

WORK-BASED LEARNING INSPECTION
Skills for Life and Work, Training for Success
and ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
Limestone Youth Training Project Limited
(Academy of Hair and Beauty Training School)
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

Limestone Youth Training Project Limited trading as the Academy of Hair and Beauty Training School (the Academy) is a privately owned company with charitable status. It is a work-based training provider contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Skills for Life and Work, Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI (ApprenticeshipsNI 2021 programme) training programmes in the professional and technical (P&T) areas of beauty therapy and hairdressing. 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 of the training programmes provided by the Academy on behalf of DfE, having previously carried out a baseline inspection of its provision for the Skills for Life and Work training programme in June 2022.

Two of the organisation's five training business premises closed in 2021 and 2022, in Belfast and Ballymena respectively, leading to a reduced provision overall, provided in the remaining premises in Belfast city centre, Newry and Portadown.

At the time of the inspection, 64 trainees were registered, 55 on the Skills for Life and Work; and nine on the legacy Training for Success 2017 programme (eight on Skills for Work Level 1 and one on Skills for Work Level 2) (all data in this report was provided by the organisation). Forty of the trainees were registered for beauty therapy and 24 were registered for hairdressing. Of the 145 apprentices, 77 were registered at level 2 and 68 at level 3; there were 30 and 115 apprentices registered on the P&T areas of beauty therapy and hairdressing respectively. Fifty-nine trainees and 121 apprentices were completing at least one of the essential skills.

It is notable that a minority (11%) of the trainees and a significant minority (28%) of the apprentices entered their programme with four or more GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics.

Most of the trainees have additional learning support needs (83%) and/or a disability (41%) and two-fifths of the apprentices either have additional learning support needs (25%) or a disability (15%).

Views of trainees, apprentices and staff

Inspectors met and spoke with two focus groups of 12 trainees and apprentices, as well as a further 52 trainees and apprentices during their learning, teaching and training sessions. They reported that they are very well supported by staff in their P&T training and pastorally, and as a result have high aspirations to succeed. They are given useful feedback from their tutors which helps them to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. They are well informed about their progress and clear on their progression pathways.

Eighty-two percent (171) of the trainees and apprentices completed the online questionnaire. All of the respondents reported that: the organisation's pre-enrolment information, guidance and support is useful; the training sessions are well taught; their work is assessed regularly; they are well-informed about progress across all aspects of their learning; they have good access to resources including appropriate ICT equipment; and their programme is well managed. Nearly half of the respondents provided written comments which were overwhelmingly positive, highlighting in particular the importance of the supportive environment and building friendships during their training programme.

Seventy-six percent (19) 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 face-to-face and online learning and has good channels of communication. Nearly two-fifths provided written comments, with a common theme related to the supportive environment in which they work.

Focus of the inspection

The report is based on an inspection of the organisation's provision for the Skills for Life and Work and the ApprenticeshipsNI training programmes, and the essential skills. The inspection focused on the P&T areas of beauty therapy and hairdressing. 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 overall findings

Overall effectiveness

At the time of the inspection visit, and in the areas evaluated, the Academy has a high level of capacity for sustained 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	26%	Outstanding
ApprenticeshipsNI	70%	Outstanding

* As less than 10 (4%) of the learners were registered on the legacy Training for Success programme, no Performance Level has been awarded for this programme.

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

Programme	Performance Level
Beauty Therapy	Outstanding
Hairdressing	Outstanding
Essential Skills	Outstanding

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 outstanding retention rate for the current cohorts of trainees (91%) and apprentices (95%).
- The outstanding achievement rates for those trainees and apprentices who completed their programmes.
- The essential skills outcomes are very high.
- The high-quality standards of work attained by the trainees and apprentices in their P&T training and essential skills.
- The trainees and apprentices feel valued and consistently demonstrate exemplary behaviour.
- The highly effective learning, teaching and training observed in all of the sessions, the extensive range of high-quality learning resources and the excellent training accommodation.
- The well-considered curriculum includes a wide range of enhancement and enrichment activities, and the integration of the essential skills.
- The highly experienced and flexible essential skills team.
- The excellent provision in place to support the personal and social development of the trainees and apprentices, and to promote their health and well-being, and that of staff members.
- The range of appropriate professional learning and development activities for staff to remain upskilled in their professional area, as well as in aspects such as learner health, wellbeing, and safeguarding, and additional learning needs.
- The comprehensive and well-embedded quality assurance processes, including a formalised programme of tutor observations, which inform well the strategic and operational leadership and management of the provision.

Key findings

- Very good working relationships have been developed between the staff and the trainees and apprentices; the trainees and apprentices have well-founded trust and confidence that staff have their best interests at heart. The high expectations set for the trainees and apprentices to achieve high standards, the engaging, well-targeted teaching and training, the individualised planning and feedback have resulted in them feeling valued and making very good progress. They consistently demonstrated exemplary behaviour and referred to the Academy as a safe, warm, welcoming, and positive learning environment.
- All of the learning, teaching and training sessions observed, in both of the P&T areas and the essential skills provision, were highly effective. The sessions were characterised by: high levels of engagement and enjoyment by the trainees and the apprentices; use of a wide range of impactful learning and teaching strategies, including active learning and skilful use of questioning to progress learning; effective team teaching and adaptive teaching; and excellent tutor occupational knowledge and skills. The trainees and apprentices receive high levels of support and appropriate stretch and challenge from the staff who know their needs well.
- The trainees and apprentices work independently and with perseverance on a range of tasks. They participate confidently in class discussions, sharing views and experiences, for example in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) lesson on the contemporary issue of sextortion. In the theory and practical classes, they are developing a very good understanding of how to converse appropriately with clients using correct tone and technical vocabulary, for example, when explaining the effects of the different strengths of developer in the colouring process.
- The standards of work attained by the trainees and the apprentices in their P&T training were very high; as they develop their skills set, they increasingly and regularly exceed the targets and levels set. There was a high standard of written work in the folders of the trainees and apprentices, with for example, the use of a variety of sentence structures and accurate spelling in their evaluations of practical assessments.
- While most (89%) of the trainees had no previous qualifications, all of those observed are progressing well in their learning, as are the apprentices observed. The apprentices nearing completion of their level 2 qualification are encouraged to start undertaking level 3 tasks, in order to provide challenge and maintain their interest, build their confidence further and to ease the transition to level 3 work.

- The essential skills outcomes are very high, with the trainees and apprentices achieving in line with and exceeding their framework requirements. Of those that commenced their training since September 2021, all that were targeted and completed at level 2 achieved the essential skills (36 in ICT; 6 in literacy; 15 in numeracy). Almost all of the trainees and apprentices that were targeted and completed at level 1 achieved the essential skills. Very good levels of attendance are maintained at the essential skills sessions.
- The retention rates for the current cohorts of trainees (91%) and apprentices (95%) are outstanding, and the achievement rates (100%) for those who have completed their programmes are also outstanding. Rigorous tracking and monitoring ensure timely intervention for those trainees and apprentices at risk of not completing their programme.
- A key strength of the provision is the integration of the development of the essential skills across complementary curricular areas such as personal and social skills, as well as the P&T areas. The highly experienced and flexible essential skills team work collegially with all staff to ensure the highest possible outcomes for the trainees and apprentices.
- A wide range of extra skill enhancement and enrichment activities are provided on a regular basis to enable the trainees and apprentices to reach the highest standards in their P&T area of work. These activities also enhance their awareness of specialist activities and raise their aspirations around potential career pathways.
- The trainees and apprentices are also provided with opportunities to undertake project-based activities, where they can work in teams to provide support to local communities and charities, for example, compiling food hampers for delivery to families in need, planning coffee mornings to raise money for specific charities and providing pampering activities for individuals in need of support. These activities enable them to develop well transferable skills such as working as a member of a team and problem solving and they also enjoy being able to help others.
- The organisation maintains the quality of its training accommodation to a high industry standard, and provides an extensive range of high-quality learning resources, including ICT equipment, to support the trainees and apprentices.
- A strong focus is placed on the health and well-being of trainees and apprentices. For example, healthy eating is promoted through the provision of a breakfast club at each of the premises and keeping safe messages through a well-developed and embedded preventative curriculum. The trainees and apprentices are able to talk freely about their feelings and emotions with staff, who support them to build their resilience, in order to recover from setbacks, adapt to change, and cope with adversity.

- There is also a strong emphasis placed on the care and welfare of staff. A “Mental Health Awareness Team” team has been set up to plan and develop the provision further, to support the mental wellbeing of all. This has led initially to the introduction of mental health awareness training for all staff and planning is in place to deliver accredited training to trainees and apprentices. This initiative and other ongoing support is highly valued by the staff who inspectors met with. They reported that it demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to supporting them to better meet the changing and often complex needs of the trainees and apprentices.
- The strategic and operational leadership and management of the trainee and apprenticeship provision is highly effective. Self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well-embedded at all levels across the organisation, with a collegial approach to continuous improvement with engagement from all staff.
- An appropriate quality improvement plan is in place to address the well-targeted areas for further development identified, including measurable targets and regular review milestones. Overall, the leadership and managers are planning very effectively for learning and quality improvement, including planning for sustainability of the provision and the progression of the trainees and apprentices.
- The well-established leadership and management team, well-supported by the board of directors and its long-standing chairperson (and owner of the business), continually strive to raise standards of the training provision across both the beauty therapy and hairdressing industry, while responding proactively and strategically to the challenges facing the organisation.
- The comprehensive and well-embedded quality assurance processes include a formalised programme of tutor observations, to support and promote ongoing improvements and developments in the quality of the provision. Staff are supported and encouraged to engage in a wide range of appropriate professional learning activities. For example, all staff have recently completed their level 3 ICT and mental health awareness training. In addition, all have access to online safeguarding training which helps develop their knowledge of child protection and adult safeguarding practices, as well as additional needs, including neurodiverse conditions such as autism and dyslexia. The tutors are highly professional, reflective practitioners and are well-informed about and responsive to contemporary challenges experienced by the trainees and apprentices. They have undertaken a range of professional development opportunities, including qualifications in youth work practice and counselling, to better support the increasing levels of mental health concerns.
- The Academy has well-established and collaborative working relationships with a wide range of employers. These are used well to inform curriculum development and to support the trainees and apprentices in the development of their professional, technical and employability skills. The placement monitoring officers engage effectively with the employers, keeping them well-informed of the trainees’ and apprentices’ overall progress.

- All of the trainees have had a placement, job sampling opportunities or taster sessions in industry at some stage during their programme. Almost all (94%) of the hairdressing trainees and a significant minority (41%) of the beauty therapy trainees were in a suitable work-experience placement at the point of the inspection. However there have been challenges over the last year finding work-experience placements and employment opportunities for all of the trainees, particularly in beauty therapy, due to salon closures and reduced opening hours since the pandemic. For trainees who are not in work experience placements, they are provided with effective 'out of placement' provision which includes a range of high-quality extra training activities to improve their work-readiness, along with 'in-house' experience in the salon environment.

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, the Academy has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the trainees and apprentices.

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	N/A	N/A	55	26%
Programme	Number of registrations at level 2	% of total registrations	Number of registrations at level 3	% of total registrations
Training for Success	8	4%	*	#
Programme	Number of registrations at level 2	% of total registrations	Number of registrations at level 3	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	77	37%	68	33%

* Fewer than 5

figures suppressed

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
Beauty Therapy	40	19%	30	14%
Hairdressing	24	12%	115	55%

B. Methodology and evidence base

ETI observed 15 learning, teaching and training sessions and spoke with 52 trainees and apprentices during these sessions, as well as a further 12 trainees and apprentices in focus group meetings. Inspectors had discussions with nine employers by telephone and met with key staff, including the chairperson of the board of directors. 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 its 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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