

FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Provision for the Priority Skills
Areas at Level 3 North West
Regional College

Report of an Inspection
in January 2010

CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	1
3.	CONCLUSION	3

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, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report summarises the findings of an inspection of the college's provision at level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework in the Priority Skill Areas of computing and information and communication technology (ICT), construction and the built environment (construction), electrical and electronic engineering, and manufacturing and mechanical engineering. The college's provision of Priority Skill Area programmes funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) Apprenticeships Northern Ireland (ANI) programme was not inspected. The inspection was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) during the second term of the 2009/10 academic year.

1.2 In the Autumn term of 2010, the Inspectorate will publish summary reports for each Priority Skill Area across the further education sector. These reports will evaluate the:

- the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum for each Priority Skill Area;
- the strategic planning for the provision;
- the effectiveness of employer engagement and links with key stakeholders;
- the quality of the provision for learning; and
- the standards of students' work.

The reports will identify best practice to help the further education sector implement strategies to meet the needs of students and the economy. They will also inform the Department on the impact of its current policies regarding level 3 provision in these Priority Skill Areas.

1.3 A total of 41 lessons were observed during the inspection visit and members of the inspection team interviewed groups of students in each Priority Skill Area. The inspection team met members of the senior management team, the head of department for further education, relevant heads of school, course teams, and curricular managers with cross-college responsibilities. The inspection team reviewed quality assurance documentation and self-evaluation reports, curriculum development plans and minutes of course team meetings.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 The college has a good provision of full-time and part-time level 3 courses in the professional and technical areas inspected. These courses are provided in the college's main campuses in Limavady and Londonderry. There is, however, no provision of level 3 courses in these Priority Skill Areas in Strabane. The wide range of part-time technician and craft courses in construction and electrical installation is a feature of the provision in the college. In these areas, the college makes a significant contribution towards up-skilling the existing workforce and the non-employed, in the local and regional economy.

2.2 Most of the professional and technical courses are well-designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the students. They typically offer a good blend of theoretical and practical units to enable the students to progress to relevant employment and higher education. A

significant minority of the students on full-time courses, however, have weak academic achievements, and struggle with the demands of the Edexcel National Diploma courses. The college should consider developing a more flexible and appropriate provision for these students, particularly the National Certificate qualification.

2.3 There are good progression routes from level 2 to level 3 courses within the college, particularly for full-time students; a significant minority of the students on the level 3 courses have progressed from the college's wide provision of level 2 courses. Students who successfully complete their level 3 technician courses have good progression pathways in the college to higher education courses.

2.4 The senior management team, heads of school and course teams, have developed a wide range of links with employers, professional bodies and sectoral bodies. Good links have also been established with local primary and post-primary schools to promote the college's provision in these Priority Skill Areas. A start has been made by the heads of school and course teams in developing links with local employers, through their industrial liaison committees. The impact of these links at the time of the inspection on the curriculum in the professional and technical areas inspected, however, was limited. There are insufficient opportunities for curriculum managers and course teams, to plan their provision and resources across the Priority Skill Areas, so they can respond more effectively to new and emerging technologies, particularly in automation and control systems and in computer networking.

2.5 The course teams work effectively to meet the needs of their students. The students report that lecturers provide good support to them in their work.

2.6 The quality of teaching and learning in most (76%) of the lessons observed is good or better; it is very good or outstanding in a minority (27%) of the lessons. The very good quality of teaching and learning is a feature of the provision in electrical and electronic engineering. The quality of teaching and learning in a small number (4%) of the lessons is inadequate. The range and quality of the students' learning experiences in manufacturing and mechanical engineering are inconsistent. A minority of these lessons are dull and uninspiring with the lecturers using a limited range of teaching approaches to involve students effectively in their work.

2.7 The lecturers are well-qualified and experienced across nearly all of the areas inspected. There are, however, shortfalls in the existing deployment of specialist lecturing staff to teach the professional and technical courses in electrical and electronic engineering.

2.8 Although a minority of the full-time courses make good use of work-related learning, through site visits, project-work, and through the use of guest speakers, work-related learning is underdeveloped in most of the professional and technical areas, particularly in computing and ICT and construction.

2.9 Students have good access to careers advice and guidance from staff in the college's careers service. The integration of careers advice and guidance into the students' professional and technical units and through tutorial lessons is inadequate across most of the courses inspected.

2.10 Most of the areas have an appropriate range of specialist resources and accommodation to meet the needs of students. There are, however, deficiencies in the range and quality of practical workshops for courses in mechanical engineering. Good progress has been made in significantly upgrading the quality and range of information and

learning technology resources across the college. Students based at the Greystone campus in Limavady, however, have inadequate access to specialist information and learning technology resources following the decision to re-designate the Learning Resource Centre as a classroom.

2.11 Most of the students attain good or better standards in their professional and technical work across all of the courses. They also have good opportunities to develop and apply their communication and mathematical skills to meet the course requirements in their vocational units. There is evidence of significant enhancement in the mathematical standards of work for many of the students across the Priority Skill Areas.

2.12 Assessment arrangements in most of the courses are well-organised. The lecturers make use of an appropriate range of assessment tools, and marking for improvement is implemented effectively across nearly all of the courses. The assessment burden for students on most National Diploma courses, however, is excessive and the course teams should implement approaches to integrate assignments across the professional and technical units.

2.13 The levels of attainment in the professional and technical areas inspected are variable. They are mostly good for part-time courses, but are poor for most of the two-year full-time courses, particularly in computing and ICT in Londonderry.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION

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

3.2 EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION IN EACH PRIORITY SKILL AREA

In the professional and technical areas of construction and electrical and electronic engineering, the quality of education and training provided by the college is good. The college has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the college has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

In the professional and technical areas of computing and ICT, and manufacturing and mechanical engineering, the quality of education provided in this college is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, in learning and teaching, and in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the college's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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