

9. **ADVANCED LEVEL: GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION PROVISION**

Performance Level: Satisfactory

Areas inspected:

- Full-time and part-time further education General Certificate in Education (GCE) Advanced level provision.

CONTEXT

9.1 The College offers both full-time and part-time GCE Advanced (A) level courses across a broad range of subjects. At the time of the inspection, nearly 20 subjects were provided; most of the provision was in the Titanic Quarter campus. In its full-time provision, the College offers an appropriate alternative sixth-form option to meet the needs of those learners who wish to access a varied A-level curriculum outside of the post-primary school system. This includes a unique one year 'fast track' option that is unavailable elsewhere in the Greater Belfast area and which provides important access for these learners to higher education pathways. Over the past three years, enrolment to the full-time courses has remained steady at over 800 learners; over the same period, there has been a significant decline in the number of part-time enrolments, from 509 in 2010 to 282 in 2012.

The quality of the leadership and management is satisfactory.

9.2 The head of school and curriculum area managers work well together to administer, co-ordinate and further develop the provision. The co-ordinators are supported well by the head of school and the curriculum area managers and the lines of communication are good. They have identified appropriately the need to analyse the internal and external data more rigorously to better inform the self-evaluation judgements across the provision. In the more effective self-evaluation reports, the co-ordinators analyse appropriate qualitative and quantitative data and benchmarks to inform their action plans in order to effect improvement in the learning experiences for individual learners and their outcomes in public examinations. The majority of the self-evaluation reports, however, do not focus clearly on improving the quality of the learning and teaching in order to raise standards. The process for self-evaluation needs to include the thorough monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice and the more consistent base lining of the learners' needs, on entry to their courses, in order to raise further the achievement rates.

The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.

9.3 The quality of the teaching and learning observed ranged from outstanding to inadequate, with a majority (62%) of the sessions being good or better. In the more effective practice, the lecturers planned the sessions well with an appropriate range of learning strategies, including the effective use of ILT and the consolidation of learning through effective plenary sessions. These lecturers use effective questioning to engage the learners in higher quality thinking and to elicit extended responses from them in order for the learners to achieve good or better outcomes. In the less effective practice, the planning was inadequate and the sessions were overly directed by the lecturers, resulting in the learners remaining too passive and unchallenged. In a minority of the sessions observed, the attendance by learners was erratic and too low overall.

Achievements and standards are satisfactory.

9.4 When given the opportunity, in around 60% of the sessions observed, the learners work well in groups and in pairs and they display good standards of written and verbal communication skills. In a significant minority of sessions, however, the learners do not develop sufficiently their independent learning skills. While the overall outcomes in the A-level provision are satisfactory, there is considerable variation across the subjects and room for some improvement. Over the past three years, the retention rate for both part-time and full-time learners is very good at 89% and 85% respectively. Over the same period, the proportion of the full-time and part-time learners attaining a pass grade at A*-E and at A*-C has increased. The proportion of learners attaining two or more A levels at grades A*-E in 2011/12 is 80%, while the proportion of them achieving three or more A-levels at grades A*-C is 49%.