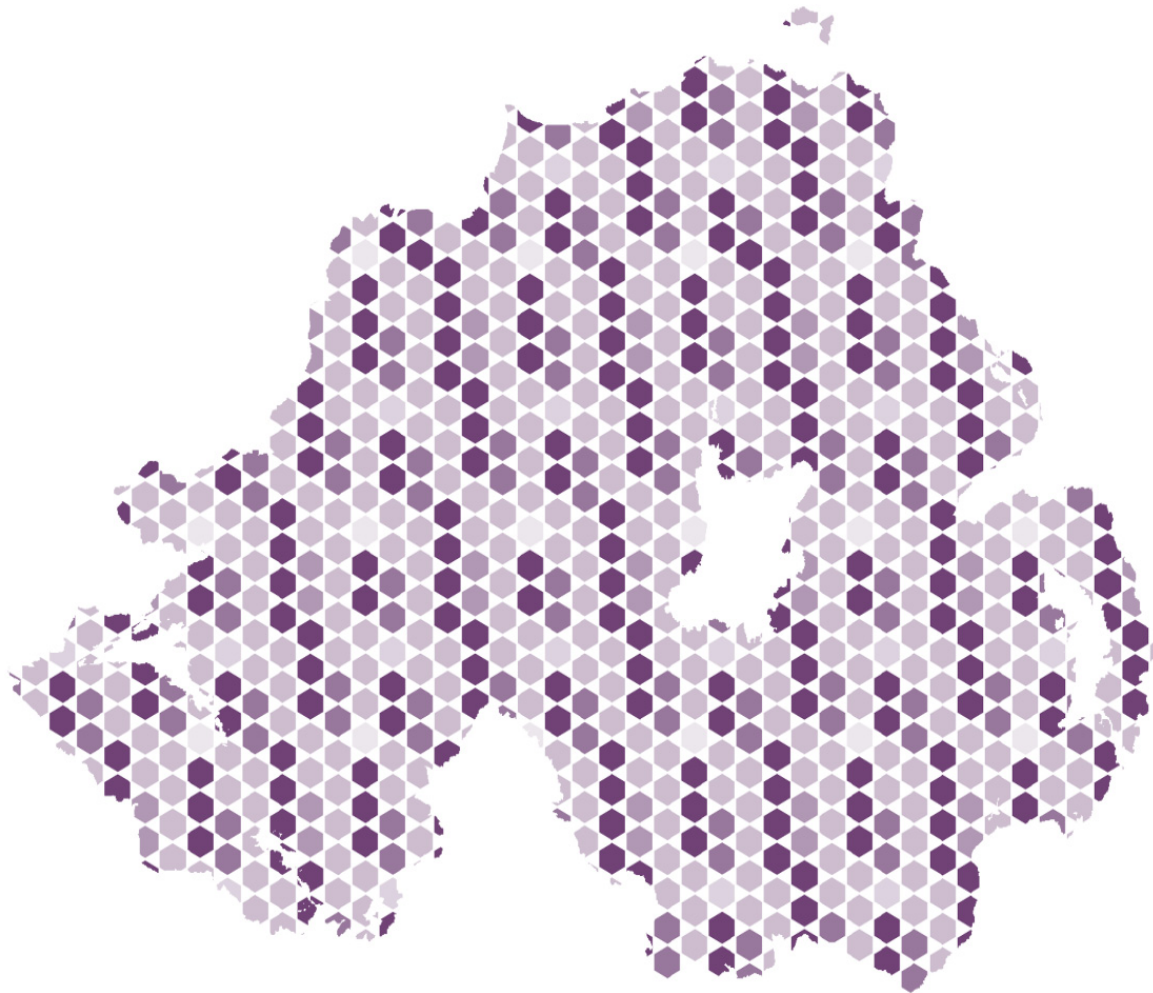


FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Provision for the Priority Skills
Areas at Level 3 South West
College

Report of an Inspection
In April 2010

CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	1
3.	CONCLUSION	5

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

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report summarises the findings of an inspection of the college's provision at level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework in the Priority Skill Areas of computing and information and communications technology (ICT), construction and the built environment (construction), electrical and electronic engineering, and mechanical engineering. The college's provision of Priority Skill Area programmes funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) under the Apprenticeships Northern Ireland programme was not inspected. The inspection was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) during the third term of the 2009/10 academic year.

1.2 In the Autumn term of 2010, the Inspectorate will publish summary reports for each Priority Skill Area across the further education sector. These reports will evaluate the:

- the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum for each Priority Skill Area;
- the strategic planning for the provision;
- the effectiveness of employer engagement and links with key stakeholders;
- the quality of the provision for learning; and
- the standards of students' work.

The reports will identify best practice to help the further education sector implement strategies to meet the needs of students and the economy. They will also inform the Department on the impact of its current policies regarding level 3 provision in these Priority Skill Areas.

1.3 A total of 49 lessons were observed during the inspection visit and members of the inspection team interviewed groups of students in each of the Priority Skill Areas. The inspection team met members of the senior management team, the head of the technology department, assistant heads of departments, curricular managers, course teams, managers with cross-college responsibilities, and local employers. The inspection team reviewed quality assurance documentation and self-evaluation reports, curriculum development plans and minutes of course team meetings.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 The college's approaches to support economic development and enterprise in the local and wider regional areas are well-developed. They are based on establishing and developing links with industry; the strategy is aligned effectively to key drivers for change in the economy, particularly sustainable energies, and major infrastructure developments in the local area, including the A5 Western Transport Corridor and the planned education quarter in Omagh.

2.2 The college is well placed to support economic development; aspects of the college's provision are unique in Northern Ireland, including the wind turbine installers' programme, with examples of good practice in supporting employers and start-up businesses. Staff in the college-based Innotech centre have been successful in securing funding and developing partnerships with industry and public sector bodies, other academic institutions and sectoral bodies to help local employers develop their workforce, and to promote Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Good progress has been made in utilising the expertise from

the Innotech centre in the work of the college, although the majority of this is with higher education courses. Nine members of staff from the centre teach across a range of professional and technical programmes in the college. There is also evidence of the Innotech centre informing curriculum planning, particularly with wind turbine and sustainable energies, where the college is a 'cutting edge' centre in Northern Ireland. In construction and engineering, for example, lecturing staff are working with the Innotech centre to develop a hydrogen safety project and mathematical modelling of quarry screening equipment using partial differential equations finite element analysis and Solid Works software. The college is the lead college in a number of initiatives including the Department funded, 'Carbon Zero' project.

2.3 The college has a good provision of full-time level 3 courses across the programme areas; nearly all of the campuses provide full-time courses in these priority skill areas. There are examples of innovative approaches to course development, particularly the development of the Edexcel National Certificate in motor sports within mechanical engineering. The range of part-time courses is mostly well-matched to local needs which are based on strong links with industry. Across most of the programme areas, there are examples of unique part-time courses in Northern Ireland. In construction, the college, for example, developed the innovative National Certificate in Extractives and Mineral Processing, for both full-time and part-time students, based on strong links with Proskills and local industry. In engineering, the college is planning to introduce a bespoke up-skilling level 3 course for maintenance engineers who work in the local meat industry. Although the college offers courses in the New Regulations in electrical installation, there was no provision at the time of the inspection. The provision for telecommunications and security systems could be expanded further. The provision of part-time level 3 courses in computing and mechanical engineering courses is underdeveloped. The college offers a good range of level 3 courses in construction and engineering to pupils in local post-primary schools through the Edexcel National Award programme.

2.4 Nearly all of the courses are well-designed to meet the needs of students wishing to progress to relevant direct employment or to higher education. Most of the courses offer a good blend of theoretical and practical units and include units in further maths to enhance progression to university courses. Full-time students in construction, for example, can take units in mathematics, further mathematics, structural mechanics and environmental science to widen their choice of higher education progression routes. However, there are few opportunities for construction and engineering students to develop their team working and problem solving skills through project-led learning or integrated assignments. In each priority skill area, full-time students are offered a good range of option streams to meet their career aspirations. In mechanical engineering, however, links between similar units on full-time courses are not exploited fully, with undue discrete planning of course modules. Across most of the priority skill areas, there are limited opportunities for full-time students to undertake additional units to enhance their main programmes. There are, however, features of good practice, including the level 2 computer aided design course for construction students in Dungannon, and the provision of CISCO night classes for full-time computing and ICT students in Enniskillen and Omagh.

2.5 There are excellent progression routes within the college to relevant higher education courses in each priority skill area; the college has developed an extensive suite of foundation degree programmes across the campus locations. There are examples of innovative approaches including the planned foundation degree in civil engineering and transportation to complement existing foundation degrees in construction engineering and architectural technology. With the exception of computing and ICT, the range of progression opportunities to full-time level 3 courses from First Diploma courses are limited, though plans are in place to offer these from 2010.

2.6 The programmes inspected are well-managed; this is consistent across all of the programme areas. The head of technology, assistant heads of department and curriculum managers work effectively to support their students. A key strength is the ongoing development of new courses in these skill areas to meet the needs of students and pupils from local post-primary schools. In spite of their heavy teaching and management responsibilities, they show effective curricular leadership and professionalism in their work in their campuses. The use of management information to monitor student progress and to schedule teaching staff resources across the college is strong.

2.7 Across all of the areas inspected, there is a lack of the cross-campus co-operation in the curricular planning and in the development of learning resources. In computing and ICT, and construction, progress is limited currently to the joint submission for National Standards Sampling.

2.8 Across the professional and technical areas, the lecturers are well-qualified and experienced. Staff development is effectively managed; there are good links with curriculum development and the college invests significant resources in staff development.

2.9 The college has a rigorous approach to self-evaluation. All of the courses are subject to standardised reviews with effective monitoring and evaluation of the action plans. There is a close match between the findings of the self-evaluation reports and the findings of the Inspectorate. There is a need, however, for a more streamlined approach to allow for a more holistic and coherent review of the provision in each priority skill area, across the different campus locations.

2.10 The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent across the programme areas. It is good or better in electrical and electronic engineering but is variable in the other programme areas. The quality of teaching and learning ranges from excellent to inadequate; two-thirds of the lessons were good or better, and just over one-quarter of the lessons is very good or outstanding. A significant minority (one-third) of the lessons, however, were satisfactory or inadequate. The main features of the less effective practice include, weak lesson planning, poor questioning techniques, limited teaching approaches and insufficient opportunities for students to develop independent study skills. Although high quality teaching and learning is a priority in the college's staff development programme, more needs to be done to identify and to share best practice within and across the vocational areas. In addition, part-time lecturers need more support and guidance on how to enhance their teaching approaches.

2.11 The lecturers make use of information and learning technologies in their lessons; in most instances this is limited to multi-media presentations. In most areas, there is insufficient use of the interactive features of education technology to motivate and engage students more effectively.

2.12 Students have good access to careers advice and guidance, particularly on applying for higher education courses; there is a qualified careers officer in each campus. The full-time students are well-informed about progression routes to higher education. More needs to be done, however, to embed careers education into the students' main programme through timetabled tutorials. The use of work-related-learning to enhance the students' understanding of the world of work and to undertake real project work is variable. Effective use is made of work experience, in construction, where all year one full-time students participate on a block release work experience programme. In computing, full-time students

in Dungannon have two weeks work experience which is linked to their project work. The use of work-related learning is underdeveloped in engineering; full-time students, for example, have insufficient opportunities to undertake industry-based project work. In addition, they should be given more opportunities to visit the Innotech centre to observe the planning and implementation of industry projects.

2.13 The provision of a coherent programme of essential skills for those students with weaknesses in literacy and numeracy is a key priority in college, and this is monitored effectively by the management team and the Governing Body. Across the priority skill areas, the proportion of full-time students entering the courses without a level 2 qualification in literacy and numeracy ranges from 25% to just under 40% of all students. There is evidence of vocational and essential skills tutors working together to share good practice in teaching and learning approaches, particularly in construction. Across most of the areas inspected, these students have good opportunities to enhance their literacy and numeracy competences in their essential skills' lessons. In addition, nearly all full-time students have good opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in their vocational units; these are very good in engineering. The opportunities for developing their own writing skills are more limited; much of this work is summative, with little formative work in the vocational classes.

2.14 Students receive good support from their lecturers; the pastoral support for students is good. The inspection identified some examples of good practice including the learning support in computing and ICT.

2.15 Assessment is mostly well-organised in most areas. Good use is made of integrated assignments in computing and ICT, to reduce the assessment burden for students in Enniskillen. Insufficient use is made of controlled assignments in manufacturing and mechanical engineering, especially in the mathematics units. Marking for improvement is used effectively across most of the professional and technical areas. Internal verification arrangements are implemented effectively across most areas; they are particularly effective in electronic and electrical engineering.

2.16 Most of the students are well-motivated, attendance is good and many of the students are well-informed about progression pathways to relevant higher education courses. In engineering there are high levels of progression to higher education.

2.17 The standards of work are good for most students. The lecturers work effectively with the students to help them gain accreditation beyond the minimum pass grades. In electrical engineering, for example, there is good challenge and stretch in teaching and learning and through course work; this is enhanced with the good links staff have with the Innotech centre. There are features of good practice, where students with a wide range of ability levels attain good standards in mathematics, particularly in engineering. Students have good oral skills and speak confidently about the technical terminology in their professional and technical areas.

2.18 Outcomes are mostly good on one year courses. Although outcomes are mostly modest for two-year courses, they are consistently above the norm for other colleges. The outcomes are mostly good in engineering courses.

2.19 The quality of resources and specialist facilities are either very good or outstanding in most of the campus locations. The buildings are well-designed and equipped with high quality resources to support students in their work. The classrooms and workshops have good information and technology resources, including interactive whiteboards and desk-top computers. Course teams have worked effectively with employers to ensure that their specialist resources match current practice in industry. In construction, for example, the choice of computer-aided design software in each campus is based on usage by local

employers. There are however some shortfalls in the available resources. In electrical and electronic engineering, there is a lack of industrial standard motors and control equipment, which has an adverse affect on the quality of the students' project work. Although the three main campuses have good broadband connectivity, it is inadequate in Cookstown and the Technology and Skills Centre in Enniskillen.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION

In the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the South West 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 college has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

3.2 EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION IN EACH PRIORITY SKILL AREA

In electrical and electronic engineering, the quality of education provided by the South West College 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.

In computing and ICT, construction, and mechanical engineering, the quality of education provided by the South West 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 college has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2010

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk

