# FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training Inspectorate

Provision for the Priority Skills Areas at Level 3 Belfast Metropolitan College

Report of an Inspection in January 2010



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





INVESTOR IN PEOPLE CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

# CONTENTS

Section	Page	
1		1
2.	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	1
3.	CONCLUSION	5

```
A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond
as follows:
      More than 90%
                          almost/nearly all
                      -
           75%-90%
                     -
                          most
           50%-74%

    a majority

                     - a significant minority
           30%-49%
           10%-29% -
                          a minority
      Less than 10% -
                          very few/a small minority
```

The statistics used in this report have been supplied and verified by Food and Drink Sector Skills.

## **Grading System**

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

Performance Level	Grade	Descriptor
Outstanding	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	2	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	3	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which the organisation has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

# 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 communications 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) under ApprenticeshipsNI 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 Areas 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 64 lessons were observed during the inspection visit and members of the inspection team interviewed groups of students in each of the Priority Skill Areas. The inspection team met members of the senior management team, senior thematic managers, programme area managers, centre managers and course teams, and 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 most of the areas inspected. The extensive range of part-time technician and craft courses in construction and electrical and electronic engineering is a feature of the provision in the college providing students with good opportunities to enhance their professional and technical skills. The craft courses in both areas attract students who travel considerable distances to the college to undertake their education and training. The college has worked effectively to promote its range of Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses through a range of initiatives, including a reduction funded courses in manufacturing and mechanical engineering, however, is limited.

2.2 Most of the courses are well-designed to meet the needs of the students. The professional and technical units combine a good mixture of theoretical and practical units to enable students to progress to employment and higher education. The full-time provision in computing, however, is incoherent; the college offers the Applied General Certificate of Education Advanced level double award in ICT, as well as the national certificate and national diploma for Information Technology (IT) Practitioners. With the exception of electrical and electronic engineering, full-time students have limited opportunities to supplement their main professional and technical courses with additional qualifications. In electronic engineering, a feature of good practice is the inclusion of four industry recognised vendor qualifications for students on the full-time Diploma for IT Professional ICT Systems Support, which significantly enhance their prospects of progressing into relevant employment.

2.3 There are good progression routes from level 2 to level 3 courses, particularly for full-time students. A feature of good practice is the full-time bridging course in construction, which combines the First National qualification with units from the National Certificate course for those students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements for direct entry to the level 3 course enabling them to achieve a National Certificate qualification on completion of a further one year of full-time study. The college also provides a unique bridging course in building services engineering for students with level 3 craft qualifications who wish to progress to part-time higher education courses. With the exception of mechanical engineering, students who successfully complete their level 3 courses have good progression pathways in the college to relevant higher education courses.

2.4 The quality of the provision in the professional and technical areas inspected is variable, ranging from outstanding to satisfactory. The quality of the provision in electrical and electronic engineering is outstanding, with excellent curriculum planning and collegial work across the campuses, strong industrial links, high expectations, and standards of work. The quality of the provision in construction and computing and ICT, and manufacturing and mechanical engineering is satisfactory. There are a number of recurring weaknesses in the management of the curriculum in these areas including, a lack of collegial work and sharing of resources, poor sequencing of course modules, and ineffective timetabling arrangements which are not conducive to supporting student motivation and retention.

2.5 Senior members of staff in the college have developed strong links with key sectoral bodies in industry and professional groups, with some members of staff leading the further education sector planning groups. The senior thematic manager for STEM has worked effectively to revitalise the college's provision in construction and engineering, especially in extending the range of the provision in these areas. Across all of the professional and technical areas inspected, the course teams have developed and are developing good links with industry to enhance the college's provision of part-time nationally accredited qualifications and bespoke training for local and regional employers. A feature of good practice is the work of the industrial liaison forum in electrical and electronic engineering to inform curriculum planning. One outcome is the development of a range of part-time courses to up-skill employees who have been made redundant.

2.6 The senior management team has given appropriate attention to improving the quality of provision through the implementation of revised self-evaluation procedures. This includes the scrutiny and moderation of the grades assigned by course teams in their self-evaluation reports. Although this process is informed by key performance indicators, especially course achievements, it does not evaluate sufficiently the quality of the students' learning experiences. In addition, more work is needed to elicit the views of students at key stages of their learning to aid quality improvement planning.

2.7 Pre-entry advice and guidance is inconsistent across the professional and technical areas. Appropriate steps are taken to interview full-time students in mechanical engineering before they are enrolled. The admissions process for full-time students in construction and electrical and electronic engineering is not effective in ensuring that those students with the appropriate aptitudes and interests are recruited onto both programmes, particularly for those courses that are over-subscribed. In both areas, the students are accepted onto the courses on a first-come first-served basis without an initial interview by the vocational tutors. Although the course teams provide one-to-one guidance to students on the course content and the specific requirements, this only occurs once an offer of acceptance is made to the students.

2.8 The quality of teaching and learning is variable across and within the professional and technical areas, with only just over half (55%) of the lessons being good or better. A minority (15%) of the lessons are very good or outstanding. With the exception of electrical and electronic engineering, too much of the teaching is dull and uninspiring, with the students remaining passive for excessive periods of time. Key recurring weaknesses across these areas include the limited range of teaching approaches, insufficient challenge and lack of relevance to current practice in industry, and ineffective questioning approaches.

2.9 The use of information and learning technology to support students in their learning is inconsistent across the professional and technical areas. The lecturers make good or better use of the college virtual learning environment in electrical and electronic engineering and in construction. A feature of good practice is the effective use of the college's virtual learning environment to support part-time students on craft courses in both of these areas. In the other professional and technical areas, the lecturers are not exploiting sufficiently the wide range of information and learning technology resources in the college to enhance the quality of the students' learning experiences. The main weaknesses include inadequate use of the virtual learning environment, over-reliance on the college shared-drive facility and the under-use of interactive and multi-media resources, to stimulate the students in their work.

2.10 The lecturers are well-qualified and experienced across nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected. The recruitment of new lecturing staff in construction, and electrical and electronic engineering has led to improvements in course design and delivery. In electrical and electronic engineering, these appointments have helped innovate the curriculum, enhanced industrial links, and have refreshed the technical expertise of the course team. In the other professional and technical areas, recent progress has been made, in updating the industrial experience of lecturers, with more participation in the Learning Skills and Development Agency Northern Ireland Lecturers into Industry programme. More needs to be done, however, to develop the lecturers' knowledge and understanding of current practice in industry. Across all of the professional and technical areas, there is a need to ensure that staff undertaking specialist technical training are provided with adequate support from the college's Employee Development unit.

2.11 The curriculum managers through the college Workforce and Economic Development unit have worked effectively to enhance the use of work-related learning to develop the full-time students' employability and enterprise skills across the college. There are features of good practice in the college, especially in higher education programmes and in a number of further education courses. In the professional and technical areas inspected, however, the impact of these initiatives was limited. Although most of the professional and technical areas make some use of work-related learning, more needs to be done to develop the scope of work-related learning, through site visits, work experience, real project-work, and through the use of guest speakers. 2.12 Although students have good access to careers advice and guidance through the college careers service, the embedding of tailored advice and guidance on relevant career pathways into higher education and employment is under-developed in most of the professional and technical areas inspected.

2.13 Most of the professional and technical areas have a good or better range of specialist physical resources to meet the needs of students. The range and quality of the practical workshops in construction and engineering is excellent. In electrical and electronic engineering, the extensive range of specialist resources is well-managed by the course team; students have regular access to these resources and they are used effectively to support teaching and learning across all of the provision. There are weaknesses in the management of specialist resources across the other professional and technical areas, especially in construction, and manufacturing and mechanical engineering. A number of the specialist rooms, particularly the materials laboratory in the Millfield campus, are poorly maintained and deployed. With the exception of electrical and electronic engineering, many of the teaching rooms are uninspiring, with little use of wall displays to present a positive image of the professional and technical area for the students.

2.14 Most of the students attain satisfactory standards in their professional and technical work in computing and ICT, construction, and mechanical engineering. The standards of work attained by the students in electrical and electronic engineering are outstanding; the students work well beyond the minimum requirements in their assessed units, they are wellmotivated, and attendance in lessons is good. Through their project work, they effectively apply their knowledge and problem-solving skills to develop solutions in a range of industrially relevant activities. Attendance in many of the other programmes, however, is It is very poor for full-time students enrolled on the National Diploma in variable. construction at the Castlereagh campus. Across all of the professional and technical areas inspected, the standards of oral communication were mostly good and the standards of written communication ranged from good to satisfactory. The students achieve satisfactory or better standards in mathematics in their professional and technical units; they are very good in electrical and electronic engineering, where the students effectively develop and apply complex mathematical concepts in their work.

2.15 The levels of attainment in the professional and technical areas are variable, with mostly good outcomes on most part-time courses and lower levels of attainment on two year full- time courses. The levels of attainment on most of the full-time and part-time courses in electrical and electronic engineering courses are good.

2.16 Assessment arrangements in most of the courses are well-organised, particularly the prompt return of completed assignments to students. The lecturers make use of an appropriate range of assessment tools, and marking for improvement is implemented effectively across nearly all of the courses. In mechanical engineering and construction, insufficient use is made of assessment planners to schedule the students' assignment workloads. In computing and ICT, good use is made of industrial links to review the quality of course assignments. In construction, a feature of good practice is the flexible and responsive use of work-based assessment for students enrolled on the National Vocational Qualification level 3 craft programme in plumbing.

# 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 Belfast Metropolitan 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.

## 3.2 Evaluation of the Quality of the Provision in Each Priority Skill Area

In the areas electrical and electronic engineering, the quality of education provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The organisation has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

In the professional and technical areas of computing and ICT, construction, and manufacturing and mechanical engineering, the quality of education provided in Belfast Metropolitan 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.

#### © CROWN COPYRIGHT 2010

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk

