

15. ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Performance Level: Satisfactory

Areas Inspected:

- Further education full-time provision, further education provision in the community and work-based learning essential skills provision.

CONTEXT

15.1 The essential skills provision in the College is large, varied and complex. It includes: further education; work based learning; a bespoke provision for key external stakeholders, including the Belfast and the South Eastern Health and Care Trusts; and an adult and community provision, a large part of which services areas of identified disadvantage and social need in the city and in the Greater Belfast area. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 4,700 learners enrolled across the provision.

The quality of the leadership and management is satisfactory.

15.2 The College has reviewed and developed its strategic infrastructure for the management and delivery of the essential skills provision. The early evidence shows that this revised structure is facilitating improved communication across the provision and is bringing about some improvements in delivery through appropriate approaches to contextualisation of the essential skills, particularly in the work-based learning provision. The management team, however, need to review and monitor the resourcing of this structure to ensure that it is adequate and that staff new to their roles and responsibilities are given appropriate support and development. Within the revised structure, the head of school for the essential skills brings appropriate expertise and provides strong and committed leadership. Together with the head of faculty, and key management information services and enrolments staff, the head of school has had a significant role in the design and establishment of a centralised data management tool which is beginning to facilitate more effective review, tracking and monitoring of the provision. The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes for the essential skills are not yet developed adequately within the new arrangements for the management of the provision. The evaluative processes lack cohesion and are not always underpinned sufficiently by evidence-based evaluations. The role of the other academic schools do not make a strong enough contribution to the review and quality improvement planning for the essential skills within their schools, resulting in benchmarking and target-setting for improvement being under-developed.

15.3 More needs to be done to improve attendance at essential skills sessions, particularly in the further education and ApprenticeshipsNI provision. The management team needs to ensure that all of the provision is scheduled in a timely manner, particularly the further education and ApprenticeshipsNI provision, and that it meets all of the learners' needs. The College employs a significant number of part-time staff and it is essential that management review systematically the staff qualifications profile to ensure that it is in line with the Department's tutor education requirements.

The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.

15.4 The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory overall but it is noteworthy that it is mostly very good in the adult and community provision and in the bespoke provision for two of the Health and Social Care Trusts. The College has established strong links with a significant number of community groups within the Greater Belfast area. A minority of the

adult provision in the primary school settings is very good and contains aspects of sector-leading good practice in that it links adult, parental learning in literacy and numeracy to the support and development of children's learning in the classroom. This provision also raises parental aspirations and expectations of their own progression and that of their children. In other areas of the adult provision, the College has been successful in progressing a small number of adult learners from community settings to main College sites to continue their learning. It is timely and appropriate that the College is reviewing and developing further its adult engagement strategies in order to increase participation in this key area of provision. The provision of the essential skills within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is also very good, almost all of the learners make very good progress in their learning and develop and extend their skills and competencies in literacy and numeracy relevant to their workplace. Through its links with the South Eastern Health Trust, the College has developed a good range of contextualised resources for the essential skills, relevant to up-skilling staff within the Trust. These contextualised resources are also well used by learners within early years education and training programmes in the College.

15.5 In work based learning and further education, the quality of the essential skills provision is satisfactory. While almost all of the essential skills staff work hard and demonstrate high levels of commitment to improvement, there are low levels of attendance in some of the sessions in further education, and this impedes continuity in learning and progress for these learners. The range of the initial and diagnostic assessment tools are less well developed in work-based learning and further education, and the outcomes are used less effectively to plan for learning. As a consequence, planning for differentiation is weaker and the range of teaching and learning strategies need further development in order to engage and motivate learners, particularly the more reluctant learners, but also the most able.

15.6 Across the provision, 51% of the quality of the teaching, training and learning observed was good or better, but too much of it, the remaining 49%, was satisfactory or below. Where the teaching was satisfactory or below, the sessions were overly directed by tutors and there were limited opportunities for the learners to develop extended responses to questions, or to develop confidence and ease in the use of the language of mathematics to explain processes. In these sessions, there was insufficient emphasis on progression in learning and only limited use of ILT to support and enhance learning. In the sessions which were good or better, the balance between one-to-one support and whole group teaching, training and learning was effective, the learners were engaged well in challenging tasks, questioning was effective, there was evidence of good progress and a sense of enjoyment in new learning and achievement.

Achievements and standards are satisfactory overall.

15.7 The quality of the achievements and standards in the adult and community provision are mostly good or very good. The majority of adult learners make good progress in their learning and achieve appropriately high standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT. These adult learners demonstrate the capacity to transfer their new learning to a range of contexts, including the workplace and the home setting. In this area of provision, almost all of the learners are well-motivated and enthusiastic, develop a good range of individual and collaborative skills and demonstrate clear enjoyment in learning.

15.8 In the work-based learning provision, almost all of the learners who are retained achieve in line with the requirements of their programme and/or framework; a minority achieve above this requirement. There is, however, only limited evidence of learners' reviewing or evaluating their own work, and too little evidence of their ability to transfer learning across a range of settings.

15.9 In further education, a minority of learners develop a good range of independent and collaborative working skills which support their learning in the professional and technical programmes. However, too few of these learners achieve consistently high standards of work and there is too little evidence of formative work that demonstrates they have assimilated, and can apply their learning with confidence. Overall, although achievements in the essential skills are still slightly below the sector averages, there is an improving trend in achievements. The achievement rate in literacy has risen from 75% in 2009/10 to 89% in 2011/12; in numeracy, the achievement rate has risen from 63% to 83% over the same period, and in ICT the achievement rate has risen from 57% in 2009/10 to 88% in 2011/12.