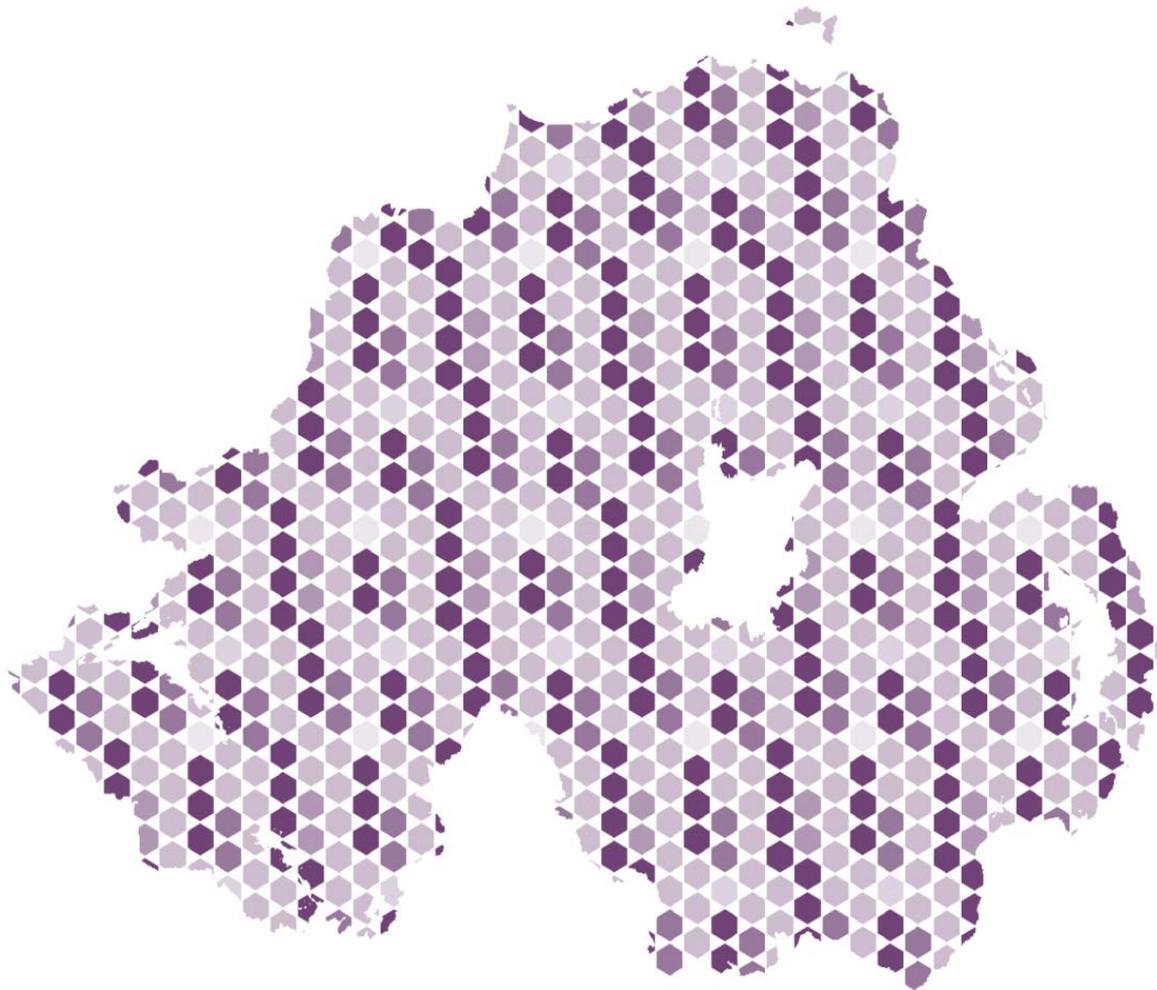


# FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Provision for the Priority Skills  
Areas at Level 3  
Southern Regional College

Report of an Inspection  
in May 2010

*eti*

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*

**Providing Inspection Services for**

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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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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

**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:

<b>Performance Level</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>
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 the ApprenticeshipsNI programme was not inspected. The inspection was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) during the third term of the 2009/10 academic year.

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

- the 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.

1.3 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.

1.4 A total of 61 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, heads of school, deputy heads of school, course teams, and managers with cross-college responsibilities, and local employers. 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 level 3 full and part-time courses in computing and ICT, and construction. The provision in computing and ICT is extensive with 563 students enrolled on full-time courses in the college's campuses in Armagh, Newry and Portadown. These include the Edexcel National Diploma for Information Technology Practitioners and the National Diploma in Media Production (Games Development). The college also offers a good range of part-time courses in computing, including industry relevant courses in programming and computer networking. In construction, 90 students are enrolled on full-time courses in Armagh, Newry and Portadown. The college also has a good range of part-time courses in construction, including the Edexcel National Certificate in construction and civil engineering, and a National Award (bridging course) for craft workers who want to progress to part-time higher education courses. In addition, there are good examples of courses to up-skill and re-skill workers in the construction industry, including the level 3 computer-aided design course, and the recently introduced National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in heritage skills (stonemasonry) for existing workers in the construction industry. The number of students enrolled on part-time craft courses, however,

is limited; they are combined with trainees on ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. The range of engineering courses provided is underdeveloped. The college offers the full-time National Diploma in electrical and electronic engineering in Newry and a combined mechanical and electrical engineering course in Portadown. Although the numbers enrolled on these courses have increased in recent years in Newry, the provision in Portadown is small. The college offers a good range of part-time courses in electrical and electronic engineering in Portadown and Newry campuses. These include the National Certificate in electrical and electronic engineering in Portadown, a range of electrical maintenance courses and bespoke up-skilling courses for local industry in Programmable Logic Control Systems (PLCs), and electrical maintenance. The range of part-time courses in electrical installation, however, is limited in comparison to the other colleges of further education. In addition, there are gaps in the college's provision, including industrial electronics, networking, telecommunications, and security and alarm systems. The range of provision and recruitment levels to part-time level 3 courses in manufacturing and mechanical engineering courses is inadequate, and does not meet effectively the needs of the extensive range of manufacturing and mechanical engineering firms in the local and regional area.

2.2 The quality and effectiveness of the curriculum is variable across the professional and technical areas. It is good in computing, and ICT, where full-time students are provided with a good range of units to enhance their progression to employment and or higher education. In construction, the full-time curriculum is variable across the different campuses; it is good in Armagh and Portadown but is inadequate in Newry, where students are unable to carry out materials testing experiments. The curriculum in manufacturing and mechanical engineering is inadequate. The students are not provided with an appropriate range of units in manufacturing and mechanical engineering, and they are not able to develop their practical skills; the curriculum is narrowly focused on mechanical principles and mathematics. In electrical and electronic engineering, the traditional electronics content within the National Certificate programme in Portadown does not match the needs of the part-time students enrolled on the course. There are good progression routes within the college to higher education courses in most of the Priority Skill Areas.

2.3 All full-time students supplement their main vocational units with additional qualifications to enhance their employment prospects and progression to higher education. The relevance of these additional qualifications is variable across the programme areas. Full-time students enrolled on the National Diploma in Media Production (Games Development) undertake an additional unit in programming which meets well the needs of the students. In construction, students take additional qualifications in computer-aided design at level 2 or level 3 which effectively supplement their main course and increases their employment prospects. The choice of the additional qualifications in the other areas, particularly in engineering, is incoherent, and does little to extend the range of the students' employability skills.

2.4 The college, through its Business Support Unit, has developed a good range of bespoke training programmes for industry in computing and ICT, and electronic engineering. In both areas, lecturing staff are working with local and regional employers in a range of projects; this provides important and relevant staff development for the lecturers involved in the projects. The college is leading the Department funded Open Source Project. To date, it has supported 60 businesses to raise their capacity to make use of Open Source software applications to bring about business improvement. This has been well-managed in the college; the support provided to industry by staff in the college is excellent. This has also helped refresh the curriculum for full-time students, where students are starting to make use of Open Source software applications in their work. In electrical and electronic engineering, the lecturers deliver bespoke training in PLCs and this work has informed the planned investment in new automation and control equipment in the college.

2.5 The employer-led Workforce Development Forum has configured eight sub-groups which are chaired by an employer from the forum. Each sub-group is also made up of curricular leaders from college to help align the curricular provision to meet the needs of local and regional employers. These arrangements have been effective in future planning to improve the curriculum in electrical and electronic engineering.

2.6 The college provides an extensive range of programmes in each Priority Skill Area with post-primary schools under the Entitlement Framework Support programme. The college provides an extensive suite of qualifications at level 2, and offers the level 3 National Award/Certificate courses in engineering to post-primary schools.

2.7 The quality of the provision is variable, ranging from very good to inadequate. The quality of the provision in computing and ICT is very good. The quality of provision in construction and electrical and electronic engineering is satisfactory and the quality of the provision in manufacturing and mechanical engineering is inadequate. The provision in computing and ICT is well-managed in each campus with examples of innovative practice, consistently high expectations across the different campuses, effective co-ordination of programmes, and strong pastoral support for students. Recurring weaknesses in the other areas include undue variations in the quality of the provision across different campuses, inadequate sharing of good practice and collegial work, and inconsistencies in the management of resources to support students in their learning.

2.8 The effectiveness of the deployment of lecturers to manage and deliver courses varies across the Priority Skill Areas. In computing and ICT, the co-ordinators undertake their work effectively in each campus, and lead co-ordinators are collating existing learning resources, as well as developing new resources across the different campuses. In engineering, significant numbers of experienced lecturers deliver bespoke training courses in industry as well as teaching on courses provided to local post-primary schools under the Entitlement Framework Support programme. This has resulted in shortfalls in the deployment of experienced lecturers to co-ordinate and to teach on engineering courses in the college, which has an adverse effect on the quality of the students' learning experiences. A number of full-time courses are co-ordinated by inexperienced staff, and the wide deployment of staff including part-time lecturers, across different campus locations, hampers effective communication and curriculum planning. Some of the lecturers are not familiar with important aspects of programme management, particularly on how to effectively monitor and review student progress and attendance. More generally, there are insufficient numbers of suitably qualified lecturers to teach manufacturing and mechanical engineering courses. In construction, the deployment of key staff on one campus, to teaching on courses under the Entitlement Framework Support programme has also led to a significant number of part-time lecturers teaching on the National Diploma programme that has had an adverse effect on students' learning experiences.

2.9 The management of specialist resources across the programme areas is variable. There are excellent electronic engineering resources on the Newry campus which are used very effectively to develop students' practical skills and knowledge. In contrast, the college's good range of manufacturing and mechanical engineering workshops are underutilised, with some being largely unused by students, particularly full-time students. The students also have no access to suitable experimentation or science laboratories in the college. There are inconsistencies in the range and quality of specialist resources in construction across the different campus locations; they are good in Armagh and Portadown but are inadequate in Newry, where there is no science and materials laboratory. In computing and ICT, most of the students have good access to appropriate resources. The range of licensed specialist software applications in the Newry campus, however, is inadequate to meet their needs effectively.

2.10. The college has detailed procedures to review the quality of provision within courses and across programme areas, and of key cross-college functions through the college self-evaluation arrangements. While these arrangements are implemented systematically, they are not sufficiently honed to identify key weaknesses in the quality of the provision, particularly in curriculum design, use of resources and the effectiveness of leadership and management. The quality of the self-evaluation reports vary across the programme areas; they are effective in computing and ICT but are inadequate in the other areas. In these areas, there is a mismatch between the findings of the self-evaluation reports and the Inspectorate.

2.11 The quality of teaching and learning ranges from outstanding to inadequate. A majority of the lessons (64%) are good or better, and a significant minority (30%) are very good or outstanding. Although very few of the lessons are inadequate (5%), too many of the lessons are dull and uninspiring, with insufficient challenge and relevance to industry. Good or better teaching and learning is a feature of the provision in computing and ICT, with examples of innovative approaches to get the best responses from the students. In construction, there is undue variation in the quality of teaching and learning across the different campuses; it is good or better in Armagh and Portadown, but ranges from satisfactory to inadequate in Newry. In engineering, the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent; half of the lessons are good or better and nearly all of the remaining lessons are satisfactory. The college makes use of significant numbers of part-time lecturers in some programmes in construction and engineering. Although they receive guidance in lesson preparation and on features of good practice, they need more support to develop their pedagogic skills.

2.12 The college is well-equipped with information and learning technology resources across the main campuses. Most classrooms, for example, have interactive whiteboards. Although lecturers make use of information and learning technology in their lessons, in too many instances this is limited to direct transcription of information from multi-media presentations, with little effective use of the more interactive features of education technology.

2.13 The college is committed to support students in addressing issues that affect their health and well-being. It is the lead college in the Department funded Healthy Living Project, where specialist support officers provide workshops to students as part of their tutorial programmes.

2.14. Full-time students have good access to specialist careers advice and guidance through contact with college careers staff during their induction programme and through timetabled tutorials. Most of this aims to help students complete their applications to higher education courses. The students' knowledge and understanding of career pathways and job opportunities in nearly all of the professional and technical areas, however, is limited, particularly in engineering. In most areas, the students have inadequate opportunities to apply their learning through work-related learning, including site visits, guest speakers, work-experience, and industry-based project work. Across the professional and technical areas, there are features of good practice that could be developed further. In computing and ICT, effective use is made of wall displays to inform students of the skills needed in the industry, and some use is made of real case studies in their coursework assignments. In construction, full-time students in Portadown, undertake work experience in their course; this is well-managed by the course team. There is no work experience in the Newry campus and it is offered only on a limited scale in Armagh.

2.15. The standards of students' work are variable across the professional and technical areas. In computing and ICT, students develop good skills in their work and they are making good progress in their vocational units. Although students are encouraged to work beyond the minimum pass level criteria, more needs to be done to ensure that the most capable students meet the requirements at Distinction level in their assignments. In construction, the standards of work are mostly good. However, attendance rates in the full-time construction programmes in Newry are poor and are not monitored effectively. As a result, the students are not reaching their full potential in their work. In electrical and electronic engineering the standards of full-time students' work is good, however, most students on the National Certificate course in Portadown are only targeting the minimum pass grades. In manufacturing and mechanical engineering, both part-time and full-time students are developing a limited range of skills and knowledge in their work. Full-time students are not prepared sufficiently to work as technician engineers in industry. The range of practical craft skills being developed by part-time students is inadequate.

2.16 The students have good opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in their professional and technical units and in their essential skills classes. The standards of the students' literacy and numeracy skills range from very good to poor overall, and are mostly good. In computing and ICT, and in construction, the standards of the students' oral skills need to be further developed to enable them to articulate more effectively extended answers to complex questions. Although the standards of written work in the vocational assignments are good in the majority of courses, a significant minority of students still struggle with the technical accuracies of language and with the skills required to present high quality, evaluative responses in their written work, particularly in computing and ICT. In numeracy, the students have very good opportunities to develop and to apply their mathematical skills in their vocational units, particularly in electrical and electronic engineering.

2.17. The levels of achievement on most of the programmes are in line with or exceed the outcomes of other colleges in each professional and technical area. In engineering, the shortfalls in experienced staff have resulted in a decline in course retention rates.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

#### **3.1 OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION**

In the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the 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 professional and technical area of computing and ICT, 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.

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

In professional and technical area of manufacturing and mechanical engineering, the quality of education provided by this college is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement, in learning and teaching, leadership and management which need to be addressed urgently if the college is to meet effectively the needs of all of the students.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the college's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

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