



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Tier 4 Educational Oversight
Inspection

North West Academy

Report of an Inspection
February 2014

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1. Context

North West Academy is a private limited company which was established in 2003. It has been operating out of its current premises, close to the centre of Derry city, since 2010. North West Academy is accredited by the British Council, is a World Host training centre, and is a registered International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 centre. It is also a member of English UK, the representative body of English language schools across the United Kingdom, and a member of its sub-group English UK Northern Ireland (NI).

North West Academy offers a wide range of English language courses to learners which are certified in-house and are aligned to all levels of the Common European Framework (CEF) for languages; they include a General English course on which learners can enrol continuously at all levels, intensive English courses, summer and winter school English courses, and custom designed English courses for organisations or groups of learners. It also offers preparation courses for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the University of Cambridge English language examinations.

As an open test centre for Trinity College London Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE), North West Academy offers examination courses at all levels for its own learners, and end-test facilities for learners from other institutions. It is also a test centre for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC).

All of the learners enrolled on English language courses in North West Academy are fee paying and are either privately funded or funded through a European Union project such as the Leonardo da Vinci or Erasmus programmes. Nearly all (91%) of the current learners are participants on European Union funded projects. Learners can attend North West Academy in a number of different ways: as a language only learner; a language and work placement learner; or a work placement only learner. North West Academy organises work placements for these learners who are required to undertake work experience as part of their European project, and individual work placements can also be arranged for privately funded learners. A majority of the learners who enrol on courses in North West Academy are adults from a range of European countries and ethnic backgrounds.

During the period from January 2010 to December 2013, 2251 learners completed in-house certified courses; of these, nearly all (97%) completed a General English course at various levels and the remainder completed custom designed English courses. Over the same period, 117 learners completed the University of Cambridge and the IELTS examination preparation courses, and 134 learners completed the Trinity College London (GESE) examinations at various levels.

At the time of the inspection, 79 learners were undertaking a General English course at various levels, and 35 learners had just completed their English language course as part of a winter school programme. None of the learners were undertaking examinations or examination preparation courses. All of the learners were adults, and there was a balanced gender mix of male and female learners.

2. Overall Finding

Overall, the quality of education provided by North West Academy is satisfactory and meets the necessary standards for Tier 4 Educational Oversight inspections.

Overall effectiveness	Satisfactory
Achievements and standards	Satisfactory
Provision	Satisfactory
Leadership and management	Satisfactory

What does North West Academy need to do to improve?

1. To develop more integrated and cohesive systems to plan and manage all aspects of the learning programmes, including more formal arrangements to record and report on the progress and achievements of the learners.
2. To formalise and develop further the processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, to support on-going improvement in the overall quality of the provision across the organisation.

3. Key findings of the inspection

Achievements and standards

All of the learners observed are progressing well in their learning. Most of them have developed an appropriate level of reading skills and spoken English, in line with the requirements of their course; a small number demonstrate a high level of conversational skills. The learners participate enthusiastically in their learning and work well, both individually and in small groups, to complete tasks and, at times, share and present their findings to their peers.

There was limited evidence available during the inspection of the quality of the learners' writing skills. North West Academy should consider the development of a more formal and effective process to record and report on the development of these skills by the learners.

Over the past four years, all of the learners who enrolled on General English courses, custom designed courses, examination preparation courses, or examination courses were retained (100%). Over the same period, in the in-house certified General English courses and custom designed courses, nearly all (99%) of the learners achieved their qualification at their targeted level, and in the Trinity (GESE) examinations all of the learners (100%) achieved their targeted qualification.

Provision

The North West Academy offers an appropriate curriculum for the learners. Management and staff work hard to continually review the provision, update and develop an appropriate range of relevant paper-based and electronic learning resources, and source suitable work placements for the learners.

In all of the teaching sessions observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good or better. Most of the tutors planned well for the learning and used an appropriate range of teaching strategies, including the effective use of information learning technology, to motivate and engage the learners. The learners participated well and there was evidence of mutual respect and good relationships between them and their tutors. In all of the sessions,

the tutors made effective use of a range of relevant learning resources, both paper-based and electronic, and there was evidence of good assessment for learning; for example, the effective use of questioning and the regular recapping of the lesson content. The quality of the workplace training session observed was also good; it was well-planned to meet the needs of the learners.

Processes are in place for staff to monitor learner progress and achievement, however, these need to be more formalised and developed further to allow them to record and report more effectively on the overall progress made by the learners during their courses.

The processes for learner induction are well developed and include a presentation for new learners on how the school operates, information on the learning facilities, personal advice and guidance and safety tips for the learners, the distribution of a detailed student handbook, and an orientation tour of the city. While the processes in place to prepare learners for the workplace are also appropriate and comprehensive, they tend to be mostly information sessions; more effective strategies need to be developed to engage the learners and make these sessions more interactive and enjoyable.

Effective arrangements are in place to support the pastoral care, additional learning support needs and well-being of the learners, both on an individual and group basis. The learners appreciate the good support they receive from the staff; the feedback from the learner pastoral care questionnaires and the learner focus group meeting indicates that the learners are positive about the quality of the provision and are aware of what to do or who to speak to if they have any worries about any aspects of their learning, or personal issues.

Appropriate learning support and relaxation facilities are in place for the learners including a library and a social area with access to computer equipment, and these are used well. Information is available on the range of social and cultural events, and places of interest in the city and across Northern Ireland, and staff have also organised a varied programme of social events and trips for the learners to participate in during their time at the school.

The North West Academy promotes effectively the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.

Leadership and management

The English language provision in North West Academy is managed well at both a strategic and operational level. An appropriate management and staffing structure is in place and the roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly defined. An appropriate range of policies and procedures have been developed to guide and support staff and learners.

The teaching staff are well qualified and are mostly well experienced. All of the staff are provided with appropriate opportunities to identify and undertake relevant continuous professional development.

The accommodation for teaching and learning is of a high quality and is well maintained. The learners also report that the residential accommodation, including that of the host families, is also of an appropriate quality and any issues identified are dealt with effectively and in a timely manner by staff.

The North West Academy has established a wide range of links and partnerships with local, regional, national, and international organisations and businesses, schools, universities, support agencies, and public and government bodies, to support and further develop the range of its provision.

While a management information system is in place and processes are used to register and enrol learners and manage their performance, they tend to be separate and disjointed and not as effective as they could be. Management need to consider the development and implementation of a more integrated and cohesive management information system to allow staff to plan and manage all aspects of the learning programmes, and the learner journey, more effectively.

The processes in place to review and monitor the quality of the provision are also under-developed. Management need to formalise and further develop the processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, to support on-going improvement in the overall quality of the provision across the organisation.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the quality of education provided by North West Academy is satisfactory and meets the necessary standards for Tier 4 Educational Oversight inspections. Strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The Education and Training Inspectorate will continue to monitor the quality of the provision in North West Academy through the annual health check process.

5. Inspection method and evidence base

The Education and Training Inspectorate (the ETI) is the approved Educational Oversight body in Northern Ireland authorised by the Home Office to inspect privately funded further education providers and private language schools, which offer provision up to and including level 3 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The ETI carried out a two-phase inspection of the provision for English language courses in North West Academy in December 2013 and February 2014. The inspection focused on:

- the quality of the leadership and management of the organisation;
- the achievements and standards; and
- the quality of the provision for learning.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection in these three aspects of privately funded further education providers and private language schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available on the ETI website <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/tier-4-educational-oversight-2011/tier-4-educational-oversight-inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework.pdf>

A team of two inspectors observed a total of 5 directed training sessions, one learner induction session, one work place preparation session, and carried out one workplace visit. The inspectors held discussions with management and key staff in the organisation, observed the administrative systems in place to manage learner enrolments and work placements, scrutinised key planning and monitoring documentation including company policies, looked at paper-based and electronic learning resources, and evaluated the organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation.

The inspection also focused on the arrangements for care, support and guidance and safeguarding of vulnerable groups. The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the learners to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. The inspectors also held a focus group meeting with learners during the inspection.

Pastoral Care and Safeguarding

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Learners	50	27	54	4

6. Information about North West Academy

Current registrations by programme

Programme	Type of attendance	Enrolments	
		Private learners	Learners on EU funded projects
General English courses (in-house certified)	Language only	2	0
	Language and work placement	5	48
	Work placement only	0	24
Total		7 (9%)	72 (91%)
Overall		79	

Overall summary table of performance (over the past 4 years) ¹

Programme	Number enrolled	Retention	Achievement (inc partial achievements)
General/Intensive/Summer School/Winter School English courses (in-house certified)	2177	2177 (100%)	2176 (99%)
Custom Designed Courses (in-house certified)	74	74 (100%)	74 (100%)
Total	2251	2251 (100%)	2250 (99%)
Cambridge /IELTS (examination preparation courses)	117	117 (100%)	n/a
Trinity GESE (examination courses)	134	134 (100%)	134 (100%)

¹ All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by North West Academy

Qualitative terms used by ETI

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%

Performance Levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate use the following performance levels for (Tier 4) Educational Oversight inspections:

Performance Level
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	<p>The percentage of learners who complete their English language course, out of the number of learners enrolled at the beginning of the course.</p> <p>$\text{Retention Rate} = \frac{\text{Number Completed}}{\text{Number Enrolled}}$</p>
Achievement	<p>The percentage of learners who completed and achieved all, or partially achieved some, of the components of their English language course.</p> <p>$\text{Achievement Rate} = \frac{(\text{Full Achievement} + \text{Partial Achievement})}{\text{Number Complete}}$</p>

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