

Report of a Pilot Inspection
Skills for Life and Work and ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
Springvale Training Ltd

November 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Springvale Training Ltd (Springvale) is a registered charitable organisation governed by a voluntary board of directors (the board) and owned by a not-for-profit charity, Upper Springfield Development Trust (USDT). Springvale is located in West Belfast, an area with higher rankings than the Northern Ireland (NI) average across a number of deprivation domains*.

Throughout the report, where text is accompanied by an asterisk, this indicates that additional information can be found in Appendix 2: Notes.

Springvale is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Skills for Life and Work programme (the skills programme) and the ApprenticeshipsNI 2021 programme (the apprenticeships programme). The organisation is led by a senior leadership team, comprising a chief executive, an assistant chief executive and a director of operations. The contracts for the programmes are managed by a compliance and quality manager, who has very recently taken combined responsibility for both the skills programme and the apprenticeships programme, working alongside a quality manager, a recruitment and business development officer, a finance and corporate service manager, and a marketing manager. A team of four provide administrative support. Fifteen full-time tutors and three part-time associate tutors deliver the programmes across a range of professional and technical (P&T) areas, along with provision for the essential skills. Three of the tutors are registered to undertake the Certificate in Teaching qualification in September 2024. A wellbeing officer supports the trainees, the apprentices and the staff.

At the time of the pilot inspection in November 2023, 138 trainees (74 year one; 58 year two; six year three) were registered at entry level on the skills programme across the P&T areas of beauty (22), childcare (15), catering (9), computer technology (9), hairdressing (11), joinery (35) and plumbing (37). Almost all (130, 94%) of the trainees were aged 16 to 19 years, and the remaining were aged 20 to 23 years.

Seventy-five apprentices were registered on the apprenticeships programme across a range of P&T areas: catering (11); childcare (11); hospitality (22); information and communications technology (ICT; 15); and the remainder (16) in customer service, information technology (IT), hairdressing, joinery, plumbing and warehousing. The majority of them (54; 72%) were registered at level two, with the remainder (21; 28%) registered at level three. A small number of apprentices were registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI 2017 programme at level two, in the P&T areas of hairdressing, ICT, and warehousing. Sixty-eight percent (54) of the eighty apprentices were aged 16 to 24 years, with the remainder aged over 25 years old. The P&T area of health and social care is also part of Springvale's ApprenticeshipsNI 2021 contract, but no apprentices were registered for this area at the time of the pilot inspection.

All data used for the inspection and presented in this report has been supplied and verified by Springvale at the time of the pilot inspection.

B. VIEWS OF APPRENTICES, TRAINEES, PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to trainees, apprentices and staff in advance of the pilot inspection.

Forty (29%) of the trainees and nearly one-quarter (19; 24%) of the apprentices responded, with a number providing written comments (15; 38%). All of them indicated that they found the induction to their programmes useful, and they have good opportunities to undertake additional learning to enhance their core qualification. They also indicated that their work is assessed regularly and they are given useful feedback on how to improve their work.

Inspectors also met and spoke with a sample of the trainees and the apprentices during their learning, teaching and training sessions, in a number of focus groups and in the workplace. They reported that they are happy with their programmes, and they know who to go to if they have a concern. Overall, there is regular contact with the tutors, and they feel well supported in their learning. They spoke positively about the induction process, and the good feedback they are given on their progress and achievements. They value how the organisation uses the feedback they give to tutors and managers to inform their learning experiences. The trainees were particularly appreciative of how the staff care for them, value them and want them to achieve, while the apprentices spoke positively about the timely access to essential skills classes.

A small number of the trainees' parents spoke with an inspector, and they were wholly positive. They found the engagement with Springvale prior to their children beginning the skills programme particularly beneficial, as it gave them confidence that the organisation was the "right fit". They value the relationships they have established with the staff and how the tutors support their children to engage successfully as trainees and achieve. They spoke about how their children are supported well to overcome a range of individual challenges to learning and as a result were not only happy to attend, but were achieving success. For example, where any of the children had been reluctant to engage in education previously and over an extended period of time, they spoke about how the staff worked to successfully engage them. They also spoke appreciatively about a range of support provided, along with signposting which benefitted not only their children on the skills programme, but also themselves as parents and the wider family.

Half of the tutors (9/18) completed the online confidential questionnaire. They reported that the organisation supports them well to deliver the training programmes, and that they have access to appropriate IT equipment, internet facilities and learning resources both within the organisation and at home. Staff know who to go to if they have a problem or concern and overall are happy with their experiences working in the organisation.

The inspectors also met and spoke with staff during the inspection, including in a focus group. They all spoke about a positive change of culture in the organisation. They reported this has resulted in improved collegiality, and the longer-serving staff reported that they now feel more valued and have greater involvement in the decision-making of the organisation.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

During the pilot inspection and informed by Springvale's quality improvement planning and underpinning self-evaluation processes, the ETI inspectors worked alongside the organisation to consider how well it:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

The skills programme and the apprenticeships programme, the P&T areas of catering, children's care, learning and development, construction, hospitality, and ICT, the provision for essential skills and the arrangements for child and adult protection were evaluated.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Springvale's self-evaluation process is effective, resulting in appropriately identified priorities for development which are related well to the organisational vision. More meaningful and measurable targets are required in the action plans, using the qualitative and quantitative data available.
- The actions for improvement have had a positive impact on the appropriateness of the curriculum delivered and the quality of the learning, teaching and training. Almost all of the learning, teaching and training observed was effective.
- High priority is given to the promotion of the trainees' health and wellbeing, through carefully considered provision within the curriculum, a wide range of interventions and support, and appropriate signposting to services to address the main challenges they face. Where required, there is also suitable support provided to apprentices.
- There is effective promotion of inclusion and equality, with disadvantage minimised and barriers to learning identified, understood and addressed through the well-targeted support provided to trainees and when required, their parents/guardians.

- Events and award programmes celebrate the successes of the trainees and apprentices.
- There has been a strategic focus on developing the workforce, with a well-conceived range of professional learning opportunities provided for all staff, along with good support for their wellbeing. As a result, the morale of the workforce is positive and there is a strong collective commitment to realising the organisational vision.
- Springvale is focused clearly on the growth and development of a community of learning, through building and sustaining partnerships. Collaborative and collegial staff working is being fostered, along with purposeful engagement with the local community and employers. The continued growth of high quality and sustainable provision across the programmes is necessarily prioritised, with a focus on increasing recruitment to the programmes and improving further the retention rates.
- The provision for the skills programme and the apprenticeships programme is effective, as is the provision for the essential skills and the P&T areas sampled: catering, children’s care, learning and development, construction, hospitality, and ICT.
- The arrangements for child and adult protection take full account of current policy and guidance.

Areas for further action:

- Set more meaningful and measurable targets in the action plans, using the qualitative and quantitative data available, to be able to evaluate better the progress being made in addressing the identified areas of improvement.
- Promote the continued growth of high quality and sustainable provision across the programmes through well-targeted recruitment, ongoing monitoring of retention, and a continued focus on achieving more successful outcomes and progression for all of the trainees and apprentices.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Springvale's vision is *“to deliver the highest quality vocational training and support services to our young people and adults to gain skills, qualifications and confidence to achieve their goals and exceed their expectations.”* The vision has been informed by consultation with all of its stakeholders, with good account taken of the NI economic and skills policy position*. The vision is underpinned by agreed values of inclusion, integrity, passion, respect, empowerment and quality.

Through its self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes, a clear baseline was established at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year in relation to where Springvale was at in terms of achieving its vision and this was well understood by the board, leadership at all levels and the tutors. There were realistic reflections and evaluations made in relation to strengths in the provision and the appropriately identified areas for improvement, namely: the development of teaching and learning, including development of active learning; enhanced community engagement, including school and business/employer engagement; positive destinations for trainees and apprentices; being a trusted delivery partner; and sustainability through securing alternative revenue sources.

More meaningful and measurable targets should be set in the action plans, using the qualitative and quantitative data available, to be able to evaluate better the progress in addressing the identified areas of improvement, such as the growth of sustainable provision. Additionally, better capture of exit interview information from leavers, and in particular early leavers, and its use has been appropriately identified as an area for improvement. Addressing this area for improvement would provide information and quantitative data to better inform actions to address the organisation's necessary focus on improving retention across the two programmes.

The inspectors' evaluations of the provision, along with responses to the ETI questionnaires, the inspectors' discussions with trainees, apprentices, parents, staff, employers and community representatives affirm that the organisation's vision, and its contribution to delivering on key NI strategies, is now being better realised.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

In the past 20 months Springvale's leadership and staff, supported by the board and USDT, have been undertaking a necessary phased change management journey to address the identified areas for improvement and better achieve its vision. Effective communication between management and staff and a now shared commitment to realising the vision have contributed to the development of a positive organisational culture. The staff report they are working in a more collegial way. The quality of the experiences and the outcomes for the learners* are improving as a consequence of a range of impactful actions.

The strategic focus on the delivery of sustainable growth of quality provision for both programmes is clearly evidenced in the implementation of the four appropriate strategic priorities in Springvale's three year strategic plan: *Quality in everything we do*; *Training organisation of choice*; *Engaged organisation*; and *Sustainable organisation*. There are a number of well-considered recovery plans in place to support the development and sustainability of the apprenticeships programme.

A number of appointments have been made to strengthen the management and teaching teams. A strategic associate recruitment model for new or small P&T areas has been adopted to ensure teaching appointments are a "right fit", for both the tutor and the organisation, and that the growth of the provision is high quality and sustainable. Tutor caseloads are increased incrementally, as staff with considerable industrial experience are supported well to build and develop their pedagogical skills.

The staff know the learners well and the provision across the P&T areas is well-planned. Units are chosen by tutors to match the needs of the learners and enable them to develop appropriate occupational skills, knowledge and understanding. Tutors have high expectations of the learners and there is evidence of good marking for improvement and tutor feedback, including for example electronically in the P&T area of ICT.

Employers with trainees on work experience placements are very complimentary about the individuals and the level of skill they can bring to their roles. Apprentices' employers report that they are happy with communication from the organisation, and they value the skills development of their apprentices and how it impacts positively on their job role. A number of employers spoke about how the apprentices' vocational qualification units are well-matched to the job roles and that the learners are making good progress.

The holistic development of the trainees is appropriately prioritised. There is a good understanding of the barriers and challenges they face, due for example to negative experiences of compulsory education, their caregiving responsibilities and disabilities. The lifeskills units for the skills programme are chosen carefully, informed by experiences the learners have identified they would like to explore, such as how young people can be unfairly perceived by others. The trainees can gain a level 1 award in personal and social development and employability.

There is a strategic approach to the delivery of the essential skills and provision is in place soon after registration for all those who require one or more of the essential skills. The curriculum covers the required standards for the three essential skills. The delivery model is flexible and includes face-to-face group and one-to-one sessions, and also sessions in the workplace to suit the needs of the learners and the employers. The essential skills tutors and the vocational tutors articulate clearly the importance of ensuring learners and employers see the essential skills as an integral part of the overall qualifications. Good links are developing between these tutors to ensure that tasks are contextualised appropriately and to ensure a more uniform approach to assessment for example, in assessing standards of accuracy in written work.

There are purposeful processes in place to monitor regularly the quality of the provision across the P&T areas and in the essential skills. Classroom observations and book scoops are completed, and files and personal training plans are sampled. All of the sessions observed were well-planned and paced, with effective classroom management, respectful relationships and a good rapport between tutors and learners. The learners display positive dispositions to their learning. Adaptive teaching* was evidenced in the lessons observed and schemes of work indicate its importance, however there are only a few examples of specific activities, tasks or resources included in the schemes.

Across all of the sessions observed, there was evidence of the organisation's focus on the development of technology-enhanced learning, and it being used well, including: as an effective starter activity to develop mental maths, listening skills and promote discussion in essential skills; through pre-recorded videos in the practical

catering classes which enables the tutor to maximise time providing at elbow support for trainees where required and at the same time challenging them to work independently. Effective use of videos in hair and beauty sessions could have been developed further by recording the discussion.

The vocational sessions observed were characterised by effective questioning and reinforcement of learning. There were effective examples of peer teaching and learning, such as the catering trainees leading the kitchen related tasks in mixed groups and the hairdressing and beauty trainees dealing with customers. In essential skills, the effective lessons observed were characterised by: good levels of learning support; chunked, purposeful activities to sustain engagement and successful learning; and contextualised tasks and explicit links made to the vocational areas. Some of the learners should be encouraged to give more extended verbal responses.

The quality of the learning resources and accommodation observed during the inspection, both in the organisation and the workplaces visited, was generally good. There has been an investment in a newly-resourced IT hub.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Of the 138 trainees, 98 (71%) were males and 40 (29%) females. Trainees spoke about how they were recruited to the skills programme by a variety of means, including personal recommendation and previous experience with the organisation when they were attending school. A number of the trainees spoke about being out of formal education for at least a year before beginning the skills programme. They were very positive about their learning experiences at Springvale. They appreciated being treated as young adults and having their opinions listened to; as a consequence, they accepted that the expectations set for them as learners are fair.

Among the trainees, there is a wide range of ability levels, and a high percentage of them have a range of recognised learning needs. Appropriate adjustments are made to meet their needs and the organisation maintains good contact with trainees' parents/guardians. Where required, they are supported by staff from the disability support services* who work actively with the learners and provide good support in practical classes and in their work-experience placements.

As a result of the barriers and challenges they experience, many of the trainees are not yet work ready. At the time of the inspection, none of the year one trainees had yet commenced a placement, nearly two-fifths (38%) of the year two trainees had a placement and half (50%) of the year three trainees had a placement.

Of the 80 apprentices registered across a range of P&T areas, 40 were male and 40 were female. Reflecting gender stereotypes which continue to exist for certain job roles, the apprentices in childcare, customer service and hairdressing were all females, while in joinery, plumbing and warehousing, they were all males. In catering, the apprentices were all male, whereas in hospitality there were 10 males and 12 females. Twelve of the 19 apprentices in IT and ICT were females.

Inclusion and equity are promoted well through delivery of a number of projects and initiatives which involve collaborative working with other community-based organisations and stakeholders. For example, learners are benefitting from participation in Springvale's Inclusive Initiatives pilot project which involves all of the P&T areas in community-based activities. The learners benefit from working with and supporting others facing challenges in their own community, while developing their P&T skills. These opportunities are promoting the development of responsible citizenship, environmental awareness, and empathy for others in the learners.

For example, learners from Children's Care, Learning and Development have read to children and old people in the library. They have also provided a community pantry and clothing share service in Springvale for all of the learners. The construction trainees have worked with a number of local community-based organisations, including: Farset Hotel* to build seating in a picnic area, service water taps and upcycle furniture for those in need; the Falls Residents Association* to complete a regeneration project, tidying up a green recreation space for the community; and the Clonard Residents Association*, to coordinate repairs to homes of older residents. The catering trainees partake in meaningful community projects such as training for and preparing a Christmas lunch project for pensioners, and preparing, cooking and delivering breakfast to Farset Hotel residents. The hairdressing and beauty trainees provide professional standards of service to Farset Hotel residents which they appreciate. Some learners have also gained valuable insights through for example completing anonymous interviews with residents from Farset Hotel about their stories of residence and what has led to the residents needing the services of the hotel.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

To better celebrate the achievement of its learners, the profile of Springvale's awards ceremony has been raised, with stakeholders in attendance and its promotion in the local press and social media. Other events and award programmes also celebrate the successes of the learners, along with celebratory social media posts.

Sharing of data and information gathered, as well as its analysis and use by all staff, including the wellbeing officer, is improving. The processes in place to regularly and monitor and track the progress being made by the learners are purposeful and effective. The focused fortnightly case conferences for each P&T area and the essential skills are resulting in learners at risk of not achieving being identified at an early stage and suitable interventions or support put in place. A range of strategies are implemented to build upon success and mitigate barriers faced by learners, including additional classes, flexible timetabling and lessons with dyslexia friendly content.

Standards of the trainees' work are good or better. They engaged well in both the theory and practical elements of the sessions and made good responses when questioned, and demonstrated good practical skills. There were high levels of support for them, such as with spelling key words, sentence construction and

development of digital skills through for example taking photographs of work products and emailing them to the tutor. Good or better standards of work were demonstrated in apprentices' files and in the workplace. However, a significant minority of apprentices in catering and hospitality are making slow progress in unit achievement.

Since 2021, 26 trainees had completed the skills programme at entry level, and of these 21 (81%) gained the P&T qualifications and 18 (69%) gained the full award. None of them had yet completed the skills programme at level one or level two. Eighty-six apprentices had completed the apprenticeships programme in the same period, and of these 78 (91%) had achieved the full award; of the 72 who completed at level two, 65 (90%) achieved the full award and of the 14 who completed at level three, 13 (93%) achieved the full award. From the start of the skills programme in September 2021 to present, the retention rates across the P&T areas have typically varied from 60% to 100%, while the overall retention rate is too low at 51% for the apprenticeship programme over the same period. Well-targeted recruitment, ongoing monitoring of retention and a continued focus on achieving more successful outcomes and progression for all of the trainees and apprentices is required.

Of the cohort registered since 2021, 65% have completed literacy, 57% have completed numeracy and 30% have completed ICT essential skills and all achieved their targeted level. To support further their future progression, there should be consideration given to enabling learners to progress beyond achievement of the targeted level and where possible, to achieve at level 2.

Where required, transition support was put in place for a number of learners who progressed to the local further education college (the college) in 2022/2023, with visits arranged for the learners to meet staff and become familiar with the building before their course started.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

Springvale is focused clearly on the growth and development of a community of learning, through building and sustaining partnerships. Collaborative and collegial staff working is being fostered, along with purposeful engagement with the local community and employers.

There has been a strategic focus on developing the workforce, with a good range of professional learning for all staff and support for their wellbeing. As a result, the morale of the workforce is positive and there is a collective commitment to realising the organisational vision, including through the ongoing development of staff roles and responsibilities. The review and update of key policies, namely the teaching, learning and assessment policy and the inclusive learning policy are being appropriately prioritised. Staff avail of a range internal and external training, including for example assessor awards, training in keeping children and adults safe, and disability training, along with tailored development opportunities.

Links are being developed with a greater range of employers to support the further development of the apprenticeships programme. Additionally, greater links have been forged with the college and some learners have received bespoke information sessions from the college about progression opportunities. Overall, learners would benefit from more consistent information about careers and a greater understanding of progression opportunities.

Forty percent of learners in Springvale's September 2023 intake came from post-primary and special schools involved in a vocational training programme in P&T areas for schools run by Springvale from September 2022 to May 2023. The chosen vocational P&T areas of the 119 pupils who attended the schools programme included beauty, catering, childcare, and joinery, as well as digital media. Almost all of the pupils achieved unit accreditation or entry level awards in their chosen vocational P&T area. Additionally, Springvale supported the delivery of employability within a number of these schools by carrying out mock interviews with pupils in their school setting. Springvale's leadership reports that due to budgetary challenges for the schools previously involved, its schools programme has been negatively impacted for this academic year, 2023/2024.

F. CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION

At the time of the pilot inspection, the policies and procedures for child and adult protection take full account of current policy and guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

Springvale is focused on realising its vision "*to deliver the highest quality vocational training and support services to our young people and adults to gain skills, qualifications and confidence to achieve their goals and exceed their expectations*". The staff have high expectations for the trainees and apprentices and work collegially to ensure that they are well supported to engage, learn, achieve and progress.

The setting of more meaningful and measurable targets for the identified areas for improvement is required, along with well-targeted recruitment, ongoing monitoring of retention, and a continued focus on achieving more successful outcomes and progression for all of the trainees and apprentices.

ETI will continue to work with Springvale which is well placed to take forward the areas for further action detailed above and in the body of this report.

5. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

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%

APPENDIX 2: NOTES

- Page 1** **a number of deprivation domains** * - These come from of the [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 \(NIMDM2017\)](#) and include: the proportion of those leaving school aged 16,17 and 18 not entering education, employment or training; the proportions of working age adults (25 -64) with no or low levels of qualifications; the proportion of the population aged 15 and under living in households whose equivalised income is below 60% of the NI median; the proportion of working age population who are employment deprived; and the proportion of the population living in households whose equivalised income is below 60% of the NI median.
- Page 4** **the NI economic and skills policy position*** - Including the NI Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework; the New Decade, New Approach Social Inclusion Strategies, 2020; the OECD Skills Strategy Northern Ireland, 2020; the Economic Recovery Action Plan 2021; 10x Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation, 2021; the NI Skills Barometer 2021; and the NI Draft Industrial Strategy 2030.
- Page 5** **learners*** - In this report learners refers to trainees and apprentices.
- Page 6** **adaptive teaching*** - The term ‘adaptive teaching’, as set out in [Standard 5 of the Department for Education’s Early Career Framework](#) in England resets expectations about what it means to differentiate, to provide opportunities for all learners to experience success by: adapting lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all, so that all learners have the opportunity to meet expectations; balancing input of new content so that learners master important concepts; and making effective use of teaching assistants. Adaptive teaching is an approach used to continually assess the strengths and needs of learners and adapt teaching accordingly to ensure all learners can meet expectations.
- Page 7** **disability support services*** - Clanrye Group Ltd and Disability Action are two of three organisations in Northern Ireland contracted by DfE to provide specialised support for young people, aged 16 to 22 years, on the Skills programme and the ApprenticeshipsNI programme across the region as part of DfE’s disability support service. The other organisations is Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL).
- Page 8** **Farset Hotel*** - [The Farset Hotel](#) (Farset) is part of the Farset group of charities which includes Farset Youth and Community Development (FYCD) and FYCD Respect Programme. It is located on the Springfield Road and was opened in 2003 as an international hostel. Its aim is to promote the plight of homelessness and poverty within the community. Farset delivers a range of programmes, courses, outreach services and accommodation which are homeless and poverty centric.

the Falls Residents Association* - The association works with local residents to deal with issues that affect residents' daily lives. The association seeks to build on the relationships between statutory and community contacts to ensure a strong and vibrant community.

the Clonard Residents Association* - The association promotes the benefit of the inhabitants of the Greater Clonard district, without distinction of age, gender, race, political, religious or other opinion, by associating with statutory authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to advance education and to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for health, recreation and leisure time occupation, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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