



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Inspection of the Further  
Education and Work-Based  
Learning Provision in the  
Southern Regional College

November 2013



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
EXCELLENCE



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<sup>1</sup> Each of these individual professional and technical reports are accessible through the appropriate web link at the end of this report.

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

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

In assessing the various features of the provision, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

### Key Performance Indicators used by the ETI to Evaluate Achievements and Standards

Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The proportion of learners enrolled who completed their courses or are still on their programme.
Achievement	The proportion of those learners completing their course who gained their full target qualification.
Success	The proportion of learners enrolled who gained their full target qualification.
Progression	Proportion of successful completers who progress to further/higher education/training or employment.

## **PART ONE: SUMMARY**

### **1. Background Information and Context**

1.1 Southern Regional College is the second largest College in Northern Ireland (NI), and it recruits the majority of its learners from the four District Council areas of Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, and Newry and Mourne. The College's main campuses are located in Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown. Along with smaller campuses in Newry and Kilkeel, the College provides education and training in 83 outreach centres across the region. The College's catchment area covers a number of the most disadvantaged areas in NI including five Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Armagh, Brownlow, Lurgan, Newry and Portadown.

1.2 In October 2013, the rate of unemployment (claimant count) across the four main District Councils that the College serves was below or in-line with the NI average of 5.1%.<sup>2</sup> While there are good levels of economic activity across the region, there is evidence of high levels of unemployment in some areas with three of the wards in the Armagh, and Newry and Mourne district council areas having a claimant count in excess of 10%.<sup>3</sup> In addition, one-fifth of the working-age population in the Banbridge, Craigavon, and Newry and Mourne District Council areas have no formal qualifications.<sup>4</sup>

1.3 In the year 2012/13, the College had 30,921 learner enrolments across its further education provision; there were 3,464 full-time enrolments and 27,457 part-time enrolments. Enrolments on full-time level 1 courses were small at 4% but have increased to 6% in the current year. Enrolments on full-time level 2 courses accounted for 26% of the full-time provision but have decreased by 2% to 24% over the past year. Enrolments on full-time level 3 courses accounted for 70% of the full-time provision, and although the percentage remains steady over the past year, there has been a slight drop in enrolments. Enrolment to part-time courses remains steady.

1.4 In 2013, the College was re-contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning to provide the Training for Success 2013 and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes, which are offered alongside the Department for Employment and Learning's legacy<sup>5</sup> training programmes. At the time of the inspection, 735 learners were registered on Training for Success programmes; 178 learners were registered on the Skills for Work level 1 strand (including learners with an identified need for additional time up to 156 weeks), and 557 learners registered on the Programme-Led Apprenticeships or Skills for Work level 2 strand. There were 255 learners registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, with 102 level 2/3 learners and 153 level 3 learners. A significant minority of the learners were registered on programmes in construction and building services (42%) and motor vehicle (33%), with a minority (11%) in engineering programmes. The remainder were registered on; catering, children's care, learning and development, food manufacturing and horticulture. Almost all of the learners undertake their training with the College, with only a small number registered with other training providers, as part of a sub-contracting arrangement.

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<sup>2</sup> October 2013 Claimant Count by District Council Area

<sup>3</sup> November 2013 District Council Economic Briefing

<sup>4</sup> 2012 LADB District Council Labour Market Structure

<sup>5</sup> The legacy Training for Success programme was introduced in 2007 and was superseded by Training for Success 2013.

1.5 The essential skills provision in the College is large and varied and includes further education, work-based learning, and adult and community provision. In the year 2012/13, 5,496 learners were enrolled on essential skills programmes. Within the College's adult and community provision, there are 483 learners enrolled across the three Essential Skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Also, within this adult and community provision, the College offers pre-essential skills and pre-English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses.

1.6 As part of the College's school partnerships programme (Entitlement Framework), a substantial, diverse and well-established provision is provided to 37 partner schools across four area learning communities. In the four year period from 2009/10 to 2012/13, there have been over 18,000 enrolments onto the schools partnerships programme across the College; at the time of the inspection, 2,283 pupils were participating in the programme.

1.7 The College provides community-based education and training to approximately 100 community and voluntary organisations across the region. In the three year period from 2010/11 to 2012/13, excluding the essential skills, the College delivered education and training courses to over 7,000 community-based learners.

**Table 1: Enrolments in the College**

Type of provision	Number of learners enrolled
Total Enrolments (Further Education )	30,921
Further Education	Full time: 3,464 Part-time: 27,457
Entitlement Framework (14 – 19)	2,283
Work-based Learning (Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI)	990
ApprenticeshipsNI:	Level 2/3: 102 Level 3: 153
Training for Success:	Programme-Led Apprenticeships/Skills for Work Level 2: 557 Skills for Work: 76 Skills for Work (156): 102

## 2. Scope and method of the inspection

2.1 In November 2013, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection of the College's further education and work-based learning provision. The further education provision covered a representative sample of professional and technical courses up to and including level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework. In work-based learning, the inspection focused on the College's provision under the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes.

2.2 The inspection focused on leadership and management, including the College's processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement, the provision for learning, and achievements and standards. The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation are available in the Inspectorate's publication '*Improving Quality: Raising Standards*' which can be found on the Inspectorate's web site at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards.htm>

2.3 A team of inspectors observed 284 lessons and directed training sessions. Discussions were held with the Chief Executive, members of the executive and senior management team including directors and assistant directors, representatives from the Governing Body, heads of school, deputy heads of school, lead co-ordinators, course team co-ordinators, lecturers, support and administrative staff across the College, and a sample of employers and community representatives. The inspection team also examined samples of the learners' work, progress reviews, personal training plans, minutes of team meetings, course planning and development documentation, self-evaluation reports and quality improvement plans, and other relevant documentation, policies, and reports.

2.4 The inspection also focused on the provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance. The arrangements for care, guidance and support and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups were also inspected.

2.5 The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the learners to complete a confidential on-line questionnaire prior to the inspection.

Questionnaire	Number of responses	Number with comments	Percentage with comments
Learners	996	467	47%

In addition, inspectors carried out focus group meetings with a wide range of learners in the College. The ETI reported to the Chief Executive and representatives of the Governing Body the main findings emerging from the questionnaires and, where appropriate, these have been commented on within this report.

### 3. Overall findings of the inspection

#### 3.1 Further Education and Work-Based Learning Provision in the College.

In the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of education and training 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.

#### 3.2 Further Education Provision.

In the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of education and training 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.

#### 3.3 Work-Based Learning Provision.

In the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the Southern 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 organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address.

#### 4. Table of performance levels

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	Further Education and Work-Based Learning Provision	Further Education	Work-Based Learning
	<b>Very Good</b>	Very Good	Good
<b>Contributory Performance Levels</b>			
	Further Education and Work-Based Learning Provision	Further Education	Work-Based Learning
Leadership and Management	Very Good	Very Good	Good
Quality of Provision for Learning	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good	Very Good	Good

<b>Professional and Technical Areas (Further Education and Work-Based Learning)</b>	
Essential Skills	Good
<b>Professional and Technical Areas (Further Education)</b>	
Applied science	Good
Art and design/media and communication	Very Good
Business/computing and information and communication technology (ICT)	Good
Child development and well-being (childcare)	Outstanding
Hospitality and catering	Outstanding
Mechanical and manufacturing engineering	Good
Sport	Very Good
Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (SLDD)	Very Good
<b>Professional and Technical Areas (Work-Based Learning)</b>	
Electrical and electronic engineering	Very Good
Mechanical engineering services (plumbing)	Very Good
Transportation operations and maintenance (motor vehicle)	Satisfactory
Trowel occupations (brickwork)	Very Good
Wood occupations (carpentry and joinery)	Very Good

#### 5. Summary of main findings

5.1 The Chief Executive and members of the executive and senior management teams provide very good strategic leadership and management of the curriculum. The leadership of the Chief Executive is exemplary. The members of the Governing Body are well-informed about the work of the College and while they are highly supportive of senior management they also provide an effective challenge function. The middle management tier of the College is also very effective.

5.2 The College provides an extensive curriculum offer. It is broad and balanced and relevant to the needs of learners, industry and the wider community. The curriculum offer is a high strategic priority and a continual focus of review and further development. An important development is the inclusive curriculum strategy to meet the diverse needs of those learners who experience barriers to learning.

5.3 The quality of the leadership and management of the school partnerships programme and the community education provision is outstanding. It is characterised by effective strategic planning, excellent relationships and very good, collegial teamwork.

5.4 The quality of the provision is very good or better in 60% of the professional and technical areas inspected; it is good or better in nearly all of the areas inspected. The quality of provision is underpinned by robust and effective approaches to performance management.

5.5 The College affords a high strategic priority to supporting industry, resulting in very good levels of economic engagement across the provision. Employer links are strong and there are many good examples of appropriate employer-focused curriculum developments. A feature of good practice is the deployment of a group of research lecturers to provide training and undertake development work for industry as part of the innovative i3 initiative.

5.6 The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are good overall, although they are more effective in the further education provision than in work-based learning. The self-evaluation of the overall leadership and management of the College is particularly incisive.

5.7 Performance management is well-established and effective. The collation, analysis and use of management information are well developed. Through the College's performance enhancement process, underperforming courses are effectively identified and appropriate intervention and support strategies for improvement are implemented. Importantly, the College also critically evaluates the quality and impact of key business support services to support the management of the curriculum.

5.8 The quality of the teaching and learning was good or better in 85% of the lessons observed, with just over one-half (52%) of them being very good or outstanding. The College is investing in the further improvement of the quality of teaching, training and learning through the deployment across the schools of well-trained and experienced Teaching and Learning Advisers.

5.9 The use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support and enhance teaching, training and learning is underexploited. While the College's virtual learning environment is used to good effect by almost all staff and learners, too many opportunities to enliven the learning experiences through the use of ILT are missed. There are, however, some pockets of very innovative uses of technology to extend learning and these need to be more widely shared and built upon.

5.10 The arrangements for the care, guidance and support of the learners, including the provision for pastoral care and additional learning support is outstanding. The learner support team, along with curriculum staff, work together very hard to support and promote the care, welfare and academic progress of all learners. There are comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding.

5.11 The College has worked hard to develop and improve its essential skills provision. As a result, the quality of the provision is good overall, characterised by good leadership and management, effective use of data to drive improvements and very good outcomes.



5.12 The careers education, information, advice and guidance is mostly very good. Most of the learners' needs are well met through very good quality careers learning opportunities and individual career planning. As a result, they are well-informed on the range of pathways available to them within the College and externally, and high progression rates to further education, training or employment are a feature of the College's provision. Further work is necessary to embed more consistently the careers education, advice and guidance across all of the work-based learning provision.

5.13 Almost all of the learners in work-based learning achieve good or better occupational standards in their practical and technical training and in the workplace. Expectations are high and most of them have good access to industry-standard equipment.

5.14 Effective strategies have been implemented by the College to increase the quantity of relevant work placements for learners on the Training for Success programme. It is a notable achievement that around 82% of the learners are in a work placement.

5.15 Achievements and standards in the further education provision are mostly very good. Most of the learners in further education demonstrate good or better standards of work and develop good professional, technical and transferable skills.

5.16 According to the most recent data from the Department, the College is the highest performing in Northern Ireland. In further education, retention rates are outstanding and achievement rates are good or better. Outcomes in further education have increased year on year and are consistently above the sector average.

5.17 In work-based learning, while there are variations in the retention rates across the various strands and at individual programme level, almost all of the learners who are retained achieve.

#### 5.18 **What does the Southern Regional College need to do to improve further?**

The College needs to:

- take a more strategic approach to the longer term planning for the curriculum, to ensure that it continues to fully meet the needs of learners, industry and the wider community;
- improve the use of technology to support and enhance the quality of teaching, training and learning across the College;
- further improve the quality of teaching and learning in the provision for the essential skills; and
- address the satisfactory quality of the provision in transportation operations and maintenance (motor vehicle).

## **PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION**

### **6. Leadership and management**

6.1 Overall, the quality of the leadership and management of the curriculum is very good; it is very good in further education and good in work-based learning.

6.2 The Chief Executive and members of the executive and senior management teams provide very good strategic leadership and management of the curriculum. The leadership of the Chief Executive is exemplary as evidenced by high levels of collegial working, a culture of innovation and an emphasis on continuous improvement; the College is outward facing and has strong propensity to engage with and benefit from best practice elsewhere. The College is highly committed to meeting the needs of the learners, industry and the community. The learner is at the centre of the strategic planning of the curriculum and this is evident in key processes across the College.

6.3 The governors are fully involved and know and understand the College well. While they are supportive of management they do provide an effective challenge function to management at all levels across the College.

6.4 The business planning processes to develop and support the curriculum are robust and effective; they contribute to consistency and coherence in decision-making, and there is significant 'buy in' from academic and support staff to achieve the strategic aims of the College. Managers at all levels apply effectively sophisticated business planning tools in the management of the curriculum; target-setting and monitoring arrangements are rigorous and effective. Internal communications are very good and staff report high levels of confidence in the management of the College. The management could strengthen the business planning processes further by taking a more strategic approach to the longer term planning for the curriculum to ensure that it continues to fully meet the needs of learners, industry and the wider community.

6.5 The use of management information at whole College level is a key strength. The collation and interpretation of management information at all levels is very good and is used effectively to improve outcomes and maintain a continual and strong focus on standards. Performance management is very good. Through the College's performance enhancement process, underperforming courses are effectively identified and appropriate support strategies for improvement are implemented. An important feature of the performance enhancement process is the work of the Teaching and Learning Advisors, who support effectively underperforming courses to improve the quality of teaching, training and learning. The College also critically evaluates the quality and impact of key business support services to support the management of the curriculum.

6.6 The College provides an extensive range of professional and technical courses, from entry level through to level 7 on the National Qualifications Framework. In further education, there is a broad and balanced curriculum, up to and including level 3, which is relevant to the needs of the learners, industry and the wider community. At all levels, good progression pathways are provided for learners to access further or higher levels of study or training. The curriculum is increasingly well aligned to the Department for Employment and Learning's emerging priority skill areas and other important policy initiatives including Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The College is proactive in working with industry and other key stakeholders to further develop the curriculum and it is currently engaged with a number of strategically important employers to develop higher level apprenticeships and programmes in areas such as accounting, chemical sciences and software development.

6.7 In work-based learning, the learners have access to a broad and increasingly diverse curriculum offer. While this includes, appropriately, the more traditional areas such as the construction trades, engineering and motor vehicle, well-established employer links, reinforced through the work of a team of research lecturers, is leading to innovative curriculum developments in accountancy, butchery, food manufacturing engineering, pharmaceuticals, renewable technologies, software, and sustainable construction methods. The well-thought out curriculum offer available at level 1, and the associated good uptake by learners, are strengths of the work-based learning provision. To ensure optimum coherence in the longer term curriculum planning, the College should plan for co-operation between the various professional and technical areas, for example, curriculum work in sustainable construction and renewables needs to be aligned with electrical, electronic and mechanical engineering.

6.8 The College has redesigned appropriately the curriculum offer for those learners on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand of the legacy Training for Success programme who are not currently in a work placement. As a result, the skills enhancement programme provided for these learners is fit for purpose, well co-ordinated and provides good opportunities for them to acquire new skills and participate in a range of well-thought out activities to enhance their employability skills.

6.9 A key feature of the College has been the introduction of an inclusive curriculum strategy. Underpinned by extensive research on best practice internationally, the College provides a very good, innovative range of further education and work-based learning courses to meet the diverse needs of those learners who experience barriers to learning. As a result, learners follow a curriculum plan matched well to their specific needs and career aspirations. In 2013, for example, the College introduced a bespoke 'Fresh Start' cross-campus programme for 27 learners with histories of high levels of disengagement from education and training.

6.10 The middle management tier of the College is very effective. Almost all of the heads of school, supported well by their deputies, provide very good strategic leadership of their curriculum areas. Common features include: high expectations and a shared vision to meet the needs of learners; strong collegial working; effective communication flows, including across the campuses; innovative approaches to curriculum planning and economic engagement; and effective use of data to inform decision-making and identify and address any underperformance. In work-based learning, the leadership and management of some of the engineering provision, mechanical and manufacturing engineering and transport operations and maintenance, requires improvement. The shortcomings include a lack of coherence in curriculum planning, timetabling and the ineffective use of some specialist equipment and resources.

6.11 In further education, the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes underpin to good effect the continuous monitoring of the quality of provision across the College. The processes are well-established, underpinned by an effective use of accurate data, involve key stakeholders, and are used well to identify underperformance. The whole-college self-evaluation report is a high quality, evaluative working document and includes benchmarking against the performance of other further education colleges in the United Kingdom. The self-evaluation of the overall strategic leadership and management of the

College is particularly incisive. At middle management level, the quality of most of the self-evaluation reports and quality improvement plans at school and cross-College functional area level are good. There is, however, some variability in the quality of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in a minority of the professional and technical areas. This is characterised, at course-team level, by reports which are not sufficiently evaluative and inconsistencies in the awarding of performance levels.

6.12 The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in work-based learning are not as well-refined, robust or effective as those in the further education provision. Better use needs to be made of data to coherently track all aspects of learner progress, the language in some of the reports is overly descriptive, important areas for development identified at course-team level are not sufficiently represented in the overall quality improvement plans and there needs to be more analysis of the impact of issues such as staff absences on the learners' progress. The variations in the quality of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes at head of school and course-team level need to be addressed.

6.13 The College is implementing effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching, training and learning. As part of this, the College has invested in the training and deployment of five Teaching and Learning Advisers to undertake lesson observations, provide feedback and support for lecturers and to promote continuous improvement in pedagogy. While most of their initial focus has been on those courses identified as underperforming through the performance enhancement process, a good start has been made by the Advisers in supporting staff and sharing good practice in the schools they are linked with. In addition, the College is keen to include part-time staff in strategies to improve pedagogy; over 100 of them have completed the Teaching and Thinking Skills certificate and ten of them are participating in the teaching module for part-time lecturers being piloted by the University of Ulster.

6.14 The leadership and management of the school partnerships programme is outstanding, as characterised by an appropriate, decisive and responsive management structure, excellent relationships at area learning community and individual school level, effective teamwork by the managers, and robust and effective processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning. The programme is valued highly by the principals of partner schools who report high levels of confidence in the management of the provision, the quality and breadth of the curriculum offer and the excellent skills acquisition opportunities provided for their pupils. The curriculum offer is broad and well-matched to the career aspirations and aptitudes of the pupils; it does much to enhance their potential progression pathways. The wide range of STEM subjects is an important feature of the provision, as is the inclusive curriculum offer for those pupils identified with specific learning difficulties.

6.15 The leadership and management of the community education provision is outstanding. The Assistant Director with specific responsibility for this area provides very effective strategic leadership and is very well supported by the community development officers, programme managers and their assistants who are highly motivated, and work very effectively as a team. They work hard to provide very high levels of support and encouragement to the learners across the various programme strands, which are effectively monitored and reviewed. The programmes developed by the College are extensive, and focus well on providing a diverse range of education and training opportunities to learners who, in the past, have been either disengaged from learning, unemployed or economically inactive. These include a number of programmes funded by the Department for Social Development to support its Neighborhood Renewal Strategy.

6.16 The College, through the Department's Community Innovation Fund, has developed a programme of support aimed at engaging young people who are not in education, employment or training. While the initiative is at an early stage of development, the College has been successful in re-engaging a small number of young people with full-time mainstream further education provision. The College also provides a unique programme of training and learning opportunities to the migrant and traveller communities across the southern region. It has been very successful in engaging with these communities, as evidenced by the enrolment of around 1,700 learners over the past four years onto a varied range of short focused programmes of targeted learning and support. During the inspection, the College was awarded the "Pearson Award for Widening Participation" for this programme, which is a Beacon Award presented by the Association of Colleges.

6.17 The leadership and management of economic engagement across the College is very good. The College has a strong track record in supporting local and regional industry and the executive management team have developed a clear vision for economic development. The approaches are strategically well-informed and based on key external policy drivers and labour market intelligence, as well as a systematic assessment of the College's capacity to meet the needs of industry. The key processes are mapped out effectively across the College to identify the synergies between support programmes for industry and the development of an economically relevant curriculum to meet the needs of learners.

6.18 The College has invested significantly in its i3 initiative to support local and regional businesses. A feature of good practice is the deployment of nine research lecturers who, in addition to their support for industry in training and development, mentoring and knowledge transfer, have specific curriculum development and teaching duties in the College. This has resulted in the development, for example, of innovative apprenticeship opportunities, as well as sector-leading curriculum development projects. These activities are aligned closely to the emerging skill needs in the regional economy. The i3 unit is well-led; the business support officers and the research lecturers work effectively as a tight and cohesive team. Employer links are strong and local employers report that they consider the College to be a key resource in up-skilling and re-skilling their workforce. The employers also report high levels of contentment on the quality of the support and training provided, including the flexibility and the speed of response to support their needs. The College is at an advanced stage in the implementation of an online learning platform to offer a blended learning solution to meet the needs of employers in up-skilling in leadership and management competences. Target-setting and overall monitoring arrangements are strong. Economic engagement is well embedded into the curriculum in nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected.

6.19 The quality of the leadership and management of the essential skills is good. The senior management team strategically supports the essential skills and have invested significantly in their development and delivery; they recognise and acknowledge their centrality to the core curriculum offer of the College. There are good internal structures in place to manage the provision, including a good communications process which is well informed by a regular cycle of meetings at executive, middle management, and staff levels. The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in the essential skills, however, requires improvement. A more robust analysis of the provision, which identifies clear areas for improvement, particularly within each area of the essential skills provision, is required. Although the leadership and management is good overall, there are aspects of it which are very good. Amongst these are the essential skills provision within the "Fresh

Start” programme for level one learners, and the excellent links and partnerships with community organisations, for example through the “Employ Me” essential skills strand. Underpinning all of this is the commitment of the College to social inclusion and economic engagement, which is demonstrated in the implementation of well articulated, cohesive community policies, with measurable outcomes in the essential skills.

6.20 The College has introduced a centralised data management tool, an e-portal, which is facilitating the more effective data capture of key performance information to assist in the management and monitoring and evaluation of the essential skills provision. The College uses this data well at a strategic level to identify underperformance in the essential skills at the level of individual class groups and to drive improvement in a positive and supportive manner. A case conference approach is being piloted in work-based learning in order to provide timely interventions to address any low or underperformance by learners. There are good collaborative and working links between the quality improvement unit and the key essential skills managers and co-ordinators. As a result, a range of support interventions have been introduced to improve learner attendance and performance, for example, a mentor in-class support system.

6.21 The participation by learners and staff in competitions is a key feature of the College’s provision; learners have competed successfully in a wide range of competitions at local, national and international level. Participation by learners and staff across a number of schools in international study trips is also a strong feature of the College; these are well-led and managed and involve learners at all levels. Any good practice identified, along with the impact on curriculum development and the benefits for learners, staff and employers, are shared widely across the College. As a result, a variety of good quality resources has been produced and disseminated, including a number of good practice support materials which have been translated into a number of languages. The College has also developed an appropriate internal system to recognise, reward and celebrate the achievements of staff and learners, including the opportunity for learners to apply for a number of prestigious bursaries. The pupils attending the College as part of the schools partnership programme also have the opportunity to compete in skills competitions, which has a positive impact on the standards of work and their levels of motivation.

6.22 Almost all of the staff are appropriately qualified and experienced; a good number of them are current industry practitioners or have recent industrial experience. Inspection evidence shows a reliance on a significant number of part-time staff in a few of the professional and technical areas, although management report that this is necessary to meet flexibly the wide range of specialisms needed for some courses, and that these part-time staff enhance programme delivery and the learning experiences of the learners through their relevant work in industry. Management recognise, however, the need to monitor the deployment and effectiveness of part-time staff across the College, in particular those with a large number of teaching hours, and also the small number of staff absences which are impacting negatively on the learners.

6.23 There is good support for new and existing staff, including an appropriate induction programme and sound mentoring support. There are very good opportunities for staff to undertake continuous professional development through a range of initiatives including Colleges into Industry, curriculum development engagement with employers, support to undertake higher level qualifications, participation in exchange visits to other countries and engagement in industry-led projects.

6.24 The quality of the accommodation is good across the College campuses. The buildings are generally well-maintained and most of the learners have access to an appropriate range of physical resources which support the needs of their learning programmes. Plans are well advanced by management to update and modernise a number of campuses through new-build programmes across the College's estate.

## **7. Quality of provision for learning**

7.1 Overall, the quality of the provision for learning is very good; it is very good in further education and in work-based learning.

7.2 Overall, the quality of teaching, training and learning is very good; it was good or better in 85% of the lessons observed during the inspection, with just over one-half (52%) of them being very good or outstanding. A consistently high quality of teaching, training and learning was evident in art and design/media, child development, electrical and electronic engineering, hospitality and catering, mechanical engineering, SLDD and sport. In the very good or outstanding lessons, the lecturers plan effectively to meet the specific needs of each learner through the skilful use of a range of teaching and learning approaches to engage and challenge learners in their work. These lessons are underpinned with high expectations, effective questioning approaches and appropriate reference to current practice in industry. In a minority (15%) of the lessons observed, the planning for learning was weak and the lessons tended to be over-directed by the lecturers.

7.3 In the schools partnership programme, the quality of almost all of the teaching, training and learning observed during the inspection was very good or better. Staff in the College work effectively with schools to ensure pupils are well informed about the range and type of provision when they make their subject choices. The pupils are engaged and motivated by teaching and learning strategies which are well-tailored to their needs. These include active and inclusive approaches to learning, relaxed but very purposeful learning sessions, relevant practical activities to match their career interests and aspirations, and access to specialist staff and industry standard equipment and workshops. The monitoring, tracking and reporting of pupil progress is ongoing and effective. A notable feature of the programme is the opportunity for pupils to participate in cross-campus skills competitions.

7.4 In the community education provision, the quality of the teaching and learning observed was consistently good or better; the learners were engaged and highly motivated during the active, purposeful sessions. The provision includes, for example, the "Grow" programme and the "Enterprise Firm" programme which provide horticultural and enterprise training respectively to a wide range of learners from the five Neighbourhood Renewal Areas which the College serves. In addition, the College provides training across a range of professional and technical areas through its "Employ Me" programme, which is funded through the European Social Fund. The learners achieve good standards of work across the respective professional and technical areas. Appropriately, all of the learners on these programmes target a range of vocationally relevant level 2 awards and certificates. Almost all of them report very high levels of satisfaction with their training and the opportunities it provides for them to increase their self-confidence and employability skills.

7.5 The use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support and enhance teaching, training and learning is underexploited in the majority of the professional and technical areas inspected. While the learners have access to a range of generally good quality learning materials through the College's virtual learning environment, and many of the lecturers make regular use of whole group multimedia presentations, the many opportunities to enliven and enhance the learning experiences in the classrooms, workshops and theory sessions through the use of ILT are missed. While there are pockets of very

innovative uses of technology to extend learning, for example through use of mobile tablet technologies, these are often down to the motivation, skills and creativity of the individual lecturers concerned. Overall, the staff require further professional development in this important area of pedagogy, including the use of e-portfolios in work-based learning.

7.6 The College supports learners and lecturing staff effectively through the provision of easy access to an extensive range of e-books and electronic journals. This is valued highly by learners, who can use them on a range of devices, and access rates are very high. The College monitors closely the usage by learners of this resource, and feedback from lecturing staff is used effectively to inform further investment decisions.

7.7 Across nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of assessment is good or better. Typically, marking is thorough and lecturers provide learners with detailed, constructive and sensitive feedback on how they can improve their work. In the work-based learning provision in mechanical engineering, there is a need to ensure that assessment portfolios are regularly updated, and in transport operations there are undue delays in the assessment of the learners.

7.8 Economic and employer engagement is a key priority across the College, particularly in terms of reviewing on an ongoing basis the curriculum offer. As a consequence, effective processes are in place to rebalance the curriculum to meet the needs of industry. In a number of professional and technical areas, links with sub-groups of the prior workforce development forum have been sustained and further developed. Through these collaborative links, course teams have amended their curriculum planning and delivery to meet the needs of employers. As a result, the learners access a fit-for-purpose curriculum and benefit from improved, more relevant learning experiences through the industry links. The quality and range of the levels of engagement with industry are outstanding in child development and well-being, hospitality and catering and sports. In hospitality, the provision is extensive including innovative customised training courses and cutting edge knowledge partnerships. The levels of economic engagement across the College's community and outreach work are outstanding and do much to address barriers to employment and social exclusion. The College currently has links or live projects with 436 businesses. It is timely that the College should develop a coherent strategy on economic development that will identify any gaps in the provision and set targets for further development.

7.9 In work-based learning, the quality of the personal training planning process is good overall. The plans are individual in nature and capture sufficiently the outcomes of initial assessment and identify appropriately any additional educational needs of the learners. Most of the plans include targets for achievement and progress, although these need to be more specific with clear, measureable outcomes identified. Although the monitoring and review of learners in both directed training and the workplace is good, and includes input from the employers and specialist lecturers, it is not recorded effectively or consistently enough within the process. It is clear that some inconsistencies exist across the professional and technical areas, and the good work of the monitoring officers is not reflected strongly enough in the personal training planning process.

7.10 The quality of the arrangements for the care, guidance and support of the learners is outstanding. The provision for learner support services is dynamically and enthusiastically led by senior staff and is given a high priority at all levels in the College. There are outstanding examples of staff learning from, and developing a curriculum, which is shared and benchmarked against practice locally, nationally and internationally. The evidence is clear that the College's main core value of placing the learner as the central focus of all of their work is implemented to good effect at all levels across the College. On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the Southern Regional College has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding.



7.11 The learner support staff are a hard-working, cohesive team who work in partnership effectively with curriculum staff to support and promote the care, welfare and academic progress of all learners. The learner support team have developed effective collaborative links with a wide range of appropriate external organisations and agencies to facilitate the transition of learners to the College, and to provide clear guidance and support on a wide range of personal, social, financial and educational matters. Tailored individual support and mentoring services are also provided to those learners who require additional help with their learning, including the provision of specialist equipment. There are a range of mechanisms for learners to express their views on all aspects of the life and work of the College, including an independent learner survey which provides benchmarked data against a large number of further education colleges across the United Kingdom; senior managers and staff are responsive to the feedback received.

7.12 A range of externally funded projects are used creatively and innovatively to develop provision for learners who are underrepresented in the College, for example, travellers, newcomers and those not in education, employment or training. Where the outcomes from the projects are successful, the staff work to good effect to embed these into the mainstream curriculum. Almost all of the lecturers, across the further education and work-based learning provision inspected, provide very good levels of support and guidance to the learners and are well aware of their individual personal and learning needs. The learners' electronic individual learning plans (eILPs) are generally used well to support their learning and plan for progression; the learners are encouraged to set relevant targets which are reflective of their career goals and aspirations. While the College has in place rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality and impact of the range of learner services, the senior managers need to continue to promote greater consistency in the provision of care, guidance and support, particularly across the work-based learning programmes.

7.13 The learners' responses to the ETI's pastoral care questionnaires and the feedback from the learner focus group meetings held during the inspection was mostly positive regarding their experiences in the College. Almost all of them reported that they felt well cared for and supported in their learning. They did, however, raise some concerns around a few matters, including perceived inequity in the provision of social areas, access to and quality of ILT resources and the extent of staff cover for absent colleagues.

7.14 The quality of careers, education, information, advice and guidance is mostly very good. The senior staff have a clearly defined strategic vision resulting in a well planned, phased programme of careers advice which meet the needs of most of the learners and supports effectively individual career planning. There are very good arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of careers provision. Almost all of the learners have very good career learning opportunities underpinned by good access to a wide range of high quality, up-to-date, well organised and relevant resources.

7.15 The careers and employability staff are well-qualified and experienced. The College is well supported by business and industry and community and statutory agencies. In addition, staff collaborate effectively with other providers to enable learners to make well-informed career decisions. The current arrangements for careers education and guidance place an appropriate emphasis on strengthening the links between careers education and employability; they also prioritise widening participation through a well-developed advice and guidance service for those with identified barriers to learning.

7.16 In work-based learning, while the quality of the careers education, information advice and guidance is good overall, there are some inconsistencies across the professional and technical areas. While the evidence is clear that learners have access to regular careers education and advice, in electrical and electronic engineering, mechanical engineering and motor vehicle, the careers education is overly generic in nature and not well enough matched to the specific advice needs of individual learners in terms of their particular career options and progression pathways.

7.17 The quality of the provision for learning in the essential skills is good overall, although it is very good in the adult and community provision. The College has worked hard to develop the links between the professional and technical tutors and the essential skills tutors to facilitate the integration, contextualisation and embedding of the essential skills. This has resulted in good practice examples of professional and technical staff supporting the development of the essential skills through an integrated and embedded approach, which is a key strength of the provision.

7.18 Across the further education and work-based learning provision, the quality of teaching and learning in the essential skills was good or better in 61% of the lessons observed. Too many (39%) of the lessons, however, were satisfactory or inadequate. It is clear that the College needs to do more work to develop the pedagogic skills of staff, including the use of ILT to support teaching and learning, in order to further improve the quality of the provision in the essential skills. The role of the co-ordinators in literacy and numeracy has been largely administrative and has not included sufficient support for the development and improvement of the teaching and learning. This needs to be addressed.

## **8. Achievements and standards**

8.1 Overall, achievements and standards are very good; they are very good in further education and good in work based learning.

8.2 Most of the learners in further education demonstrate good or better standards of work and develop good professional, technical and transferable skills. In the lessons observed, most of them were well-motivated, confident and engaged fully in their learning. The learners participated well in group work and class discussions, and were able to express their own views and ideas confidently while showing respect for the opinions of their peers. Almost all of the learners take pride in their work, most of them demonstrate high levels of competence in the use of ICT to support their work and generally their written work is of a high standard.

8.3 Across most of the professional and technical areas inspected in further education, the learners are developing a good range of important self-management and team working skills. They are well-informed about potential career pathways and the standards required to successfully progress. Their courses of study are enhanced effectively through a range of activities, including opportunities to take part in competitions, involvement in relevant work placements, the use of motivational guest speakers, workplace visits and participation in European projects and study visits. The success and achievements of the learners are valued and celebrated by the College.

8.4 The majority of the learners on the Training for Success programme are well-behaved and display good levels of maturity; there is clear evidence of very good relationships between the tutors and the learners, which is underpinned by strong mutual respect.

8.5 Most of the learners in work-based learning benefit from good workplace training. Effective strategies have been implemented by the College to increase the quantity of relevant work placements for learners on the Training for Success programme. It is a notable achievement that around 82% of them are in a work placement. The very good links with employers are underpinned by the effective work of the monitoring officers who keep them well-informed of the learners' progress and the nature of the qualifications and training they are undertaking. The learners are supported well by their employers to further develop specialist skills and apply their knowledge, in often challenging commercial settings.

8.6 Almost all of the learners in work-based learning achieve good or better occupational standards in their practical and technical training and in the workplace. Most have good access to industry-standard equipment and the lecturers set high expectations with regard to the acquisition of specialist skills. The monitoring officers work hard to ensure there is a good match between workplace and directed training and take appropriate corrective action when this is weak. The standards and expectations of the learners are raised considerably through their participation in regional and national skills competitions across a good range of professional and technical areas, usually with high levels of success.

8.7 The quality of the achievements and standards in the essential skills is good overall. Most of the learners are making good progress and are keen to complete successfully their essential skills. In further education, there is evidence that a majority of the learners develop a good range of additional skills, including effective group working and peer and independent working skills, which are supported and enhanced in their professional and technical programmes of study. Within the adult provision in the essential skills, the learners are well-motivated and effectively supported to progress and achieve. Almost all are keen to progress beyond the present level of study. Most of the adult learners achieve appropriately high standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

8.8 Over the past four years, the overall achievement rates in the essential skills provision are above the sector average. The average achievement rate is 85% in literacy, 80% in numeracy and 83% in ICT.

8.9 According to the most recent data from the Department for Employment and Learning, the College is the highest performing in Northern Ireland. Over the past three years, the outcomes in the College's further education provision have increased year on year, and have been consistently above the sector average. The retention rate on level 1 courses is outstanding at 93%; the achievement rate is also outstanding at 92%. The retention rate on level 2 courses is outstanding at 95%; the achievement rate is good at 86%. Over the same period, on level 3 courses, the retention rate is outstanding at 97%; the achievement rate is very good at 90%. The retention and achievement rates for the provision under the schools partnerships programme are mostly outstanding.

8.10 In work-based learning, over the past four years, the majority of learners on the Training for Success programme are retained, and almost all achieve. The overall low retention rate (50%) for the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand has had an adverse impact on the overall retention rate for the Training for Success programme. Most of the learners on the Training for Success programme progress to employment or further training.

8.11 Over the past three years, most of the learners on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme are retained, and almost all achieve their full frameworks. The overall rate of retention in electrical engineering at level 3 (61%), mechanical engineering at level 2 (64%), motor vehicle at level 2 (62%) and wood occupations at level 2 (64%) require improvement.

### PART THREE: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREA REPORTS

9. [Applied science](#)  
**Performance Level:** Good
10. [Art and design, and media](#)  
**Performance Level:** Very Good
11. [Business, computing and Information Technology](#)  
**Performance Level:** Good
12. [Child development and well-being \(childcare\)](#)  
**Performance Level:** Outstanding
13. [Construction \(Brickwork, Plumbing, Carpentry and Joinery\)](#)  
**Performance Level:** Very Good
14. [Electrical and electronic engineering](#)  
**Performance Level:** Very Good
15. [Essential skills](#)  
**Performance Level:** Good
16. [Hospitality and catering](#)  
**Performance Level:** Outstanding
17. [Mechanical and manufacturing engineering](#)  
**Performance Level:** Good
18. [Sport, leisure and recreation](#)  
**Performance Level:** Very Good
19. [Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities \(SLDD\)](#)  
**Performance Level:** Very Good
20. [Transportation operations and maintenance \(motor vehicle\)](#)  
**Performance Level:** Satisfactory

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