

WORK-BASED LEARNING INSPECTION

Skills for Life and Work and ApprenticeshipsNI
Provision in Twenty One Training Limited (21
Training)

Report of an Inspection in May 2023



Providing Inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



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Introduction

Twenty One Training Limited (21 Training) is a work-based training provider which was established in January 2021 through the merger of two former work-based training provider organisations, Customised Training Services and Strabane Training Services. 21 Training is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to provide the Skills for Life and Work and ApprenticeshipsNI (ApprenticeshipsNI 2021 programme) training programmes across a range of professional and technical (P&T) areas, from entry level to level 3. DfE introduced the Skills for Life and Work programme in September 2021 to replace Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work Level 1 of Training for Success. It is a programme designed for young people aged 16-17, or under 22 years for those with a disability, and under 24 years for those who qualify under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) (2002).

In May 2023, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection to 21 Training on behalf of DfE, having previously carried out a baseline inspection of its provision for the Training for Success, Skills for Life and Work and ApprenticeshipsNI training programmes in April 2022. At the time of the baseline, 43 trainees were registered on the Training for Success programme; there were no trainees remaining on the programme at the time of the inspection in May 2023.

21 Training operates primarily in areas with high levels of [multiple deprivation](#): 27% of the Northern Ireland population identifying as living in poverty reside in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area. It delivers the training programmes primarily from its offices in Strabane and also from offices in Derry/Londonderry. Since the baseline inspection, its offices in Coleraine, Enniskillen and Omagh have closed. The organisation is managed by a board of four directors and operates with a complement of 42 staff.

At the time of the inspection, 108 trainees and 550 apprentices were registered across the P&T areas of: business administration; children's care, learning and development; construction; creative and digital media; customer service; food and drink; hair, beauty and barbering; health and social care; hospitality; information technology; logistics operations; management; plant and machinery; retail; sport; and warehousing and storage (all data in this report was provided by the organisation). Of 108 trainees registered on the Skills for Life and Work programme, 95 were at entry level and 13 at level 1. On the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, 439 apprentices were registered at level 2 and 111 at level 3; almost all of them were in food and drink, with 316 at level 2 and 75 at level 3. Most of the trainees (88) and apprentices (489) were completing at least one of the essential skills.

Only a small number of the trainees and a minority (11%) of the apprentices entered their programmes with four or more GSCE passes at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics. Most of the trainees (86%) entered their programmes with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications. It is of note that most of the apprentices (78%), many of whom are newcomers aged 25+, also entered their programmes with no prior, nationally recognised level 1 or level 2 qualifications.

A majority (51%) of the trainees on the Skills for Life and Work programme have additional learning support needs or a disability. None of the apprentices formally declared an additional learning support need but, through its support services, the organisation has identified and put in place required support for a small number of them.

Views of trainees, apprentices and staff

Feedback from the trainees and apprentices (106) spoken to in the work place or in focus group meetings was positive. The trainees reported that the tutors are friendly and approachable and accept them for who they are. As a consequence, they reported that they engage better in their training, attend more frequently, and are making better progress than when previously at school. The apprentices spoken to also reported that they are well supported by the staff and that the training is matched well to their job roles.

A small number (6%; 46) of the trainees and apprentices completed the online questionnaire. All of the respondents reported that: they find their programme interesting, challenging and well managed; the training sessions are well taught; their work is assessed regularly; they are well-informed about progress across all aspects of their learning; and, they have good access to resources, including appropriate information and communications technology (ICT) equipment. A small number of the respondents provided additional positive written comments about their experiences in the organisation.

Sixty-nine percent (29) of the staff completed the online questionnaire. They all reported that the organisation: gives them regular feedback on how to improve their work; supports them well to deliver learning; and has good channels of communication. There were also a small number of positive written comments about the organisation being a welcoming environment in which to work.

Focus of the inspection

The report is based on an inspection of the provision for the Skills for Life and Work and ApprenticeshipsNI training programmes, and the essential skills. For the apprenticeship programme, the inspection focused on the P&T area of food and drink; this area accounts for 71% of the organisation's total apprenticeship programme and 59% of the overall contracted training provision. The inspection also included the capacity of the organisation to identify and bring about improvement, and the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding.

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

At the time of the inspection visit, and in the areas evaluated, 21 Training has the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the trainees and apprentices.

Overall quality of the programmes inspected

Programme	Proportion of registrations	Performance Level
Skills for Life and Work	16%	Good
ApprenticeshipsNI	84%	Good

Overall quality of the professional and technical areas inspected and the essential skills provision

Programme	Performance Level
Food and drink	Good
Essential skills	Good

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and apprentices reflect current legislation and practice.

Strengths

- The high levels of care and support in place for the trainees and apprentices, informed by well-targeted continuing professional development for staff.
- The effective leadership and management of the training provision, with roles and responsibilities for all staff clearly defined.
- The effective learning and teaching observed, with good processes in place for monitoring its quality.
- The appropriate curriculum for the food and drink programme which is well-matched and tailored to the apprentices' job roles through effective employer consultation.
- The positive actions being taken to develop and improve further the essential skills provision.
- The good or better standards of work demonstrated by the apprentices in their P&T training and in the workplace, and the good standards of work demonstrated in the trainees' portfolios of evidence.
- The effective links with a wide range of employers and stakeholders.

Areas for improvement

- To develop a more consistent process for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning across the provision, including the better use of available data and information.

- To address the identified gaps and inconsistencies in the information and data being used to analyse and monitor performance and outcomes across the organisation's ApprenticeshipsNI provision.
- To provide more consistent advice and guidance for apprentices about progression pathways.
- To review recruitment, particularly the long-term viability and sustainability of the overall ApprenticeshipsNI provision.

Key findings

- The food and drink apprenticeship curriculum appropriately includes various specialist pathways, incorporating food industry skills, food team leading, meat and poultry at level 2, and food management at level 3, providing a well-balanced programme of learning. Established, effective collaborative working relationships with a wide range of employers in the food and drink sector are used well to inform curriculum planning and development. 21 Training consults well with employers to choose carefully the most appropriate accredited qualification units to meet their specific needs and those of apprentices. This results in curriculum content that is relevant to the apprentices' job roles.
- In the food and drink provision, almost all of the learning, teaching and training sessions observed were effective, with some aspects of highly effective practice. The sessions were characterised by well-planned learning approaches, productive working relationships between the tutors and apprentices, good or better levels of learner participation, and skilful use of questioning. They were underpinned by very good tutor knowledge and experience to reinforce learning. In one company with a significant number of apprentices, team-teaching was used very effectively to deliver training in its modern, bright learning facility, using visual aids and contextualised scenarios to engage the apprentices and to support their development in a purposeful manner. The apprenticeship data should be used more effectively to inform session planning and timetabling for the tutors. A small number of apprentices reported that they would appreciate having access to the qualification specifications, so that between training sessions they could prepare for the next session.
- The standards of work demonstrated by the apprentices observed in their P&T training and in the workplace were good or better. The standards of work observed in the trainees' portfolios of evidence were also good. The quality of the apprentices' written work was variable, ranging from important areas for improvement to very good, but was mostly good. The most effective written work demonstrated clear understanding and knowledge of key work processes, such as, the need for high standards in food safety and hygiene, complying with company policy and industry regulations.

- While the majority of trainees and apprentices are progressing well in their learning, too many of the apprentices are not aware fully of their progress on the qualification on which they are registered. The tracking and monitoring systems in place record effectively the progress the trainees are making in their training and learning. On the apprenticeship programme, however, the recording of recruitment details and information relating to progress, retention, and completion of the apprentices on their framework, is not always accurate. There is a need to ensure that all records are completed in a timely manner and reflect current cohorts of apprentices. Going forward, the use of a more visual approach to recording the apprentices' progression should also be considered, such as that used with the trainees.
- Tutors engage with most of the employers regularly, to keep them informed of the apprentices' overall progress, however not all employers are involved sufficiently in the review process. In addition, it is important to ensure regular contact with employers so that they inform 21 Training promptly when the employment status of an apprentice changes, in order that relevant management information systems are updated.
- In line with the requirements of the training programmes, the trainees and apprentices complete essential skills in ICT, literacy and numeracy. They showed good levels of engagement in the essential skills lessons, had positive dispositions to learning and were making good progress. The portfolios of work were generally of a good standard, with the writing structured appropriately and an awareness of audience and purpose demonstrated. Almost all the trainees could express their views in discussions, and most could respond to and build upon the opinion of others. In numeracy, they were able to use a calculator to check for accuracy, understand simple ratio and represent information in a bar chart. In ICT they were able to develop and present information in, for example, a spreadsheet.
- The majority of the learning and teaching observed in the essential skills provision was effective. The effective lessons: were well-structured with clear learning outcomes; related to the apprentices' P&T area; included a range of active learning strategies relating to the planned outcomes; provided opportunities to plan and draft writing; and were underpinned by respectful relationships. In the less effective lessons, more well-considered planning for learning was required and the learners had insufficient opportunities to develop their oral communication skills. Good quality learning resources, including technology enhanced learning, were used.
- The outcomes for the essential skills for both the trainees and apprentices are consistently high. Over the two-year period from 2021/2022 to 2022/2023, average achievement rates for ICT, literacy, and numeracy are 93%, 90%, and 95% respectively.

- Overall, the outcomes are positive for the training programmes over the two-year period from 2021/2022 to 2022/2023. On the Skills for Life and Work programme, most (84%) of the trainees were retained, and of those who completed (41), almost all (98%) achieved their full award. Over the same period, the overall retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is 87% and all of the apprentices who completed (130) their training achieved their full award.
- On the food and drink apprenticeship programme, the retention rate for the 2021/2022 level 2 and level 3 cohorts is very good (88%) and good (75%) respectively; all of those who completed (88) achieved their full award. Retention for the current apprentices at both level 2 and level 3 (2022/23) is outstanding (100%).
- The food and drink apprenticeship programme, including the essential skills requirement, is seen by apprentices and employers as an opportunity to return to education and achieve successful outcomes. Both the apprentices and employers reported that the apprenticeship training is beneficial, in not only affirming the skills and knowledge the apprentices previously acquired, but also in supporting the development of new and additional skills and competences.
- The apprentices reported how the training further supports the development of their confidence and customer service skills, improves working practices and staff morale, and encourages the operation of a healthier and safer working environment for both staff and customers. The level of knowledge and understanding about career and progression pathways varies for the apprentices; they would benefit from more consistent advice and guidance about progression pathways beyond level 3.
- Employers stated that good channels of communication are in place between them and 21 Training and there is good support, citing that the tutors are flexible and responsive to their needs. It is of note that a number of employers reported they celebrate the apprentices' successes when they achieve their qualifications, through presenting them with vouchers, offering bonuses, and organising graduation ceremonies.
- A strong focus is placed on the trainees' and apprentices' health and wellbeing, and self-care and keeping safe messages are promoted effectively through a well-developed preventative curriculum. The trainees are provided with an extra-curricular programme which includes a range of planned activities to promote physical well-being and being active, as well as pathways around supporting mental wellbeing. An inclusive ethos is apparent, providing a welcoming environment for all.
- Staff are well-informed about the complex needs of the trainees and manage any challenging behaviour well. Case conference meetings identify those at-risk at the earliest stage and appropriate interventions such as one-to-one support or access to counselling services are initiated quickly. Appropriate support is also put in place for the apprentices, as required.

- The leadership and management of the training provision is effective. There are good levels of communication and working relationships among staff, at all levels, with roles and responsibilities defined clearly. Good processes are in place for monitoring the quality of learning and teaching and the progress of the trainees and apprentices in the essential skills. A planned calendar of events includes procedural audits of the documentation, such as personal training plans and individual learning plans, and a sampling of the work of the trainees and apprentices. The senior staff also undertake regular “walk-about” and tutor observations; as a result, they have an informed overview of the quality of the provision across the organisation.
- The process for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning needs to be more consistent. Across the professional and technical areas and the essential skills, better use should be made of available data, the language used in self-evaluation reports should be more evaluative and the resulting areas for improvement need to be more clearly defined, leading to a more effective quality improvement plan. Appropriate management information systems are in place and planning is at an advanced stage to introduce a more centralised management information system across the work-based learning provision. The inspection has identified gaps and inconsistencies in the information and data being used to analyse and monitor performance and outcomes across the organisation’s ApprenticeshipsNI; these need to be addressed going forward.
- The managers have taken appropriate action to address almost all of the areas for improvement identified at the baseline inspection in April 2022; a small number remain as work in progress, such as the ongoing review of the IT Users programme to support the development of the apprenticeship provision.
- At the time of the baseline inspection, the essential skills provision was identified as a key priority for improvement and managers have worked innovatively and flexibly since then to ensure consistency and continuity of provision. Very good links exist between the essential skills team, the vocational tutors, and the employers. Despite the challenges of recruiting suitably qualified tutors to deliver over a wide geographical area, and accommodating the varying work patterns of some of the industries in which the apprentices are employed, a designated essential skills team has been established to ensure that lessons are provided for all apprentices requiring any of the essential skills. While only in place since March 2023, a good induction programme has been put in place to support the newly established team which is focused clearly on continuing to develop and improve the provision further.
- It is positive that the team of food and drink tutors was expanded two years ago in line with growing business demand for apprenticeship training in this P&T area. Staff appointed to the team have brought a wide range of relevant industrial experience and knowledge from across an appropriate range of sectors in the industry. The management of the food and drink apprenticeship provision has been effective in facilitating the growing number of apprentices within the food and drink sector.

- It is noteworthy, however, that the organisation's recruitment to the food and drink framework in the current year (2022/2023) has reduced drastically, by 93% at level 2 and 83% at level 3. This has coincided with the removal of the DfE's employer incentive scheme. If the significant reduction in the organisation's recruitment persists, the long-term impact and sustainability of the programme will become a challenge.
- While current registration levels to the Skills for Life and Work programme and the food and drink apprenticeship programme are high, the numbers of apprentices registered across the other P&T areas are low. The organisation needs to review recruitment, particularly the long-term viability and sustainability of the overall ApprenticeshipsNI provision.
- Staff are provided with a wide range of professional learning opportunities to develop their understanding and ability to meet the often complex needs of the trainees and apprentices. For example, staff have undertaken training in drugs and alcohol, equality and diversity, first aid, and managing challenging behaviours. Mental health first aid training is planned. Currently eight tutors do not hold the minimum qualification standard required, the DfE endorsed Certificate in Teaching. Plans are in place for four of the tutors to undertake the qualification from September 2023, with the remainder from September 2024.
- Effective links and partnerships have been developed not only with employers, but also with a wide range of stakeholders including industry bodies, support providers, and statutory bodies. These links and partnerships are used well to provide work placements for trainees, support the development of the ApprenticeshipsNI provision, and inform developments to the curriculum offer across the P&T areas. At the time of the inspection most (75%) of the trainees were on a suitable work-experience placement and most (84%) had been on a placement at some stage during their programme. There is evidence of good partnership working to support and meet the individual needs of the trainees and apprentices; this includes working to address pertinent issues as part of the personal development curriculum, including gender identity, mental health and emotional wellbeing, drugs and alcohol, sexuality and relationships/mood matters, as well as the provision of one-to-one counselling.

Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and apprentices reflect current legislation and practice.

Overall effectiveness

At the time of the inspection, and in the areas evaluated, 21 Training demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the trainees and apprentices.

There are areas for improvement that the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The areas for improvement are to:

- Develop a more consistent process for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning across the provision, including the better use of available data and information.
- Address the identified gaps and inconsistencies in the information and data being used to analyse and monitor performance and outcomes across the organisation's ApprenticeshipsNI provision.
- Provide more consistent advice and guidance for apprentices about progression pathways.
- Review recruitment, particularly the long-term viability and sustainability of the overall ApprenticeshipsNI provision.

The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

Appendix 1

A. Programme Registrations

Table 1 – Current registrations by programme

Programme	Number of registrations at entry level	% of total registrations	Number of registrations at level 1	% of total registrations
Skills for Life and Work	95	88%	13	12%
Programme	Number of registrations at level 2	% of total registrations	Number of registrations at level 3	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	439	80%	111	20%

Table 2 – Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of trainees	% of total registrations	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Business Administration	-	-	5	1%
Children's care, learning and development	16	15%	*	#
Construction	41	38%	17	3%
Creative and digital media	7	5%	-	-
Customer service	-	-	27	5%
Food and drink	-	-	391	71%
Hair, beauty and Barbering	19	18%	33	6%
Health and social care	5	5%	-	-
Hospitality	*	#	*	#
Information technology	*	#	*	#
Logistics	-	-	*	#
Management	-	-	*	#
Plant and Machinery	-	-	*	#
Retail	*	#	19	3%
Sport	10	9%	16	3%
Warehousing and storage	-	-	26	5%

* Fewer than 5

Figures suppressed

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI inspectors, supported by an associate assessor, observed 15 learning, teaching and training sessions and spoke with 106 trainees and apprentices during these sessions, in focus group meetings and in the work place. Inspectors had discussions with 38 employers and met with key 21 Training staff, including the chief executive officer. Samples of the trainees' and apprentices' work and personal training plans, and tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans were examined. Trainees, apprentices and staff had the opportunity to complete a confidential questionnaire. The inspection was also informed by the organisation's quality improvement planning processes and associated documentation, including the organisation's self-evaluation report.

ETI's Inspection and [Self-Evaluation Framework for Work-based Learning](#) is available on the ETI website.

C. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Programme(s) / essential skills/P&T area outcomes

The ETI use the following performance levels:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Safeguarding

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the arrangements for safeguarding:

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and/or apprentices reflect current legislation and practice.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and/or apprentices reflect broadly current legislation and practice. The organisation, however, needs to: ...

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the trainees and/or apprentices are unsatisfactory. < Insert detail >. The ETI will return to the organisation within six working weeks to monitor and report on progress in addressing the safeguarding issues which have been identified.

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