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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

Provision for the Priority Skills Areas at Level 2

Southern Regional College

Inspected: March 2009

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PART ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Southern Regional College was formed in August 2007 following the merger of the former Armagh College of Further Education, the Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education and the Upper Bann Institute. The college has five main campuses located at Newry, Portadown, Armagh, Lurgan and Banbridge, and an additional six sites located in Newry, Kilkeel and Armagh. The college has a very wide catchment area stretching from South Armagh to Lurgan, and includes four local government districts. A minority of students are drawn from the Republic of Ireland. Most of the main campuses are located a significant distance from one another which has provided senior management with major challenges in a number of key areas, including staff travelling times, timetabling and in the development of a corporate identity for the college.

1.2 According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry, May 2009 'Monthly Labour Market Report', the unadjusted claimant count in the Newry and Mourne District Council Area (4.7%) is above the Northern Ireland average (4.3%). The Craigavon District Council Area is the same as the Northern Ireland average while the Armagh and Banbridge District Council areas are below at 3.9% and 2.9% respectively. The Banbridge District Council Area has the third lowest unadjusted claimant count in Northern Ireland.

1.3 In 2007-08, the college had a total of 3,065 full-time, and 19,044 part-time students funded under the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) Further Education Grant. Based on the information supplied by the Department, in the year 2006-07 the college had a total enrolment of 4,160 students in priority skill areas, which account for 26% of total student enrolments funded under the Further Education Grant. The college also provides a significant amount of priority skills training under the Department's Jobskills, Training for Success (TfS) and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes on all of its main campuses.

1.4 The inspection focused on the college's full-time, and part-time provision in the priority skill areas at level 2 on the national qualifications framework, which is equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grade C or above. The main areas inspected were computing and information and communications technology (ICT), construction, engineering (electrical, electronic and manufacturing), the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, and tourism and hospitality. The college's provision of priority skills training funded by the Department's Jobskills, TfS and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes, were not inspected. Prior to the inspection, students were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire to ascertain their views of their experiences at the college. The inspection team also interviewed groups of students during the inspection. The inspection team held discussions with members of the senior management team, representatives of the Board of Governors, heads of school, course team leaders, managers with cross-college responsibilities and a sample of employers. A total of 44 lessons were observed. The inspection team reviewed self-evaluation reports of the priority skill areas, minutes of senior management and course team meetings, and strategic and quality assurance documentation.

1.5 'Circular FE 11/08', required the six colleges of further education in Northern Ireland, to submit to the Department, a self-evaluation report for the provision of priority skill areas at level 2, 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 priority skill area at level 2. This information was used by the inspection team to compare the performance of the college in each priority skill area, against the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

1.6 The Southern Regional College has a good provision of priority skill area level 2 technician and craft courses. It provides full-time courses in each of the professional and technical areas inspected including the Edexcel First Diploma courses in construction, information technology (IT) practitioners, travel and tourism, and engineering. It also provides a good range of level 2 hospitality National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at the Newry, Armagh and Portadown campuses, a comprehensive range of part-time IT qualifications including the Oxford and Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts (OCR) level 2 Diploma and certificate for IT Users and the City and Guilds (C&G) level 2 certificate in mechanical engineering services. There are good opportunities for progression within all of the PSA areas; from level 2 to level 4 in ICT, engineering, construction and travel and tourism, and from level 1 to level 5 in hospitality. In computing/ICT, engineering, and tourism and hospitality the students have good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications. Students on entry to the priority skill area level 2 programmes have mainly low entry qualifications with a majority not having achieved grade C or above in English or mathematics. In addition, a significant minority of students are identified as requiring additional learning support needs, for example, over one-third of the full-time students on the computing/ICT course are receiving additional support with their learning.

PART TWO

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the Southern Regional College is very good. The college is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

2.2 The main strengths are the:

- strong strategic leadership provided by the Chief Executive and the senior management team, and their commitment to improving the quality of the learning experiences and achievements of the students;
- excellent progress made towards establishing a unified college identity through the appropriately strong emphasis placed by the Chief Executive and senior management team on good communication and collaboration at all levels across the college;
- very good progress made in enabling staff at all levels to access, analyse and interpret key performance data to inform their planning for continuous quality improvement across the curriculum;
- very good progress made in establishing cohesive course teams, and strong collegial working practices across all college campuses;
- management and leadership provided by the heads of school and their deputies particularly in their support of course team leaders;
- very good or excellent management, and co-ordination of almost all of the programmes inspected;
- well embedded system of quality assurance and improvement across the further education provision, including all management functions and areas of significant responsibility, and the well targeted programme of staff development to promote further the active involvement of all staff in the quality improvement process;
- good or better quality of the teaching in almost all of the lessons observed; almost 90% of lessons were good or better; 57% were very good or excellent;
- very good pastoral care, and the high quality of learning support provided for the students, including the rigorous system of identification and referral for those requiring additional help with their learning;
- excellent provision in hospitality and tourism and the very good provision in Computing/ICT;

- strategic review and decisive action taken to address the quality of provision in essential skills, and the good progress made towards raising standards and achievements in literacy and numeracy;
- very good or excellent links with business and industry, particularly in hospitality and tourism; and
- good or better standards of work in most of the areas inspected.

2.3 The main areas for improvement are:

- to provide more opportunities for all students to become better informed of career choices through the increased availability of industrial visits and work placements;
- to develop further the use of Information and Learning Technology (ILT) to enhance teaching and learning in engineering, construction and literacy and numeracy, and to provide better access to high quality ILT resources at the Armagh and Portadown campuses;
- to extend the excellent links with industry as evidenced in tourism and hospitality to all level 2 courses across the college; and
- to strengthen the self-evaluation process within the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, and to raise student achievement in external assessments.

3. **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

3.1 Following the merger of the three legacy colleges in 2007, the process of developing a management structure for the Southern Regional College began in November of the same year, and has only recently been completed with the appointment of the Director of Finance. During this period, the college faced major challenges in advancing the merger process due to a significant delay in the appointment of the Chief Executive. Currently, the senior management team comprises eleven senior management posts: the Chief Executive, three directors, a Head of Human Resources, a Controller of Finance, and five assistant directors with responsibility for specific curricular, and quality related roles. The three directors are responsible for curriculum and student services, finance and corporate services, and economic engagement. There are ten heads of school, including one with responsibility for the college's work-based learning provision. In addition, there are ten administrative assistants whose role is to support their respective heads of school and to enable them to focus on management and curriculum matters.

3.2 The work of the pre-merger quality improvement group has been instrumental in establishing effective, common quality assurance systems across Southern Regional College. Responsibility for quality assurance is clearly defined in the job specifications of the revised management and staff appointments. The high priority afforded to continuous quality improvement demonstrated by the Chief Executive and the senior management team requires staff at all levels to review the effectiveness of their work, and to plan and implement

improvement. This practice has been key to the progress made in establishing good working practices based on empowered accountability, supported and promoted through well planned, responsive professional development. Consequently, the understanding by staff of self-evaluation, and their role in informing college development planning processes is increasingly contributing to a strong culture of openness and collegiality.

3.3 The quality improvement team has demonstrated robust analysis of their own function and has recently introduced a number of improvements to their systems. For example, the further developments of the quality audit of course files and the refinement of the self-evaluation process. In addition, a high priority is being placed on developing the college management information system to ensure the reliability of data and enabling all staff to access, analyse and interpret performance data to help raise standards, and the achievement of students. For example, course retention for level 2 full-time courses has been identified by the college as an area for improvement. A range of strategies has been implemented to address the issue; benchmarking through the use of the e-register system, rigorous monitoring of student attendance followed up by a system of communication and referral, and the introduction of pre-entry advice sessions supported by comprehensive training for all front line administration and academic staff. There is good evidence that this strategy, implemented in May 2007, is already having a positive impact with a 22% reduction in withdrawals, and an 88% reduction in transfers of full-time level 2 students to other courses. The college is involved in the pilot initiative for electronic individual student learning agreement. Early evaluation of the pilot by the college indicates that this is contributing to improvement in communication among staff and between staff and students, particularly with regard to the referral and tracking of student support, and significant benefits with regard to student career planning.

3.4 A staff mentoring scheme which is integral to the college's quality assurance system, is in the early stages of implementation. The scheme is designed to support individual lecturers to develop professionally through a well considered three-tiered system: providing support for lecturers undertaking the Post-Graduate Certificate in Further and Higher Education, support mentoring within the school structure, and performance management.

3.5 The quality of all programmes and cross college management functions and major areas of responsibility are reviewed annually as an integral part of the quality improvement process. Priorities for improvement identified through the review process, form the basis of the respective action plans, progress of the implementation of all action plans is monitored systematically and is reported formally upon in the quality improvement cycle of the following year. The outcomes of the quality improvement cycle are used effectively to inform the development planning process of the college. Across the priority skill areas the quality of the self-evaluation reports is consistently good, and in tourism and hospitality it is very good. In the self-evaluation for essential skills there is insufficient inclusion of, or reference to, the evaluative information contained within the self-evaluation reports of each of the priority skills areas.

3.6 The quality of leadership and management is very good. All of the courses are well managed and co-ordinated. In the areas inspected, there are good relationships among staff and between staff, and the senior management team. There is good evidence that the integration of course teams across college campuses has been instrumental in the development of an increasingly strong sense of collegiality within the professional and

technical areas. The communication within course teams is good. Regular team meetings are held and clear guidance is provided by the quality improvement unit with regard to the structure and content of meetings which ensures that team meetings are used to evaluate the quality of their programmes, and to amend course design when necessary.

3.7 The Director for Economic Engagement is responsible for the Business Development Unit. The unit is led by the head of business support who, in turn is supported by the Business Support Unit manager and five Business Development Officers. The unit engages with local micro businesses through cluster groups and is represented on the Workforce Development Forum by the head of unit. The Business Development Officers provide an important link in terms of sharing local market information with the heads of school to inform curriculum and resource planning and to match training requests with specialist expertise. The services of the Business Development Unit is built on the best practice of the three legacy colleges and provides a dynamic, responsive and tailored service to local business partners. Local businesses are encouraged to enter into partnership arrangements that facilitate bidirectional knowledge transfer and support including; customised training, student and lecturer into industry placements, student projects and guest speakers from industry. The Business Development Unit actively sources funding to resource key projects to meet identified local business needs and which also provide secondment opportunities for teaching staff. Current innovative projects in the priority skill areas include; Manufacture Innovate Grow (MIG), InterACT, Inspire, Connected, and the Open Source Centre, all of which are funded by the Department; the college also participates in the international Leonardo and Transversal projects, funded by the European Union Fund for the Economically Inactive.

3.8 Southern Regional College has set itself the ambitious target of achieving Embedded Status of the Demonstrating Transformation Framework by 2010, and, in evaluating progress towards realising this goal, the college is undertaking a thorough review of its e-learning strategy which is informed by staff consultation. The further development of ILT to enhance teaching and learning is already recognised as a high priority and consequently the new college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) will be based on the Moodle platform which will provide greater flexibility to meet the needs of an increasingly demand led sector. The college has made significant investment in exploring the use of a range of free software tools through the Open Source initiative which will provide staff with an increased range of options in applying ILT to course design and delivery.

3.9 The quality of accommodation ranges from excellent to adequate. It is good in tourism and hospitality, computing/ICT and construction; there have been extensive improvements made to the facilities for the provision for plumbing at the Newry campus. The quality of the accommodation and resources for the engineering programmes is excellent. The accommodation for hospitality at the Armagh and Portadown campuses does not adequately reflect current industry standards, and is scheduled for refurbishment. Due to the high levels of enrolment there is insufficient capacity to provide adequate access to hospitality programmes at the Portadown campus for the school partnership programme.

3.10 The lecturers are well qualified and experienced across all of the priority skill areas. There are extensive opportunities for staff development from which almost all staff have benefitted. A majority of staff have recent and relevant industrial experience with a particularly high uptake of Lecturers Into Industry, and other industry related continuing professional development through a good range of programmes and initiatives provided by

the Business Development Unit. For example, hospitality lecturers have used to good effect their experiences provided through the Lecturers Into Industry scheme which enabled staff to avail of an excellent range of national and international placements including high profile restaurants in Dublin, New York, Florida and Manchester. The quality of the provision is enhanced further by the deployment of highly skilled local chefs who provide the students with a contemporary view of the industry. Despite the logistical challenges of the location of the college's buildings, staff are appropriately deployed. The significant investment in learning support staff, including the extensive deployment of classroom assistants, is a particular strength across the priority skill areas.

3.11 The college has forged strong collaborative arrangements with local schools through the school partnership programme and provides a good range of applied programmes, including programmes in almost all of the priority skill areas, in preparation for the implementation of the Entitlement Framework in 2013. The college has played an important role in raising awareness in the post-primary sector with regard to increasing the breadth, balance and coherence in the learning pathways offered by local schools to their pupils. The school partnership programme is reviewed annually as an integral part of the college quality assurance and improvement system; the outcomes from the review inform well the action plan for improvement, and the outcomes from the process are shared with partner schools.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

4.1 The standard of work achieved by the students on the level 2 priority skill area programmes ranges from good to excellent; in hospitality they range from very good to excellent. Across the priority skill areas, almost all of the students demonstrate good standards of motivation, behaviour and willingness to learn. Good opportunities are provided for hospitality students to participate and succeed in vocationally relevant national and international competitions, which are effective in building their level of confidence and self esteem. There are insufficient timetabled workshop sessions to enable students on the First Diploma in engineering to develop a suitable range of craft skills. In addition, there is insufficient differentiation in the mathematics and numeracy provision in the First Diploma in engineering to ensure that students achieve in line with their potential.

4.2 The standard of the students' written work ranges from satisfactory to very good; consistently high standards are evident in the work of computing/ICT, and tourism and hospitality students. The majority of students can apply effectively their knowledge of literacy and numeracy to their professional and technical work and the presentation in their folders is generally good. Almost all of the students have good standards of oral communication; many are confident communicators and respond well to questions about their work. The attendance of students is generally good although there is some variation across campuses, for example, in travel and tourism and computing/ICT. The senior management team has prioritised this issue and is implementing a range of well-considered strategies to promote consistently high attendance across the college.

4.3 In light of insurmountable problems in collating reliable data covering the last three years from two of the legacy colleges, Southern Regional College has limited its quantitative reporting regarding retention and achievement in the priority skills areas inspected, to that generated in 2007-08. The data reporting regarding the essential skills of numeracy and literacy, relates to the last two years. In the areas inspected, the average achievement rate for 2007-08 is 70%, which is well above the rate for all Northern Ireland colleges (61%). The

average achievement rate in tourism and hospitality (89%), and computing and ICT (84%) are well above the average for Northern Ireland colleges at 64% and 56% respectively. The achievement rate in construction (61%) is close to the average for all colleges (66%); the rate for engineering (64%) is below the Northern Ireland average (71%).

4.4 Over the last two years (2006-2008) the levels of achievement in the essential skills are modest in literacy (66%), and satisfactory in numeracy (72%). The achievements in numeracy on the First Diploma engineering programme are poor.

5. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1 The quality of teaching and learning is a strength of the provision inspected; almost 90% of lessons were good or better, 57% of the lessons were very good or outstanding, and 16% were outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning is particularly strong in tourism and hospitality where almost all of the lessons observed were either very good or outstanding. In the remaining curriculum areas almost all of the teaching and learning was good or better. In the essential skills of literacy and numeracy the quality of teaching and learning in a majority of lessons was good or better. There are very good examples of thoughtful planning of the assignment programme which match well the range of student ability and supports their career aspirations. In most courses a good range of teaching approaches is used effectively to engage and stimulate the students' interest in their work, including well organised demonstrations, the use of project based assignments, visiting speakers and professionals, relevant and stimulating study visits and one-to-one guidance and support. In a minority of lessons, there are examples of less effective teaching. For example, construction students receive an excessive quantity of course notes, and, in engineering, students have limited opportunities to develop their practical skills in welding and machining. With the exception of tourism and hospitality, there is a need to improve the planning for differentiated learning to raise the standards of learning and achievement for a minority of students, including more stretch and challenge for the potentially high achieving students.

5.2 The development and use of ILT continues to be a high strategic priority for the college, the senior management team has already identified important areas for improvement and is implementing a range of strategies to ensure the dissemination of existing good practice. In the courses inspected there are examples of good practice in computing and ICT, engineering, and tourism and hospitality. In essential skills, and construction the use of ILT and in particular use of the VLE, is not sufficiently well developed to promote more innovative use of ILT in classroom practice or to stimulate the development of a wider range of teaching and learning approaches.

5.3 In all of the areas inspected the quality of assessment is good; it is well-planned and set at an appropriate level. The students understand the criteria used to assess their work, almost all receive constructive feedback from their lecturers which promotes high levels of motivation, and progression in their learning. Co-ordinators regularly record, monitor and review student progress through the individual learning agreement system in computing/ICT, good use is made of the VLE to monitor and track student progress.

5.4 The students receive very good specialist careers advice and guidance from their professional and technical tutors and visiting speakers, complemented by well informed, more general advice and guidance from the two full-time college careers officers. In addition, the students based at the Newry campus receive suitably structured careers education and guidance through the provision of a useful careers pack; this good practice should be extended across the priority skill areas on all campuses. There are insufficient opportunities for all students to become better informed of career choices through the provision of work placements and industrial visits.

5.5 Learning support is a strength of the college's provision. The Assistant Director responsible for student services provides clear strategic direction for the development of student services based on a holistic approach which seeks to integrate all aspects of support. For example, support for students requiring help with numeracy and literacy, the provision of professional student counselling services, careers education, information, advice and guidance, the promotion of student health and well being, the provision of an expanding provision of student extra curricular activities and the election of the joint college students union. A learning support policy is in place which outlines clearly the college's commitment to providing comprehensive student support services. The roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly defined and effective procedures have been established for the identification, referral and provision of student support requirements. A significant minority of the students on priority skills area level 2 programmes have been identified as requiring additional support with their learning. Very good levels of support are provided for these students through the extensive provision of classroom assistants, and the additional timetabling of professional and technical staff to provide vocationally relevant support.

5.6 The students' responses to the pastoral care interviews in almost all instances report very high levels of satisfaction with their experiences of the college. The key features highlighted by almost all of the students include: the very good relationships with staff, the excellent support and encouragement provided by their course tutors, the access to a comprehensive range of additional support services, the opportunities to learn in different ways, and to develop their study skills. Most of the students reported that they enjoy being at the college, that they are clear about the standards required in their course, and that they would recommend it to a friend. A minority of students raised concerns regarding the links between their course and work experience, and the limited access to a range of extra-curricular activities.

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

- the commitment of senior management and the student services team to provide an integrated, seamless provision of learning and pastoral support;
- the established procedures, initiated by the college, for systematic inter-agency collaboration to ensure tailored student support;
- student access to a very good range of professional counselling and support services; and

- the commitment of the college to the emotional and physical health and well being of staff and students demonstrated through its involvement in the Health Promoting College project.

The Southern Regional College has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

PART THREE: REPORTS ON CURRICULAR AREAS

6. CURRICULUM AREA: COMPUTING/INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Southern Regional College offers a good range of full-time and part-time programmes in computing/Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at level 2, across its campuses in Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown. The full-time provision consists of the Edexcel level 2 BTEC First Diploma for ICT practitioners. Students on full-time courses also have the opportunity to undertake additional qualifications such as the wider key skills of Improving own Learning, and Working with Others, and essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. The part-time provision consists of a range of courses including the British Computer Society level 2 Certificate for IT Users, the OCR level 2 Diploma and Certificate for IT Users, and the CompTIA A+ programme. Appropriate progression opportunities to a range of further and higher education programmes, also exists for students.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

6.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- provision of a good range of computing/ICT programmes at level 2, with opportunities for the students to achieve additional qualifications and progress to further learning;
- very good management and co-ordination of computing/ICT programmes at level 2;
- good or better quality of the teaching and learning;
- very good standards of work produced by most of the students, who are making good progress in their learning;
- very good pastoral care and additional learning support offered to students; and
- good overall retention and success rates.

6.2.2 The main area for improvement is the:

- development of procedures to share and develop good practice across the campuses, to improve the overall learning experiences of the students.

6.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The management and co-ordination of the level 2 programmes in computing/ICT is very good. Good relationships have been established between the head of school and the various co-ordinators across the college. Staff across the college, are well qualified and experienced in the delivery of Computing/ICT programmes and are provided with appropriate

opportunities to undertake staff development. The quality of computing/ICT hardware and software is good, however, there are a number of computing resources across the campuses, which need to be updated. Good practice exists in the provision of computing/ICT programmes across the various campuses including, the development of links to a range of computing employers, the provision of appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance, and the use of innovative teaching and learning techniques. The procedures for sharing and developing good practice which would improve the overall learning experiences of students across the campuses are currently underdeveloped.

6.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The standards of work produced by most of the students across the level 2 programmes in computing/ICT, are very good. They are working at an appropriate level and are confident in using a range of software packages. On full-time programmes, a majority of the students have been identified as having additional support needs. However, they are responsive to their lecturers, are well motivated and are making good progress in the development of their ICT skills and in addressing their essential skills needs in literacy and numeracy. Over the past two years, the overall retention rate for the level 2 programmes is good at 86%, the success rate is good at 89% and progression to further education, training or employment is also good at 79%. Attendance on full-time programmes, during the inspection, was variable across the campuses.

6.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning is good or better in the lessons observed. The lecturers are well prepared, and the quality of their teaching and learning materials is good. They use a good range of teaching approaches and make appropriate use of ILT to support their teaching and learning. Staff have developed a good range of resources which are available on the college VLE. The quality of assessment is also very good; standardised assignments have been developed for programmes across the campuses and they are at an appropriate standard for the students. The quality of the pastoral care and support for students is very good, particularly for those students who have been identified as having additional learning or support needs. The lecturers and learning support staff work well together to address these identified learning needs. Students on computing/ICT programmes across the college have access to appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance and most of the students interviewed during the inspection, were aware of careers opportunities in computing/ICT and the various progression routes available to them.

6.6 CONCLUSION

In computing/ICT programmes at level 2, the quality of education provided by the Southern Regional College is very good. The college is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

7. CURRICULUM AREA: CONSTRUCTION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Southern Regional College provides a good range of technician and craft further education programmes at level 2 delivered at the Armagh, Newry and Portadown campuses. This provision is supplemented by the extensive range of level 2 craft programmes offered by the college's training school. Over the last three years, 622 students enrolled on a level 2 construction programme. However, in 2008/09, enrolments have declined by approximately one-third to 147. The main programmes running this year are the Edexcel First Diploma in construction, the City and Guilds Technical Certificate in mechanical engineering services (plumbing) and City and Guilds computer aided design courses. There are good opportunities for progression to level 3 technician programmes at the Armagh, Newry and Portadown campuses.

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS

7.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- excellent retention and success rates in the plumbing course;
- good work experience provided for the plumbing students;
- good physical resources in plumbing on the Greenbank campus;
- good use of project based teaching in a minority of the units in the First Diploma in construction;
- good standards of work produced by most of the students; and
- monitoring of students progress in the First Diploma in construction.

7.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- provision of more practical activities, and site visits in the First Diploma programme;
- increased recruitment to level 2 further education programmes across the campuses; and
- excessive quantity of course notes the students receive.

7.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Head of School was appointed in September 2008 and is currently reviewing the provision. It is planned to introduce a First Certificate in construction next year, to meet the identified needs of schools. The courses are well managed by the course co-ordinators, and the recent introduction of a progress tracking sheet in the First Diploma has proved to be successful in motivating students to complete assignments. The students on the plumbing course attend college two days each week; one day is allocated to practical activities and the

second allocated to theory. All the students are on relevant work experience for three days each week. The upgrading of accommodation and resources have been prioritised appropriately; the plumbing workshops in the Newry campus have been extended and modernised to include a level 2 workshop, a level 3 workshop and a new gas workshop is nearing completion.

7.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The average retention and success rates over the last three years are satisfactory at 74% and 79% respectively. A total of 363 students achieved their qualification from a total of 622 enrolled, giving an average achievement rate of 58% which is below the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland, at 66%. The retention and success rates in the plumbing course over the last two years since it commenced, are excellent with an achievement rate of 96%. The plumbing students develop a good range of practical skills and nearly all secure employment and progress to an apprenticeship programme. The standard of most of the students work in the First Diploma is good with students producing accurate and well presented work in their drawing assignments. Most of the students are well behaved and the classes have good attendance.

7.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

A project approach based on a domestic garage is used in the delivery of some units in the first diploma. This provides a good context to which the students relate and which helps them to understand the concept of working from a plan to produce a list of materials. To date there have been no site visits to enable the students to further contextualize the theory from the course and to contribute to their preparation for work experience, scheduled towards the end of the programme. At present the course has an imbalance towards theory; this has been identified in the course self-evaluation, and planning is underway to introduce more practical work next year. In the plumbing course, the students spend a full day in practical sessions, and a further day on theory each week. The practical work and theory lessons are planned to complement each other, however, the theory classes are long and there is insufficient active engagement by students in their learning. Information and Learning Technology is used in both courses, consisting mainly of PowerPoint presentations with relevant photographs. In a minority of instances, however, it would be more appropriate to use the readily available physical components or models. The students receive too many course notes and, on occasions, the level of the technical language employed by the lecturers is not well matched to the literacy levels of some of the students.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In the area of construction, the quality of education 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 college has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

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

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The range of level 2 engineering programmes comprises a full-time First Diploma in engineering, extensive provision of the First Certificate in engineering for local post-primary schools, and short part-time computer-aided design (CAD) courses. The full-time First Diploma has just commenced in September 2008 on the Newry campus. Currently, 17 students are enrolled on this programme most of whom have progressed from local post-primary schools. Over the last two years, 40 year 11, and year 12 pupils have completed successfully a First Certificate in engineering; currently a total of 103 pupils are enrolled on this programme. Recruitment to CAD courses is healthy; currently, 98 learners are enrolled across eight part-time classes held on the Portadown and Newry campuses. Most of the full-time students do not hold a level 2 qualification in literacy or numeracy on entry to their programme.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

8.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- good development of the provision for post-primary schools;
- very good to excellent standards of most of the students' work;
- excellent retention rate;
- good or better quality of the teaching and learning;
- excellent quality of the learning facilities and resources; and
- very good co-ordination of the programmes.

8.2.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- modest success rate in computer-aided design;
- insufficient differentiation in the students' numeracy and mathematics provision; and
- narrow range of accredited further education courses at level 2 offered across the college.

8.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management is very good. The provision is well-led with an appropriate focus on developing the First Diploma/Certificate programmes. Through effective partnerships with local post-primary schools, there is a well co-ordinated First Certificate programme for pupils in years 11 and 12. Combined with the college's full-time First Diploma, these programmes provide an excellent foundation for students to progress to

level 3 technician programmes. The comprehensive provision of nationally recognised, part-time CAD programmes is organised well to meet the needs of all students. All the programmes are resourced and supported well with industry standard hardware and software, learning support material, and regular staff development. The electronic laboratories are excellent; they are bright, well-maintained and equipped with modern computer design and manufacturing facilities. The CAD resources are updated regularly to ensure they are matched well to industry practice. The current range of accredited further education courses offered at level 2 across the campuses, is narrow.

8.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The standards of most of the students' work are very good or excellent. The students' practical skills and their understanding of engineering principles are well-developed. They are able to complete design and manufacturing tasks using industry standard processes to a very good standard. These tasks include three-dimensional computer modeling of engineering components, electronic computer design and analysis of circuits, and the production of functional electronic circuits. The range and level of the skills and knowledge they develop prepares them well for progression to higher level programmes and enhances significantly their employability skills. The students' ability to work as part of a team, problem solve, and take responsibility for their own learning are variable. A minority of the full-time students has poor attendance, and their study skills are underdeveloped. Retention rates on the CAD programmes vary from poor to excellent, and on average are modest at 65%. The average success rate is excellent at 94%.

8.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of the learning and teaching varies from good to excellent; it is mainly very good or excellent. A good range of well-planned teaching strategies is used effectively to stimulate the students' learning and engagement. These include appropriately challenging computer-based design tasks, investigations and problem-solving activities, and electronic circuit construction. There are insufficient opportunities for the First Diploma students to develop practical mechanical engineering skills, including welding and fabrication skills. Good progress is evident in the use of ILT to support and enhance the students' learning experiences; PowerPoint presentations and interactive whiteboards are used frequently to enhance the teaching. Although there is increasing application of the college's VLE to support the students' learning, its use is underdeveloped; it is mainly a repository for course material, lecture notes and assignment briefs. Assessment activities are well-planned and students are provided with comprehensive feedback on how to improve their work. First Diploma students are provided with assignment workshops to support them in the completion of their assignments. The numeracy and mathematics provision for First Diploma students is satisfactory. However, there is insufficient differentiation in learning and assessment, and as a consequence a minority of the students make insufficient progress in their learning and achievement.

8.6 CONCLUSION

Across the areas inspected, the quality of the education provided is good. The engineering provision has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified key areas for improvement, which the college has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

9. CURRICULUM: ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The majority of students enrolled on full-time PSA level 2 courses had not attained a grade C or better in GCSE English and mathematics. All full-time students who have an identified literacy and numeracy need are set individual targets in literacy and numeracy, as appropriate, through essential skills. At the time of the inspection, 271 learners were enrolled on essential skills courses.

9.1 MAIN FINDINGS

9.1.1 The main strengths are the:

- well informed strategic and operational revision of the essential skills provision;
- shared management and leadership responsibility for the implementation, monitoring, review and evaluation of essential skills;
- increased professional confidence, and high levels of motivation and commitment of the essential skills staff at all levels; and
- improved opportunities for continuing professional development including staff involvement in the Lecturers into Industry scheme, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (Northern Ireland) numeracy project, and the in-house mentoring support programme.

9.1.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- achievement rates in literacy and numeracy in external assessments;
- use of the outcomes of initial assessment in the planning for more effective, differentiated teaching and learning; and
- further development of the self-evaluation process to take fuller account of the performance and progression in essential skills across and within the priority skills areas.

9.2 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management in essential skills in the Southern Regional College is very good. An effective review of the provision has been carried out by the Assistant Director for Curriculum, and the head of school. The outcomes of the review process, and the implementation of the subsequent action plan were fully supported by the

senior management. The college uses a distributed leadership and management model for essential skills, wherein the heads of school have a shared responsibility for the improvement of the quality of the provision within their school. The college has established a good structure and system for the cross-college co-ordination of essential skills. Within this system the co-ordinators have developed a group folder on the VLE, through which both full and part-time staff can access resources and relevant information. The current leadership and management model has impacted positively on teaching staff, and on their confidence in their delivery of essential skills to the 16+ cohorts undertaking priority skills programmes. A mentorship programme has been introduced, and it is working effectively to support staff and to promote improvement. However, the self-evaluation process needs to be more focused on the quality of the essential skills provision within the priority skill areas at level 2 in order to improve outcomes. In order to ensure ongoing improvement, leaders and managers at all levels need to ensure that the self-evaluation process is robust across the essential skills provision.

9.3 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

In the majority of lessons inspected, students are well motivated and demonstrate good levels of oral communication. The majority of students can apply effectively their knowledge of literacy and numeracy to their professional and technical work and the presentation of their professional and technical folders is generally good. The standards of written work of most of the students in their essential skills classes range from poor to good, and are mostly satisfactory. While the college has made good progress in engaging and retaining students on essential skills programmes, as demonstrated by the excellent retention rate of 91% over a two year period, achievements in external assessments in literacy, over the same two year period, are modest at 66%, and are satisfactory in numeracy at 72%.

9.4 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of the provision for learning in essential skills is good overall. All staff are highly motivated and are fully committed to the progress of their students. Staff provide excellent, well-focused one-to-one support in the course of their lessons, and students benefit from the individual attention. However, while an initial assessment process is carried out for each student, the results are not used sufficiently to plan for differentiated teaching and learning. Students participate in a wide range of learning activities and lessons are generally purposeful and appropriately paced. There are good opportunities for discussion, and the majority of students make appropriate links between the work in their essential skills classes and their professional and technical skill development.

9.5 CONCLUSION

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

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

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The Southern Regional College, which is recognised by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) as a centre of excellence for tourism and hospitality, provides a wide 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 1 to level 5 programmes within the college. Recruitment on all level 2 programmes has almost doubled over the past two years, with 105 students recruited in the current year. Only 22% of the students recruited to level 2 courses have achieved on entry, two GCSE passes at grades A* to C. The majority (62%) has not achieved grade C or better in English, and most (88%) have not achieved at least grade C in mathematics.

10.2 MAIN FINDINGS

10.2.1 The main strengths are the:

- excellent leadership of the curriculum area;
- wide range of links developed with key stakeholders;
- very good or excellent quality of almost all of the teaching;
- good retention, and excellent success and progression rates; and
- high expectations of the tutors, and the mostly very good or excellent standards of work achieved by the students.

10.2.2 The main area for improvement is:

- access to ICT resources in the Armagh and Portadown campuses.

10.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The college's senior management team is fully supportive of the centre of excellence, and has demonstrated its commitment through the provision of up to date kitchen equipment requested by lecturers following their Lecturers Into Industry placements. The quality of the leadership and management is excellent. The Head of School provides clear strategic leadership for the development of the provision across the college and is actively involved in a diverse range of tourism and hospitality initiatives, which include mentoring small businesses in customer service, marketing and selling skills. The co-ordination of the programmes is effective in ensuring high standards of teaching and achievement. The communication within and across course teams is excellent; team meetings are held regularly and provide a valuable opportunity for course team members to evaluate the quality,

relevance and appropriateness of the programmes, and amend course design when necessary. Strong external links have been developed with an extensive range of tourism and hospitality organisations. These are used to good effect to support teaching and learning through the provision of work placements, meal experiences, careers talks, educational visits, sponsorship and mentoring support for students.

10.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Almost all of the students are highly motivated and hard-working; they take pride in their work and respond positively to their lecturers. With few exceptions, timekeeping and attendance are very good. The standards of the students' work are mainly very good, with examples of excellent work being achieved on the NVQ provision. The lecturers set and expect high standards of work from the students, with a strong emphasis on developing the personal skills and transferable qualities that are needed in a work situation. The standards of almost all of the students' oral skills are very good, and in some instances, they are excellent. Similarly, the written work produced by nearly all the students is very good; however, the errors in spelling and syntax in the written work of a small number of students are not adequately addressed. The average retention rate for the full-time programmes is good at 87%, and the average success rate is excellent at 90%. This is an achievement rate of 89% which is well above the average (64%) for colleges in Northern Ireland. The progression rate to further education, training or employment is excellent at over 90%.

10.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The students are provided with excellent programmes of learning to prepare them to work in industry or to progress to higher level courses. The programmes are well-balanced and appropriately well planned, providing the students with excellent opportunities to develop their practical skills, and their knowledge and understanding of the tourism and hospitality industry. The students are provided with very good opportunities to undertake additional professional and technical qualifications and units, including NVQ level 2 in food and drink service, food hygiene, patisserie and customer service. The quality of almost all of the teaching is very good or excellent; it is excellent in one-third of the lessons. The lecturers use competently a wide range of suitable teaching strategies, including clear exposition, well organised demonstrations and workshops, opportunities to participate in local and international competitions, visits to trade shows and European cultural visits. They are well-experienced, passionate and hard-working; most have undertaken recent industrial experience through the Lecturers into Industry initiative, or through continuous professional development in the industry. The assessment of the students' work is regular and thorough, and almost all of the lecturers provide evaluative and constructive feedback to the students. The course co-ordinators they regularly and effectively monitor, review and record the students progress through the Individual Student Learning Agreement system.

10.6 CONCLUSION

The quality of education and training within the centre of excellence for tourism and hospitality is excellent; the quality of pastoral care is also excellent. The college has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

PART FOUR

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the Southern Regional College is very good. The college is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

11.2 The college provides a very good range of courses in the priority skills areas at level 2. The inspection has identified significant strengths in the provision, including the strong strategic leadership, the quality of the teaching and learning, the well embedded system of quality assurance and improvement and the arrangements for pastoral care.

12. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- to develop further the use of ILT to enhance teaching and learning to help raise the level of student achievement across all campuses;
- to extend the excellent links with industry as evidenced in tourism and hospitality to all level 2 courses across the college; and
- to continue to embed a strong corporate commitment to quality improvement which is based on the involvement of staff at all levels in the rigorous self-evaluation of their work and associated development planning processes.

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