

eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Southern Group Enterprises
Newry

Inspected: October 2006

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

- more than 90% - almost/nearly all
- 75%-90% - most
- 50%-74% - a majority
- 30%-49% - a significant minority
- 10%-29% - a minority
- less than 10% - very few/a small number.

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by Southern Group Enterprises.

Grading System

ETI is piloting a new 6-point grading scale to replace the original 4-point scale as set out below. Where grades are recorded in this report, the grade is given on both the old and the revised scales

ORIGINAL GRADE	REVISED GRADE	DESCRIPTOR
1	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence.
1	2	Consistently good; major strengths.
2	3	Important strengths in most of provision. Areas for improvement which organisation has the capacity to address.
2	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed.
3	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action.
4	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action.

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Southern Group Enterprises (SGE), established in 1986 as a community workshop, supplies vocational training for the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) Jobskills programmes. It is situated in the Greenbank Industrial estate in Newry, and it is a not-for-profit organisation committed to the delivery of vocational training to enhance the employment prospects of communities throughout the Newry and Mourne area. Southern Group Enterprises also provides training through a special training education partnership scheme (STEPS) for a number of local schools. The scheme, funded by the Southern Education and Library board (SELB), is for year 12 pupils who intend to follow a course based upon vocational and occupational skills.

1.2 In the past two years, there have been some significant changes to the staffing complement in SGE. A new senior management team (SMT) has been established, two tutors have been recruited for key skills, and, more recently, a tutor has been recruited for the vocational area of childcare. Of the 13 members of staff employed by SGE, six are deployed in the delivery of Jobskills.

1.3 At the time of the inspection, a minority of trainees (11%), had achieved the equivalent of at least four or more General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) at grades A* to C on entry to the programme. Approximately 30% of the trainees have key skills qualifications at level 1 in both application of number and communication. The remaining trainees have either some entry level qualifications or no qualifications.

2. THE PROVISION

2.1 Over the past number of years, there has been a decrease in the number of trainees recruited to the Jobskills programmes, and in the number of vocational programmes offered. In 2002/2003, 33 trainees were recruited across the vocational areas of retail, childcare and administration compared to the recruitment of five trainees in 2006/2007 to the vocational programme of childcare. Currently, childcare is the only vocational programme on offer.

2.2 In the past three years, the number of trainees recruited to the occupational area of childcare has been low. In total, only nine trainees have been recruited to the Access programme, ten to the Traineeship programme and eight to the Modern Apprentice (MA) programme over this period. During the week of the inspection, there were two trainees registered on the Access programme, three on the Traineeship programme and four on the MA programme.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 The inspection focused specifically on the quality of the training provided by SGE in the vocational area of childcare. The area of preparation for life and learning, which includes the Access programme, the essential and key skills provision, the provision for trainee support, and the careers education information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) provision, was also inspected. These areas, in total, account for all of the nine trainees registered at the time of the inspection.

3.2 During the inspection, a team of three inspectors observed directed training sessions and visited trainees in the workplace. A total of eight trainees were observed in eight vocational training sessions, and five were visited in the workplace. Discussions were held with the centre managers, course co-ordinators, employers and trainees. The inspectors examined samples of the trainees' work, vocational and key skills' portfolios, internal and external verifier reports, and other relevant documentation.

3.3 All of the trainees completed a pastoral care questionnaire prior to the inspection which provided them with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their learning experiences and the pastoral care arrangements in SGE. In addition, the SMT completed a questionnaire relating to the provision of pastoral care within the organisation.

4. MAIN FINDING

4.1 In the areas inspected, SGE has strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

The main strengths are the:

- quality of most of the workplace training;
- hard working and committed staff; and
- excellent retention rate on the MA programme.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- achievement rates for the full-frameworks for the Traineeship and MA programmes;
- low levels of recruitment, which limit the training experiences provided for the trainees;
- poor attendance at directed training;
- planning for the development and integration of the essential and key skills;
- use of key performance indicators, including retention and success, in self-evaluation and development planning; and
- improvement plans to promote training and learning.

4.2

Overall grade	5
Contributory Grades	
Standards and Outcomes	5
Quality of Training and Learning	5
Leadership and Management	4

Programme Area	Grade	Number of Trainees
Childcare	5	9
Learning for Life and Work	4	
Contributory grades:		} 9
Access programme	4	
Keyskills	5	
Trainee support	4	
CEIAG	4	

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

5.1 Most trainees are well motivated and generally enthusiastic about their training programme and achieving their vocational qualifications. They work cooperatively and respond well to their vocational tutors and to their employers and supervisors in the workplace. Most achieve good levels of attendance and timekeeping in the workplace. In contrast, the average attendance in directed training during the inspection was poor.

5.2 Tutors and supervisors have high expectations of the trainees, and as a result most achieve good standards of occupational skills in the workplace. Trainees on the Access programme, for example, work effectively to set out and clear away play activities. Trainees working towards the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 2 can read stories competently to children, and contribute effectively to the creation of classroom displays. Trainees on the NVQ level 3 programme have good opportunities to support children in structured play activities and they apply effectively their ICT skills in the production of worksheets to assist the children's learning.

5.3 All of the trainees are in good work placements and the employers are well informed, through rigorous and regular monitoring visits, about the trainees' progress and the content and structure of the NVQ programme. The planning for the implementation of the technical certificate and the key skills is at an early stage and this is reflected in the poor outcomes, over the past three years, in terms of the achievement of the full framework on both Traineeship and MA programmes at 0%. Almost all of the trainees have good standards of oral communication, and are able to discuss and relate their work in the workplace to the work they complete in directed training. The trainees are developing pertinent employability skills and the majority are gaining employment with their workplace providers.

5.4 Over the past three years, the retention rates on the programmes inspected ranged from satisfactory to excellent. Nine trainees commenced the Access programme, six completed their training and six gained the NVQ. This represents a satisfactory retention rate of 67%. Ten trainees commenced the Traineeship programme, six completed training, and six gained the NVQ. Taking into account the one trainee still on the programme, this represents a modest retention rate of 70%. Eight trainees commenced the MA programme, seven completed training, and seven gained the NVQ. Taking into account the one trainee still on the programme, this represents an excellent retention rate of 100%.

5.5 The standards of the literacy and numeracy skills for most trainees range from satisfactory to good, and are mostly satisfactory. However, insufficient use is made of initial and diagnostic assessment of the key skills to plan for learning and training. Overall, the delivery of the key skills needs to be more firmly embedded in the context of the childcare programme. The standards of written communication and the presentation of work in the trainees' portfolios range from satisfactory to good, and are mostly satisfactory. However, while a minority of trainees demonstrate weaknesses in spelling, grammar and syntax in their written work, there is insufficient evidence that these weaknesses are being identified and that appropriate support for improvement and progression is being given by tutors across the vocational area. A small number of trainees are capable of working at a faster pace than their peers, and provision needs to reflect more fully a differentiated approach to training and learning to facilitate the needs of these trainees.

5.6 Almost all of the trainees have good or better standards of oral communication and are able to discuss their work. They are able to relate the work carried out in the workplace, to the work they undertake in directed training. The trainees are also developing a suitable range of relevant workplace skills including team working, problem solving, career planning and jobsearch skills.

6. TRAINING AND LEARNING

6.1 The analysis of the trainee questionnaires, completed prior to the inspection, indicate that the trainees consider they have good learning experiences in SGE. Key features highlighted by most of the trainees include the caring environment, the good progress they make in their learning and the high levels of support and encouragement they receive from their vocational tutors.

6.2 Good relationships exist between tutors and trainees, and between the trainees and their employers. The tutors and the administrative staff of SGE are hard-working, caring and committed to helping the trainees progress in their vocational programmes. In addition the trainees benefit from the well-managed personal and life skills programme, provided by Opportunity Youth, which has boosted their confidence and self-esteem.

6.3 The trainees receive excellent support from their tutors. Much of the training takes place on a one-to-one basis due to the small numbers recruited on to the vocational programme. While the trainees value the intensive and supportive guidance they receive, the small numbers in training sessions limit the opportunities for effective discussion and debate to support the trainees' learning. Furthermore, the trainees do not benefit sufficiently from inputs by specialist speakers to extend their knowledge of the settings in which childcare is provided.

6.4 The directed training is planned thoroughly to meet the requirements of the NVQ. There is a good balance of practical and theoretical activities, and the trainees have good access to the Internet to enable them to research topics related to childcare and gather information from relevant, up-to-date websites. The trainees are also provided with good opportunities to gain additional qualifications which include basic food hygiene and key skills in information and communication technology. Planning for the implementation of the technical certificate started in January 2006 and implementation commenced in September 2006. Currently, the planning is insufficient to integrate the requirements of both the technical certificate and the key skills within the vocational programme.

6.5 The quality of the workplace training is good or excellent for all of the trainees. Relationships with the employers are excellent. The tutors maintain regular contact with employers and there is good integration of directed and workplace training. The work placements are good and the trainees are developing good skills in, for example, contributing to classroom displays, and providing support for individuals and groups of children with literacy and numeracy needs. The trainees are assessed regularly in the workplace and they are provided with good feedback on their performance. The trainees have good levels of underpinning knowledge in relation to the principles of good practice in working with children, but, in the absence of the integration of the knowledge base of the technical certificate within the directed training, standards of underpinning knowledge in relation to broader issues of childcare legislation and practices are only satisfactory.

6.6 All of the trainees undergo initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs on entry to their programme. The outcomes of the initial and diagnostic assessments are not, however, used sufficiently to plan effectively for the development of the range of required skills in literacy and numeracy.

6.7 The induction programmes provided for the trainees focus well on the administrative aspects of the Jobskills programme, the health and safety procedures, and the support services available. As a result, most of the trainees have a clear understanding of the structure of their specific vocational programme and the assessment requirements of the NVQs.

6.8 The monitoring and review of the trainees' progress by their tutors is well organised, and the reviews are recorded systematically and regularly. While the individual training plans contain general training targets related mainly to the completion of the vocational qualification, they do not have sufficient short-term targets to enable tutors to monitor and evaluate the progress the trainees make in relation to their key skills.

7. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

7.1 In the past two years, there have been significant changes to the staffing complement in SGE. A new SMT has been established, two tutors have been recruited for key skills, and, more recently, a new tutor has been recruited for the vocational area of childcare.

7.2 Internal communication is good and staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The SMT meets regularly with the vocational tutors and the key skills tutors to plan and review aspects of provision across the programmes.

7.3 The SMT has identified appropriate areas for improvement and development through the self-evaluation process, and there is a satisfactory match with the findings of the inspection. While the self-evaluation report and development plan identifies many of the areas for improvement, the SMT needs to detail fully strategies to address the areas for improvement in training and learning, and success criteria to monitor and evaluate progress.

7.4 The quality of the accommodation is good. The training rooms are bright and well maintained. There are good ICT resources, including data projectors and whiteboards which tutors use effectively to enhance the directed training sessions.

7.5 The vocational tutors are well qualified and bring a strong sense of commitment to continuous improvement to their work with the trainees. The management team ensures that tutors have the opportunity to participate in a range of staff development activities, which contribute well to the tutors' personal development and to their ability to provide effective vocational training.

7.6 The pastoral care policies and procedures need to be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently comprehensive and robust to meet fully the requirements of the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003. In particular, the deputy designated officer for child protection requires additional training.

7.7 The internal and external verification arrangements are thorough and systematic, and the results are used well to provide good feedback to the trainees on their progress.

7.8 Southern Group Enterprises has well-established and effective links with employers. The organisation provides good quality work placements, which enable the trainees to develop well their occupational competences and employability skills.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Southern Group Enterprises needs to revise the annual development plan to take account of the following priorities for development:

- the need to develop strategies to broaden the provision for Jobskills, and improve the low levels of recruitment;
- the need to plan for the achievement of the full framework, including the technical certificates and key skills; and
- the need to implement strategies to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the action taken to address the areas for improvement identified through the self-evaluation and development planning process.

APPENDIX

Jobskills retention, success and progression rates for the Access programme

Year	Started (completed 4 weeks)	Retention Rate %	Success Rate %	Progression %
2003/2004	3	67%	100%	100%
2004/2005	2	50%	100%	100%
2005/2006	4	75%	100%	67%
	Average	67%	100%	83%

Jobskills retention, success and progression rates for the Traineeship programme

Year	Started (completed 4 weeks)	Retention Rate %	Success Rate %	Progression %
2003/2004	4	75%	100%	100%
2004/2005	3	67%	100%	50%
2005/2006	3	67%	100%	100%
	Average	70%	100%	83%

Jobskills retention, success and progression rates for the MA programme

Year	Completed 4 weeks	Retention Rate %	Success Rate %	Progression
2003/2004	2	100%	100%	0%
2004/2005	6	100%	100%	100%
2005/2006	0	0%	0%	0%
	Average	100%	100%	100%

All of the figures included in the tables and in this report were supplied Southern Group Enterprises.

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