Education and Training Inspectorate

Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in Customized Training Services Limited

Report of an Inspection in
May 2016

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The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE

CSE

Quantitative 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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning, on Leadership and management, and on the overall quality of professional and technical areas:

Current performance level	Previous performance level[1]
Outstanding	Outstanding
Very good	Very good
Good	Good
Important area(s) for improvement	Satisfactory
Requires significant improvement	Inadequate
Requires urgent improvement	Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness

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

Overall effectiveness outcome	Previous performance level
The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing any area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.	Outstanding and very good
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.	Good
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, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for a formal follow-up inspection.	Satisfactory
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 areas for improvement, which includes the need to produce an improvement plan, which will be the basis for a formal follow-up inspection.	Inadequate and unsatisfactory

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[1] The ETI performance levels were revised with effect from the 1 September 2015.

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments at week 4 of year one who completed their occupational training framework, measured over the full duration of their course.
Achievement	The percentage of trainees/apprentices who completed their occupational training framework and who fully achieved their framework qualification.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who progressed to further/higher education/training or employment.

Contents

## 1.	Inspection method and evidence base

A team of seven inspectors observed a total of 118 apprentices and trainees in 26 directed training sessions. Inspectors visited 10 workplaces and interviewed fourteen employers. Fifty-three trainees and apprentices were interviewed in focus group meetings. The inspectors held discussions with the operations director, managers, co-ordinators, and tutors. In addition, inspectors examined samples of the trainees' and apprentices' work and personal training plans, and tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

The inspectors evaluated the organisation's arrangements for care, guidance and support and for safeguarding young people. The inspection included the opportunity for the trainees and apprentices to express their views on their training and learning experience by completing an online questionnaire prior to the inspection.

The questionnaire returns show that almost all of the apprentices and trainees feel safe, secure, and well supported in Customized Training Services Limited (Customized Training). Almost all of the apprentices and trainees who responded to the questionnaire, and all of those who made written comments were positive about the quality of training and support provided in Customized Training.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Learners	100	42	42%	3

## 2.	Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all trainees and apprentices, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to evaluate the:

- achievements and standards;

- effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;

- quality of provision for training and learning; and

- quality of the leadership and management of the organisation.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation and which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI's publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Work-based Learning* http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards-iqrs-work-based-learning.htm

## 3.	Context

Customized Training delivers training programmes from its main learning and training facilities in Strabane and Londonderry (Derry) and a satellite office in Belfast. The organisation is managed by the operations director and a manager in each of the Strabane and Derry premises, supported by a team of administration staff and ten professional and technical and essential skills tutors. The operations director reports to a board of directors.

Many of the young people recruited locally to the training programmes live in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland (NI) with high levels of multiple deprivation[2]. Notably, the district council area of Derry City and Strabane has the highest claimant count across all of the council areas of NI, at 6.1%, which is significantly above the NI average of 3.2%[3].

The organisation is contracted by the Department for the Economy [4] to provide the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. At the time of the inspection, there were 83 trainees on the Training for Success 2013 programme. Of those trainees: 12 were on the Skills for Your Life strand; 56 on the Skills for Work level 1 strand; and 15 on the Skills for Work level 2 strand. There were 38 apprentices on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme; 17 at level 2 and 21 at level 3. The numbers of trainees and apprentices has declined over the last three years by approximately 56%. Most of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipNI training is delivered in the North West area; however, training is also delivered to 15 retail apprentices in the greater Belfast area.

Four professional and technical areas were evaluated as part of the inspection sample; children's care, learning and development (CCLD), construction, information technology user (IT user), retail operations (retail) and the essential skills[5]. On the Training for Success programme, 18 of the trainees were registered in the professional and technical area of CCLD; 12 in construction[6]; 12 in IT users and 24 in retail. On the ApprenticeshipsNI level 2 programme, ten apprentices were registered in the professional and technical area of retail. On the ApprenticeshipsNI level 3 programme five apprentices were registered in retail and two were registered in CCLD.

Based on information provided by the organisation, a significant minority (40%) of the trainees have an assessed and supported disability and/or have additional learning support need. The organisation reports that most of the young people recruited have a range of barriers to learning, including mental health issues, addictions and involvement with the criminal justice system. A minority (28%) of the trainees have declared no formal qualifications on entry to their training programme while all of the apprentices have declared some formal qualifications. Around 7% of the trainees and 66% of the apprentices entered the programme with four or more GSCE passes or equivalent at grades A* to C. Only 16% of the trainees hold a GCSE qualification at grade C or better in English and/or mathematics.

4.   Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Good
Leadership and management	Important areas for improvement

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[2] The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) statistics show that some of the electoral wards in the areas served by Customized Training are the most deprived in Northern Ireland.
[3] The Northern Ireland claimant count by council area - April 2016 (published by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment).
[4] The functions and services delivered by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and some of the functions and services delivered by the Department for Employment and Learning transferred to the Department for the Economy on 9 May 2016.
[5] Customized Training also holds the contract for the professional and technical areas of business   administration, hospitality & catering, health & social care, customer service, management, team-leading and warehousing & storage but these were not included in the inspection sample.
[6] Sub-contracting arrangements are in place with Strabane Training Services (STS) for the delivery of construction, sport, fitness & leisure, hairdressing, barbering and beauty therapy. Construction was the only professional and technical area evaluated as part of this inspection.

Professional and technical areas performance levels	
Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD)	Good
Construction	Important areas for improvement
Essential Skills	Good
Information Technology User (IT user)	Good
Retail Operations	Good

Going well

- The high level of commitment of the organisation to providing a broad range of training programmes and progression pathways for young people living in disadvantaged areas, including those with significant barriers to learning and employment.

- The mostly good or better quality of the learning, teaching and training observed, and the appropriate focus on quality improvement across the organisation.

- The highly effective levels of pastoral and additional learning support provided for the trainees and apprentices including the extensive use of external specialist support agencies.

- The good quality of the provision across the professional and technical areas of CCLD, IT user, retail and the essential skills.

What does Customized Training need to do to improve?

- Aspects of leadership and management require further development, including the urgent need for full implementation of the management information system and the associated use of data to more effectively monitor key performance indicators, particularly to effect improvement in retention rates on the Training for Success programme.

- Increase the levels of employer engagement to inform curriculum development and to increase the number of trainees accessing relevant work-experience placements on the Training for Success programme and to enhance the quality of the careers provision.

- Further develop/embed self-evaluation and quality improvement planning particularly within the professional and technical areas to include the clearer identification of key strengths and areas for improvement and improved action planning.

- The overall quality of the provision for construction.

5.   Achievements and standards

The achievements and standards are good.

The standards of the work and occupational skills achieved by the majority of the trainees and most of the apprentices, in both the directed training sessions and in the workplace, are mostly good. In construction, however, the standards of the trainees' occupational skills and knowledge are mostly satisfactory.

Most of the trainees and apprentices demonstrate good standards of behaviour and have developed mutually respectful relationships with their peers and their tutors. Despite their very low entry profile in English and mathematics, the trainees engage and participate well in their learning.

Most of the trainees and apprentices are developing and improving their communication and social skills and have increased levels of confidence. The quality of the trainees' oral communication skills is mostly good. The standard of the trainees' and apprentices' written work, across the professional and technical areas is variable, and ranges from good to having important areas for improvement. Links between professional and technical and essential skills tutors need to be strengthened to develop further the trainee's and apprentice's independent writing.

Most of the apprentices are progressing well in their learning, however, too few of the trainees are in a suitable work-experience placement (33%) and, as a result, they are unable to apply effectively their learning and understanding within a professional and technical context. In addition, the overall pace of the progress being made by the trainees in construction is too slow.

Over the last four years, the overall retention and achievement rates on the Training for Success programme are good at 63% and outstanding at 90%, respectively. Of those trainees who successfully complete their training, most (87%) progress to employment or further training or education. Over the same period, the average retention and achievement rates on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme are good at 71% and outstanding at 100%, respectively.

Most of the trainees and apprentices who complete their training in the essential skills achieve their qualification. In the last year, however, there has been a decline in achievements in both literacy and numeracy, where achievements have decreased from 100%, in both, to 75% and 83% respectively and action needs to be taken to address this as soon as possible.

6.   Provision for learning

The quality of the provision for learning is good.

Customized Training provide a broad range of professional and technical programmes which meet well the needs of most of the trainees and apprentices; a number of curriculum areas where demand is low continue to be offered in order to accommodate the trainees' and apprentices' interest and chosen professional and technical area, such as business administration. A good range of short accredited courses are provided to enhance the curriculum offer. Other practical extra-curricular enhancement activities provided for all of the trainees and apprentices include the opportunity to participate in a "coding club" [7], personal money management programme and a range of fund-raising activities.

The overall quality of the learning, teaching and training is good. With the exception of construction, the lessons across the professional and technical areas inspected and the essential skills are well-planned and identify clear learning and progression opportunities for the trainees and apprentices. In the best practice observed, the tutors use a wide range of active learning and teaching strategies to support the individual needs of the learners

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[7] Trainees and apprentices are provided with the opportunity to develop their computer programming skills through the Code Academy programme.

including purposeful peer to peer learning. One-to-one support is targeted well, and effective use is made of information and learning technology (ILT) to enhance learning experiences, however, there is insufficient differentiation, particularly to provide more stretch and challenge for the more able learners.

While the range and quality of assessments are at an appropriate level across most of the professional and technical areas, the arrangements for assessment in construction are a significant area for improvement with evidence of gaps and incomplete work. In the essential skills, the diagnostic assessment processes need to be strengthened further to plan better for learners at the lower levels.

All of the tutors have developed a broad range of good quality learning resources to stimulate and support the trainees and apprentices in their learning. More effective collaboration between the essential skills, personal development, employability, and professional and technical tutors would provide better opportunities for: contextualisation of learning; developing the trainees and apprentices transferable skills; and could further enhance the quality of the resources.

The quality of the personal training plans is mostly good across the provision. The plans reflect accurately the prior achievements of the trainees and apprentices. They are updated regularly to reflect any changes in the trainees' and apprentices' training programmes and the monitoring and review process is robust.

The quality of the arrangements for care and support in Customized Training is very good. A learner-centred ethos pervades the organisation and staff, at all levels, work together effectively to support and promote the care and welfare of all the trainees and apprentices and to help them to address their often complex barriers to learning and progression to employment. An effective pastoral support programme is in place for all of the trainees and includes issues such as bullying, addiction, and the promotion of health and well-being. The significant minority (40%) of the trainees who have an assessed need and/or have additional learning support needs are provided with targeted support and assistance through extensive collaboration with a wide range of external specialist support agencies.

The provision of careers education, information and guidance includes a regular time-tabled programme of employability and personal life skills, and for those trainees not in a work-experience placement the provision is supplemented by one-to-one and small group sessions of career clinics. A relevant employability provision is also in place in which careers information is well embedded to inform the trainees about the necessary skills and qualifications needed to progress to further training, apprenticeships, or employment. The overall programme, however, has important areas for improvement, it is fragmented and better co-ordination is required between the staff delivering the employability, careers clinics, mentoring, personal life skills provision and the professional and technical tutors to make it more coherent. The use of industry visits or guest speakers to raise the trainees' awareness of the work environment and possible employment opportunities and progression pathways is also under-developed. In addition, all of the tutors need to place an increasing focus on preparing the trainees for work and ensure that all of them access and sustain work-experience placements in a timely fashion. There are no planned careers education, information, advice and guidance sessions for the apprentices; it is the responsibility of the individual professional and technical tutors to provide information, advice and guidance. In retail this arrangement is working effectively and the apprentices are well supported and informed about progression opportunities to further training and in their employment. The CCLD apprentices however are not well enough informed about potential career pathways in their area of learning.

7.   Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management has important areas for improvement.

Over the past year the management team have embarked on a review of the organisation and an appropriate five year strategic plan has been developed, as a result, changes have been made in the management of the provision and further staff changes are planned. Urgent action is required to implement the new management structure to sustain improvement and to address the decreasing retention rates on the Training for Success programme.

The ETI has confidence in the organisation's self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. The quality improvement plan identifies key issues in line with the inspection findings but needs to be further refined and developed across the professional and technical areas and in the essential skills, particularly in relation to the better use of data to inform key evaluations. It is also important that the planned management information system is implemented as soon as possible to support on-going quality improvement across the provision.

The tutors are appropriately experienced, and have good opportunities to undertake relevant continuing professional development. It is timely that the organisation is reviewing the roles of the essential skills co-ordinator, and the centre manager, in order to strengthen further the overall quality and leadership and management of the essential skills provision. A tutor observation process is in place but this could be enhanced further, through the introduction of a peer observation process to support the sharing of practice across the three delivery sites.

The quality of the accommodation is good. The learning environment for the trainees and apprentices in IT user and retail are particularly well-equipped to support the delivery of this provision. In construction, the workshops provide a suitable and appropriate learning environment with good opportunities for the trainees to develop practical skills. The organisation needs to invest in a range of CCLD resources to further support the tutor in her role.

Links and partnerships with local and regional employers are underdeveloped. Customized Training needs to increase the level of employer engagement, to inform curriculum development, and to support an increase in the number of trainees accessing relevant work-experience placements on the Training for Success programme.

Customized Training has well-established links and collaborative partnerships with a range of community and other local organisations to support the delivery of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. Links to other funded programmes within the organisation, for example, the Community Family Support Programme and Strengthening Families Project, also provide additional support for the minority of trainees from highly disadvantaged communities.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the organisation has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable groups. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

8.   Overall effectiveness

Customized Training demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.

9.   Professional and technical area reports

9.1   Children's Care, Learning and Development (CCLD)

Key findings

In CCLD the quality of training provided by Customized Training is good.

Achievements and standards are good.

In the direct training sessions observed, the trainees were well behaved and respectful to the tutors. The levels of attendance and time-keeping for most of the trainees are good. Most of the trainees are making progress in the underpinning knowledge theory units in line with their abilities and while most of them engage well in classroom activities, they provided only short oral responses to the tutor's questions. Most of the trainees have low levels of communication skills and more work is required to support them in the development of their confidence and skills in the use of descriptive and mathematical language to support and enhance children's learning and development in a range of play activities. All of the trainees report that they feel very well supported by staff from Customized Training and, for those in work-experience placements, by their supervisors. The overall retention rate for the Training for Success programme is good (66%); the average achievement rate is outstanding (94%); and the average progression rate to further education, training or employment is very good (85%).

The quality of the provision for learning is good.

The tutor knows the trainees well, is aware of their individual needs, and is fully committed to their learning, development, care and welfare. The trainees are provided with additional training such as Paediatric First Aid and Basic Food Hygiene which adds to their employability. The quality of the CCLD training sessions observed was good; they were well planned with a range of active teaching and learning approaches used such as small group work, practical activities, and the use of ILT. Planning for the delivery of the sessions is detailed and thorough but often with too much emphasis on the completion of discrete tasks. There is a need to ensure that there are clear benefits from the trainees' engagement in each task, clear understanding and a resulting progression in their learning. Too few of the trainees (33%) are in work-experience placements and most do not have the opportunity to develop their skills in the workplace and to apply child development theory in practice.

The quality of the leadership and management has important areas for improvement.

The tutor has been in post for less than 2 years; she is appropriately qualified and suitably experienced. Planning for the delivery of underpinning knowledge is detailed and matched well to the levels of the trainees. Where trainees are in work-experience placement contact and communication with employers is regular and effective. However, strategically there is a need to strengthen the induction process and integrate more fully all aspects of the Training for Success programme to ensure that more of the trainees are better prepared for placement, earlier in their programme. In addition, the organisation needs to invest in a range of CCLD resources to support the tutor in her training role. Overall, the current self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in place for CCLD are good.

There is a need however to strengthen the quality improvement planning processes, to ensure that they capture more fully and strategically the overall actions for change and improvement in CCLD in relation to retention, teaching and learning, and increasing the numbers of trainees in appropriate work placements.

9.2 Construction

Key findings

In construction, the quality of training provided by Customized Training has important areas for improvement.

Achievement and standards have important areas for improvement.

Most of the trainees display good standards of behaviour and engage readily in their training activities. While the most of them have a low entry profile, they are developing a positive disposition to learning and are increasing steadily their confidence levels. They are, however, making too slow progress in developing their employability skills to an appropriate level. The standards of their occupational skills and knowledge are mostly satisfactory. Whist they are developing an appropriately wide range of basic practical skills, the pace of their work, initiative taking and attention to detail are not sufficiently developed. A majority of the trainees are not completing their level 1 units and associated assessments in a timely manner and are subsequently not progressing quickly enough to level 2 work. The quality of the trainees' spoken communication skills is mostly good. Their written skills are however more variable; most of their written work comprises a few simple sentences. More needs to be done to underpin the ongoing development of the trainees' competence and confidence to write independently extended accounts relating to both their vocational work and other contexts. The retention rate is an important area for improvement (55%). Most (86%) of the trainees who complete their training programme achieve their full framework. Progression to employment or to a higher level programme has also declined significantly over the last three years and is too low (56%). It is concerning that only a few of the trainees achieve a level 2 qualification and none progress to a level 3 programme.

The quality of the provision for learning has important areas for improvement.

The trainees are provided with a well-structured and balanced programme of practical skills training and theory sessions in order for them to develop a broad range of basic construction skills and knowledge, enabling them to make informed career choices relating to the construction trades. While the trainees are provided with three level 2 units within their level 1 programme, there is a need to ensure that realistic opportunities for the trainees to progress to a level 2 qualification within a specific construction trade are promoted more proactively. The quality of the directed training has important areas for improvement. Whilst the trainees are provided with good opportunities to develop practical construction skills in appropriate training workshops, the planning for learning, matched to the individual training needs of each trainee, is inadequate. Consequently, the training tasks set for the majority of trainees are not matched well enough to appropriate targets in their personal training plan. The percentage of trainees in a work-experience placement is too low (25%); more needs to be done to provide the trainees with relevant placements in order for them to apply and consolidate their occupational skills and knowledge. The assessment arrangements are a significant area for improvement. The recording, tracking and monitoring of the trainees' assessments are underdeveloped. Marking for improvement and feedback, with signposting to inform the trainees on how to improve further their work is insufficient.

The quality of leadership and management has important areas for improvement.

Customized Training has a longstanding subcontract partnership with another training provider who provides the directed training. This ensures that the trainees have access to good quality training workshops and tutors with relevant specialist expertise and experience. While there are well-established communication channels to ensure regular monitoring of the provision, the tracking and evaluation of the trainees' progress in their learning and achievement lacks sufficient rigour and cohesion. The well-defined milestones contained within the trainees' personal training plans are not used consistently well enough to measure their progress and to inform and guide the planning of future learning. Links and partnerships with local and regional employers within the construction sector are underdeveloped; more needs to be done to generate a wider range of relevant work-experience placement opportunities and build possible progression pathways to apprenticeships. The quality improvement planning process is inadequate; the self-evaluation report lacks a critical analysis of the quality of the provision and there is limited evidence of a subsequent robust quality improvement plan being used to bring about sustained improvements.

9.3 Essential Skills

Key findings

In essential skills, the quality of training provided Customized Training is good.

Achievements and standards are good.

The organisation supports the trainees well to develop positive dispositions to learning and, as a consequence, most become more confident learners, engage well in their essential skills sessions, and are keen to progress and to achieve their target qualification. The attendance at the essential skills sessions is mostly good and the standards of behaviour are also good. The standard of the trainees' spoken communication skills are generally good although a minority of the trainees need to develop further their skills in formulating and expressing extended responses to oral questions across a wider range of contexts. There are missed opportunities for the development, and tracking of progress, in their communication skills, through their professional and technical work, personal development training, and their workplace training. This is particularly the case in CCLD and in construction where more needs to be done to progress all of the trainees to appropriate work-experience placements where they can use, develop and apply their communication and application of number skills consistently in a work related context. The standard of the trainees' written work, across the professional and technical areas, ranges from satisfactory to good, it is better in retail and in IT users than in CCLD and construction. Overall, a minority of trainees achieve good standards of written work but the majority need to continue to develop their writing and to demonstrate the more systematic application of their communication skills across the full range of their written work in their professional and technical folders. A minority of the trainees make significant progress across more than one level of the essential skills, and in a few instances have progressed from entry level to level 2, which represents significant added value to their learning, progression and employability; the organisation needs to track and report on this more systematically. Over the last four years, most of the trainees and apprentices who completed their training achieved all of the essential skills required by their framework.

The quality of provision for learning is good.

The essential skills staff are all are highly supportive of the trainees and work hard to develop productive learning relationships based on mutual respect. There are initial and diagnostic assessments in place although the diagnostic assessment processes need to be strengthened and the outcomes of these processes need to be used, more consistently, to plan for learning at the lower levels, and particularly for those trainees who are at risk of non completion. The delivery of the essential skills for the apprentices in retail has not yet started and this needs to be addressed as soon as possible. In numeracy, literacy and Information Communication Technology (ICT), the quality of the provision observed is mostly good. In most cases, the lesson planning is good and the tutors use a range of resources to interest the trainees, although these resources could be enhanced by developing further the contextualisation of the essential skills within the personal development and employability aspects of the provision. In the better practice, the tutors used a wide range of learning, teaching and training strategies, including well targeted one-to-one support to motivate and engage the learners. The one-to-one support provided to the trainees is a particular strength of the provision. Customized Training provides scheduled one-to-one support sessions, in addition to the regular essential skills sessions in literacy, numeracy and ICT. These sessions address well the individual needs of the trainees and provide good opportunities for them to ask questions and to extend their understanding and their learning. However, attendance at these sessions needs to be formally recorded in order to measure, more effectively, their impact on the trainees' progression.

Whilst most of the provision is good, the tutors should continue to work to ensure that there is a consistent level of stretch and challenge for the more able learners and sufficient opportunities for the trainees to develop their spoken responses and to demonstrate their capacity to embed and to transfer their new learning to their professional and technical work. Across the provision, whilst the tutors do provide feedback and marking for improvement, they need to check more systematically the impact of the marking and signposting for improvement on the transferability of the skills.

The quality of the leadership and management has important areas for improvement

The management team has invested substantially in the essential skills provision and the organisation supports the trainees to progress across more than one level of the essential skills through the duration of their programme. Management, however, needs to capture, and to record more systematically, the progress across the levels achieved and the value added that this represents. The class sizes for the essential skills are appropriately small and they provide good opportunities for individualised support. The length of the sessions is appropriate to the needs of the trainees and the formal sessions are well supported by 1:1 sessions, where appropriate. The scheduling of the essential skills provision for the apprentices is organised in consultation with the apprentices and the employers. However, the essential skills training for the apprentices needs to support, more promptly, the learning needs of each apprentice across the full duration of their programme.

9.4   Information Technology (IT) User

Key findings

In IT User, the quality of training provided by Customized Training is good.

Achievements and standards are good.

All of the trainees observed work well, demonstrate good occupational competence and produce good standards of work in-line with their ability levels; they use a range of application software packages well, demonstrate good software development skills using modern programming languages, build and configure hardware systems, and competently complete on-line assessment tasks. Most of them are progressing well in their learning and in the completion of their programme. The trainees engage well with their tutor and peers, and provide good responses and demonstrate a good understanding of the lesson content when questioned by the tutor. Their written work and on-line assessment tasks are also of a good quality and there is evidence in their on-line work of extended writing. Good opportunities exist to allow the trainees to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through their professional and technical training, however, these are not being fully exploited by their tutors and need to be further developed. Over the past 4 years, the overall retention rate for the IT User programme is very good (72%); all of the trainees and apprentices who completed their programme achieved. The overall progression rate to further education, training or employment is good (79%), however, it is low and showing a declining trend on the Skills for Work strand of the Training for Success programme and needs to be closely monitored.

The quality of the provision for learning is good.

The quality of learning, teaching and training in the lessons observed was good or better. The lessons were well planned and the tutor has developed a range of good quality learning resources to support the delivery of the IT User provision. Information and learning technology (ILT) was used effectively by the tutor to engage the trainees, tasks were well explained, the trainees worked well independently in completing their work, and the tutor frequently re-capped and questioned the trainees to evaluate their understanding of the work being undertaken. The range and quality of the formative and summative assessment tasks are mostly at an appropriate level and standard, however, there is a need to provide more stretch and challenge for a small number of the trainees who demonstrate good or better technical skills and competences. The tutor has also developed an appropriate electronic system to track and monitor the trainees' overall progress. At present, the work-experience placement rate for the trainees is too low with only one (8%) of the trainees currently in a placement. This needs to be increased or an alternative programme of work inspiration activities or project-based learning put in place to better support the development of the trainees' professional and technical skills and competences.

The quality of leadership and management is good.

The provision for IT User is managed and co-ordinated effectively by the tutor who is well qualified and has a good working knowledge of modern industry practices. While the curriculum content is not matched well enough to current IT industry needs, the tutor has adapted it effectively to include elements of software development, hardware systems, online safety and security, mobile technologies, on-line communication and social networking, as well as online learning, to allow the trainees to develop the necessary IT skills and competences needed to progress to further education or training at level 2 and beyond. The curriculum is currently under review and plans are in place to introduce a more industry relevant curriculum to support the delivery of the IT provision. Links to IT companies and other industry related bodies are currently underdeveloped however, and it is important that these are strengthened, to inform curriculum development going forward. The quality of the accommodation and hardware and software resources used to support the delivery of the programme is very good. While a self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan for the IT User provision is available, it does not clearly identify key strengths and areas for development, or the actions needed to further enhance the overall quality of the provision and demonstrate ongoing improvement.

9.5   Retail

Key findings

In retail, the quality of training provided Customized Training is good.

Achievements and standards are good.

Almost all of the apprentices and the trainees engage well in their training and can apply their learning in an appropriate range of retail contexts. Most employers report that the apprentices' and trainees' communication and personal skills have improved well through the training and that they work confidently in their work-experience placements. The apprentices' and trainees' work is well presented and the quality of written work is mostly good. Most of the apprentices and trainees are making good progress in their training and they demonstrate good understanding of retail theory and practices, which the apprentices, and the trainees in placement, can apply successfully in the workplace. The apprentices are able to complete tasks such as dealing effectively with customers, and providing informed customer service in relation to age-restricted products. The trainees can apply health and safety practices appropriately to the retail environment. The tutors work hard to raise the self-confidence of all of the apprentices and the trainees. Over the past four years, the average retention rate is good (at 66%) and the achievement rate is also good (at 73%) on the Training for Success programme. On the ApprenticeshipNI programme the average retention rate is good (at 76%) and the achievement rate is outstanding (at 100%). It is a strength that all of the apprentices who stay on the programme achieve the qualification.

The quality of provision for learning is good.

The quality of the learning, teaching and training is mostly good and includes the use of an appropriate range of teaching and learning strategies to engage and motivate the apprentices and trainees. In the directed training active learning strategies are used effectively, including group discussion, peer-to-peer learning and reflection to inform planning for learning. In all of the observed directed training sessions, the quality of learning, teaching and training was good or better. The learning environment is well resourced to motivate and engage the apprentices and trainees, including an electronic platform to support the learning on both the ApprenticeshipsNI and more recently the Training for Success programme. A range of appropriate resources have been developed to stretch the apprentices' and the trainees' knowledge and understanding of retail practices and to support the improvement in literacy and numeracy skills, relevant to the commercial retail setting. The opportunity for trainees to participate in curriculum enrichment activities such as industry visits and guest speakers is underdeveloped. The tutors work effectively to support the apprentices to select appropriate units to develop their work-specific skills and knowledge.

The quality of leadership and management is good.

The professional and technical area is effectively co-ordinated across the ApprenticeshipsNI and Training for Success programmes. The organisation provides a flexible provision of work-based learning that meets well the needs of a range of mostly small or medium sized employers. The tutors maintain effective communication with the employers to support the delivery of the training and the work-experience placements. While the overall placement level is low across the Training for Success provision, the majority of the level 2 trainees are in an appropriate placement. The tutors have a breadth of relevant professional expertise and experience, and they are encouraged to participate in ongoing professional development opportunities, to support the quality of the learning, teaching and training.

While a good start has been made to the self-evaluation and quality improvement processes, identification of targets and areas for improvement specific to the professional and technical area would further support the quality of the provision.

Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	38	31%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Your Life	12	10%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Work (strand 1)	56	47%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Work (strand 2)	15	12 %

Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of trainees	% of total registrations
Administration	7	8%
Childcare	18	22%
Construction	12	15%
Customer Services	1	1%
Hospitality and Catering	7	8%
ICT	12	15%
Music	2	2%
Retail Operations	24	29%
Professional and technical area	**Number of apprentices**	**% of total registrations**
Childcare	2	5%
Customer Services	7	19%
Health & Social Care	14	37%
Retail Skills	15	39%

Qualifications of current trainees/apprentices on entry to their programme

Programme	Training for Success (%)	ApprenticeshipsNI (%)
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	6%	58%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	7%	66%
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	16%	84%
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	16%	87%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	20%	63%
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	28%	0%

Note: All data was sourced from Customized Training Services at the time of the inspection.