM AREA: ESSENTIAL SKILLS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Nearly all of the students enrolled on full-time PSA level 2 courses have not attained a grade C pass in GCE English and mathematics. At the time of the inspection, a total of 305 students enrolled on PSA level 2 courses, were following essential skills programmes. Almost all of the full-time students on PSA level 2 courses are offered the opportunity to undertake essential skills in literacy and numeracy. Students enrolled on full-time courses in hospitality and catering, however, were not provided with support in the essential skill of numeracy. The provision of essential skills for part-time students enrolled on PSA level 2 courses is mostly underdeveloped.

9.2 MAIN FINDINGS

9.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- good start to the identification of the strategic issues to be addressed within the essential skills provision and the formulation of an action plan to address these issues;

- good standards of behaviour and good levels of motivation of almost all of the students in the essential skills lessons inspected; and
- good one-to-one support provided by all staff in the sessions inspected.

9.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need for senior management to agree a policy for the management, co-ordination and delivery of essential skills, to implement it effectively across the college, and to implement the action plan, in line with the policy, to address weaknesses in the provision;
- need to deploy a Senior Lecturer to support the work of the Head of School;
- need for the senior management team, the head of school and lecturers to improve the outcomes in external assessment in both literacy and numeracy across the provision; and
- need for essential skills lecturers to develop and embed a wider range of teaching and learning methodologies, including the innovative use of ILT, to provide differentiated approaches to teaching and learning to meet the needs of all the students.

9.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Head of School for Foundation, Access and General Education has been in post since June 2008, and at the time of the inspection, the NWRC had not deployed a Senior Lecturer to co-ordinate and support the provision for essential skills. The Head of School has made a good start in drafting an essential skills policy, and in identifying the strategic weaknesses in the essential skills provision across the NWRC. An appropriate action plan has been developed to address these weaknesses and to plan for improvement. It is important that the senior management team implement these changes, particularly in the co-ordination and coherent provision of essential skills across the NWRC, including more effective collaboration between essential skills lecturers and vocational course teams to plan, develop and support appropriate levels of skills development in both literacy and numeracy. The essential skills lecturers are appropriately experienced and qualified in line with Department's requirements.

9.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

In the majority of lessons, attendance is good and the students are well motivated. The essential skills lecturers make insufficient use, however, of vocationally relevant learning materials and approaches to stimulate the students. The standards of oral communication of almost all of the students are good. The standards of written communication are variable, and range from poor to good, and are mostly satisfactory. They are good for most students in construction, engineering, and in hospitality and catering. They are poor on the First Diploma in travel and tourism. The standards in numeracy range from poor to good but are mostly satisfactory. The overall levels of achievement in external assessments are poor in both literacy and numeracy, particularly for full-time students on the First Diploma for IT

practitioners. More opportunities need to be provided by the senior management team for essential skills lecturers to work closely with the vocational course teams to develop a common understanding of standards required in the external assessments, in order to improve overall achievements in essential skills.

9.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of the provision for teaching and learning is mostly satisfactory. The use of differentiated learning approaches to meet the wide range of abilities of students, including those for whom English is not their first language, is underdeveloped. Insufficient use is made of ILT to facilitate individualised learning and teaching in most lessons. The one-to-one support provided by all tutors inspected is good and the students benefit both in terms of their skill development and in terms of their confidence. In the best practice, the lecturer, who had been involved in an external curriculum development project, made good use of active learning strategies. In most lessons, however, little use is made by lecturers of formative assessment and feedback, to monitor and record student progress.

9.6 CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this college is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, in learning and teaching, and in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the NWRC's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

10. CURRICULUM AREA: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY (HOSPITALITY AND CATERING, AND TRAVEL AND TOURISM)

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The NWRC provides a good range of full-time and part-time courses in hospitality, catering and tourism. The courses provide appropriate opportunities for the students to progress from level one to Foundation Degree programmes within the NWRC. The inspection focused on the NVQ level 2 in professional cookery and the Edexcel First Diploma in Travel and Tourism. Over the past three years, the numbers recruited to level 2 in this curriculum area have increased only slightly from 85 during 2005/2006 to approximately 91 during the 2008/2009 period.

10.2 MAIN FINDINGS

10.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- good quality of teaching and learning observed in hospitality and catering;
- very good quality provision in hospitality and catering, particularly the good standards of practical work achieved by the students;
- well -developed links with the hospitality industry;

- positive impact of the Lecturers into Industry initiative on the quality of teaching and learning; and
- effective use of ILT in hospitality and catering to enhance the quality of the students' learning experiences.

10.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need for the senior management team to address the unsatisfactory quality of education on the Edexcel First Diploma in travel and tourism;
- effective integration of the essential skill of numeracy into the level 2 provision for all full-time courses; and
- sharing of good practice in teaching and learning across the PSA.

10.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management in hospitality and catering is good. The Head of School has worked hard to promote, and develop further the provision. The management and co-ordination of the programmes, across level 2, is effective and ensures high standards of training and achievement. The lecturers are well-qualified and experienced; most have undertaken recent industrial experience through the Lecturers into Industry initiative or through relevant continuous part-time employment. They have very good links with business, schools and the community, and are represented on a number of education and business organisations, which include the North West Human Resource Forum.

In contrast, there are significant weaknesses in the management of the level 2 provision in travel and tourism. These include poor planning and co-ordination of the course, and monitoring and evaluation procedures, which do not address adequately the quality of teaching and learning, and the standards of students' work. It is unsatisfactory that little action has been taken to address the very poor levels of student achievement over the last three years. The management team must take immediate action to provide the current cohort of students with appropriate support to ensure they make progress in their work; there is a need to foster and share the good practice in teaching and learning, across the PSA, including the good assessment processes in hospitality and catering. While the lecturers are well-qualified, they need the opportunity to update their practice through extensive placements in industry.

10.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Nearly all of the students on the hospitality and catering courses are enthusiastic and are making good progress in their work. They can work independently and as part of a team, and apply their skills and knowledge. The students have good opportunities to develop a wide range of skills and cooking methods. The quality and presentation of dishes prepared are very good and reflect modern industry standards. The written work of most students is of a good standard with evidence to show marking for improvement. Most have a thorough understanding of the health, safety and food hygiene requirements relevant to current industry practices. The standards of work in travel and tourism are poor, and the students are making slow progress in their work. They are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop

the personal skills and attributes to work effectively in the travel and tourism industry. They have a poor knowledge and understanding of the domestic travel and tourism industry and basic travel geography. In addition, their written work contains inaccuracies which have not been corrected. Although the essential skill of literacy is well embedded in both full-time courses, there are no arrangements in place for the provision of the essential skill of numeracy. Over the past three years, the average retention rate across all the programmes inspected is good at 87%. The average success rate over the same period is modest at 60%. From a total of 242 students enrolled over the last three years, 127 students achieved their qualification; this is an achievement rate of 52% which is well below the average for other colleges (64%) of further education in Northern Ireland. Much of this is due to consistently poor levels of achievement in travel and tourism.

10.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The students have very good learning experiences in all of the hospitality and catering lessons. They participate in a wide range of challenging practical activities which develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of the industry. The quality of the teaching ranges from good to outstanding. Lessons are well-planned, purposeful and appropriately paced. Good use is made of ILT, including multi-media software to support and enhance the students' learning. Appropriate use is made of the well-established links with industry to inform and to motivate the students. Demonstrations and workshops by very experienced chefs, for example, provide good opportunities for the students to extend their knowledge and understanding of their roles within the industry.

The quality of the students' learning experiences in travel and tourism is poor. The range of teaching and learning methods is narrow, and the students spend excessive periods of time undertaking independent research for coursework assignments. The use of formative assessment to plan for improvement is underdeveloped.

10.6 CONCLUSION

In the area of hospitality and catering, the quality of education and training provided by the NWRC is very good. The NWRC is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the students and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

In the area of travel and tourism, the quality of education and training provided by the NWRC is unsatisfactory; the areas for improvement significantly outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified major areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching, and leadership and management which need to be addressed urgently if the NWRC is to meet effectively the needs of all its students. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the NWRC's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

PART FOUR

11. CONCLUSION

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

11.2 The NWRC provides a good range of full and part-time PSA level 2 courses in most of the vocational areas. The inspection has identified key strengths in the quality of provision in most areas, including the quality of the teaching and learning, pastoral care arrangements, curriculum and staff development, the quality of the accommodation and specialist resources, and the progress made in developing links with industry.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

There is a need for the NWRC senior management, and staff with key curricular responsibilities to:

- develop a more coherent and systematic approach to quality improvement, and ensure that it is aligned to the operational and business planning processes in the college. There is a need for more ongoing professional development for lecturers and course teams, to ensure they make consistent and evidence based judgments on the quality of provision in each PSA. The improvements in the use of management information to monitor and plan provision need to be developed and shared more effectively with course teams across the NWRC;
- take urgent action to improve the quality of the provision in travel and tourism, particularly leadership and management, course planning, teaching and learning approaches, links with industry, and in the standards of the students' work;
- more coherent and innovative planning of the NWRC provision for the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, which should include the vocational course teams, to address more effectively the low levels of achievement;
- more effective implementation of the NWRC policy for student support, and in the professional guidance provided to the curriculum support co-ordinators, to ensure that all students with specific learning needs are provided with appropriate support; and
- to develop more consistent and effective use of ILT in teaching and learning across the PSAs, to include providing vocationally specific information and guidance on relevant career pathways to further and higher education, and employment.

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