



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Training for Success and  
ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in  
Seven Towers Training Limited

Report of an Inspection in  
November 2015

## Quantitative terms used by the ETI

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 <sup>1</sup>
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

<sup>1</sup> The ETI performance levels were revised with effect from the 1 September 2015.

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

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## 1. Inspection method and evidence base

A team of six inspectors and two associate assessors observed a total of 124 trainees and apprentices in 37 directed training sessions. The inspectors and associate assessors visited 35 trainees and apprentices in the workplace and 48 were interviewed in focus groups. The inspectors and associate assessors also held discussions with the director, management team and tutors. In addition, the inspectors examined samples of the trainees' and apprentices' work, tutors' schemes of work, lesson plans and personal training plans. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised. The inspectors and associate assessors evaluated the organisation's arrangements for care, guidance and support and for safeguarding young people and adults at risk. The inspection included the opportunity for the trainees and apprentices to express their views on their training and learning experiences by completing an on-line questionnaire prior to the inspection.

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

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Trainees and apprentices	120	89	74%	8

## 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;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the quality of provision for learning and training; and
- the quality of the leadership and management of the organisation.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in evaluating these aspects of training supplier organisations, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Work-based Learning*: <http://www.eti.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards-iqrs-work-based-learning.htm>

## 3. Context

Seven Towers is a private training company with training premises located on two sites in Ballymena. It was established in 1981 as a charitable organisation limited by guarantee and became a private training organisation in 1996. Seven Towers is governed by a board of five directors, with a full-time manager and 20 full-time and part-time staff.

Seven Towers is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) to provide the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. The organisation sub-contracts its training for mechanical and manufacturing engineering to Wrightbus Engineering Ballymena (Wrightbus). At the time of the inspection, there were 70 trainees registered on Training for Success 2013 and three trainees registered on the legacy Training for Success 2008 programme. Of those trainees on the 2013 programme: 48 (69%) were on the Skills for Your Life Strand; 14 (20%) were on the Skills for Work level 1 strand; and 8 (11%) were on the Skills for Work level 2 strand. There were 164 apprentices on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme; 96 registered at level 2 and 68 registered at level 3. Of those on the level 2 ApprenticeshipNI programme; two (2%) were registered on the professional and technical area of business administration; nine were on catering and hospitality (9%); 75 were on engineering (78%); six (6%) were on wood occupations; two (2%) were on decorative operations and two (2%) were on retail and warehousing and storage. Of those apprentices registered at level 3; two (3%) were on business and administration; five (7%) were on hairdressing; 49 (72%) were on engineering; two (3%) were on wood occupations; three (4%) were on decorative operations and seven (10%) were on retail and warehousing and storage.

A majority of the trainees and apprentices (67%) have a recognised disability and/or an additional learning need. Of these, almost half (47%) are supported directly by Disability Action. In addition, Seven Towers reports that a minority of the trainees and apprentices (21%) have significant barriers to learning; the most prevalent being mental health issues, addictions and involvement with the criminal justice system.

Only a very small percentage (4%) of the trainees entered their programme with four or more General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grades A\*-C, or equivalent; the profile is better for the apprentices with over one half of them (55%) holding four or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C, or equivalent on entry. The number of trainees who enter the programme with GCSEs at grades A\*-C, or equivalent, in English and mathematics is also low at 13% and 9% respectively. By contrast, almost half of the apprentices (48%) hold a GCSE pass grade or equivalent in English, and over half (56%) in mathematics.

At the time of inspection, 67% of all trainees were in a suitable work-placement and, of these, 79% of the trainees in the second year of their training were in a work-placement.

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Good
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Very Good

Professional and technical areas performance levels	
Catering and hospitality	Good
Construction	Good
Engineering	Outstanding
Hairdressing	Good
Retail, storage and warehousing	Good
Essential skills	Important Areas for Improvement

## **Going well**

- The strong commitment of the organisation to providing a broad range of training programmes and progression pathways for young people including those with significant barriers to learning and employment.
- The investment, by management, in the continuing professional development of the tutors and the positive outcomes in the standards of teaching, training and learning that have resulted from this.
- The range, and the good quality, of the work placements provided for most of the trainees.
- The high levels of pastoral support, combined with an effective range of positive behaviour management strategies and good quality additional learning support, provided to help the trainees and apprentices to achieve and progress.
- The outstanding quality of the training provided for the apprentices in engineering.
- The actions taken by Seven Towers, and by their sub-contracted organisation, Wrightbus, to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) related careers to address the gender balance in engineering.
- The growing number of trainees achieving the essential skills of literacy and numeracy above the level of the framework requirements and the considerable value this adds to their future career prospects.
- The very good retention and achievement rates on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, over the last three years.

## **What does Seven Towers Training need to do to improve?**

- Improve the variable attendance patterns of the trainees, and the low retention rate, across the Training for Success programme.
- Improve the quality of the provision for the essential skills, including the processes used for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning.
- Further refine the processes used for target setting, and for monitoring the outcomes of actions taken against the targets, within the quality improvement planning process across the professional and technical areas.

## **5. Achievements and standards**

### **The achievements and standards are good.**

In the directed training sessions, and in the workplace, almost all of the apprentices, and most of the trainees, achieve good or better standards of work, and develop an appropriately wide range of relevant occupational skills.

Whilst most of the trainees and almost all of the apprentices demonstrate good levels of engagement and enthusiasm in their learning, the apprentices in engineering are particularly highly motivated and achieve outstanding standards of work. They make very good or better progress in the development of their occupational skills and they demonstrate a comprehensive range of new learning which they apply effectively to their work place duties. Their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills are also mostly well-developed and they can apply these skills competently in the workplace. In all of the other professional and technical areas, almost all of the trainees and apprentices, are developing a good range of occupational skills.

Most of the trainees are also achieving good standards in their personal, social and employability skills from a low baseline on entry and, in particular, most develop positive attitudes to the workplace and acquire effective team working skills. In the essential skills, most of the trainees and almost all of the apprentices develop good standards of work and a significant minority of trainees, 32% in literacy and 46% in numeracy, achieve the essential skills at a level higher than that required by their framework. This represents significant progression for those trainees who enter their programme with very low levels of prior attainment in English and mathematics and enhances their career prospects. Most of the trainees, and almost all of the apprentices, demonstrate good or better standards of spoken communication skills and can draw effectively on their experiences in the workplace when formulating answers to complex questions in their directed training sessions. A minority of the trainees, however, are reluctant communicators and the organisation works hard to develop the trainees' self-confidence and self-esteem as part of the wider personal development and employability agenda.

The enrichment activities offered by the organisation, particularly in catering and hospitality, contribute significantly to the development of the trainees' preparation for the world of work and they also raise the trainees' aspirations for employment. The written work of the trainees is of a more variable standard than their spoken communication skills; it is better in engineering and in retail, storage and warehousing than in the other professional and technical areas. The quality of the trainees' and apprentices' written work is also mostly good in the essential skills. All of the trainees and apprentices are supported well to overcome their barriers to learning and almost all gain a suitable range of key employability skills.

Over the last three years, based on the information provided by Seven Towers, the overall retention and achievement rates are good at 76% and 100% respectively.

On the Training for Success programme, the average retention rates are an important area for improvement at 58% whilst the achievement rates are very good at 100%. Of the total number of trainees (190) who commenced the Training for Success programme in 2013, 105 (55%) have been retained; of these 36 (34%) achieved their target qualification whilst 69 (66%) are still in training. Of those trainees who completed successfully their training, most (81%) progressed to employment, higher level training or further education.

Of the ApprenticeshipNI programme, the average retention and achievement rates are 90% and 100% respectively. Almost all (93%) of them progressed to sustained employment following the completion of their apprenticeship.

## **6. Provision for learning**

### **The quality of the provision for learning is good.**

Seven Towers provides a broad range of professional and technical training programmes which meet well the needs of most of the trainees and apprentices. Through its sub-contracted work with Wrightbus, Seven Towers is addressing effectively the needs of this important local industry and is providing effective pathways to training and progression for the apprentices in engineering. The organisation works hard to engage effectively all of its trainees and apprentices, including those trainees who are furthest from employment, and its ethos is one wherein a lack of prior attainment is not a barrier to achievement and progression.

The curriculum planning is good overall, and Seven Towers has retained its breadth of curriculum offer even in areas of construction, such as decorative operations, which are of a minority interest and where numbers are low.

The quality of the teaching, training and learning is a clear strength of the organisation in the professional and technical areas. The quality in most of the directed training sessions observed was good and the quality of almost half of the sessions observed was very good or outstanding. In the best practice observed, the tutors had carried out a range of initial assessments to inform the planning for teaching, training, learning and progression. The planning was effective at whole group level, and at the level of each individual trainee and apprentice. For example, the planning in retail, storage and warehousing is particularly effective; here, all elements of the trainees' learning programme are well integrated and good use is made of information and learning technology to support teaching, training and learning and to provide feedback to the trainees, and signposting for improvement. In engineering, the planning for delivery was also appropriately detailed and there were well organised work-place training blocks to deliver a cohesive curriculum with clear progression pathways.

Across the professional and technical provision, the assessments, for both the trainees and the apprentices, were well planned and regular and effective feedback was provided. In construction, there were examples of skilful behaviour management strategies, well employed, to promote a supportive learning environment. In catering and hospitality, and in hairdressing there were good opportunities, well-planned and well exploited, to develop the trainees' and apprentices' speaking and listening skills and to apply numeracy skills in a work-place setting.

In the less effective sessions (14%), the teaching, training and learning did not take full account of the need for a wider range of strategies to promote effective, differentiated learning. In the essential skills there were important areas for improvement in the quality of the provision for learning. In these sessions, the outcomes of the initial and diagnostic assessment processes were not used well enough to plan for learning, there was too much tutor lead teaching and limited time for the consolidation of learning. By contrast, in the personal development and employability aspects of the provision for the trainees, the tutors provide a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities to challenge and interest the trainees.

Seven Towers also offers a good range of enhancement opportunities which include, amongst others, industrial visits and guest speakers and, in hairdressing, visits from staff from local businesses to provide demonstrations and information for trainees on current trends in the sector. In construction, however, the use of guest speakers needs to be planned better and organised through a systematic and formal calendar of enrichment.

The quality of the personal training plans is mostly good across the provision. The personal training plans are well structured and are updated regularly to reflect any changes in the trainees' and apprentices' training programmes. There is an effective recording, tracking and monitoring system in place which informs well the review processes at whole organisation, and individual trainee and apprentice level. This system also includes appropriate and timely mechanisms to support the trainees and apprentices, when required. The personal training plans could be improved further, however, through a more detailed recording of the trainees' and apprentices' personal and social development needs.

Seven Towers has reviewed recently, and improved, its induction processes. As part of the induction process, the trainees and apprentices have access to impartial careers education, advice and guidance (CEIAG) to help them to make informed choices about the career pathways available to them. Overall in the organisation, the quality of the CEIAG is good. The recently appointed co-ordinator of personal development, employability and CEIAG is very enthusiastic and plans innovative, interactive sessions that engage the trainees and apprentices well and help them to develop the skills they need to progress into employment. There are regular opportunities for the trainees to visit different local businesses and the Careers Service offices. The trainees and apprentices can access a wide range of appropriate CEIAG resources and there is very good support for them to find and sustain relevant work-experience placements or employment. Further action is required to develop the input of guest speakers and to use the information from interviews with early leavers and those who do not sustain their work-experience placements to inform improvement planning.

The quality of the arrangements for care and support in Seven Towers is very good. The organisation has a very caring ethos and a strong commitment to the welfare of the trainees and apprentices. All of the staff work effectively to help the large number of trainees, and the significant minority of apprentices, to address their often complex barriers to learning and progression to employment. A wide range of external organisations are engaged to provide targeted support for those assessed as requiring it and there is effective signposting for all trainees and apprentices to other services such as emotional health and well being, addiction and counselling. The curriculum has an appropriate focus on promoting keeping safe messages including online safety and healthy relationships; this is supported well by very good resources available on the virtual learning environment. The trainees and apprentices are provided with a well-resourced social area which is used regularly by them and a pilot breakfast club has been initiated.

## **7. Leadership and management**

**The quality of the leadership and management is very good.**

The manager, the qualifications manager, and the essential skills co-ordinator have considerable experience in leading and managing training programmes; they are supported well by the employment liaison officers, specialist tutors and administrative staff. The management team works cohesively to provide training and employment and progression opportunities for young people living in recognised areas of disadvantage in a climate of local economic downturn. The organisation is supported well by the Board of Directors whose members take an active interest in the day-to-day running of the organisation, and curriculum planning is supported appropriately through links with local community stakeholders, business and industry.

The organisation has very good links with a range of employers and these links have resulted in training and progression opportunities for a significant number of apprentices in Wrightbus, a local engineering firm that is of significant importance to the economy in Northern Ireland. The quality of the apprentices' teaching, training and learning experiences in engineering is outstanding. Since the time of the last inspection, the manager of Seven Towers has demonstrated the capacity to support continuous improvement in this important area of priority skills provision.

Seven Towers continues to expand its range of employer links and the recent addition of other nationally recognised employers to its employer base has provided additional placement, training and further accreditation opportunities for a minority of the trainees.

Seven Towers continues to develop the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning; these processes are now well embedded at whole organisational level. There is room for improvement in the self-evaluation process at individual programme level, and especially in the essential skills. The organisation has a bespoke management information system which enhances and supports the administration and management functions and contributes well to informing the overall self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. The target setting within the quality improvement plan, and the associated actions, would benefit from further review and refinement to bring about measurable improvements.

The organisation recognises that there is an urgent need to address the low retention rate on the Training for Success programme and the manager tracks meticulously the reasons for each trainee's and apprentice's non-completion of their programme. Early intervention strategies are in place to improve retention, and there are very good links to a range of support agencies which are being used appropriately, however, most of the documented reasons for non-completion correlate to the complex barriers on entry with which a growing percentage of the trainees present.

The tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced and continuing professional development arrangements are in place for tutors to update their pedagogical skills and their specialist skills. The essential skills co-ordinator has been facilitated recently to undertake a diploma in management at level 5, and is aware of the inconsistencies and areas for improvement in the essential skills provision, and is working to address these areas, particularly the arrangements for timetabling after induction. Through his leadership, the organisation has raised the number of attainments above the level required by the framework, in both literacy and numeracy.

The quality of the accommodation is mainly good in Seven Towers, however, the facilities for catering and hospitality are used to their full potential by the current numbers of trainees registered in this professional and technical area, with limited capacity for further expansion.

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 adults at risk. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

## **8. Overall Effectiveness**

Seven Towers 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 for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.

## **9. Professional and technical area reports**

### **9.1 Catering and hospitality**

**In catering and hospitality, the quality of the training provided by Seven Towers is good.**

**Achievements and standards are good.**

The trainees and apprentices are developing a good range of professional and technical skills appropriate to their level. Most of the trainees are also achieving good standards in their personal, social and employability skills from a low base line on entry. The apprentices achieve good to very good standards of work both in the workplace and in the learning setting. The attendance and punctuality of both the trainees and the apprentices are good and almost all of them display high levels of motivation and enthusiasm for their practical work. A minority of the trainees (28%) are work ready and are currently in suitable work placements where they achieve good standards of professional practice. The remaining trainees are not yet work place ready and are undertaking a good range of work preparation activities.

The enrichment activities, and the industrial visits organised for all of the trainees, challenge their expectations of the world of work, improve their self-confidence and raise their aspirations for gainful employment in the industry.

All of the apprentices are making good progress in their workplace and the employers are actively involved in the development of the apprentices' skills and knowledge and are mostly well informed about the curriculum content of the apprentices' programme of learning.

Whilst the standards and achievements are good overall, it is a concern that the average retention rate on the Training for Success programme is low at 43%. The retention rate on the ApprenticeshipNI programme is much better at 95%.

**The quality of the provision for learning is good.**

The quality of the teaching, training and learning is good for both the apprentices and the trainees. The provision is co-ordinated effectively by the catering and hospitality tutor, and the manager, and the qualifications are matched well to the entry profiles and prior experiences of the trainees and apprentices.

The quality of directed training and assessment is good and the tutor uses an effective range of teaching and learning strategies to promote engagement. Information and learning technology is mostly used well to introduce industry relevant materials. Assessments, including the workplace assessments, for both the trainees and apprentices, are regular and are well planned and effective oral and written feedback is provided. The training, learning and assessment in the workplace are carried out to a good standard. The employers are engaged well through tutor visits which are regular and during which the trainees' and apprentices' progress, achievements and areas for further development are discussed, agreed and recorded. The essential skill of numeracy is integrated in practical kitchen skills and theory lessons and there is also a good emphasis on the development of talking and listening skills which promotes the trainees' confidence. The trainees' and apprentices' writing skills are supported well through regular feedback and signposting for improvement and most improve appropriately over time.

The quality of most of the personal training plans is good. Most of the plans are detailed with evidence of regular reviews and appropriate target setting, although there is room for improvement in short term target setting for those trainees who are furthest from employment.

**The quality of leadership and management is very good.**

The manager of Seven Towers, and the hospitality and catering tutor, work collaboratively and effectively to meet the learning and pastoral needs of all of the trainees and apprentices. There are effective self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes in place, regular reviews of the trainees' and apprentices' work and regular, effective communication with employers. There are productive links with employers and good quality placements have been sourced and used well by Seven Towers to help the trainees and apprentices to develop their work readiness skills, and their occupational and communication skills.

There is an effective cycle of tutor and management meetings to monitor and review the provision which is very well informed by a comprehensive tracking and monitoring system. A schedule of industrial visits is organised and these visits contribute substantially to the trainees' learning experiences. Going forward, it is important to continue to increase the placement rate in catering and hospitality.

## **9.2 Construction**

**In Construction, the education and training provided by Seven Towers is good.**

**Achievements and standards are good.**

At the time of the inspection, most of the wood occupation trainees and the majority of the decorative occupations trainees were in a work-experience placement. All of the employers visited reported that the trainees and apprentices are developing well their professional and technical, personal and employability skills; in particular they develop good attitudes to work and effective team working skills. The trainees and apprentices demonstrate good or better technical knowledge of the area of joinery and painting and decorating in line with their level and experience.

Most of the trainees and apprentices are very well motivated and are enthusiastic about their training and, during the inspection they displayed high standards of work and good behaviour. Most of the trainees demonstrate a good standard of spoken communications skills but the standard of the trainees' written communication skills, however, is variable; there is limited evidence of the development of their free writing skills.

Over the last four years, in wood occupations, the average retention rate on the Training for Success programme is very good (71%), and all those who remained achieved their target qualifications. The progression rate to further education, training and employment is very good (89%). Over the same period, the average retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is also very good (88%) and all of those who remained achieved their target qualification. All of them sustained employment on the successful completion of their apprenticeship.

Over the same period, in decorative occupations, the average retention rate on the Training for Success programme requires significant improvement (47%). The retention rate was impacted negatively by the significant minority (41%) of the trainees who transferred to another professional and technical area within the organisation. All of those who remained achieved their target qualifications. The progression rate to further education, training and employment is also very good (89%).

### **The quality of the provision for learning is good.**

There is an appropriate curriculum offer in place to meet the learning and progression needs of the trainees and apprentices, and, in wood occupations, the trainees and apprentices are able to choose a pathway to suit their specific job roles. Overall, the quality of the teaching, training and learning is good. The most effective practice was characterised by the skilful behaviour management strategies of the tutor that promoted an inclusive learning environment; the very good engagement by the trainees and apprentices in their learning; well developed questioning strategies that were used well to develop the trainees' and apprentices' thinking and problem solving skills; and, in particular, the very good links made to the development of the trainees and apprentices essential skill of numeracy. In the less effective practice, the learning was not sufficiently differentiated to address the learning needs of the group and there was limited use of information and learning technologies to enhance learning. The quality of the provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is good. Going forward, however, Seven Towers should provide all the trainees and apprentices the opportunity to obtain a certified health and safety course to enhance their employability.

### **The quality of the leadership and management is very good.**

The co-ordinator and the tutor work very effectively as a team to meet the learning and pastoral needs of all the trainees and apprentices, and to develop the provision through the sharing of resources and the development of training and learning strategies. The employer support officer and the tutors in Seven Towers have developed productive relationships with the employers and the communication between them, the trainees and apprentices is very good. The recruitment to the apprenticeship programmes has increased significantly in the last two years. In contrast, the recruitment to the level 2 Skills for Work programmes in decorative and wood occupations programmes has declined significantly over the same period. The coordinator has rigorous and robust systems in place to track and monitor the provision. Regular meetings are held with the qualifications manager to monitor the provision and to discuss the development of the provision with a particular focus on developing the pedagogy. The professional and technical self-evaluation reports are evaluative and identify appropriately the areas for improvement in the provision and they make good use of data to inform improvement planning. There is, however, a lack of incremental target setting in the quality improvement plans against which success can be measured.

## **9.3 Mechanical and manufacturing engineering**

In mechanical and manufacturing engineering, the quality of the education and training provided by Seven Towers is outstanding.

### **Achievements and standards are outstanding.**

Almost all of the apprentices are highly motivated and progressing very well in their training. They develop highly effective interpersonal skills, manage efficiently their own work tasks, and demonstrate diligence and pride in their work. The standards of the apprentices' occupational skills and knowledge are mostly very good to outstanding. The apprentices acquire quickly a broad range of practical competencies. Most of them are able to complete work tasks confidently, at the appropriate pace, and to the high standard expected by their supervisors. They develop a thorough understanding of the underpinning engineering principles and technology associated with current manufacturing processes. In particular, they understand the benefits and features of modern engineering materials, advanced manufacturing techniques, and of safe and efficient working practices.

The apprentices' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are mostly well-developed. They are able to communicate confidently with their colleagues, present written work to a good standard, read drawings to mark-out work, and use competently a variety of ICT packages to support their learning and work tasks.

For the last three years, the retention rate is very good at 84% and the achievement rate is outstanding at 100%. It is noteworthy that almost all (93%) of the apprentices who commenced training in September 2014 have remained on their programme. Almost all of the apprentices sustain employment and progress to level 3. A small number also progress to higher education.

### **The quality of the provision for learning is outstanding.**

A significant strength of the provision is the high levels of pastoral care and learning support provided for the apprentices by the tutors, training managers, workplace mentors and pastoral care officer. A cohesive curriculum provides clear progression pathways for each apprentice, aligned well to their individual aptitudes and aspirations. There is a broad and balanced range of specialist units and workplace training organised in blocks of weeks, and delivered in a coherent manner, allowing the apprentices to develop systematically their occupational skills and knowledge. The quality of the directed training sessions is mostly very good with some outstanding aspects. The sessions are characterised by detailed planning, a brisk pace of learning, effective questioning and an appropriately challenging range of assessment approaches. The apprentices' progress and achievements are tracked and recorded systematically, supported by the effective use of an electronic assessment portfolio. Recent professional development, and upgraded ICT facilities, underpin sound developmental work in the use of information and learning technology which is used effectively to enhance and support learning. Regular reviews of the apprentices' personal training plans monitor well their progress and provide opportunities for supportive interventions, when required.

A well-considered careers strategy provides the apprentices with opportunities to progress through a variety of work roles within the Wrightbus Group. The apprentices engage in, and benefit from, a range of enrichment activities, including charity fund raising events, team building exercises, and registration with a professional engineering body.

### **The quality of the leadership and management is outstanding.**

A clear vision and a strong commitment to excellence, at all levels within Wrightbus, ensure that the apprenticeship programme is well-resourced. The highly-professional training staff and workplace mentors are dedicated to meeting the training needs of the apprentices in a supportive and appropriately challenging manner. The tutors have a wide range of industry experiences and engineering expertise, and supported well by continuing professional development. The training facilities are very good. Continued investment in the training workshops, ICT equipment and specialist training resources ensures that the learning environment is fit-for-purpose. The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well-embedded. The training team has a clear understanding of current and future actions needed to maintain and consolidate the highly effective practice. Current considerations include the development of higher level workplace projects to extend the apprentices' information handling and analysis, and communication skills.

## **9.4 Hairdressing**

### **Key findings**

In hairdressing, the quality of training provided by Seven Towers is good.

### **Achievements and Standards are good**

Almost all of the trainees and apprentices engage well in their learning and are developing a good range of practical skills through their training. They are supported effectively to overcome their barriers to learning and all are developing their work-readiness and employability skills.

The tutors work hard to raise the self-confidence of all of the trainees and apprentices. Levels of attendance and time-keeping are low for a significant minority of the trainees and very good for the apprentices.

Most employers report that the trainees and apprentices can apply their new skills and knowledge effectively in the workplace. Most of the trainees gain relevant work-experience through their placements which are suited to their individual needs. All of the apprentices have appropriate job roles to support their training.

The standards achieved by the trainees and apprentices are mostly good or better and most of the trainees and apprentices are making good progress in their learning. The majority of trainees are able to complete an appropriate range of practical tasks. Most of the trainees' and apprentices' assessment portfolios are well structured and the quality of written work is mostly good. The tutors integrate well the essential skills within the professional and technical area and provide good opportunities for the trainees and apprentices to develop their literacy skills.

Based on the data provided by the organisation, the retention is a significant area for improvement (49%) for the Training for Success provision and is very good at 75% for the ApprenticeshipsNI provision. The average progression rate for those who complete their training is good at 71%. All of the trainees and apprentices who complete their programme achieve their qualification.

### **The quality of provision is good.**

At the time of the inspection the quality of the teaching, training and learning in the directed training sessions was mostly good or better. Clear learning objectives were identified for each session, and these included practical, industry relevant, learning activities to engage the trainees and the apprentices, in the classroom and the salon. The tutors have developed effective links with past apprentices and appropriate local business managers, who provide demonstrations and talks to inform the trainees about opportunities and current trends in the sector. The quality of the work-based training is of a high standard and is delivered within a professional context in commercial settings.

The tutors are appropriately qualified and support well the individual learning needs of the trainees and the apprentices by providing a high level of care, guidance and support. The trainees and apprentices are given appropriate careers advice which is often tailored to their individual needs. There is effective use of information and learning technology to encourage and engage the trainees and apprentices in their learning experience.

The personal training plans are well structured and reflect the progress of the trainees and apprentices. There is a robust tracking and monitoring system in place which is used to good effect to support the trainees' and apprentices' progress throughout the programme.

**The quality of the leadership and management is very good.**

The introduction of e-portfolios for a pilot group of level 1 trainees has supported them to develop their independent learning.

Effective strategies, such as learning reflection have been implemented to improve the quality of teaching, training and learning. The hairdressing tutors collaborate well with an appropriate range of external support services to help the trainees and apprentices progress in their learning and to enhance their life chances.

There is a good level of employer engagement, they are well informed about the training and are involved in planning to support the development needs of the trainees and the apprentices. The tutors deliver a flexible provision of work-based training that meets well the needs of employers across the local community. The tutors and employment liaison officers maintain highly effective communication with the employers to support the trainees and the apprentices in their training and progression opportunities.

There are effective quality assurance arrangements in place, including robust internal verification and standardisation across the professional and technical area. The processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning are well established and identify clearly the areas for development and the strengths of the provision.

## **9.5 Retail, storage and warehousing**

**In retail, storage and warehousing the quality of training provided by Seven Towers is good.**

**Achievements and standards are good.**

The standards of work demonstrated by nearly all of the trainees and apprentices observed, in both directed and workplace training, are good; they can deal effectively with customers, handle cash, order and manage stock, and they work well independently or as part of a team. Their spoken communication skills are good and most of them are progressing well in their learning. The quality of the work observed in the trainees' portfolios is good or better; it is mostly well presented, the written work, including extended pieces of writing, is of a good quality, and an appropriate range of evidence is presented.

Over the past three years, the retention rate on the Training for Success Programme is low at 62%, and there is a need for significant improvement in the retention rate for the ApprenticeshipsNI programme at 53%. Over the same period, all of the trainees and apprentices who completed their programme achieved. The progression rate to further training or employment for trainees on the Training for Success programme is very good (86%); this includes a small number of trainees on the Skills for Your Life strand, who have progressed to supported employment with a local company, despite having significant barriers to learning.

**The quality of the provision for learning is very good.**

The curriculum provision, for retail, storage and warehousing is well planned. On the Training for Success programme, an appropriate range of units is offered, a good programme of enrichment activities and industry visits has been put in place, and there is sufficient stretch and challenge for the trainees, for example, a small number of the retail trainees are supported to work at a level higher than that at which they were initially assessed in their professional and technical area. A range of good quality work-experience placements has been developed with a range of local, national and international companies, and almost all of the trainees are currently in a work-experience placement. The placements provide the trainees with good opportunities to develop a good range of relevant professional and technical skills and competences and good employability skills. On the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in warehousing, the units are well matched to the job roles and needs of the apprentices.

The quality of teaching, training and learning is good or better. The lessons are planned well and the learning resources are of good quality. In the most effective practice, good links are developed between all elements of the trainees' learning programmes, the trainees are engaged well in their learning through a series of short tasks and learning activities, and information and learning technology, is used well to support teaching, training and learning. While good quality on-line learning resources have been developed, the range is limited and in need of on-going development across the retail and warehousing and stores provision.

The trainees and apprentices are very well supported by staff in Seven Towers and also by their supervisors and employers in the workplace. The personal training plans are of good quality and are updated to reflect any changes in the trainees and apprentices' training programmes. Regular monitoring and review processes are in place to track and monitor their progress. The assessments are set at an appropriate level and there evidence of good feedback and marking for improvement from the tutors to support the trainees and apprentices in their learning. The quality of the provision for CEIAG is good; the trainees and apprentices are aware of the various job roles across the retail, storage and warehousing sectors and of possible career progression opportunities.

### **The quality of leadership and management is good.**

The provision for retail, storage and warehousing is effectively managed and co-ordinated. The staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and have good opportunities to undertake continuing professional development. Good links have been established with a range of employers, and other external agencies, to support the delivery of the retail and warehousing and stores provision. The quality of the accommodation and physical learning resources is very good. While the processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning are well developed and identify key issues arising in the provision, progress in addressing the areas for improvement has been slow and, in addition, target setting within the quality improvement plan needs to be further developed. Management need to monitor and review the provision for retail, storage and warehousing; over the past three years, enrolment numbers have declined significantly, particularly on level 2 programmes.

## **9.6 Essential Skills**

**In essential skills the quality of education and training provided by Seven Towers has important areas for improvement.**

**Achievements and standards are good.**

Most of the trainees have a very low attainment level in English and mathematics on entry to their programme. Most of them also present with significant barriers to learning and low levels of confidence in their own capabilities in English and mathematics; the entry profile of the apprentices is, however, stronger.

During the inspection attendance was unusually low, this is an area which the organisation has identified as an area for improvement and which is actively monitored by management. A strategy is in place to improve attendance further.

Most of the trainees and apprentices are making satisfactory to good progress in their learning. A significant minority of the trainees are working towards a higher level qualification than required by their framework in both literacy and numeracy and most of the apprentices target level 2 qualifications in their first year.

The standards of the trainees' and apprentices' spoken communication skills are mostly good or better with the trainees demonstrating clear improvements over time. The standard of their written work is satisfactory or better, and is mainly good. Most of the trainees and apprentices are developing good ICT skills.

Over the last 4 years nearly all the apprentices and trainees who complete their programme achieve their essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

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

All of the tutors demonstrate high levels of commitment to the trainees and apprentices. Working relationships are good and are based on mutual respect; this results in good behaviour in class. All the tutors provided the apprentices and trainees with highly effective one- to- one support.

In half the sessions observed the quality of teaching, training and learning was good. In the other half, however, there were important areas for improvement. In the more effective sessions observed the tutors deployed a good range of strategies to engage the learners that resulted in good progress being made in their learning. In the less effective sessions, the results of initial and diagnostic assessment were not used sufficiently to inform planning for learning, there was too much whole class teaching, poorly planned use of information and learning technology and not enough time allocated to consolidation activities. In the session observed with apprentices, the teaching, training and learning was overly assessment driven.

The essential skills tutors work collaboratively with the professional and technical tutors. Where the collaboration works well, the tutors are making appropriate links to literacy and numeracy development opportunities in the professional and technical curriculum, and are providing opportunities for the trainees and apprentices to consolidate their skills. In most professional and technical areas however, further opportunities are required for the trainees and apprentices to consolidate their extended writing skills.

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

The management demonstrate a clear commitment to the essential skills provision with dedicated, well equipped rooms and small class sizes. The essential skills co-ordinator is on the management team and makes good use of data to monitor and track the trainees' and apprentices' progress and, in particular, their achievements and their progression to higher levels. The co-ordinator also provides appropriate support to the tutors.

The tutors are all appropriately qualified and experienced. The organisation supports the essential skills staff well to undertake a range of ongoing professional development. For example, the co-ordinator has recently completed a level 5 Diploma in Management.

The essential skills classes are timetabled suitably in short blocks of time. However, the composition of the classes needs to be reviewed. In four out of the seven literacy and numeracy classes observed there were too many different levels of trainees in the same group. The most recent essential skills provision for the engineering apprentices has been slow to start and it needs to commence earlier in their programme to support them more fully in their professional and technical units.

The self-evaluation report makes good use of data, however, it uses mainly descriptive language. The evaluations, including those from the lesson observation process are not sufficiently robust and as a result it does not accurately reflect the quality of the essential skills provision. The quality improvement plan does not sufficiently address all of the identified areas for improvement and it would benefit from the use of clearer targets and a more robust tracking of the achievement of each target over time.

## APPENDIX

### Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	164	69%
Training for Success (2008)	3	1%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Your Life	48	20%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Work (strand 1)	14	6%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Work (strand 2)	8	4%

### Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of trainees	% of total registrations
Business administration	3	4%
Catering and hospitality	7	9%
Construction	29	40%
Engineering	0	0
Hairdressing	16	22%
Retail, storage and warehousing	18	25%
Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Business administration	4	3%
Catering and hospitality	9	5%
Decorative operations	5	3%
Engineering	124	76%
Hairdressing	5	3%
Retail, storage and warehousing	9	5%
Wood occupations	8	5%

### Qualifications of current trainees/apprentices on entry to their programme

Programme	Training for Success (%)	Apprenticeship sNI (%)
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	4%	41%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	4%	55%
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	13%	48%
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	9%	56%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	33%	64%
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	33%	1%

Note: All data was sourced from Seven Towers Training at the time of the inspection.

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