FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION
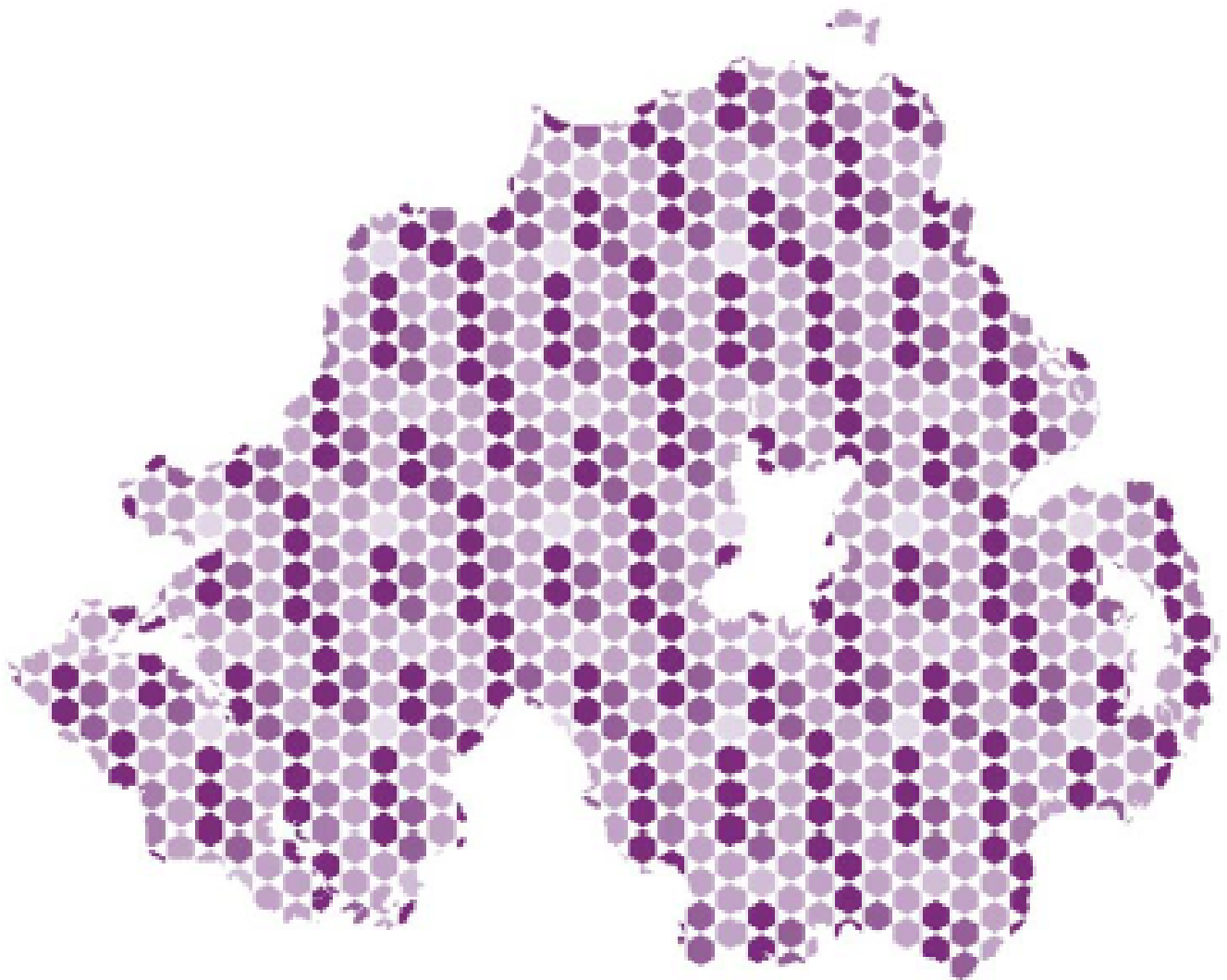
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1.   **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   The Belfast Metropolitan College (the College) was formed following the merger in August 2007, of the former Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, and Castlereagh College. The College's main campus is in the Millfield complex in Belfast. Its other main sites are the Brunswick Street, Castlereagh, College Square East, Tower Street and Whiterock campuses. In addition, the College has 143 outcentres, located throughout Greater Belfast.

1.2   In 2007-08, the College had a total of 5,324 full-time, and 42,976 part-time enrolments. Of these, a total of 2,590 full-time and 27,257 part-time enrolments respectively were funded under the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) Further Education Grant.   The total contribution in Further Education at levels 0-3 is 22,960 enrolments. The College had a total enrolment of 6,254 students in the vocational areas that the Department has identified as designated priority skills areas. These are: computing and information and communications technology (ICT), construction; electronic and electrical engineering; mechanical engineering, software engineering and tourism and hospitality. The priority skills area enrolments in 2007-08 accounted for 22.8 % of the funded learning units under the Further Education Grant.   The College also provides a significant amount of priority skills area training under the Department's Jobskills, Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in all of its main campuses.

1.3   The College serves a wide catchment area, which includes all of the wards of the city of Belfast and also the Greater Belfast area. Higher education enrolments (3,310) form a significant proportion of the College enrolment, and the higher education programmes attract students from all parts of Northern Ireland, and from European and non-European states. As a result of demographic changes in the Belfast area, the number of potential students in the 16-19 age range is falling, and the College faces increasing competition from local schools addressing reductions in their respective enrolments. Currently, there are 2,543 full-time students at level 3 and 807 at level 2 in the College in all areas. According to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 48% of the Belfast population live in the most deprived Super Output Areas in Northern Ireland. The Income Scale shows that there are 82,986 people living in Belfast local government district experiencing income deprivation, while the Employment Scale shows that a total of 30,119 people in Belfast local government districts experience employment deprivation (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

1.4   The inspection focused on the College's full-time and part-time provision in the priority skills areas on the national qualifications framework at level 2, equivalent to General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) at grade C or above. The main areas inspected were computing and information and communications technology (ICT), construction, engineering (electrical, electronic, and mechanical), and tourism and hospitality.   The College's provision in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy was also inspected. The inspection team was joined by a professional associate from the hospitality industry to evaluate the College's industrial links and resources in tourism and hospitality. Prior to the inspection, students were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire to elicit their views of their experiences in the College. Members of the inspection team also interviewed groups of students during the inspection. The inspection team met members of the Directorate,

Thematic heads, programme area managers with responsibility for the designated priority skills areas and curriculum centre managers, course teams, managers in the College with cross-college responsibilities, and employers. A total of 48 lessons were observed. The inspection team reviewed priority skills areas self-evaluation reports, minutes of course team meetings, and quality assurance documentation.

1.5   'Circular FE 11/08', required colleges in Northern Ireland to submit to the Department, a self-evaluation report for their priority skills area level 2 provision and a Whole College Quality Improvement Plan, in addition to their College Development Plans for 2008-11. They were also required to include in their submission, statistical information on student enrolments and levels of achievement for each priority skills area at level 2. This information was used by the inspection team to compare the performance of the College in each priority skills area against the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

1.6   The College has a satisfactory provision of priority skills area level 2 technician and craft courses in the areas inspected. It provides full-time courses in each area, including: the Edexcel First Diplomas in construction, electronic and electrical engineering, and travel and tourism; City and Guilds Level 2 courses in electrical installation and welding; and, the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) level 2 course for IT practitioners. Only one full-time course is provided in the priority skills area of computing and ICT, the Diploma in Digital Applications (DiDA). The full-time National Vocational Qualification at level 2 in professional cookery is based in one of the main campuses in Belfast city centre and on the Whiterock site. Most of the students enrolled on full-time courses are school leavers who enter the college with poor levels of educational attainment. The students mostly have achieved GCSE grades D to G, including English and mathematics. The College offers good opportunities for students to progress to level 3 or higher education courses in each priority skills area. The College also provides a good range of part-time craft and technician courses in most of the priority skills areas.

2.   **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

2.1   Across the areas inspected, the quality of the education and training provided by the College is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

2.2   The main strengths are the:

- good start made to the development of a quality assurance and quality improvement planning process;

- good vocational and industrial links, particularly in hospitality and catering and computing;

- satisfactory or better quality of the teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed;

- excellent provision in the ICT practitioners course and the very good quality of the provision in hospitality and catering, and welding; and

- good or better standards of students' work in most of the courses inspected.

2.3   The main areas for improvement are:

- higher expectations by staff at all levels of the standards of the students' behaviour, including attendance and punctuality, to improve retention and success rates in a significant minority of the courses inspected;

- the limited full-time curriculum offer in the priority skills area of computing and ICT;

- the planning of the curriculum for the First Diplomas in electronics and electrical engineering, and in travel and tourism to improve the employability focus and engage students more effectively, and the planning for the First Diploma in construction to enable students to sample a wider range of vocational options;

- the development of strategies to improve students' attendance at, and levels of attainment in, the essential skills of literacy and numeracy; and

- staff development for course teams in managing challenging behaviour, and opportunities for some lecturers in electronics, computing and ICT and travel and tourism to update their industrial experience.

3.   **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

3.1   The College's organisational structure has undergone considerable change since the merger in August 2007, and appointments to the senior and middle management tiers were only made in September 2008. As a result of the long-term illness of the Director, the College is currently being led by an Interim Director. Within the new matrix structure, there are four Deputy Directors, with responsibility for the curriculum, curriculum services, learner services and business services respectively. Five senior managers have been appointed as Thematic Heads, with cross-college responsibilities for School Links, Further Education (full-time), Further education (part-time), Higher Education, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Seventeen programme area managers have been appointed at principal lecturer level to manage broad curricular areas. Each programme area manager is assisted by a number of curriculum centre managers, with responsibility for discrete curricular areas; each manages a number of course teams. One of the programme area managers has responsibility for essential skills. Staff with responsibility for key cross-college functions, including student services, information and learning technology (ILT), and careers advice and guidance, have also been appointed. A Workforce and Economic Development Team has been established and employer engagement officers have been appointed to develop and enhance links with industry across the College.

3.2   The arrangements for self-evaluation of priority skills area programmes at level 2, are mostly satisfactory or better at course team level. The senior management team has given appropriate weight to the importance of effective quality improvement arrangements within the overall development plan, and has resourced this function appropriately. A centralised Curriculum Enhancement Service, with a dedicated manager and three additional staff at senior lecturer level, one of whom is yet to be appointed, has been established; they report directly to the Deputy Director with responsibility for quality improvement. Considerable work has already been undertaken to develop and implement a whole college quality improvement strategy. There are good links between the Curriculum Enhancement Service and the Employee Development Unit. A comprehensive programme of staff development has been implemented for the recently appointed programme area managers and curriculum centre managers to develop their understanding of self-evaluation and improvement planning. A moderation process for self-evaluation reports for curriculum areas has also been established, and there is a good match between most of the moderated grades allocated to programme areas and the findings of the inspection team.

3.3   The Inspectorate's framework for inspection, Improving Quality Raising Standards (IQ:RS) has been used effectively as a template to guide and underpin the self-evaluation and improvement planning process for the academic staff, and this process is currently being extended, appropriately, to involve support services. A good start has been made to the implementation of procedures for self-evaluation of the cross-college functions. Current procedures are not sufficiently robust to ensure that reliable management information on key performance indicators, including retention, success, progression, finance and important aspects of whole college performance, are made available in a timely and accessible manner, to support planning for improvement.

3.4   A good start has been made to gathering the views of students at key stages of their learning, and those of employers. Currently, there is no systematic, college-wide approach to ensure that the useful information gathered separately through surveys undertaken by the Curriculum Enhancement Service, the Information and Student Services, and the Employee Development units, is collated, reviewed and analysed centrally, to inform the quality improvement strategy for priority skills areas level 2 provision.

3.5   The majority of the priority skills area courses inspected are well-managed. The programme area managers work effectively with curriculum centre managers and most of the course teams to provide good support and encouragement within the new organisational structure. The leadership and management of the First Diplomas in electronics and electrical engineering and travel and tourism are inadequate. In most of the areas inspected, the course teams work effectively and collegially. With few exceptions, the lecturers are hard working, and committed to meeting the needs of their students. Whilst an extensive programme of staff development is on offer, there is insufficient emphasis on the provision of sessions for lecturers on the priority skills area level 2 programmes, on strategies to promote active learning and to manage the types of challenging behaviour increasingly presented by students on full–time courses.

3.6   The lecturers are well-qualified and experienced across all of the areas inspected. Many of them have participated in effective staff and curriculum development programmes. In hospitality and catering, for example, the lecturers have benefitted from participation in the Lecturers into Industry scheme, and from part-time employment in the industry to enhance and update their professional expertise. Lecturers on construction, travel and tourism and

computing and ICT programmes would benefit from similar opportunities to update their industrial experience to ensure that teaching relates most effectively to contemporary practice. The course teams are well–supported with qualified specialist technicians in most of the priority skills areas. There is insufficient technician support for students on construction courses on the Castlereagh campus.

3.7   The quality of the accommodation and specialist resources to support students in their work are good in most of the areas inspected. Most of the course teams have worked effectively to provide a welcoming learning environment for their students, although the lack of base rooms where work can be displayed and a sense of collegiality fostered, is a limiting factor for students on the First Diploma and other level 2 programmes on the Millfield site. There is inadequate provision for dust extraction in the practical brickwork workshop, and the standards of cleaning and caretaking are inadequate in some of the workshops on the Millfield site.

3.8   The Director, Interim Director and senior managers have formed strong links with Invest Northern Ireland, the local enterprise network and a range of Sector Skills Councils. The College hosts the Workforce Development Forum for Belfast, and has developed good relationships with Belfast City Council and major local employers in each of the priority skills areas. The Workforce Development Forum has made a good start to the provision of effective workforce intelligence to assist curriculum planning. In each of the priority skills areas, there are good links with both large and small companies. As a result of the strategic links between the College, Sector Skills Councils and the local universities, new foundation degrees have been designed in building services and renewable energies, events management and games technology. The courses in computing and ICT, and software engineering are dispersed across the discrete programme areas of engineering, media and ICT; there is a need to audit this provision to ensure that a cohesive and appropriate curriculum is offered, which contributes more effectively to the development of the local workforce, and meets more appropriately the needs of local employers.

3.9   The College through the Workforce and Economic Development Team, has implemented a college-wide strategy to embed work-experience, industry-led project work, enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability skills across all of the higher education courses. The unit acts strategically as a central source for the College's contacts with industry and employers across a range of programmes including: Training for Success; Collaborate Graduate Development; and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. The Workforce and Economic Development Unit uses its links with employers to support small to medium enterprises through bespoke training, student placements and product development. The unit has also established an effective staff development programme to develop internal capacity in coaching and mentoring, small business advice and support for project-based learning. Currently, insufficient use is made of the expertise that has been developed by staff in the unit to inform the planning of the priority skills area level 2 curriculum. Senior managers within the College are working, appropriately, on the development of a Student Employability Policy for the period 2009-2012, for embedding in all further education courses.

3.10   College staff have worked with a number of employers and other training organisations, including Bombardier, Ryobi, Montupet, the Engineering Training Council, Impact Training and Springvale Training, in an innovative interagency project funded by the Department, and the European Social Fund. As a result of the 'Engineering Skills for Industry' project, sixty unemployed people worked towards and gained level 2 NVQ qualifications in fabrication and welding last year, and 91% of these students progressed to employment.

3.11   Most of the programme area managers have developed effective links with industry, professional bodies and with local schools. There are employer engagement officers in three of the priority skills areas, and they work hard to develop effective links with a wide range of employers. Each of the curriculum centres is in the process of establishing employer fora to plan and review their curriculum provision. Although this process has only started, these links are well established in a number of curriculum centres, particularly in hospitality and catering, and computing and ICT.

3.12   The College provides a wide range of professional and technical courses to pupils from local post-primary schools under the Schools Partnership Programme, primarily on the Belfast City centre sites and on the Castlereagh campus. Currently, staff from the College deliver priority skills area courses to 705 pupils across 20 schools in the Greater Belfast area. Approximately 5% of the students on these courses are on priority skills area level 2 courses. A particular feature of good practice is the effective partnership work with a local grammar school, delivered on the school site; this is in the fourth year of delivery and the provision has grown from four year 14 classes to ten year 13 and 14 classes, with 125 students. The outcomes of the programme to date have been excellent, with success rates exceeding 90%.

3.13   The College has undertaken a self-evaluation of the whole college provision for the Schools Partnership Programme. The Thematic Head for school links is developing a strategic overview of the range and spread of provision of the Vocational Enhancement Programme on level 2 programmes across the four learning communities covered by the College. The College has made a good start to the analysis of data to identify the numbers of pupils who participate in this provision who progress to level 2 or level 3 courses within the College.

4.   **STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES**

4.1   The standards of work achieved by the students on the priority skills area level 2 courses range from satisfactory to excellent, and are mostly good. Most students are well-motivated and are enthusiastic about their work. The students in most vocational areas achieve good work-related technical and practical skills. They have appropriate opportunities to work independently and in teams with other students. The standards of work for students on the ICT practitioners course are excellent. In the First Diplomas in electronics and electrical engineering, and in travel and tourism, students are not well motivated and display a poor attitude to the programme of work provided for them. The students' personal skills and qualities for work within the travel and tourism industry are underdeveloped. Time-keeping and attendance are poor in a significant minority of classes, including the Essential Skills, and there are insufficient strategies in place to address these issues.

4.2   The standards of the students' written work are variable, ranging from poor to good and are mostly satisfactory. They are good for most students in construction, engineering, and in hospitality and catering. They are poor on the First Diploma in travel and tourism. The standards in numeracy are mostly satisfactory, and are good in engineering.

4.3   The average rate of achievement over the last three years in the areas inspected is 56%, which is below the average (61%) for all Northern Ireland colleges. The average achievement rate in construction (57%) and ICT (52%) are also below the average for all colleges at 66%, and 56% respectively. Achievement rates in engineering (80%) are well above the average for Northern Ireland colleges at 71%. The average achievement rate for tourism and hospitality is 69%, which is well above the average for all colleges (64%); although most of this is due to catering and hospitality with an average achievement rate of 74%, with travel and tourism at 51%.

4.4   The levels of achievement in the Essential Skills of literacy and numeracy are poor in all of the vocational areas inspected. The provision in Essential Skills is inadequate. The attendance of students is a major problem and the development of strategies to improve attendance at classes and to drive up the levels of attainment in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy require urgent attention.

5.   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1   The quality of teaching and learning ranges from excellent to inadequate; 73% of the lessons inspected were good or better; 29% were very good or outstanding and 6% were outstanding. A significant minority (15%) of the lessons were satisfactory and 12% were inadequate. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in hospitality and catering, on the ICT practitioners course, and in welding. In these areas, lessons are well-planned and effective use is made of a range of teaching and learning strategies, matched well to the abilities and interests of the students. Students on most of these courses benefit from the opportunity to gain additional qualifications, including Microsoft qualifications in selected ICT courses and bakery units in catering and hospitality, which improve their employability.

5.2   The quality of the students' learning experiences on the First Diplomas in electronics and electrical engineering and in travel and tourism, are limited and do not challenge the students sufficiently. In these courses, there is insufficient emphasis on learning activities which enable students to develop their knowledge and skills to industry standard. In addition, the use of visits to industry, specialist speakers, or work-placements to enhance the students' understanding of the vocational sectors, are under-developed. Across all of the courses, essential skills are not taught in a contextualised manner, and most vocational lecturers do not support the development of literacy and numeracy effectively within their vocational units.

5.3   The College has invested significant resources in improving the quality and accessibility of Information and Learning Technology (ILT) resources. The use of ILT in most priority skills areas at level 2 is good with some examples of very good practice, particularly in terms of the extensive virtual learning environment (VLE) for the First Diploma in construction course, which students on the Millfield site use regularly. In most of the vocational courses, the course teams make effective use of ILT in their teaching and learning strategies. Access to the VLE for students on a significant minority of the courses on the Castlereagh site is limited, and this is an issue which needs to be addressed urgently.

5.4   Assessment is well planned in the majority of the vocational areas. In catering and in the ICT practitioners course the lecturers make very effective use of an appropriate range of assessment strategies, including well designed tasks, in which students are required to solve problems both individually and collectively. In the First Diploma course in construction on the Castlereagh site, lecturers work effectively to adjust the timing of assessments to match the students' abilities and capabilities. The quality of assessment in electronics and electrical engineering, and in travel and tourism is mostly inadequate.

5.5   Students have good access to careers advice and guidance from qualified staff in the Information and Student Services unit in the College, and from the Department's Careers Service. A minority of the full-time students on the courses make very good use of the College's advice and guidance and personal counselling services.

5.6   With the exception of hospitality and catering and the ICT practitioners programme, there is insufficient use of vocationally relevant careers information and guidance to inform students of relevant pathways into employment and further education, and to highlight appropriate progression opportunities. In a minority of courses, the pre-entry guidance available to students is not sufficiently robust, and does not reflect accurately the choices of vocational units and options available to them.

5.7   A total of 14 students enrolled on level 2 priority skills area courses were registered for learning support in the College. The provision of support for students with additional needs, due to learning or physical disabilities or sensory impairments, is managed and co-ordinated very effectively by the experienced and well qualified staff from the Centre for Inclusive Learning. Almost all of the students on the priority skills area level 2 programmes receive appropriate and sensitive support, which enables them to cope effectively with the challenges of their courses.

5.8   The students' responses to the pastoral care interviews in most instances report high levels of satisfaction with their experiences of the College. The key features highlighted by nearly all of the students include; the inclusive ethos; the support provided by course tutors; the access to a range of relevant support services including the College's careers advice and guidance service; the quality of the learning environment and, in the main, the good relationships between staff and students. Most enjoy being at the College and would recommend their course to a friend. Students on a small number of construction courses reported concerns about the inappropriate match between the guidance they had received about the opportunities that would be available to them on their course, and the actual course design. A minority of students also raised concerns about the poor condition of some of the workshops.

5.9   The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the College are, in the main, good but there is a need to ensure that more formalised and effective pre-entry guidance is developed and implemented for students on the First Diploma programmes across the priority skills areas. The main features in the College's pastoral care include:

- the contribution made by both lecturers and the support staff to the students' well-being and their learning experiences;

- the policy and procedures for addressing and encouraging good relations, including cultural diversity;

- student access to specialist counselling services;

- the level of support provided for students with particular learning needs or disabilities; and

- the effective communication and good working relationships with other agencies, including a wide range of organisations which specialise in disability issues.

5.10   Suitable policies and procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults are in place and are co-ordinated effectively through the Information and Student Services Department.   Current procedures reflect the guidance issued by the Department and are, appropriately, presently being reviewed to take account of both the revised management arrangements within the College, and the implications pending legislation.

REPORTS ON CURRICULAR AREAS

6.   **CURRICULUM AREA: CONSTRUCTION**

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The College provides a good range of technician and craft training programmes at level 2, which are delivered at the Millfield and Castlereagh campuses. The programmes include the First Diploma in construction, and technical certificates and NVQs in carpentry and joinery, wall and floor tiling, plastering, painting and decorating, plumbing, and heating and ventilating. The College also links well with the Belfast Boys Model School to provide a First Diploma in construction to year thirteen pupils. Over the last three years, the total enrolment figure for level 2 construction programmes has been low at 65. The College, however, in September 2008, enrolled 121 students on level 2 construction programmes in FE, and has responded well, to the recent downturn in the construction industry, by providing training for students who are unable to find employment and enter apprenticeship programmes.

6.2   MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are:

- the good quality of teaching and learning;

- the care, guidance and support provided for students to promote their personal development and raise standards; and

- the good tracking of student progress across the craft and technician training programmes.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the programme design of the First Diploma, which excludes a plumbing option in the Castlereagh campus;

- the pre-entry guidance, provided to the First Diploma students which did not match well with the final programme design, and the lack of a base room, for First Diploma students in the Millfield campus; and

- the poor attendance in a small number of programmes.

6.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The timetable of the First Diploma in construction in the Millfield campus, is creatively designed to meet the needs and abilities of the students.   The First Diploma, run in conjunction with the Boys' Model School as part of the Vocational Enhancement Programme, is popular.   The pre-entry guidance, provided to First Diploma students, on the Castlereagh and Millfield campuses, prior to their entry to the programme, does not match the final programme design.   In the Castlereagh campus the programme excludes a plumbing option.   The programme design of the First Diploma on the Millfield campus, does not include visits to construction sites or access to practical activities; there is no base room, to promote collegiality amongst the students.   In a small number of programmes, attendance is poor.   The grades awarded to the quality indicators in the self-evaluation report are too high, and do not accurately reflect the quality of provision.

6.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The average retention and success rates for level 2 construction programmes are good at 88% and modest at 65% respectively.   A total of 37 students achieved their qualification from a total of 65 students enrolled and this is an average achievement rate of 57%, which is below the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland, at 66%.   The standards of students' work on the First Diplomas in construction and the craft training programmes are good.   The majority of the First Diploma students produce good standards in their written work.   Most apply number well in manual drafting, and in the practical electrical installation unit the students achieve good standards.   The students from the Boys' Model School progress well through their practical brickwork training, where they build walls accurately to tolerances of +/- 5mm. The students in the plumbing programmes develop a wide range of practical skills, which support them well as they progress towards employment.   A small number of students, on the carpentry and joinery programme, with the assistance of the lecturers, have been able to secure employment and progress to an apprenticeship.

6.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of most of the teaching, training and learning on the level 2 construction programmes ranges from good to very good.   In the First Diploma in Millfield the needs of the students are met well by a challenging programme, which is matched carefully to the abilities of the student group.   The lecturers on the First Diploma on the Castlereagh campus, create a good ethos for learning, and adjust appropriately the timing of assessments, to match the students' abilities and capabilities.   The students on the Castlereagh campus, however, are not timetabled for a tutorial session and as a result do not receive regular careers education, information advice and guidance.   The First Diplomas are supported well by extensive VLEs, which the students on the Millfield campus use regularly.   The students in plumbing are provided with well planned practical tasks, which they complete on a rotational basis. Students on the First Diploma courses are supported well by vocational lecturers, who work hard to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

6.6   CONCLUSION

In the area inspected the quality of education and training provided in this organisation is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

7.   **CURRICULUM AREA: ENGINEERING** (Electrical and Electronic, and Manufacturing Engineering.**)**

7.1   INTRODUCTION

There is a satisfactory range of level 2 engineering programmes comprising: two full-time programmes in electrical and electronic engineering and in ICT hardware; and two part-time programmes in manufacturing engineering and in electrical installation. The programmes complement well the College's craft training provision and its Vocational Enhancement Programme with schools at level 2. Progression to these programmes is mainly from the Greater Belfast area. Recruitment over the last three years has been strong, including a significant increase in electrical/electronic engineering in 2008/09 of 90%. Most of the students on electrical and electrical/electronic programmes do not hold a level 2 qualification in English and/or mathematics.

7.2   MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are:

- the increasing range of programmes and recruitment over the last three years;

- the excellent ICT hardware programme, including the standards of the students' work and achievement rates (96%); and

- the good provision of part-time courses for electrical installation and for welding to meet students' and employers' needs.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the retention rate on the electrical installation programme;

- the narrow range of provision for mechanical and manufacturing engineering ; and

- the inadequate leadership and management and overall quality of provision of the First Diploma in electronic and electrical engineering.

7.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management is variable; most programmes are well-led. The ICT hardware programme is very well-organised and managed, including the excellent provision for students' to improve their employability skills through additional professional Microsoft qualifications. Very good laboratory and hardware equipment allow the students

to build and dismantle computer hardware and networks. The development of part-time programmes in electrical installation and in welding demonstrates commitment by curriculum managers to meet more effectively the needs of local employers and communities. Facilities and resources for these programmes are mainly good. There are good links with employers and other educational providers, including a well-established link with a secondary school to provide jointly a full-time First Diploma in manufacturing engineering. Most staff are appropriately qualified and experienced with a good complement of up-to-date specialist skills and technical knowledge. The leadership and management of the First Diploma in electrical and electronic engineering, at all levels, are inadequate; there is unsuitable accommodation and practical learning resources, insufficient curriculum planning and inadequate action to address students' poor attendance and timekeeping.

7.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The standards of the students' work vary from satisfactory to excellent. In ICT hardware, electrical installation and welding they are very good to excellent. Practical skills are well-developed; students are able to complete occupational tasks to industry standard. The range and level of their skills and knowledge prepare them well to progress to skilled employment or higher programmes. In ICT hardware, most gain excellent occupational skills, including a Microsoft professional qualification. Most students demonstrate good personal capabilities, including working as part of a team, taking responsibility for their own learning, problem solving, and good timekeeping. In electrical/electronic engineering the standards of the students' work are mainly satisfactory; they do not, however, develop sufficient relevant occupational skills to prepare them adequately for progression to employment or higher programmes. A significant minority have poor attendance and punctuality patterns. Retention, success and progression rates on the ICT hardware and welding programmes are excellent at over 90%. Success rates are good on the electrical (80%) and electronic/electrical (86%) programmes, but retention rates are modest and satisfactory at 69% and 72% respectively.

7.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

In ICT hardware, electrical installation, and welding the learning programmes are well-designed and provide the students with a broad and balanced curriculum, including progression to appropriate career pathways. There are excellent opportunities for the students to develop both their practical occupational skills and technical knowledge. In electrical and electronic engineering, the learning programme does not meet sufficiently the interests and career aspirations of most of the students, including the development of relevant basic hand skills.

The quality of the learning and teaching in electrical installation and welding is good to very good and in ICT hardware it is excellent. The students engage well in practical tasks, which include good opportunities for problem solving, and respond appropriately to questioning and extended discussions. The learning is enhanced and supported well with effective use of ILT and the College's VLE. In electrical and electronic engineering, there is an inadequate range of approaches for learning and teaching, including practical learning activities. Assessment activities are planned well; assignment briefs are clear with good guidance on assessment criteria. Feedback is mainly good; students are provided with good oral or written guidance on how to improve their work. On the ICT hardware, a good start has been made to use the VLE's grade-book to provide online feedback to students on their progress. The essential

skills provision is variable. Full-time students have access to initial assessment and a suitable programme to address any weaknesses in literacy and/or numeracy. Part-time students, however, have insufficient essential skill initial assessment and guidance, which is particularly true for apprentices on the electrical installation programme.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In the area inspected, the quality of the education provided varies from excellent to inadequate. Overall it is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the engineering provision at level 2. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students on the full-time electronic and electrical engineering programme are to be met effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

8. **CURRICULUM AREA: ESSENTIAL SKILLS**

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As a result of restructuring, a Programme Area Manager was appointed in September 2008 for Essential Skills. Previously, each of the nine departments was responsible for its own Essential Skills provision, with limited central co-ordination in place. At present, the College is in an interim stage, as timetables were set prior to the appointment of the Programme Area Manager. All full-time students have appropriate opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy and obtain an Essential Skills qualification. Currently, a significant minority of the part-time students do not have the opportunity to develop their Essential Skills.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strength is:

- the recognition by senior management of the need for, and the deployment of, a Programme Area Manager for Essential Skills.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the inadequate attendance and punctuality, and poor success rates;

- the inadequate integration of Essential Skills into the vocational areas and the planning of the provision at all levels; and

- the lack of key performance indicators to effect improvement.

8.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The programme area manager has been recently appointed and is supported by two curriculum centre managers. The role of the programme area manager is clearly defined however, while each curriculum centre manager has a clearly defined curriculum role, their cross-college responsibilities are evolving and require further clarification. Currently, there is insufficient liaison between the programme area managers to ensure that vocational and essential skills lecturers work together collaboratively to develop full-time students' literacy

and numeracy skills in appropriate contexts. In addition, the policies for managing attendance at essential skills classes are inadequate; overall student attendance is poor. It is crucial that a senior curriculum manager monitors and supports the programme area manager to ensure that all the students have a cohesive learning programme which includes Essential Skills.

8.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Success rates for Essential Skills are poor. In the academic year 2007/2008 both literacy and numeracy had excellent retention rates at 100% and 97% respectively however; success rates were poor at 27% and 7% respectively. Attendance at classes visited is poor ranging from 50% to 78%. In one class where there are only three students enrolled the attendance is 100%. Punctuality is also poor, with a culture in a minority of classes of students coming to class late. In one example, just under half of the students came to class late; half of these were 15 minutes late, and the other half were 30 minutes late. The standards of most of the students' work observed during the classes ranged from satisfactory to good. However, there is an ethos among students that they do not bring any work with them to the Essential Skills classes, and consequently it was not possible to evaluate the standards of their work completed in previous classes.

8.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of provision for learning is seriously impacted upon by poor student attendance. The provision for learning ranged from satisfactory to good, the majority being satisfactory. Where the quality of provision for learning was good the sessions were characterised by the lecturers using strategies to encourage the students to participate in their learning. These included active learning, well managed group work, and themes that were of interest to the students. In the other sessions there was an overuse of worksheets and group work was not managed appropriately. In nearly all the classes visited, links to the vocational areas were weak. In one instance there was duplication where students were completing an Essential Skills assessment on Health and Safety, which was also a large component of a vocational unit in engineering; however, no linkages were being made by the vocational lecturers. The majority of lecturers do not support well enough the development of literacy and numeracy, within their vocational units.

8.6 CONCLUSION

In the Essential Skills areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the College is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the College is to meet effectively the needs of all of the students. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the College's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

9. **CURRICULUM AREA: COMPUTING AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The ICT-practitioner programme area of the College offer the full-time Edexcel Diploma in Digital Applications (DiDA) in both the Castlereagh and College Square East campus sites. The DiDA programme design varies across the sites with College Square East delivering units of the programme sequentially, and Castlereagh delivering most of the units in parallel. In both cases students attend for a minimum of 21 hours over four days which includes sessions in the Essential Skills of numeracy and literacy for students assessed as requiring support.

The part-time provision includes a variety of text processing, computerised payroll and computerised accounts short courses, the majority of which are delivered in two hour evening sessions. The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is offered in a variety of delivery patterns on the main campus sites, in the community and as part of an enrichment programme in a local selective post-primary school.

The qualification entry profile for students enrolled on the DiDA programme is low. Of the current cohort of 39 students, only 15% have a GCSE at grades A* to C in mathematics, and 15% in English. Enrolment trends are steady across the provision with average enrolments of 880 over the past three years.

9.2 **MAIN FINDINGS**

The main strengths are the:

- good quality of teaching and learning and the good standards of work demonstrated by most students;

- effective partnership developed with a local school through the provision of a successful ICT enrichment programme; and

- good use of ILT to support teaching and learning across most of the provision.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- narrow and fragmented level 2 curriculum offer in the priority skills area of computing/ICT and software engineering, which is currently spread across the programme areas of engineering, media and ICT;

- poor retention and success rates; and

- inadequate provision of a careers education, information, advice and guidance programme across the programme area.

9.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the level 2 programmes in computing/ICT are satisfactory; the recently appointed programme area manager has implemented actions for improvement which are starting to show positive results. However, the three programme areas of ICT – practitioner, media publishing and engineering each have overlapping computing/ICT provision which require more effective co-ordination at a strategic level to improve planning and to widen the curriculum offer in this priority skills area at level 2. Good links have been established with local industry and a successful partnership has been developed with a local selective post-primary school to deliver enrichment courses on-site. The provision in the school has grown steadily from four to ten class groups with approximately 13 students in each over the last four years. A good start has been made to cross-moderate learner portfolio work on the DiDA programme across the Castlereagh and College Square East sites. Further staff development is required to keep lecturers up to date with latest industry practices and new technologies and developments.

9.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most students are well-motivated and demonstrate good standards in their work. Students on the DiDA programme develop a good range of creative skills using industry standard software including; web-site design, animation and digital content. Part-time students on specialist courses in text processing, computerised payroll and accounts develop commercial software skills which increases their employability. Most students can identify personal improvement in their ICT skills including; speed, accuracy and quality of presentation. The standards of most students' ICT skills and oral communication are good but the success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are poor.

The three year average retention across the whole provision is satisfactory at 78%, and the success rate is modest at 66%. Over this period, 1,370 students from a total of 2,654 students enrolled achieved their qualifications, and this is an achievement rate of 52%, which is just below the average (56%) for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

9.5   QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning is good or better in all of the lessons observed. The lessons are well-planned and developed using an appropriate range of teaching strategies including: group work; role-play; discussion; independent research; demonstration and practical work. Students receive good individual support in almost all sessions and there is effective differentiated teaching in most of the sessions observed. Support for students with special needs is good and examples observed include the provision of readers and sign

language support provided by the College learner support unit. There is effective use of ILT to support teaching and learning in most of the sessions observed including: good use of the College VLE; shared files and folders; and other on-line resources. The careers education, information, advice and guidance is inadequate and does not promote careers in computing/ICT or highlight appropriate progression opportunities sufficiently. Assessment on the DiDA programme is by e-portfolio and a significant minority of students find it difficult to manage their time effectively, which impacts negatively on retention and success. There is insufficient liaison between the vocational lecturers and essential skills tutors.

9.6   CONCLUSION

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided by the College is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

10.   CURRICULUM AREA: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY (HOSPITALITY AND CATERING, AND TRAVEL AND TOURISM)

10.1   INTRODUCTION

The College provides an appropriate range of full-time and part-time programmes in tourism and hospitality from Vocational Enhancement Programmes to Foundation Degree programmes. The courses provide good progression routes to employment and higher education. The College has recently introduced a pilot Vocationally Related Qualification, a Diploma in hospitality, and has been successful in recruiting 16 students. Over the past three years, the numbers recruited to level 2 have increased significantly from 59 during 2005/2006 to approximately 138 during the 2008/2009 period.

10.2   MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are the:

- good range of hospitality, catering and tourism courses, and progression opportunities for full and part-time students;

- good leadership and management of hospitality and catering programmes at level 2 across the College;

- good quality of teaching and learning and the good standards of craft skills demonstrated by students in hospitality and catering;

- well-developed links with the hospitality industry; and

- positive impact of the Lecturers into Industry initiative on the quality of teaching and learning.

The main areas for improvement are the:

- poor retention rates in travel and tourism and success rates in essential skills;

- inadequate quality of provision on the First Diploma in travel and tourism; and

- poor access to the College VLE in the Castlereagh campus.

10.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management, at all levels, in professional cookery is very good. The curriculum centre managers and co-ordinators are highly committed and work hard to ensure that the quality of the teaching and learning, and of the students' work is of a high standard. The range of expertise within the course teams is used effectively and the staff are deployed well; most have undertaken recent industrial experience through the Lecturers into Industry initiative or through continuous part-time employment within the industry. In contrast, the quality of leadership and management of travel and tourism is inadequate. There are shortcomings in many important areas, particularly the design and appropriateness of the level 2 provision, and the monitoring and evaluation procedures. The course review and quality improvement arrangements do not address sufficiently the quality of learning and standards of students' work. The use of management information to plan and review student progress is very poor. It is unsatisfactory that little action has been taken to address the consistently low retention rates over the last three years. The management team must take immediate action to provide the present cohort of students with appropriate support to ensure they make progress in their work, including access to the College VLE for the students in the Castlereagh campus. While the lecturers are well-qualified, a majority would benefit from first-hand experience in the travel and tourism industry to ensure that their teaching relates to contemporary practice.

10.4   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Nearly all of the students observed on the professional cookery courses are highly motivated and are making good progress in their learning including the development of appropriate skills and understanding. They are aware of the high quality of teaching they receive and are unstinting in their appreciation of the good support provided by their lecturers. Most of the students achieve good standards in their written work. The quality and presentation of dishes prepared are very good and reflect well industry requirements. The average retention rate over the last three years for the full-time programmes is good at 81%, and the average success rate over the same period is excellent at 91%. This is an achievement rate of 74% which is well above the average (64%) for colleges in Northern Ireland. The progression rate to further education, training or employment has been consistently excellent at over 90% over the last three years. In contrast, the standards of work in the First Diploma in travel and tourism are poor. Most students are poorly motivated and display a poor attitude to the programme of work provided for them. The students' personal skills and qualities for work within the travel and tourism industry are underdeveloped. Most of the students lack confidence when discussing their work, their written work is poor and their assignments

contain many spelling and grammatical errors which are not addressed. Over the past three years, the average retention rate is poor at 56%. The average success rate over the same period is excellent at 92%. From a total of 150 students enrolled over the last three years, 77 students achieved their qualification; this is an achievement rate of 51% which is well below the average for other colleges (64%) of further education in Northern Ireland.

10.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The staff in hospitality and catering has successfully developed a creative, industrious and sociable ethos that is based on the excellent relationships at all levels and a strong collaborative approach among the teaching team. The quality of the teaching is good or better. The lecturers have a thorough understanding of curriculum design and development. Their programmes and individual lesson planning are very good. The teaching is characterised by the lecturers' high expectations and their use of a diverse range of teaching approaches, including clear exposition, well organised demonstrations and workshops, opportunities to participate in local and international competitions, and visits to trade shows. The lecturers' high levels of specialist expertise and knowledge, and industrial links are well applied; their lessons provide the students with good levels of challenge and a very good learning experience. In contrast, the learning experiences provided for students on the travel and tourism programme are not well planned and take little account of their individual needs and interests; the lecturers place sufficient emphasis on the development of the students' literacy and numeracy skills in vocational classes. The learning activities do not provide adequate stimulation to engage and motivate the students to develop their knowledge and skills to industry standard. In addition, there is no programme of visits to industry or work-placements to enhance the students' understanding of travel and tourism.

10.6 CONCLUSION

In the area of professional cookery inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the College is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the students, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

In the area of travel and tourism, however, the quality of education and training provided by this organisation is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in leadership and management, standards, and learning and teaching, which need to be addressed urgently if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all the students. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

11. **CONCLUSION**

11.1   In the areas inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the College is satisfactory. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the College's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

11.2   The College provides a satisfactory range of full and part-time priority skills area level 2 courses in most of the vocational areas. The inspection has identified key strengths in the vocational and industrial links, the procedures for quality assurance and the very good provision in hospitality and catering.

12.   KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

12.1   There is a need for the College senior management, and staff with key curricular responsibilities to:

- review the level 2 curriculum across all of the priority skills areas to maximise the College's contribution to the development of the local and regional workforce;

- implement further strategies to improve attendance, retention and success rates across all of the courses;

- review the curriculum planning for the First Diplomas to improve their industrial focus and broaden the range of teaching, training and learning approaches;

- incorporate a stronger focus on employability skills into the Level 2 priority skills area courses;

- as a matter of urgency, strengthen the provision for essential skills to improve success rates, and promote progression to higher level courses; and

- implement further staff development to develop skills in the management of challenging behaviour, and the interpretation, use and analysis of data to inform self-evaluation and the planning for quality improvement.