



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in The Link Works

Report of an Inspection
in October 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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

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.

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

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

Six Education and Training (ETI) inspectors and one associate assessor observed 75 apprentices and trainees in 14 directed training sessions; visited 19 trainees and apprentices in their workplace; and interviewed 49 in focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the general manager, the training manager and all of the tutors. Samples of the trainees' and apprentices' work and personal training plans, and tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans were examined; and the organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

As part of the evaluation of The Link Works arrangements for care, guidance and support and for safeguarding young people, the trainees and apprentices completed an online questionnaire prior to the inspection. Of the 76 questionnaires issued, 42 (55%) were returned, including 30 with written comments. The returns show that almost all of the trainees and apprentices who responded reported a positive experience in the organisation, and felt safe, secure and well supported.

2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the achievements and standards;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the quality of Provision for training and learning; and
- the 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 publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Work-based Learning* <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/improving-quality-raising-standards-igrs-further-education-and-work-based-learning>.

3. Context

The Link Works is managed by a general manager, supported by a training manager, and is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes².

Fifty one trainees and 25 apprentices are registered across the professional and technical areas of business administration, children's care learning and development, retail skills, warehousing and wood occupations (joinery).

A significant proportion (22%) of the trainees has a disability and/or has additional learning support needs. A further 37% have significant barriers to learning. A small number of the trainees (2%) entered their programme with four or more GSCE passes at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics.

All of the second year trainees are in a suitable work-experience placement and almost all (82%) of the first year trainees are in a work sampling placement.

² Programme registration data provided by the organisation at the time of the inspection is included in the Appendix of this report.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Very Good
Leadership and management	Very Good

Overall quality of the programmes inspected		
Programme	Proportion of registrations	Performance level
Training for Success	67%	Very Good
ApprenticeshipsNI	33%	Very Good

Overall quality of the professional and technical areas inspected³ and the essential skills provision	
Essential skills	Very Good
Construction	Very Good
Children's Care Learning and Development	Good
Retail and Warehousing	Very Good

Strengths

- The good or very good standards of work, and the high levels of achievement, of almost all of the trainees and apprentices.
- The very good standards achieved in all three of the essential skills, where 57% of the trainees achieve at level 2 in literacy and/or numeracy from a low baseline on entry; and the very good standards achieved by the apprentices.
- The good to very good quality of the learning, teaching and training across all of the professional and technical areas, and the essential skills, with the majority (57%) being very good.
- The high rates of work-experience placements, and work sampling opportunities, with 82% of first and all second year trainees in good or better quality workplace settings.
- The effective pastoral care, and additional learning support, which helps all of the trainees and apprentices to develop positive dispositions to learning and to make appropriate progress, including the good quality of the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance.

³ A representative sample of professional and technical areas, agreed with the organisation, was selected for inspection.

- The high quality of the leadership and management which takes account of a range of factors to inform the development of an inclusive curriculum that supports progression and achievement.
- The systematic arrangements to review the curriculum which are used effectively to inform the robust, whole-organisation, self-evaluation and quality improvement planning.

Areas for improvement

- Continue to improve the retention rate on the Training for Success programme which is too low at 64%.
- Strengthen the action planning at operational level across all of the professional and technical areas, and the essential skills, to inform measurable targets to improve retention; and develop further the tracking and monitoring of the trainees' progress at programme level.

5. Achievements and standards

The standards of work achieved by most of the trainees and apprentices are good or better. They engage well in their respective professional and technical area, in the workplace, and in their essential skills. In retail and warehousing, and in wood occupations, for example, almost all of the trainees and apprentices develop relevant occupational skills, to modern industry standards, which they can apply well in their work. The attendance rates in all directed training sessions are high.

The trainees and apprentices are making good or better progress in their learning. Almost all of them demonstrate high levels of engagement and motivation to succeed and to progress to suitable employment. A minority of trainees, who face significant challenges in their learning, are being supported well to reach their full potential.

The trainees and apprentices are developing an appropriate range of English and mathematical skills and almost all are able to communicate effectively, and confidently, across a range of individual interests and work related topics.

Over the last three years, the average retention and achievement rates on the Training for Success programme are 64% and 100% respectively. The retention on the Training for Success programme is an important area for improvement and a range of measures has been put in place to address this issue.

Over the same period, the average retention and achievement rates on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme are 58% and 100% respectively. The retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is also an area for improvement. This low rate, however, is based on the very small numbers recruited historically to the apprenticeship provision.

6. Provision for learning

The quality of the provision for the trainees on the Training for Success programme is very good. The programme is designed well to meet the learning, development and individual support needs of the trainees, a majority of whom present with significant barriers to learning.

The well-constructed learning programme provides very good opportunities for most of the trainees to develop key occupational skills, to build self-confidence and improve their interpersonal skills to enable them to progress to employment or further training. The key features of the curriculum are: a well-planned approach which supports effectively the trainees' progression beyond level 2; the well-targeted personal and social development programme and the additional learning opportunities; and accreditation possibilities, to enhance employability skills.

There is an innovative, well-structured work-sampling programme, embedded within the induction programme, which is effective in preparing most of the trainees for their work-experience placement. It is noteworthy that at the time of the inspection, most of the first year trainees, except those awaiting the outcome of vetting checks, were placed. All of the year 2 trainees were in sustained work-experience placements, which, in most cases, were contributing effectively to the achievement of their occupational competencies qualification.

The comprehensive programme of employability, and personal and social development, underpins effectively the ongoing development of the trainees' citizenship and work-readiness. This programme includes an appropriate focus on healthy living, sexual health, emotional wellbeing, prevention of drugs and alcohol abuse and contributes effectively to the development of the trainees' citizenship and work-readiness. The provision of additional industry-related enrichment programmes, such as the construction skills register card (CSR), paediatric first aid and the information technology qualification (ITQ) enhances further the trainees' and apprentices' work-readiness.

The quality of the provision for the apprentices on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme is very good. There is an appropriate focus on establishing progression pathways from the Training for Success programme to the ApprenticeshipNI programme. This is particularly effective in wood occupations where a significant proportion of the level 2 trainees are progressing to level 3 apprenticeships. In addition, the organisation is building effective links with a number of local employers to offer apprenticeship training, tailored to support their workforce development needs. In the children's care learning and development apprenticeship provision, more work is needed to enable the employers to engage more fully in the planning for the workplace training.

The quality of the guidance, care and support is very good. The tutors are highly committed and, through well-targeted continuing professional development, are equipped to provide individualised support for the trainees. A comprehensive range of strategies, including specialist support from external agencies, are used well by the tutors to build the trainees' personal capabilities and to engage them effectively in their training programme.

The additional learning support provided for those trainees with identified additional learning needs is tailored, appropriately and sensitively, to meet the needs of each trainee, supporting them well to overcome their barriers to learning. In particular, the organisation is diligent in ensuring that all of the tutors are well-informed about individual trainee's specific learning needs.

The careers, education, information, advice and guidance provision across the professional and technical areas ranges from good to very good, and is good overall. Through informative wall displays, and discrete training sessions, the trainees have good opportunities to explore, discuss and formulate a personal career plan. With the exception of retail and warehousing, however, there is inconsistent planning for the provision of guest speakers and industry visits across the professional and technical areas.

The quality of the essential skills provision is very good across the Training for Success programme. The results of initial and diagnostic assessments are used effectively to inform planning for learning. Differentiation is well planned and all of the trainees are working at an appropriate level and have good opportunities to progress both within and across levels. There are very good levels of challenge to extend and embed learning and to enable most of the trainees (57%) to progress to level 2, where appropriate. At the time of inspection, none of the apprentices registered required essential skills training.

The quality of the learning, training, and teaching is mostly very good across the professional and technical areas and the essential skills. In the most effective practice, the directed training sessions were well-planned with an appropriate range of varied and stimulating activities that engage the trainees and apprentices fully in their learning and prepare them for the world of work. In wood occupations, for example, there is an appropriate focus on developing the trainees' key occupational skills; recently recruited trainees focus appropriately on developing basic hand skills, and progression in skills development is well planned and supported across the programmes. In children's care learning and development, whilst the provision is good, there needs to be more planned opportunities to introduce the trainees to a wider range of childcare settings and experiences.

The quality of the trainees' and apprentices' personal training plans is very good. The individual plans provide a comprehensive overview of the trainees' and apprentices' learning programme, including informative "pen portraits" of any challenges to learning and progression. Senior management, supported by the tutors, record systematically the achievements across all aspects of each trainee's and apprentice's programme of learning.

7. Leadership and management

The senior management team is effective; their strategic planning is underpinned by a strong sense of social purpose and they work consistently to support all of the trainees and apprentices to complete their training, prepare for the world of work, find and sustain employment. High standards and expectations of all of the trainees and apprentices characterise the strategic direction set by management.

Links and partnerships are very good. The organisation has an appropriate range of links with, for example, the Strategic Advisory Forum and the Belfast Skills group which it uses to good effect to inform curriculum review, development and design.

The general manager and the training manager review the curriculum offer systematically and make appropriate changes in response to a range of external drivers, including local and national labour market intelligence, the views of employers, and the views and needs of the trainees and apprentices.

The management team has introduced a range of effective incentives to encourage and support the trainees and apprentices, in the first year of their programme, to develop and demonstrate their key employability skills including attendance, punctuality and appropriate behaviour in their workplace setting and this is beginning to impact positively on the trainees' retention.

The organisation's self-evaluation and quality improvement planning is very good. The whole organisation self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are well-embedded and are working effectively. The organisation is focused on developing the capacity of all of the staff to self-evaluate in each of the professional and technical areas, the essential skills, and the personal development and employability aspects of the programme.

There are good channels of communication between management and staff at all levels and a supportive programme of tutor observations is used to inform the continuing professional development needs and to inform the overall self-evaluation process.

The quality of the resources is good and the organisation strives to update its resources, including its information and learning resources, on a systematic basis. All of the staff are appropriately experienced and are supported actively by management to undertake relevant continuing professional development on an ongoing basis.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the Link Works has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and adults at risk. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department, however the safeguarding policy should be updated to reflect current terminology.

8. Overall effectiveness

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 areas for improvement through its annual scrutiny inspection.

Table 1 - Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	25	33%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Your Life	6	8%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Work (strand 1)	12	16%
Training for Success (2013) Skills for Work (strand 2)	33	43%

Table 2 - Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of trainees	% of total registrations
Business Administration	4	8%
Children's Care Learning and Development	17	33%
Construction (Joinery)	13	26%
Retail and Warehousing	17	33%
Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Children's Care Learning and Development	14	56%
Construction (Joinery)	7	28%
Retail and Warehousing Skills	4	16%

Table 3 - 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%	60%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	8%	60%
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	45%	96%
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	41%	96%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	25%	72%
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	12%	0%

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