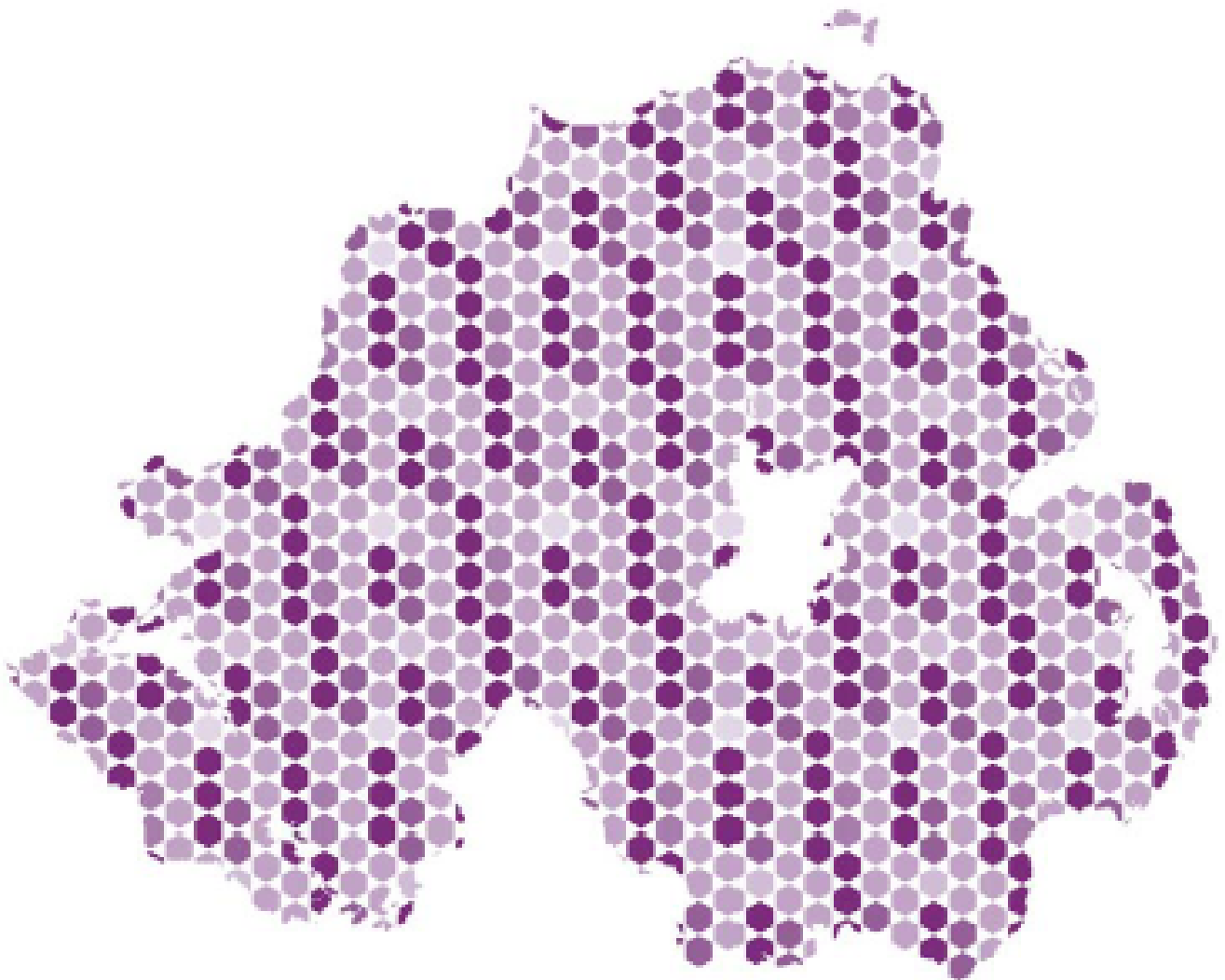FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION

Education and Training Inspectorate

Provision for the Priority Skills Areas at Level 2 South Eastern Regional College

Report of an Inspection in April 2009

CONTENTS

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

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1.   **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   The South Eastern Regional College was formed in August 2007, following the merger of the former East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education, the Lisburn Institute of Further and Higher Education, and the North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education. The College has six main campuses located at Ballynahinch, Bangor, Downpatrick, Lisburn, Newcastle and Newtownards. The College has a wide catchment area spread across four district council areas, Ards, Down, Lisburn and North Down. Although the College campuses cover a significant geographical spread, the College management team has made very good progress in establishing a corporate College identity.

1.2   In 2007, the working age population in the South Eastern Regional Workforce Development Forum was 208,535. According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, March 2009, "Monthly Labour Market Report", the Ards (3.0%), Down (3.8%), Lisburn (3.4%), and North Down (2.6%) District Council Areas have claimant counts which are below the Northern Ireland claimant count rate of 4%. However, employment prospects in the area have deteriorated over the last twelve months. In the year up to February 2009, for example, companies such as Corus, in Lisburn and Montupet, in Dunmurry have confirmed a number of job losses. Three major retail companies, within the council areas, are in administration but are still trading and there are further expected redundancies which will affect the Newtownards area.

1.3   The inspection focused on the College's full-time and part-time provision at level 2 on the national qualifications framework, which is equivalent to General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) at grade C or above. The main areas inspected were computing and information and communication technology (ICT), construction, engineering (electrical and electronic engineering and manufacturing engineering), tourism and hospitality, and the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. The College's provision of priority skills area training funded by the Department's Jobskills (residual), Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes were not inspected. Prior to the inspection, students were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire to give their views on their experiences in the College. The inspection team also interviewed groups of students during the inspection. Members of the inspection team held discussions with the Principal and Chief Executive, members of the senior management team, representatives of the Board of Governors, heads of school, course team leaders, managers with cross college responsibilities and a sample of employers. A total of 33 lessons were observed. The inspection team reviewed self-evaluation reports of the priority skills areas inspected, minutes and reports of senior management meetings, course team meetings, and strategic and quality assurance documentation.

1.4   Circular FE 11/08 required the six colleges of further education in Northern Ireland to submit to the Department a self-evaluation report for their provision at level 2 in the priority skills areas, and a Whole College Quality Improvement Plan, along with their College Development Plans for 2008-2011. They were also required to include in their submission statistical information on student enrolments and levels of success for each priority skills area at level 2. This information was used by the inspection team to compare the performance of the College in each priority skills area, against the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

1.5   The College has a good provision of level 2 technician and craft courses in almost all of the priority skills areas inspected, with the exception of construction. The provision in construction is limited to one First Diploma Course which is offered on the Bangor campus only. Due to the small numbers recruited in the priority skills area of construction at level 2, a separate evaluation is not included in this report. The College provides full-time courses in mechanical and electrical engineering, computing and ICT, and travel and tourism, and a part-time NVQ level 2 programme in professional cookery. In the curriculum areas of mechanical and electrical engineering, the full-time provision is centred on the Bangor campus only, and needs to be extended across the College, as appropriate. There is also a GCSE programme in construction offered in St Joseph's High School, Belfast. Overall, part-time provision at level 2 across the priority skills areas is limited. Almost all of the students enrolled on full-time courses enter the College with low levels of prior educational attainment and nearly all (94%) have not achieved grade C or better in both English and mathematics. The College offers good progression opportunities in further education and training for students in each priority skills area, from level 2 to further and/or higher education and employment.

2.   SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1   In the priority skills areas inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the South Eastern 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 College has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

2.2   The main strengths are the:

- good strategic leadership provided by the Chief Executive and the College management team, and their clear commitment to improving the quality of provision and the achievements of the students;

- excellent progress made in enabling staff at all levels to access and interpret management information data to inform their planning for continuous quality improvement;

- extensive system of quality assurance and improvement processes across the College, and the underpinning programme of staff development to support these processes;

- excellent progress made towards establishing a unified College, based on a shared vision of quality, and a shared values system, with an appropriate strategic emphasis on economic engagement, educational attainment, inclusion and transformational leadership;

- very good links with business and industry, and the very good or excellent quality of the industry standard resources and equipment;

- good operational management and leadership provided by the heads of school;

- good or better quality of the teaching in almost all of the lessons observed;

- good or better standards of work in most of the priority skills areas inspected;

- very good provision in tourism and hospitality; and

- very good pastoral care provision for the students.

2.3   The main areas for improvement are:

- to extend the excellent links with industry to all level 2 courses and campuses in order to facilitate more work placements, guest speakers, involvement in enterprise events, and/or relevant industrial visits;

- to use more effectively the Centre of Excellence links and the work of the Business Development Unit to support level 2 programmes;

- to develop a broader, more systematic approach to the provision of careers education information advice and guidance, and to embed an employability skills component within most priority skills areas at level 2;

- a review of the curriculum in construction at level 2, to improve learner access and to ensure that an appropriate range of courses is offered to meet the current and future needs of all learners;

- to improve learner access to the provision in construction and engineering across all of the campuses;

- to ensure that staff and students are making full use of the virtual learning environment and appropriate information and learning technology resources to support teaching and learning more effectively; and

- the poor success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy.

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

3.   **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

3.1   Following the merger of the three legacy colleges in 2007, and after several senior management personnel changes, the current Principal and Chief Executive took up post on 1 August 2008. The management structure, which was agreed in September 2007, had been implemented fully at the time of the inspection. Within this structure, the Principal and Chief Executive is supported by four directors, a Director of Teaching and Learning, a Director of Economic Engagement, a Director of Corporate Services, and a Director of Information Services. At the time of the inspection, the key tiers of management had been established across the College, including the College Management Team, the heads of school, and staff with responsibility for key cross-college functions, including student services, learner support, careers education information advice and guidance (CEIAG), information learning technology (ILT), quality assurance and links with industry. The College had also appointed a Head of Business Innovation and Development, who reports to the Head of Economic Engagement, and whose main responsibility is to develop, support and enhance links with Industry across the College. This cross college function is further enhanced by a Business Support Officer, an Entrepreneurship and Business Start Officer and seven Enterprise Champions. The College has a number of effective industrial partnerships including those with the Workforce Development Forum, the local councils and the sector skills councils, including People 1st, Construction Skills, SEMTA, and e-Skills. The College has also been involved in Technology Transfer Initiatives, including innovation vouchers, Knowledge Transfer Processes, Lecturers into Industry, the Higher Education and Further Education Connected Project. The College has also been involved in a range of projects funded by the Department which include; Specialist Support for Innovators, an Innovation and Enterprise Programme, a Developing Cross Border Links programme and an Enterprise Incubation and Innovation project. It also offers a research and development service for industry and a prototyping service for new product development. The four original roles at Director level have been replaced by three revised areas of responsibility. These include a Director of Curriculum and Information Services, a Director of Learning and Customer Support, and a Director of Workforce, Economic and Corporate Development. In addition, three Heads of Quality, Excellence and Development have been appointed within the revised structure. The transition to the new structure has begun and will be fully operational by the start of the next academic year.

3.2   The arrangements for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning for the priority skills areas at level 2 have improved since the initial review undertaken by the Inspectorate in November 2008. The College places quality improvement at the core of its business and it is embedded effectively at strategic level through project management within the organisation. The College Management Team has carried out a self-evaluation of its own work and has reviewed and addressed issues arising from the process. This process has strengthened further the college's emphasis on self-improvement at all levels. The quality improvement process has been supplemented effectively by quarterly reviews across programme areas, each of which are underpinned by a robust knowledge management system that provides all staff with timely data to assist in the review process. The Heads of School and staff participate in a "know and show" process wherein performance by school and by course is evaluated and targets for improvement are set. One of the strategies resulting from this process has been the appointment of student attendance officers who support lecturers in the drive to improve attendance and retention. The process, however, is at an early stage and

its effectiveness has not yet been evaluated. The quarterly review process fits within a quality improvement planning continuum that feeds into the self-evaluation and review process, which is now a cyclical process throughout the academic year. Targeted staff development on self-evaluation issues and processes has been provided for all staff to assist them in the completion of the self-evaluation reviews. Good progress has been made in the integration of the student voice into the quality improvement cycle, through the development of an on-line questionnaire and through the involvement of the Head of Quality in the 'student for a day' initiative. While the quality improvement agenda is high on the College's list of priorities, work still needs to be done to assist staff within the priority skills areas at level 2, to review more effectively the outcomes of the self-evaluation process, and to ensure measurable improvements.

3.3   The quality of the leadership and management, across the priority skills area level 2 programmes is good. All of the courses are well managed and the heads of school provide good support to course teams to meet the needs of most students. In most of the areas inspected, the course teams work effectively and collegially through regular course team meetings and have worked hard to standardise the provision and the quality of the student experience. However, while communication within the course teams is good, good practice is not shared across the priority skills area teams. There is evidence of good progress having been made in contextualising the essential skills within the vocational programmes, however, they are not fully integrated and are still, on occasion, being taught in isolation. There is not a sufficiently effective understanding between the vocational and essential skills staff of the overall standards to be achieved in literacy and numeracy, particularly in relation to external assessment.

3.4   The quality of the accommodation and specialist resources to support students in their work ranges from adequate to excellent. The quality of the industry standard engineering resources on the Bangor campus is particularly good and prepares the students well for their potential careers in industry. The majority of students have good general access to ICT resources in almost all of the priority skills areas inspected. Although provision has been made for staff development and staff training in the use of Moodle, the use of the virtual learning environment remains underdeveloped and a minority of staff are unsure of how to adopt materials, such as learning aids and lecture notes for use in Moodle, particularly in the priority skill area of construction.

3.5   The lecturers are well-qualified and experienced across all of the priority skills areas inspected. Most have recent and relevant industrial experience. In tourism and hospitality, however, a minority of staff would benefit from further opportunities to update their industrial skills. Many of the staff across the priority skills area level 2 programmes have benefitted from effective staff and curriculum development opportunities, both internal and external, and have participated in the Lecturers into Industry scheme. The lecturers are deployed appropriately, and are well supported by specialist technicians.

3.6   The College Principal and Chief Executive, together with the Director of Economic Development, have demonstrated strategic and insightful leadership in supporting the work of the South Eastern Region Workforce Development Forum. The initial meetings of the forum agreed the terms of reference and identified a total of ten priority sectors, nine of which has an employer representative on the forum. A considerable amount of work has been carried out in relation to the ten priority sectors identified. In tourism and hospitality for example, an employer's panel was established in January 2008 to further develop links between the

College and local industry. In software engineering, the College ran a Software Professional course for non-IT Degree, Foundation Degree, and Higher National Diploma graduates at the request of the sector aimed at converting non-software graduates into software technicians; 80% of the students found employment in the industry. In electronics, the College has provided a number of automation courses for leading industries. While the College has done very good work in its role with the Workforce Development Forum and in the development of its links with industry, the Head of the Business Development Unit, the Heads of School and the lecturers need to ensure that the benefits of this work are incorporated into the overall learning experiences of the level 2 students on the priority skills area programmes.

3.7   The College has responded swiftly to the economic recession and the attendant need for re-skilling and up-skilling through its range of rapid response courses. Since February 2009, a variety of programmes including Handling Refrigeration, Heat Pump Training, Return to Work ICT, Return to Work Software Engineering, Food Safety, and Creative Design have been made available. At the time of the inspection, 972 students were enrolled across these programmes.

3.8   The College is pro-active within the local Area Learning Community and has strong links with 33 schools in the area. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,432 students enrolled under the schools' partnership programme of which 807 are undertaking occupational studies. However, the College needs to develop better progression routes from school to the priority skills areas at level 2, and to work in partnership with schools to provide more effective awareness raising of career opportunities and progression pathways for students on programmes within the respective programme areas. At present, the College does not track adequately the progression of students from the partnership programmes to the priority skills areas.

4.   **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

4.1   The standards of work achieved by the students on the level 2 priority skills area programmes are good or better, and are mostly very good in hospitality. Most of the students are well motivated and enthusiastic about their work, and are committed to the achievement of their award and to their progress. Almost all of the students achieve good levels of practical and technical skills across the range of their programmes. In tourism and hospitality, there is a strong focus on developing the students' personal and transferable skills, including problem solving, teamwork, time management, independent learning and inter-personal skills. Within this priority skills area, there is also an effective emphasis on employability related skills, such as reliability, personal organisation, ownership of tasks and self-reflection. However, in most of the other priority skills areas, the students' independent study skills are under-developed and there is an over-reliance on guidance by the lecturers.

4.2   The standard of the student's written work in their vocational assignments ranges from good to very good. The majority of the students' work is well presented. The lecturing staff in the priority skills areas inspected provide good feedback to students on the standard of their work, and there is some evidence of marking for improvement. However, while the standards of work in the vocational portfolios are good, the standards achieved by the students in external assessments in literacy and numeracy are poor, and lecturers need to address this inconsistency. Almost all of the students demonstrate good standards of oral communication and respond well to questions about their programmes of study.

4.3   The College has faced a significant challenge in bringing together the data reporting systems of the three legacy colleges. Consequently, the College has been able to provide data on retention and success in the priority skills areas inspected for the reporting period 2007-2008 only. In the areas inspected, the average success rate for 2007-2008 is 76%, which is slightly above the Northern Ireland average rate of 74% for that year. The average success rate in computing and ICT (82%) is good and is12% above the average rate across all the colleges. In engineering, and tourism and hospitality, the overall success rates are modest at 63% and 69% respectively, and in both cases below the Northern Ireland average of 79% and 74%. However, in construction, the average success rate is poor at 50%, which is well below the Northern Ireland average of 74%.

4.4   The levels of success in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are poor in most of the priority skills areas inspected. In 2007-2008, the overall success rate for the essential skills across the level 2 priority skills provision is poor at 58%.

5.   **QUALITY OF THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

5.1   The quality of the provision for learning in most of the lessons inspected was good or better; 42% were good, 30% were very good and 6% were outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning is particularly strong in tourism and hospitality where most of the lessons observed were very good. The programmes are well planned to ensure breadth and coherence, and provide the students with excellent opportunities to develop their practical skills, and their knowledge and understanding of the industry. In almost all of the remaining priority skills areas, the quality of teaching and learning ranges from satisfactory to outstanding, and is mostly good. In the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, most of the lessons were good or better. Across most of the priority skills areas, a very good range of teaching approaches is used effectively to engage and stimulate the students. These include, well-organised demonstrations in tourism and hospitality, the provision of site surveying practicals in the First Diploma in construction, access to a wide range of industrial standard resources in engineering, and the high quality feedback in both written and electronic form provided to students in computing and ICT. In the less effective lessons observed, however, the activities are not matched adequately to the needs of the students, and consequently they make slow progress.

5.2   The College has invested significantly in improving the quality and accessibility of ILT resources. The effective use of ILT in teaching and learning, however, is variable across the priority skills areas. There are some examples of good practice across the programmes inspected. In construction, for example, the use of industry standard computer aided design (CAD) software has been supplemented by the development of animated tutorials to support learning. Overall, however, staff across the other priority skills areas, would benefit from the sharing of this good practice and the development of further innovative and creative uses of ILT to support their teaching and learning.

5.3   The assessment of the students' work is well planned in tourism and hospitality, and in computing and ICT. It is set at an appropriate level and lecturers make effective use of a suitable range of assessment strategies, and the feedback provided by the lecturers is timely and thorough; in computing and ICT, feedback is provided electronically which is valued by the students. However, in engineering and construction, there is a need for more effective assessment planning to ensure a more appropriate balance of the students' workload, and to ensure that they are clear about the assessment requirements of their programme.

5.4   The students have good access to careers advice and guidance from qualified and experienced staff in the College, and from the Department's Careers Service. A strategic review of the provision for CEIAG has taken place and a revised careers policy is in place. In tourism and hospitality, students have good opportunity to extend their knowledge and understanding of their roles within the industry and to explore potential career opportunities. However, in almost all of the other priority skills areas, more action is needed to embed CEIAG provision within the students' main educational and training programme, and to incorporate also an employability skills component. In almost all of the priority skills areas, the students would benefit from opportunities for well structured work experience and industry visits to improve their understanding of the world of work. A small minority of full-time students make good use of the College's personal counselling and support services.

5.5   At the time of the inspection, a total of 28 students enrolled on level 2 priority skills area courses were registered on learning support programmes across the college. Although the College has developed a policy for learner support, the referral arrangements have not been clearly communicated to all course teams and lecturers, particularly in the area of construction where the process is not sufficiently systematic to provide support to all students with particular learning needs. In engineering, tourism and hospitality and computing and ICT, lecturers provide effective and sensitive one-to-one support to address specific additional learning needs.

5.6   In most cases, the students' responses to the pastoral care interviews demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with their experiences of the College. The key aspects highlighted by nearly all of the students, include: the support provided by course tutors; the access to a range of relevant support services, including the College's careers and guidance service; the quality of the learning environment; industrial standard resources; the high staff expectations; and for the most part, the good relationships between students and staff. Most students enjoy being at the College and feel that they have gained significantly from their programme of study. A minority of students, however, particularly on the computing and ICT programmes, raised concerns about the costs incurred in printing their work. A small number of students also indicated the lack of extra-curricular activities as an area of concern.

5.7   The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the College is very good. The main features include: the commitment of the senior management and of the staff at all levels to provide an effective provision of pastoral support; the good student access to specialist counselling services; the effective communication and good working relationships with external agencies, including organisations which focus on disability issues; and the inclusive and supportive ethos for almost all students.

5.8   The College has comprehensive arrangements in place for the protection and safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. These arrangements are in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department.

PART THREE: REPORTS ON CURRICULUM AREAS

6.   CURRICULUM AREA: COMPUTING AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The College offers an appropriate range of full-time and part-time programmes in computing and ICT at level 2, across its main campuses in Downpatrick, Lisburn and Newtownards, and its various out-centres. The full-time provision consists of the First Diploma for ICT practitioners. Students on full-time courses also have the opportunity to undertake additional qualifications such as the British Computer Society's (BCS) level 2 Certificate for Information Technology (IT) Users, and essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. The part-time provision consists of a range of courses including the BCS level 2 Certificate for IT Users, and the CompTIA A+ programme. In addition, the College is currently developing ICT programmes to provide opportunities for those people who have lost their jobs or who hope to up-skill or retrain, due to the current economic downturn. Appropriate progression opportunities, to a range of further and higher education programmes, also exist for students.

6.2   MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- provision of an appropriate range of computing and ICT programmes at level 2, with opportunities for the students to progress to further learning;

- effective management and co-ordination of computing and ICT programmes at level 2;

- good standards of work produced by most of the students, who are making good progress in their learning;

- good pastoral care and additional learning support offered to students; and

- excellent overall retention rate and good overall success rate for 2007/08.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- lack of adequate integration of the essential skills into the students' main programmes of study;

- provision for CEIAG and the use of industry links to support the students' learning; and

- lack of innovation and creativity in course delivery on the full-time level 2 programmes.

6.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The level 2 programmes in computing and ICT are managed effectively. The course co-ordinators on the full-time programmes have standardised the provision for students across the three main campuses. The provision of additionality on these programmes, however, does not sufficiently exploit the computing and ICT competency of most of the students or enhance their learning experiences. The course teams should review the provision and consider the use of new and emerging technologies including mobile devices, the development of podcasts, blogs, digital technologies and social networking applications. In addition, the provision for CEIAG, the use of industry links and time allocated to the development of the students' study skills should be more formalised. At present, a number of students report that they are unsure about appropriate progression pathways or career opportunities open to them. The quality of the computing and ICT hardware and software is good, and this will be further enhanced by the provision of new computing facilities across a number of College campuses in the future.

6.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The standards of work produced by most of the students are good. They are working at an appropriate level, and are confident and competent in their use of computing and ICT. On the full-time programmes, most of the students who enrol have essential skills needs, learning difficulties or have been identified as having additional support needs; however, they are responsive to their lecturers and are well motivated. While most of the students are making good progress in their learning on their main computing and ICT programme, they are not making sufficient progress in the development of their essential skills of literacy and numeracy. The essential skills are mostly delivered discretely and opportunities to integrate them more effectively into the computing and ICT programme are not being sufficiently exploited by the course teams. For the year 2007/08, the overall retention rate for the level 2 programmes is excellent at 97% and the success rate is good at 82%. The progression rate to further education, training or employment is satisfactory at 76%.

6.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning is good in most of the classes observed. The lecturers are well prepared and make appropriate use of ILT to support their teaching and learning. Lecturers across the campuses would benefit, however, from the sharing of good practice, including the development of more innovative and creative teaching and learning strategies to support the various learning needs of the students. The assessments used are at an appropriate level and good feedback is provided to the students. Teaching staff, however, need to review the content of the assessment tasks and the method of presentation and submission, to make them both more interesting to the students, and to support their learning and essential skills needs. At present, the integration of the essential skills, of both literacy and numeracy, to the main ICT programme is inadequate. The quality of the pastoral care and support for students is good, particularly for those students who have been identified as having additional support needs.

6.6   CONCLUSION

In computing and ICT programmes at level 2, the quality of education 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.

7.   **CURRICULUM AREA: ENGINEERING**

7.1   INTRODUCTION

The College holds Centre of Excellence status in the two priority skills areas of electrical and electronic engineering, and manufacturing engineering. As the enrolments across the provision at the time of the inspection were small, the findings from both areas are combined. The school of engineering, motor vehicle and bio-science offers a good range of full-time provision on the Bangor campus. The provision consists of the First Diploma which is offered as two separate programmes, with options in manufacturing engineering and in electrical/electronic engineering. A good feature of the programme design is the additional time allocated to practical work in the well resourced laboratories and workshops. The College offers a limited range of part-time evening courses, including CAD, and fabrication and welding craft programmes. A First Certificate in engineering is also delivered in partnership with a post-primary school under the vocational enhancement programme. Almost all of the students have a weak academic profile on entry to the full-time programmes.

7.2   Main Findings

The main strengths are the:

- very good range and quality of industry standard resources available to support teaching and learning;

- well qualified and experienced staff who provide up-to-date specialist learning experiences which are relevant to current industrial practice;

- good standards of practical work and technical knowledge demonstrated by most students across the provision; and

- good induction programme which enables students to understand the structure and demands of their course.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- development of better teaching and learning strategies to improve the students' study skills, and their attendance and success;

- review of the full-time programme design to provide students with a more coherent learning experience and opportunities for relevant workplace visits; and

- expansion of both the full-time and part-time engineering curriculum offer across the College to widen access and increase participation.

7.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management is good. The provision of full-time programmes in both manufacturing and electrical/electronic engineering on the Bangor campus is very good. However, the part-time level 2 provision across the College is limited, and full-time provision is centred on the Bangor campus only. All of the students have access to a wide range of good quality engineering practical resources, including modern computer design and manufacturing facilities. There are a wide range of progression routes available to them, including further study at the College in manufacturing or electrical/electronic engineering up to level 5. The programmes are well resourced and the students receive good support from the well-qualified and experienced academic staff. However, on the level 2 programmes, the College links with industry are underdeveloped, and are not used effectively to organise relevant industrial visits, or to arrange lectures from guest speakers. The quality improvement procedures across the provision are good, and many of the main areas for improvement have been identified by the course teams. However, the self-evaluation reports lack rigour, and subsequent action plans are not sufficiently focused to include measurable, prioritised action points.

7.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most students are well-motivated and demonstrate good practical skills and understanding of engineering principles corresponding to the level they are working towards including: the ability to interpret drawings accurately, recognise and select components or materials, make measurements and to produce work to a specification. The pace of learning is slow in a minority of the classes observed and in manufacturing engineering there are few opportunities for the students to develop their ICT skills. Most are enthusiastic, committed to the achievement of their award and to progress to further education and employment. Progression rates across the provision are good with most students progressing to an appropriate National Diploma in the College. The retention rate in the 2007/2008 academic year was excellent at 97%, but success in the same year was modest at 63%.

7.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of most of the teaching and learning varies from satisfactory to good. Most lessons are well-planned and developed, using an appropriate range of teaching strategies including: demonstration, practical work, group work and one-to-one sessions. However, across the lessons there are few opportunities for the students to improve their study skills. They can access a wide range of industrial standard engineering resources including: simulation and CAD software, tools and equipment. The induction programme is good and

enables students to understand the structure and demands of their course and assess the need for additional learner support. Good pastoral care arrangements are in place with most students reporting that they enjoy their course and that they are well cared for and supported. Most assessments of the students' work are of good quality and meet the appropriate national standards. However, the timing of feedback is inappropriately late in a minority of course units, and the issuing of assignments is not well co-ordinated. This results in a heavy workload for students at peak times of the year. Students access regularly the College's CEIAG resources but need further individual support in tutorial sessions to build personalised career plans, and to plan more effectively for their learning. There is limited use of ILT in manufacturing engineering and of the College virtual learning environment across the provision to support and enhance teaching and learning.

7.6   CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education 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 Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the College's progress on the areas for improvement.

8.   CURRICULUM AREA: ESSENTIAL SKILLS: LITERACY AND NUMERACY

8.1   Introduction

The essential skills provision across the College is led by a head of school, appointed in September 2008, and is supported by three senior lecturers. All full-time and part-time students have appropriate opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, and to obtain an essential skills qualification, where required. Almost all of the students on the priority skills programmes at level 2 have a poor entry profile; 94% do not hold a GCSE at grade C or better in English and mathematics.

8.2   MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- commitment of senior management to the essential skills provision;

- good or better quality of teaching and learning in the majority of the classes inspected; and

- good or better standards of the students' work contained in their vocational portfolios.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- poor success rates;

- integration of essential skills across a significant minority of the priority skills areas; and

- lack of appropriate access to essential skills resources in the proposed College virtual learning environment.

8.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management in essential skills is good. Senior management in the College are highly committed to the development of essential skills. The Board of Governor's Education Committee takes a particular interest in this curriculum area and receives, for consideration, regular reports on the essential skills provision. A good start has been made to the collaborative working between the vocational lecturers and the essential skills tutors across a majority of the courses at level 2 in the priority skills areas. However, the Head of School and coordinators need to ensure that the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are fully integrated across all of the programmes. In addition, there is no consistent cross-college policy for managing attendance at essential skills classes, and more formal attendance management strategies need to be introduced on programmes where there are attendance issues.

8.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

In the majority of classes inspected, most of the students are punctual, well-behaved and co-operative. The standard of most of their work is good or better, as evidenced in the good presentation of their vocational folders. They participate well in discussions, and answer questions appropriately during class. In 2007/2008, the retention rates in both literacy and numeracy were excellent at 99% and 97% respectively. However, the success rates during the same period were poor at 59% in literacy, and 57% in numeracy.

8.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of provision for learning ranges from satisfactory to outstanding, with the majority being good. Where the quality of provision for learning is good, the classes are characterised by lecturers' using appropriate strategies to engage and motivate the students. In the less effective classes, there were few opportunities for the students to discuss their work and they were over directed by the tutor. In the areas of tourism and hospitality, and construction there was evidence of good integration between the essential skills and the vocational areas. However, in the curriculum areas of computing and ICT, and engineering, the integration is not well-developed. There is some evidence of marking for improvement in both the essential skills and the vocational written work inspected. There is limited use being made of ILT to enhance teaching and learning, and little use of the virtual learning environment by the essential skills tutors. The proposed structure for the virtual learning environment, for students to access their essential skills resources, is not suitable as the essential skills materials cannot be accessed through the respective programme area portal.

8.6   CONCLUSION

In the essential skills areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its educational 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.

9.   **CURRICULUM AREA: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY**

9.1   INTRODUCTION

The College offers an appropriate part-time provision in hospitality and catering, at level 2 across its main campuses in Bangor, Downpatrick, Lisburn and Newtownards.   This provision consists of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 in professional cookery. However, the full-time provision is limited and consists only of a First Diploma in travel and tourism across three campuses. Students on the full-time courses have the opportunity to study a foreign language or complete a period of work experience, as well as undertaking essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. The students recruited to part-time courses can undertake additional qualifications in food safety, health and safety, manual handling, and control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH). Appropriate progression opportunities, to a wide range of further and higher education programmes, exist for all students in this priority skills area. Recruitment on level 2 programmes has increased over the past year from 122 in 2007/2008 to approximately 150 during the 2008/2009 period.

9.2   MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- very good quality of almost all of the teaching;

- very good standards of work demonstrated by most of the students;

- well-established links with industry;

- excellent retention and progression rates; and

- effective co-ordination of the level 2 provision across the College.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- further development of the full-time provision at level 2 in hospitality and catering; and

- modest success rates.

9.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management, at all levels, in tourism and hospitality, is very good. The head of school has made good progress in the development and standardisation of the provision across the College. The level 2 programmes are managed and co-ordinated effectively. Industrial links are well-established; a good range of industrial visits or visits by guest speakers are used to good effect to inform and motivate the students. The College is represented on various tourism and hospitality working groups, including the Northern Ireland Future Skills Forum. While all the lecturers are well-qualified, a minority lack recent industrial experience. The leadership and management are committed to the pastoral care of the students and they work hard to develop and maintain a strong ethos of care and support for all of them, and particularly for the more vulnerable students.

9.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most of the students are well motivated and display interest in and enthusiasm for the priority skill area. They benefit from the positive encouragement and individual support provided by the lecturers. In particular, there is a clear focus on developing the students' personal skills and transferable qualities that are required in a work environment. The students on the First Diploma programme in travel and tourism have good opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of United Kingdom and European geography. The standard of work produced by most of the students on the NVQ programme in professional cookery is good or better. The range of menus available provides good opportunities to develop appropriate occupational skills. Overall, the quality and presentation of dishes prepared are good, and reflect well contemporary industry standards. The standards of the students' oral and written skills are mostly good. Of particular note, is the effective marking for improvement provided by lecturers. For the year 2007/08, the overall retention rate for the level 2 programmes is excellent at 91%. Progression rates to further education, training or employment are excellent at 100%. During the same period, however, the success rate for students is modest at 69%.

9.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning is very good in almost all of the classes observed. The well-designed learning programmes provide the students with good opportunities to develop their knowledge and practical skills. On the First Diploma course, for example, the students are developing well their customer service skills. The students on the NVQ programme, study an appropriate range of units to prepare them to work in industry, or to progress to further education. The quality of planning and preparation of the students' learning activities is good. The lecturers make effective use of a suitable range of teaching strategies to engage and stimulate the students, and students are provided with good opportunities to participate in local and regional competitions. The principles of food hygiene, and health and safety are taught thoroughly and are well applied to the practical activities. The procedures for assessment of the students' work are well-planned. All students receive appropriate and timely feedback. They are given good opportunities to discuss the outcomes of assessment and, where necessary, agree action.

9.6   CONCLUSION

In tourism and hospitality programmes at level 2, the quality of education and training provided by the 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

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION AND KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

10.   **CONCLUSION**

10.1   In the 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.

10.2   The College provides a good range of full and part time courses in most of the priority skills areas at level 2. In response to the current economic recession, the College also provides a good range of re-skilling and up-skilling courses to address the needs of local students and business and industry. The inspection has identified key strengths in the following areas: the comprehensive management information system to inform planning for improvement and quality assurance; the extensive system of quality assurance and improvement processes across the College; the very good links developed with business and industry; and the very good pastoral care provided for the students.

11.   **KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

11.1   There is a need for the College senior management, and staff with key curricular responsibilities:

- to develop further the use of ILT, including the virtual learning environment to enhance teaching and learning, to raise the level of student achievement and to improve the students' overall learning experience;

- to integrate the essential skills more fully into the vocational programmes and to ensure that there is a more effective understanding between the vocational and the essential skills staff of the overall standards to be achieved in literacy and numeracy;

- to provide a more systematic approach to the CEIAG provision and to embed an employability skills component across the level 2 priority skills areas; and

- to continue to strengthen the College's capacity to reflect critically within the self-evaluation process to effect ongoing improvement at all levels in the organisation.