



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



***Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure***

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

of

Priority Skills Area level 2 programmes

in

Belfast Metropolitan College

April 2010

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF THE PRIORITY SKILLS AREAS PROVISION AT LEVEL 2 IN BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

The focused inspection of the Belfast Metropolitan College's full-time and part-time provision in the designated priority skills areas at level 2 in February 2009 highlighted strengths in the outstanding quality of the ICT practitioners course and the very good quality of the provision in hospitality and catering.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the satisfactory provision in computing/information and communications technology (ICT), construction, and engineering, and the inadequate provision in essential skills and travel and tourism. The inspection drew particular attention to the following key areas for improvement:

- the retention and success rates in a significant minority of the courses inspected;
- the limited curriculum offer in the priority skills area of computing and ICT;
- the planning of the curriculum for the Edexcel First Diplomas in electronics and electrical engineering, and in the Edexcel First Diploma in construction;
- the major weaknesses in the quality of the provision in the Edexcel First Diploma in travel and tourism;
- the inadequate integration of essential skills into the vocational areas and planning of the provision at all levels, including the management of data and the success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy; and
- the staff development for course teams in managing challenging behaviour, and opportunities for lecturers in electronics, computing and ICT and travel and tourism to update their industrial experience.

In the interval since the inspection, a new Director has been appointed. The College has engaged in a quality improvement support process. Belfast Metropolitan College has taken the following steps, which affect the work of the curricular areas, the:

- establishment of a cross-college post-inspection working group of key academic and support staff to oversee the implementation of the improvement plan;
- development and implementation of new policies on student induction, attendance and punctuality, employability and parent-college relationships;
- review of the essential skills provision and the pre-entry guidance received by students;
- establishment of a number of curriculum projects in essential skills across the priority skills area level 2 curricular areas; and
- the implementation of a wide range of staff development activities for staff involved in the delivery of priority skills area level 2 courses, including classroom management, target-setting and active learning approaches, and increased opportunities for staff to experience periods in relevant industries.

Since the original inspection in February 2009, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has carried out two interim monitoring visits in September 2009 and March 2010. The final follow-up inspection took place in April 2010.

The improvement plan produced by the College in response to the inspection findings was of good quality.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the inspection, the:

- significant improvement in the strategic leadership and management of the priority skills area level 2 provision;
- effective implementation of a comprehensive improvement plan, which focused appropriately on strategies to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- enhanced communication between academic and administrative staff and more effective collegial working, particularly as a result of the establishment of the Timetabling and Quality Groups;
- improved retention rates in most of the courses across the curricular areas;
- improved planning for the design and delivery of the priority skills area level 2 programmes, including more systematic arrangements for the monitoring and review of the provision, including essential skills;
- comprehensive review of the curriculum offer for priority skills area level 2, which has resulted in provision which matches more appropriately the needs and aspirations of learners;
- enhanced pre-entry guidance and support across most of the priority skills area courses, and the effective use of a re-engagement strategy for learners at risk of withdrawal from essential skills;
- better access to timely and accurate data on key performance indicators;
- comprehensive staff development programme which has been instrumental in encouraging improved standards of student behaviour and, particularly in travel and tourism, an increased focus on employability; and
- rigorous and robust arrangements for regular monitoring of progress towards targets.

The areas which require further action include:

- continued systematic monitoring and review of the priority skills area level 2 provision to ensure that progress towards achievement of the objectives of the improvement plan is consolidated and maintained;
- further work to improve the satisfactory quality of the essential skills, including strategies to contextualise, embed and cascade the outcomes of the project work across all of the level 2 priority skills area provision; and

- further development of the procedures for collating and gathering data and monitoring attendance across all of the curricular areas.

In the area of travel and tourism, the quality of education and training provided by Belfast Metropolitan College is now 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.

In the areas of computing and ICT, construction and engineering the quality of education provided by Belfast Metropolitan College is now good. The College has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

In the area of essential skills the quality of education provided in this organisation is now satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

CONCLUSION

In the priority skills area programmes at level 2, the quality of education provided by Belfast Metropolitan College is now good. The College has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

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