



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in South Eastern Regional College

Report of an Inspection
in February-March 2011



CONTENTS

Section	Page
PART ONE: SUMMARY	
1.	CONTEXT
2.	PROVISION
3.	THE INSPECTION
4.	MAIN FINDINGS
PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION	
5.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT
6.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS
7.	QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING
PART THREE: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREA REPORTS	
8.	BEAUTY THERAPY
9.	ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING
10.	ESSENTIAL SKILLS
11.	HAIRDRESSING
12.	HOSPITALITY AND CATERING
13.	MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
14.	PLUMBING
15.	REFRIGERATION
16.	RETAIL FINANCIAL SERVICES
17.	SKILLS FOR YOUR LIFE AND SKILLS FOR WORK (156 WEEKS)
18.	TRANSPORTATION MAINTENANCE
19.	WOOD OCCUPATIONS
PART FOUR: CONCLUSION AND KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT	
20.	CONCLUSION
21.	KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT
	APPENDIX

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%

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by the South Eastern Regional College.

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate use the following performance levels in reports:

Performance Level
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

1.1 The South Eastern Regional College (SERC) supplies Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes for the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) in four main contract areas, Down, North Down, Ards and Lisburn. It also supplies training across a wider geographical area in a number of specialist professional and technical areas, including construction plant maintenance, polymer processing and refrigeration and air conditioning.

1.2 The main sites for the delivery of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes are the main College campuses which are located in Downpatrick, Bangor, Newtownards and Lisburn. New buildings have been opened recently on three of these sites and a total investment of £80 million pounds has been made in accommodation and specialist resources.

1.3 Approximately 84% of the trainees and apprentices on the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes live within the College's four main contract areas. The remaining 16% are drawn from other areas across Northern Ireland. While the South Eastern Regional College's main catchment area is relatively affluent, there are pockets of deprivation within it. There are a number of wards within the Ards, Downpatrick and Lisburn local government areas that are within Northern Ireland's most deprived quintile, as measured by the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2010. Analysis undertaken by the College demonstrates that a significant proportion of the trainees registered on the Skills for Work strand of Training for Success come from areas with higher levels of social deprivation.

2. PROVISION

2.1 Since 2007, the South Eastern Regional College has been contracted by the Department to supply training under the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programme in a range of professional and technical areas including: beauty therapy; electrical installation/engineering; hairdressing; hospitality and catering; mechanical engineering; plumbing; refrigeration and air conditioning; transportation maintenance; and wood occupations. The College also offers the Skills for Your Life and both strands of the Skills for Work programmes.

2.2 At the time of the inspection, a total of 1,239 trainees and apprentices were enrolled on Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. Of these, 337 (27%) were on ApprenticeshipsNI programmes, 660 (53%) were Programme-Led apprentices, with the remainder spread across the other strands of Training for Success. In recent years, mainly as a result of the economic downturn, there has been a marked change to the enrolment pattern within training programmes in the College, with a major shift in the balance between apprentices and non-employed trainees. In February 2009, for example, the South Eastern Regional College had 546 (45%) trainees and 665 (55%) apprentices. In February 2011, in contrast, only just over one-quarter, 327 (26%), of the total numbers enrolled were apprentices and almost three-quarters, 912 (74%) were non-employed trainees on Skills for Your Life, Skills for Work and Programme-Led Apprenticeship programmes. The College reports that this significant shift has created considerable challenges in sourcing work placements. At the time of the inspection, it is a concern that almost one-half (48%) of the trainees on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme either did not have a placement, or had left or lost their placement.

2.3 In February 2011, the highest enrolments on the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes were in transportation maintenance (262), of whom 30

(13%) and 17 (8%) were on the level 2 and level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes respectively, 153 (68%) were Programme-Led apprentices, eleven (5%) and 13 (6%) were on the Skills for Work 52 week and Skills for Work 156 week strands of Training for Success respectively. Of the 223 trainees and apprentices in wood occupations, 26 (12%) and 21(9%) were on the level 2 and level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes respectively, 119 (53%) were Programme-Led apprentices, 15 (7%)and 42 (19%) were on the Skills for Work 52 weeks and Skills for Work 156 week strands respectively. In hairdressing, of the 161 trainees and apprentices, 29 (18%) and 14 (9%) were on the level 2 and level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes respectively, 59 (37%) were Programme-Led apprentices, 42 (26%) and 16 (10%) were on the Skills for Work 52 week and Skills for Work 156 week strands respectively.

2.4 Of the 97 trainees and apprentices in plumbing, ten (10%) were on the level 2 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes and 87 (90%) were Programme-Led apprentices. In hospitality and catering, there were 80 trainees and apprentices, of whom nine (11%) and five (7%) were on Level 2 and level 3 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes respectively, 24 (30%) were Programme-Led apprentices, nine (11%) and 33 (41%) were on the Skills for Work 52 weeks and Skills for Work 156 week strands respectively. Other significant professional and technical areas included beauty therapy (40), electrical installation/engineering (73), mechanical engineering (32), and refrigeration and air conditioning (47). In addition, a group of 51 apprentices was undertaking training in retail financial services (general insurance pathway). There were 17 trainees on the Skills for Your Life strand of Training for Success and, across all professional and technical areas, a total of 146 trainees on Skills for Work 156 week strands.

2.5 Training is delivered by a total of 174 lecturing and support staff and trainees are supported on their programmes by 17 Training Support Officers, two of whom are additional staff employed over the past year to cope with the increasing need to locate additional work

placements. With the exception of the retail financial services programme, which has been subcontracted to another provider, Paragon Skills for Industry, all training is delivered by the South Eastern Regional College. The College has engaged with 510 employers who provide either employment or work experience placement for trainees and apprentices on the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes.

2.6 Currently, 773 of the trainees and apprentices are undertaking essential skills in literacy, 732 in numeracy and 730 in information and communication technology (ICT). The remainder of the trainees and apprentices are exempt from the essential skills as a result of their prior achievements.

2.7 Overall leadership and management of the contract is the responsibility of the Director of Learning and Customer Support; responsibility for the operational management of the provision is the responsibility of the Head of Training, who is supported by two Assistant Heads of Training. The team receives regular support from the College personnel who take responsibility for a variety of centralised support functions including quality assurance, pastoral care and student support services. The progress reviews for the trainees and apprentices are undertaken by the Training Support Officers.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 In February 2011, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out an inspection of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. An inspection team of twelve inspectors, five associate assessors and one professional associate observed a total of 183 training sessions, and interviewed 285 trainees and 147 apprentices in directed training. Workplace visits were made to 53 trainees and 110 apprentices. Extended discussions were held with the Head of Training, Assistant Heads of Training, Training Support Officers, the Head of Learning Support, administrative staff,

professional and technical tutors and essential skills tutors, and with senior managers from the College, including the Principal and Chief Executive, Director of Learning and Customer Support, Director of Curriculum and Information Services, Heads of Quality Excellence and Development, Head of SERC Extra, Head of Pastoral Care, relevant Heads and Assistant Heads of School and staff from the Management Information Service. The team also examined samples of the trainees' and apprentices' work, portfolios of evidence and personal training plans (PTPs). The team scrutinised the organisation's self-evaluation reports and quality improvement plans for work-based training across the professional and technical areas, and other relevant documentation.

3.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups includes the opportunity for trainees and apprentices to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings by the inspection team with groups of them across professional and technical areas. Four hundred questionnaires were issued to trainees and apprentices, 223 (56%) of which were returned to the Inspectorate; there were 48 additional written comments. The returns show that the trainees and apprentices indicate that their experiences in the South Eastern Regional College are very good. In particular, they appreciate the quality of the training, the good support they receive from staff, and the quality of the accommodation. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with trainees and apprentices to the Principal and Chief Executive.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional 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 South

Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good leadership provided by the Head of Training;
- breadth of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI provision;
- very good links with industry in a range of professional and technical areas;
- good or better quality of the teaching, training, and learning across almost all of the training programmes;
- effectiveness of the information and learning technology (ILT) and pedagogy mentorship programme in supporting and enhancing teaching, training and learning.
- good quality of most of the work placements and the work-based training; and
- excellent accommodation and specialist resources in almost all of the professional and technical areas.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- retention and success rates across most of the training programmes;
- inadequate provision in mechanical engineering;
- strengthening of the quality assurance arrangements, to include improved procedures for the collation and analysis of data, and a more specific focus on standards and achievements within and across all of the aspects of the training programmes; and
- balance and design of the Programme-Led apprenticeship programmes, to ensure that all of the programmes provide sufficient opportunities for the development of appropriate professional and technical skills.

Table of Grades

Overall Performance Level	Good
Contributory performance levels	
Leadership and Management	Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Quality of Provision for Learning	Very Good
Area of Learning	
Beauty Therapy	Very Good
Electrical installation/Engineering	Good
Essential Skills	Satisfactory
Hairdressing	Very Good
Hospitality and Catering	Very Good
Mechanical Engineering	Inadequate

Plumbing	Good
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	Very Good
Retail Financial Services	Good
Transportation Maintenance	Good
Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work (156 weeks)	Good
Wood Occupations	Satisfactory

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The leadership and management of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes is mostly good. The South Eastern Regional College has an extensive provision across a range of professional and technical areas, some of which is unique in Northern Ireland, including for example, refrigeration and air conditioning and polymer processing and the provision in retail financial services which meets a skills need for the insurance industry and is supplied by only a small number of providers in Northern Ireland. The innovative Polymer Apprenticeship programme, developed in partnership with the Northern Ireland Polymers Association, provides specialist training matched well to employers' needs. With the exception of mechanical engineering, where the curriculum provision is narrow, and the training programmes do not meet effectively the needs of local employers, the provision in most of the professional and technical areas is matched well to the demands of the local and regional economy.

5.2 The Head of Training, ably supported by the two Assistant Heads, provides very good leadership, characterised by strong professional relationships and open channels of communication. A commitment to improving the quality of the teaching, training and learning has been a key objective in the College's strategic plan to improve the provision for trainees and apprentices. The College has made a major investment in ILT and a clear, shared vision for ILT is a central strand of the whole-college quality improvement strategy. An ILT pedagogy mentorship programme has been implemented to good effect across both the professional and technical areas, and in the essential skills.

5.3 The ILT pedagogy mentorship programme has been developed to improve the quality of directed training sessions, for example, through stimulating trainees and

apprentices by using a range of different teaching techniques, complemented, where appropriate, with the use of new technologies to enhance learning. Fifteen ILT pedagogy mentors have been recruited and 185 staff across the College have been provided with ILT pedagogy support to date. The programme has been particularly effective in enhancing the quality of the teaching, training and learning, and has enabled tutors across the professional and technical areas to develop their confidence and skills in the use of ILT. Good use is also made of ILT to communicate with trainees and apprentices, and with parents.

5.4 Trainees on the Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work strands benefit from an appropriate curriculum, with a good range of vocational areas on offer and a strong emphasis on the trainees' acquisition of the essential skills along with relevant vocational and other work-readiness skills. Trainees are enrolled, for the most part, on programmes, and related vocational areas, most suited to their needs. In contrast, the quality of the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programmes is variable across the professional and technical areas and ranges from good to inadequate. In beauty therapy, hairdressing, hospitality and catering and refrigeration, and air conditioning, most of the trainees, including the Programme-Led apprentices, benefit from cohesive and vocationally-relevant training programmes, which are effective in developing their professional and technical skills to an appropriate level. However, in the majority of the professional and technical areas, the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programmes lack coherence in structure with too much time allocated to employability provision, at the expense of additional practical skills training.

5.5 The overall management of the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme, including the monitoring and evaluation of the trainees' learning experiences, needs to be strengthened by the College. The design of the curriculum for the Programme-Led apprentices needs to be reviewed and revised to ensure a more balanced programme, which allows for more opportunities for the trainees to develop and apply practical and occupational skills. While the employability aspect of the programme, which is timetabled for

approximately four hours each week, is generally well- planned and delivered, many of the trainees reported that they had covered much of the content previously while at school. Furthermore, there are insufficient linkages between the taught employability programme and the work completed by trainees in their tutorial session or in the setting of targets, particularly those targets relating to the development of employability skills within their personal training plans. The provision for the Programme-Led apprentices in mechanical engineering is inadequate and those who are not attending essential skills are not meeting the minimum attendance requirements.

5.6 The South Eastern Regional College, in common with many other providers, has faced major challenges in dealing with the increasing numbers of non-employed trainees as a result of the economic downturn. While it has employed additional Training Support Officers to deal with this challenge and to recruit more employers to find additional work placements for these trainees, only 343 (52%) of the 660 Programme-Led apprentices are currently in a work placement, and this is an issue which requires immediate attention. There is also a need for strategies to be implemented which replicate the good practice which has been developed in a minority of professional and technical areas, in creating innovative projects and cross-curricular activities to enable those trainees and Programme-Led apprentices without placements to engage in activities which enable them to develop effectively their practical occupational skills and capacities. This is an issue which needs to be addressed by senior management as a matter of urgency.

5.7 The Head of Training is supported well in the operational management of the programmes by senior and middle managers from key functional areas from across the College, including Student Support Services, Quality Excellence and Development, and Management Information Services. While a good start has been made to the adaptation and extension of college-wide systems and processes to support the specific requirements of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes more remains to be done,

particularly in relation to the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements, to ensure that they identify reliably and consistently any weaknesses in provision, such as the current procedures for the collation and use of data and the inadequate provision in mechanical engineering.

5.8 The arrangements for additional learning support are satisfactory. Action taken by senior management, for example, includes the allocation of additional funding from the overall College budget for the financial year 2010/2011, to complement the resources made available for the provision of Specialist Support by the Department for those trainees and apprentices with particular learning needs. Overall, there is significant variation in the quality of the learning support observed during the inspection and there is a need for senior managers to ensure that the good practice identified in a few of the professional and technical areas, including hairdressing, is used to inform the provision, and improve the quality and consistency of learning support throughout the organisation. Too few trainees on the Skills for Your Life strand, for example, with low literacy and numeracy skills and a range of barriers to learning, accept additional learning support. More thought needs to go into the model for learning support to be applied to these trainees, and both tutors and support staff need additional staff development to help these trainees progress to their full capacity across their training programmes.

5.9 The College has implemented appropriate strategies to address the poor attendance and improve the variable, and too often poor, rates of retention. These strategies include the SERC Extra programme, an initiative implemented by the College to address issues of non-attendance, extended recently to include most trainees and apprentices on the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes and to supplement and support the work of the Training Support Officers. This development represents an attempt to identify and address concerns about attendance at an early stage and provide a coherent and effective response, aimed at removing barriers and enabling trainees and apprentices to remain on

their training programmes. Whilst the initiative has only recently begun to be implemented across the training programmes, the majority of the trainees and apprentices interviewed during the inspection were aware of the service provided. In addition, a small number of the trainees and apprentices reported that they had already received support which had encouraged and enabled them to remain on their training programmes.

5.10 The tracking of trainee and apprentice progress and levels of achievement in the essential skills across the full framework are not adequately monitored by senior management or by course teams through the College's quality assurance arrangements.

5.11 The arrangements for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning have served to support and promote standardisation in the training provision across the different campuses in most of the professional and technical areas. They include the observation of teaching, training and learning, and the professional and technical and essential skills tutors are provided with clear and constructive feedback on their performance. In addition, there are systematic procedures in place for obtaining regular feedback from trainees and apprentices.

5.12 The current quality assurance arrangements are, however, not sufficiently robust to ensure that weaknesses in provision are identified and addressed, particularly in relation to issues of data management, retention, or areas for improvement in the quality of training provision. In most of the areas inspected, based upon the data supplied by the College for the inspection, the overall levels of success were typically lower than those recorded through the course review process. The quality assurance and quality improvement procedures need to be strengthened, to ensure that they are sufficiently rigorous to review, monitor and evaluate in a thorough and holistic manner all aspects of provision, including the overall quality of the provision for trainees on the Skills for Work strand across the professional and technical areas, the relevance and balance of the curriculum offer for Programme-Led

apprentices, the overall management of the essential skills, and the quality, coherence and impact of the overall support services, including learner support.

5.13 Most of the staff are suitably qualified, deployed effectively and provided with good opportunities for continuous professional development. In view of the increasing number of trainees and apprentices presenting with additional learning needs, there is a need for all of the staff, including the Training Support Officers, to receive regular training updates and support on strategies for dealing sensitively and effectively with trainees who have specific learning needs. They require training in recognising and managing dyslexia, and specific training on challenging conditions, including autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, to enable them to plan and review the effectiveness of the support provided for individual trainees and apprentices.

5.14 There are very good links with industry across a range of professional and technical areas. They are particularly well-developed in beauty therapy, electrical installation, hairdressing, hospitality and catering, plumbing, transportation maintenance and refrigeration and air conditioning. The links with employers and external agencies are used to good effect to keep staff up-to-date with contemporary developments in industry and, in the best practice, to enable staff to receive training from leading employers in the specific professional and technical area. In plumbing, for example, significant high specification equipment has been donated or sponsored by local manufacturers of gas boilers and renewable energy systems and joint training is undertaken by the College's tutors and representatives from the industry

5.15 The quality of the accommodation and physical resources is excellent in most of the professional and technical areas. In beauty therapy and hairdressing there are excellent physical resources, with modern salons and industry standard equipment, high quality ILT equipment and an excellent range and quality of resources to support the development of

the trainees' and apprentices' occupational competences. In wood occupations, the workshops are of a good size, with appropriate provision for extraction. In plumbing, the new rooms on each campus are well-designed and apprentices and Programme-Led apprentices on the Newtownards campus attend the Environmental Skills Centre during theory classes to learn about the latest technologies. There are good specialist resources and equipment to support the delivery of mechanical engineering apprenticeships across the main campuses and the specialist resources, equipment and accommodation for electrical installation are very good or excellent. In contrast, there is limited access to specialist resources and equipment for electrical engineering. In transportation maintenance, there is a need for the College to provide further practical workshop experiences and simulated workplace assessments for the significant minority of Programme-Led apprentices who are not in work placement, so that they can develop and apply occupational competence within a more realistic working environment.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 The standards of written work achieved by the trainees and apprentices range from poor to very good, but are mainly good across most of the training programmes inspected. Most of the trainees and apprentices are making good progress in their learning, at a pace appropriate to their prior learning and experience. In hairdressing, the spoken communication skills of trainees and apprentices are being developed well through the opportunities provided for them to make presentations and work together in groups to develop posters, mood boards and other products. In beauty therapy, for example, the trainees are developing very good standards in manicure, pedicure, waxing and tinting. Trainees on the hospitality and catering programmes are acquiring good health and safety practices through efficient recording of fridge temperatures and well-developed knife skills. They have excellent opportunities to create fine dining menus using top-class local products

and are also refining their personal skills in relating to and managing others and using their initiative appropriately.

6.2 In electrical installation, good standards of work are demonstrated by most of the trainees and apprentices. They can use and interpret drawings effectively and work accurately to specified dimensions and tolerances. The trainees develop a wide range of practical skills in different commercial and industrial wiring systems and enclosures, and apply safe working practices including safe isolation, visual inspection and electrical current testing. Apprentices on the retail financial services programme have significantly enhanced their technical and professional skills, along with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the insurance industry. In plumbing and refrigeration, the trainees perform tasks set by their employers in the workplace to high standards. In contrast, the provision in mechanical engineering, based mainly on the Lisburn campus, is narrow, not matched well to the needs of local employers and does not offer clearly defined pathways for craft and technician trainees. Most trainees on these programmes make slow progress and only work to minimum standards due to the limited stretch and challenge and inappropriately low expectations by the tutors. This leads to poor levels of motivation, retention and achievement, particularly in the craft strands of the mechanical engineering provision.

6.3 In wood occupations, almost all of the trainees and apprentices demonstrate high levels of occupational competence and technical knowledge in a range of settings. They are motivated, enthusiastic and able to speak confidently and competently about the technical aspects of their work and they understand and use appropriate technical language. The trainees and apprentices in plumbing achieve good standards in the installation of plumbing services and the assembly of components in practical sessions. They have been involved in dismantling carefully the bathrooms, heating systems and water storage systems on one of the campuses and their re-assembly on another campus. The trainees and apprentices

worked well together to complete the tasks, observing appropriate health and safety practices.

6.4 In transportation maintenance, almost all of the apprentices observed in the workplace were able to carry out an appropriate range of tasks to a very good standard, including replacing failed components, pre-delivery inspections, services, refitting clutches and gearboxes and diagnosis and rectification of mechanical and electrical faults. Most of the apprentices demonstrate very good problem-solving skills and the ability to communicate effectively with their supervisors and customers in the workplace. The standards of work of the Programme-Led apprentices and trainees vary from satisfactory to good, but for the majority are good. For the significant minority of Programme-Led apprentices not in a work placement, however, the standard of their practical work is just satisfactory. There are insufficient opportunities for these Programme-Led apprentices to complete maintenance and repair tasks on customer-owned vehicles to the appropriate industry standard required for the National Vocational Qualification at level 2.

6.5 In the majority of the professional and technical areas, high standards are evidenced clearly by the level of skills being developed by the trainees and apprentices and by the success of some of them in reaching the SkillBuild finals. It is noteworthy, for example, that four trainees and apprentices in wood occupations have qualified for the SkillBuild regional finals, including a Skills for Work trainee, and a wood machinery apprentice has progressed to the World Skills competition. Significant achievements have also been attained by the refrigeration apprentices in national competitions over the past five years.

6.6 The standards of most of the trainees' and apprentices' literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory or better, and are often good. Most of the trainees and apprentices have the opportunity to achieve the essential skills appropriate to their framework. Of the current trainees and apprentices who are undertaking essential skills, it is noteworthy that 278

(36%), 234 (32%) and 80 (11%) respectively are working towards a level of literacy, numeracy and ICT above that required by their training framework.

6.7 The Head of Training reports that, as a result of interventions aimed at improving attendance, the rate of retention on Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in the College has improved for those trainees and apprentices who started in the 2010 training year. Currently, retention on individual programmes and strands ranges from 96% on ApprenticeshipsNI Level 2 programmes to 81% for Skills for Your Life, for the first six months of the programme. To sustain this level of improvement, there is a need to ensure that the strategies which are being used to good effect within some professional and technical areas are implemented consistently and systematically across all of the provision.

6.8 Over the past three years, the average retention, success and progression rates to employment or further education or training on the Training for Success programmes range from excellent to poor across the professional and technical areas but are modest overall at 61%, 69% and 63% respectively.

6.9 Over the past three years, the average retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is modest at 69%, and success is good at 84%.

6.10 The overall success rate for essential skills across the same period is good in literacy at 83%. It is good in numeracy at 80%. The average success rate in ICT is satisfactory at 74%, which has impacted adversely on the achievement by the apprentices of the full framework in a number of professional and technical areas.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 A particular strength of the provision inspected in the South Eastern Regional College is the very good quality of the training and learning. In most (82%) of the 183 training sessions observed, the quality of the training and learning was good or better. A significant minority of the sessions (44%) were very good or better. Overall, 95% of the sessions observed were satisfactory or better. The professional and technical tutors and the essential skills tutors prepare their work well and use an effective range of strategies to engage the trainees and apprentices in their learning. Most of them provide very good support and guidance, are flexible in their approach and many use ILT effectively to enhance and support the learning, and develop in trainees and apprentices the capacity for independent learning. The tutors are developing their skills in the use of the College-wide Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and, in most of the professional and technical areas, it is used effectively as a repository for a wide range of materials, including assignments, worksheets, presentations and video clips. However, the more advanced use of the VLE, including the use of interactive learning resources, online quizzes and trainee and apprentice assessment and tracking tools are under-developed.

7.2 Most of the training sessions observed were characterised by the use of a wide range of suitable teaching, training and learning strategies, including clear exposition, effective questioning, and well-planned paired and small group work. In the best practice, effective and unobtrusive support was provided for individuals or groups of trainees or apprentices with additional learning needs by skilled learning support workers. In the majority of the sessions observed, the tutors enhance the learning through creative and innovative learning resources and effective pedagogy.

7.3 In electrical engineering, there is only limited collaboration with other relevant specialist areas within the College, particularly automation and control and renewable energy technologies. There is considerable scope, however, to replicate the good practice observed during the inspection, which maximises the opportunities for trainees and

apprentices to acquire specific and relevant occupational skills through well-constructed project work or innovative cross-curricular practice. In hairdressing, for example, there are very good opportunities for trainees to work in the commercial salon and gain experience in fashion shows, photo shoots and links with voluntary organisations to provide a community service for elderly people. In transportation maintenance, trainees were involved in preparing a car for the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Road Safety road show. Trainees in wood occupations worked with students from the performing arts course to build the stage set for a college-based production.

7.4 In a significant minority of professional and technical areas, including beauty therapy, hairdressing and hospitality and catering, there are good opportunities for trainees to gain additional units and qualifications, including first aid, food safety, healthy eating, nutrition and the safe catering certificate, which exceed the requirements of their training frameworks and improve their employability. In plumbing, Programme-Led apprentices have the opportunity to engage in COPPART, a small business project which involves building garden or house ornaments from workshop scrap materials. The project is supported by the College's business enterprise unit and a tutor who is one of the business champions.

7.5 In the essential skills, the College's standard operating procedures have been reviewed appropriately and set out revised procedures for timetabling, class sizes, and the make-up of classes, in terms of ability spread. They define roles and responsibilities of the relevant staff and specific procedures for referral to SERC Extra for trainees and apprentices who do not attend training sessions. Since January 2011, 69 of the 129 (53%) of trainees and apprentices who were removed from classes due to non-attendance are now back attending essential skills classes regularly.

7.6 In the majority of the professional and technical areas, trainees and apprentices benefit from the good links with industry which their tutors have established. As a result of

these links, the trainees and apprentices benefit from the inclusion of guest speakers in the training programmes, and from appropriate industrial visits. In one of the training sessions observed during the inspection, for example, the regional manager of a large plumbing company gave an interactive demonstration in the workshop, enabling Programme-Led apprentices to work with a new pipe product in bending exercises. The exercises were carried out to a high standard and the trainees and apprentices were required to repeat exercises until they had achieved the required levels of accuracy.

7.7 For almost all of the trainees who are on work placement, there is a good match between the workplace training and their target qualification. The quality of most of the work-based training is good and there are good relationships between the College staff and the trainees' and apprentices' supervisors and employers in most of the professional and technical areas. Most of the employers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and well-informed about the training programmes. There is, however, variation in the regularity and quality of the review and monitoring of the trainees' and apprentices' progress in their directed and workplace training and this is an area which requires further development by senior managers. In addition, for a minority of the trainees in electrical engineering, their directed practical training is not matched well enough to their workplace training nor is it differentiated sufficiently from the electrical installation programme.

7.8 Although the quality of the personal training plans is satisfactory overall, there are inconsistencies in the quality of the plans across the different campuses. While some account is taken of the outcomes of initial assessments, more needs to be done to ensure that the plans are individual in nature, and identify clearly any additional learning needs, and progress made towards the development and achievement of the essential skills, and both occupational and transferable skills. The plans do include some targets for achievement and progress although these need to be more specific and underpinned by a more effective and consistently applied process of the monitoring and review of progress.

7.9 The procedures for assessment and internal verification are mostly rigorous and robust. The portfolios of work in most of the professional and technical areas are well-organised and of a good standard.

7.10 Good links exist with an appropriate range of relevant external agencies. Trainees or apprentices whose personal barriers limit their progress towards completion of their qualifications are provided with good levels of support, including signposting to relevant agencies.

7.11 While the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, the College needs to ensure that information relating to the arrangements for the protection of children and vulnerable adults, and the College's complaints and grievance procedure, are incorporated for all trainees and apprentices into the student handbook and displayed prominently in key circulation areas.

7.12 The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance forms an integral element of the Training for Success programme and is focused on the individual needs of the trainees. The tutors in most of the professional and technical areas have good levels of awareness of the progression pathways available and make the trainees and apprentices aware of these opportunities. Further development of the careers component of the electronic individual student learning agreement (E-ISLA) is required, to ensure that all of the trainees and apprentices have access to the specific careers information that relates to their professional and technical area. In addition, the employability programme which forms a significant element of the timetabled programme for the Programme-Led apprentices is currently not well enough designed to ensure that it allows for sufficient progression in learning to meet the needs of all of the trainees, most of whom have followed a programme of Education for Employability while at school.

PART THREE: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREA REPORTS

8. BEAUTY THERAPY

8.1 In beauty therapy the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is very good. The College is meeting very effectively the training and pastoral needs of the apprentices; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

8.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good quality of the leadership and management of the beauty therapy provision;
- very good or better quality of the teaching, training and learning in the sessions observed;
- good or better standards of practical work demonstrated by most of the trainees and apprentices in directed and workplace training;
- good enrichment opportunities which broaden the trainees and apprentices' learning experiences;
- strong focus on the development of appropriate work readiness skills in the trainees and apprentices; and
- standardisation of the provision across the various campuses of the College.

8.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- further development of the strategies to improve the variable retention rates on the beauty therapy programmes; and
- further strengthening of the self-evaluation process, particularly at course team level.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Very good	40

9. ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING/INSTALLATION

9.1 In electrical engineering/installation, the quality of the training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the South Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

9.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good specialist resources and equipment to support the delivery of the electrical installation apprenticeship programmes;

- very good to outstanding quality of training and learning across the electrical installation programme, which caters for the majority of the trainees and apprentices;
- very good support in place to source good quality work placements for the majority of electrical installation trainees in Newtownards;
- very good workplace training provided for almost all of the trainees and apprentices;
- good standards of work demonstrated by most of the trainees in directed training and in the workplace, and the good or better average success rates; and
- outstanding use of ILT to enhance trainee learning through the development of creative and innovative learning resources and effective pedagogy.

9.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- poor match between the directed practical training and workplace training for a minority of the trainees on the electrical engineering programme;
- limited collaboration with related specialist areas in the College, particularly automation and control and renewable energy technologies; and
- limited practical time and suitable work placements for Programme-Led apprentices on electrical engineering programmes in Newtownards and electrical installation in Lisburn.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Good	Electrical Installation : 41 Electrical Engineering: 32

10. ESSENTIAL SKILLS

10.1 In the essential skills the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the trainees and apprentices are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the College's progress in addressing these areas for improvement

10.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good quality of teaching and learning characterised by the effective use of ILT;
- good use of appropriate vocational and/or personal contexts to engage and motivate the trainees and apprentices in developing their essential skills;
- good initial assessment processes to identify the trainees' and apprentices' strengths and weaknesses;

- good success rates in literacy and numeracy;
- high proportion, approximately one-third, of the Programme-Led apprentices targeting the essential skill of literacy and numeracy beyond the minimum requirement of their framework; and
- recent strategies implemented by senior management to improve the provision and to re-engage trainees and apprentices in essential skills classes.

10.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- poor levels of attendance at essential skills classes, in particular the ICT classes;
- inconsistent monitoring of progress by the tutors through the use of the group learning plans, and by the Training Support Officers through the review process;
- arrangements to ensure all apprentices and trainees have the appropriate opportunities to achieve the essential skills required for their framework.

Overall performance level	Number of Apprentices and Trainees
Satisfactory	Literacy: 773 Numeracy: 732 ICT: 730

11. HAIRDRESSING

11.1 In hairdressing, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is very good. The College is meeting very effectively the training and pastoral needs of the trainees and apprentices; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

11.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good leadership and management of the hairdressing provision;
- strong commitment to quality improvement and to the development of creative and innovative approaches to teaching, training and learning
- good or better standards of work and occupational skills of most of the trainees and apprentices, and the good or better average success rates on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme and Skills for Work strand;
- very good levels of pastoral support provided by all of the staff to support the trainees and apprentices in their learning;
- good or better quality of the teaching training and learning; and
- very good links with industry, used to very good effect to enhance the learning.

11.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- further development of the strategies to improve the variable retention rates on the hairdressing programmes; and

- rigour of the self-evaluation reports, to focus more sharply on the quality of teaching, training and learning and achievements and standards across the training programmes.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Very good	161

12. HOSPITALITY AND CATERING

12.1 In hospitality and catering, the quality of the training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is very good. The College is meeting very effectively the training and pastoral needs of the apprentices; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

12.2 The main strengths are the:

- good or better quality of the teaching, training and learning observed;
- very good opportunities for trainees and apprentices to undertake additional qualifications;
- very good support and pastoral care provided for trainees and apprentices;

- very good standard of occupational skills demonstrated by almost all of the trainees and apprentices, and the good average success rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme;
- standardisation of the provision across the organisation; and
- excellent quality of the accommodation.

12.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- further development of the strategies to improve the variable retention rates on the hospitality and catering programmes; and
- increased involvement of employers in the training process

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Very good	80

13. **MECHANICAL ENGINEERING**

13.1 In mechanical engineering, the quality of the training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, and leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the College is to meet effectively the needs of all of the trainees and apprentices.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the College's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

13.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good specialist resources and equipment to support the delivery of mechanical engineering apprenticeships across the main campuses;
- innovative polymer apprenticeship programme developed in partnership with the Northern Ireland Polymers Association to provide specialist training which is matched well to employers needs; and
- good or better quality of training and learning on the Bangor mechanical engineering and polymer processing apprenticeship programmes.

13.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- unsatisfactory provision for craft mechanical and manufacturing engineering;
- inadequate leadership and management of mechanical engineering at all levels; and
- inadequate quality of training for mechanical engineering in the Lisburn campus, which was characterised by the poor standards of the trainees' and apprentices' work.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and
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	Apprentices
Inadequate	32

14. **PLUMBING**

14.1 In plumbing, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the South Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

14.2 The main strengths are the:

- training and learning which is good or better in almost all of the sessions observed;
- provision of a plumbing apprenticeship on all three main campuses;
- excellent accommodation and training resources provided for plumbing apprentices;
- outstanding links with industry to provide sponsored equipment and training, which enhance significantly the trainees and apprentices' learning experiences;
- good standards achieved by the trainees and apprentices in practical training sessions and in the workplace, and the good average success rate on the Programme-Led apprenticeship programme; and

- committed staff, who work well as a team to provide a supportive and caring learning environment for the trainees and apprentices.

14.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- design of the Programme Led Apprenticeship curriculum to include additional practical training in typical industrial projects to improve their skills further;
- procedures for monitoring and tracking the trainees' and apprentices' progress across the full framework; and
- inconsistent monitoring of a minority of the apprentices in the workplace.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Good	97

15. RETAIL FINANCIAL SERVICES

15.1 In retail financial services, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the South Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

15.2 The main strengths are the:

- flexible and well-planned work-based directed training and work-based assessment, including the provision of well-tailored additional training and the effective use of group-based training sessions;
- mostly good or better work placements which are suitably matched to the requirements of the apprentices' training frameworks;
- good to outstanding training sessions and the quality of the learning resources to support the apprentices in their professional and technical units;
- very good team of vocational tutors deployed to deliver the training framework in financial services, which has a strong ethos and commitment to high quality training;
- highly effective monitoring of the apprentices' progress in their professional and technical units, which is backed up with robust target setting to develop further their occupational skills and competences; and
- high standards, and the good or better average success rates, attained by the apprentices and the clear evidence of skills enhancement since they commenced the programme.

15.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need to ensure that the personal training plans capture the entry qualifications of the apprentices;

- need for more effective mentoring support including access to dedicated study time provided by employers; and
- planning and delivery of the essential skills of literacy and numeracy leading to unnecessarily slow progress by a small number of the apprentices.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Good	51

16. REFRIGERATION AND AIR CONDITIONING

16.1 In refrigeration and air-conditioning, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is very good. The College is meeting very effectively the training and pastoral needs of the trainees and apprentices; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

16.2 The main strengths are the:

- effective leadership of the sole refrigeration apprenticeship provision in Northern Ireland;
- significant achievements gained by the refrigeration apprentices in national competitions over the past five years;

- outstanding links with industry which enhance significantly the apprentices' learning experiences;
- very well-planned practical sessions to consolidate and extend the apprentices' learning and thinking skills;
- very good standards, and the good or better average success rates, achieved by the apprentices; and
- effective use of the very good accommodation and training resources to motivate and engage the apprentices to progress their vocational competences.

16.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need for additional practical training for the Programme-Led apprentices in appropriate refrigeration and air conditioning projects to enhance their practical and problem-solving skills; and
- dissemination of the good practice observed in the use of the College's Virtual Learning Environment.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Very good	47

17. SKILLS FOR YOUR LIFE AND SKILLS FOR WORK

17.1 In the Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work strands, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the South Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement

17.2 The main strengths are the:

- hard-working, persevering tutors who strive to establish and maintain a good rapport and positive, supportive working relationships with the trainees;
- good quality of the teaching, training and learning in most of the sessions observed;
- appropriate curriculum offer for the Skills for Work 156 week strands;
- good opportunities for the trainees to acquire appropriate occupational skills, enhance their confidence and improve their social skills and overall work-readiness; and
- improving rates of retention on the Skills for Work 156 week strand,, and the good success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy for those trainees who complete the Skills for Your Life programme.

17.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- better strategic co-ordination and quality assurance of the Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work strands across the College campuses, to include effective strategies to improve the overall rates of attendance and retention;
- more effective and consistent monitoring, tracking and review of the trainees' progress through the personal training planning and progress review processes, particularly in setting and reviewing appropriate targets for the trainees in their vocational and essential skills work; and
- low success rate in the Skills For Work 156 vocational strands, and the modest success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, for the last cohort of completers.

Performance Level	Number of Trainees
Good	Skills for Your Life :17 Skills for Work 156 week: 146

18. **TRANSPORTATION MAINTENANCE**

18.1 In transportation maintenance, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its training and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the South Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement

18.2 The main strengths are the:

- very good range of transportation maintenance programmes offered across the main campuses;
- good to very good standards of work achieved by most of the trainees and apprentices;
- good or better quality of most of the directed training;
- very good quality of almost all of the trainees' and apprentices' work-based training;
- very good to excellent quality of the directed training facilities and resources; and
- supportive and caring learning environment that enables the trainees and apprentices to make good progress in their training, as exemplified in the good overall success rate.

18.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- overall average retention rate, which is satisfactory;
- arrangements for a significant minority (41%) of the trainees without work placements to develop their practical skills and to achieve their national vocational qualification; and
- accuracy of the statistical data used in the self-evaluation process

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Good	262

19. WOOD OCCUPATIONS

19.1 In wood occupations, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional College is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the trainees and apprentices are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the College's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

19.2 The main strengths are the:

- good or better quality of training and learning in most (88%) of the sessions observed;
- excellent accommodation and physical resources where the trainees and apprentices develop a suitably broad range of practical skills;
- good quality of the work placements;
- good or better average success rates on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme and Skills for Work strand;

- sourcing of work placements for the majority of the Programme-Led apprentices in Newtownards; and
- very good support and encouragement provided for most of the trainees and apprentices by the tutors and technicians.

19.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- low average retention rate on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship and level 2 ApprenticeshipsNI programmes, and the poor success rate on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme on the Lisburn and Downpatrick campuses;
- limited curriculum offer which does not provide sufficient opportunities for the Programme-Led apprentices to develop their occupational skills and knowledge; and
- ineffective arrangements for the overall management and monitoring of the provision.

Performance Level	Total No of Trainees and Apprentices
Satisfactory	223

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION AND KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

20. CONCLUSION

20.1 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by the South Eastern Regional 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 South Eastern Regional College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement

21. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

21.1 The South Eastern Regional College needs to revise its annual development plan to take account of the following key priorities and further improve the quality of the training provision:

- the further development of strategies to improve retention and success rates.
- the design of the Programme-Led apprenticeship curriculum to ensure a more balanced programme which allows for sufficient, ongoing development and application of the trainees' practical and occupational skills; and
- more robust arrangements for quality assurance, quality improvement planning and better data management.

OVERALL SUMMARY TABLE – 2007-2010

Programme	Started (completed 4 weeks)	Retention Rate %	Success Rate %	Progressed to FE/other training %	Progressed to relevant employment %
Personal Development/Skills for Your Life	41	61	72	38	1
Skills for Work	492	61	80	72	2
Pre-Apprenticeship/ Programme-Led Apprenticeship	972	61	62	44	12
Employability	0	0	0		0
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 2	735	67	84	49	44
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 3	123	85	87	4	77
Overall totals		64	76	50	27

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