

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSPECTORATE

WORK-BASED LEARNING INSPECTION

ApprenticeshipsNI provision in Steer Training
Academy

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in November 2024

Follow-up to the inspection of Steer Training Academy

Introduction

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection of Steer Training Academy (Steer) in May 2023 which concluded that the organisation needed to address important areas for improvement in the interest of all the apprentices. The provision for the essential skills was evaluated as requiring significant improvement.

The areas for improvement identified at the time of the inspection were:

- to address, as a priority, the lack of provision for those apprentices requiring the essential skills qualifications of literacy and/or numeracy;
- to develop and implement as a matter of urgency, an essential skills policy, with clear roles and responsibilities and models of timely delivery for all of the essential skills;
- to continue to increase recruitment to the apprenticeship training programme;
- to implement the new management arrangements, ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clear moving forward;
- to develop further the quality improvement planning processes, to include more effective action planning, with more sharply focused actions and targets set to ensure that the key areas for improvement are addressed in a timely and impactful manner;
- to develop further the safeguarding policy and procedures, to include the categories of abuse for both child protection and adult safeguarding; and
- to develop discrete staff and apprentice codes of conduct and e-safety policies.

The ETI carried out an interim follow-up inspection visit in June 2024. A follow-up inspection was carried out in November 2024 which provided the organisation with the opportunity to demonstrate the extent of its progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the time of the initial inspection in May 2023.

Views of apprentices and staff

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to apprentices and staff in advance of the follow-up inspection.

Thirty-six (46.7%) apprentices responded to the questionnaire; a small number provided written comments. The apprentices' responses were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of the programme. All of the apprentices who completed the questionnaire reported that the pre-enrolment advice, guidance and support is useful and almost all (97.2%) find their programme interesting and

challenging and relevant to career aspirations. In the written comments, the apprentices expressed that they enjoy the programme and appreciate the work of the staff. All the apprentices who provided responses to the questionnaire agreed they feel safe in the organisation. In focus groups the apprentices reported that they know who to speak to if they have a worry or concern.

A small number of staff responded to the online questionnaire; their responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with their roles in the organisation.

Key actions

Since the inspection, the key actions which affect the work of the organisation include:

- representatives from the Department for the Economy's (DfE) Quality Improvement Team provided support on quality improvement planning;
- a range of new administrative systems have been developed and implemented;
- since the introduction of the all age apprenticeship programme and the significant increase in recruitment, the organisation has reviewed and enhanced its induction programme;
- a flexible programme of delivery, incorporating both online and face-to-face training has been developed which enables greater access to apprenticeship training for employees with varying work patterns and, is also aligned well to employers' needs and priorities. The flexible delivery of the training takes account of shift working patterns and the recruitment of apprentices from across a wide geographical spread; and
- through sub-contracted arrangements, there is now provision in place for the delivery of the essential skills in a semesterised model.

Key findings

- Through sub-contracted arrangements, there is now appropriate provision in place for the delivery of the essential skills in Application of Number (AoN) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The sub-contractor has the capacity for contingency delivery in the event of tutor unavailability in these two areas.
- There is appropriate provision in place through the sub-contracted arrangements for the delivery of the essential skills in Communication. The arrangements at the time of the follow-up inspection for the delivery of Communication are temporary and staff recruitment is underway to fill the tutor post on a permanent basis.

- The provision for the essential skills is leading to high outcomes. In the two-year period 2022 to 2024, most (87%) of the 15 apprentices who completed the essential skills programme in Communication achieved at level 2. A majority (72%) of the 18 apprentices who completed the essential skills programme in Application of Number achieved at level 2 and all of the 18 apprentices that completed the essential skills programme in ICT achieved at level 2.
- A comprehensive essential skills policy is now in place which outlines clearly the lines of responsibility for the management and delivery of the essential skills provision and the model of delivery.
- The centre manager has identified clearly and clarified roles and responsibilities for all staff. There are now effective systems for monitoring the quality of provision in both the Health and Social Care and the sub-contracted essential skills provision.
- The centre manager has developed and implemented an effective employer engagement strategy which, in addition to the introduction of the all-age apprenticeships programme by the DfE, has resulted in a significant increase in recruitment to the apprenticeship programme. Fifty apprentices are registered currently at Level 2 (from 11 at the time of the original inspection) and 27 are registered currently at Level 3 (from 15 at the time of the original inspection).
- The enhanced induction programme ensures that all apprentices are now fully informed about all of the requirements and demands of the Apprenticeship in Health and Social Care.
- Significant improvement has been made in the quality improvement processes since the initial inspection. The staff's self-evaluation has impacted positively on the provision and appropriate improvements have been made in the apprenticeship programme.
- The tracking and monitoring systems are now used well by all of the staff to inform the planning and delivery of a learner-centred provision to better meet individual apprentices' needs.
- The average retention rate in the period 2022-2024 is lower than at the time of the original inspection and at 50%. The significant increase in enrolments to the programme and the challenges of the all age apprenticeship and the 25+ age apprentices' re-engagement with formal education has been identified by the organisation as a main factor in the decrease in retention. Of those apprentices who remained on the programme, approximately three-quarters achieved the full framework, with the remaining 25% achieving the professional and technical qualification in Health and Social Care. As result, just 38% of the apprentices complete and achieve their full apprenticeship framework, which is notably lower than the sector average, based on the latest DfE [statistical bulletin](#).

- The policy and procedures for the protection of children and adults have been updated appropriately to align with current guidance. In addition, discrete staff and apprentice codes of conduct and e-safety policies have been developed which are active, working policies.

Areas for action:

- improve the retention rate on the apprenticeship programme.
- ensure a permanent arrangement is in place for the provision for essential skills in Communication in time for the next planned delivery block in March 2025.

Child and Adult Protection

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by Steer demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current guidance.

Going forward

The organisation has worked hard to address the areas for improvement identified at the time of the original inspection and has made good progress against almost all areas. This work continues to be underpinned by a clear vision and strong commitment to upskill the health and social care workforce, through ApprenticeshipsNI provision at levels 2 and 3, and thereby improve the service provision for care users. The staff are highly focused on their own ongoing professional development to ensure that the apprentices are receiving up-to-date current practice training inputs, in line with the organisation's vision. The organisation's enhanced self-evaluation processes and associated systematic improvement work demonstrate that they are now well placed to continue to effect improvement in the best interests of the apprentices.

The ETI, through the engagement of the district inspector, will continue to monitor the organisation's progress in addressing the remaining areas for action as set out in this report.

No further follow-up inspection is required.

Appendix: Quantitative Terms


In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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