Education and Training Inspectorate

Inspection of the Further Education and Work-Based Learning Provision in Belfast Metropolitan College

April 2013

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

CSE

CONTENTS

Section   **Page**

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[1] Each of these individual professional and technical reports are accessible through the appropriate weblink at the end of this report.

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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

Key Performance Indicators used by the Inspectorate to Evaluate Achievements and Standards

Performance Indictors and Definitions	
Retention	The proportion of learners enrolled who completed their courses or are still on their programme.
Achievement	The proportion of those learners completing their course who gained their full target qualification.
Success	The proportion of learners enrolled who gained their full target qualification.
Progression	Proportion of successful completers who progress to further/higher education/training or employment.

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1.   **Background information and context**

1.1   Belfast Metropolitan College is the largest regional college in Northern Ireland (NI), and it recruits learners from the Greater Belfast area and beyond. It was formed in August 2007 following the merger of the two previous legacy colleges, the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, and Castlereagh College. The quality and range of the College's estate has been improved significantly over the last two years, with the opening of the Titanic Quarter campus in 2011 and the e3 building in the Springvale campus in 2012. The other main campuses are in Millfield and in Castlereagh. The College has three smaller campuses in Mallusk, Tower Street and Whiterock. The College employs 864 full-time equivalent members of staff.

1.2   In March 2013, the rate of unemployment (claimant count) in the Belfast City Council area was 8.1%[2], which was above the Northern Ireland average of 5.6%. The rate of unemployment in the area has increased steadily over the last six years, from a low base of 3.4%. Although the College's catchment area covers some of the most prosperous wards in Northern Ireland, many have high levels of economic and social deprivation; the claimant count in five of the wards in Belfast is in excess of 14%.

1.3   In the year 2011/12, the College had 27,767 learner enrolments across its further education provision; there were 3,721 full-time enrolments and 23,046 part-time enrolments. The College's provision of entry level courses[3] is significant and accounted for just under one-quarter of the total number of learner enrolments on further education courses up to and including level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework. The provision of level 1 courses was small at 6%, with 33% and 36% of enrolments on level 2 and level 3 courses respectively. After periods of decline, over the last two years, part-time enrolments on level 2 courses increased significantly by 73% and part-time level 3 enrolments increased by 7%. For 2012/13, 952 pupils from post-primary schools were enrolled on courses in the College under the Entitlement Framework programme.

1.4   At the time of the inspection, 306 learners were registered on Training for Success programmes; 18 were registered on the Skills for Your Life strand, 38 on the Skills for Work strand and 250 learners were registered on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand. There were 645 learners registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, with 225 level 2 learners and 420 level 3 learners. A significant minority (40%) of the learners were registered on hospitality, catering and bakery training programmes, around a quarter (23%) on construction and building services programmes, and one-fifth (20%) in performing engineering operations and transport operations and maintenance programmes. The remainder were registered on; hairdressing and barbering (1%), information technology (IT) services and development (5%), printing (6%), and a small number of learners on the Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work strands of the Training for Success programme who were completing their training under the College's Pathfinder and Routeway and programmes[4].

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[2] Source: The March 2013 Northern Ireland Claimant Count
[3] Source: The Department's FE Health Check Issue One 2012-2013
[4] Most of the learners on these programmes are now enrolled on relevant further education courses

1.5   A significant minority (44%) of the learners registered with the College under the ApprenticeshipsNI programme undertake their directed training with other training providers. In hospitality and catering, 277 learners undertake their training with Babcock Training NI (103), Paragon Training NI Ltd (58), and Springvale Learning (116). In food and drink, a further 81 learners undertake their training with the Scottish Association of Master Bakers. In performing engineering operations, 17 learners undertake their training with Engineering Training Services. A further 47 learners in transport operations and maintenance undertake their training with Riverpark Training and Development (37), and Transport Training Services (10).

1.6   The College recruits learners from a wide social mix, and it has been particularly successful in widening access and increasing participation rates for those learners who come from socially disadvantaged areas. In 2011/12, just under one-third[5] of the learners enrolled on further education courses came from areas with the highest levels of multiple deprivation in Northern Ireland. For the College's essential skills and its work-based learning provision, over 40% of the learners came from the most deprived areas.

1.7   One year after the formation of the College, following a series of adverse audit reports, the Governing Body requested an Efficiency Review of the College. The external consultant's report in June 2009 concluded that a College-wide Improvement Plan needed to be implemented to address the poor financial position. The consultants reported weaknesses in the strategic and corporate planning of the College, including curriculum development, estates management, financial planning, as well as other weaknesses in management information systems, financial control and accountability, and governance.

1.8   The current Principal and Chief Executive was appointed in November 2009, and following the publication of the Efficiency Review, in January 2010, the Governing Body commissioned external consultants to support the College in the implementation of a three year College Improvement Plan which was approved by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) in October 2010.

1.9   In the implementation of the College Improvement Plan, a complex change management process resulted in a widespread restructuring of management at all levels. This included the appointment of new Executive Leadership and Senior Leadership teams, and the significant realignment and streamlining of curriculum management across the College. In addition, under a planned voluntary redundancy scheme, 148 full-time equivalent staff, including academic and support staff, have left the College over the last two years.

Table 1: Enrolments in the College

Type of provision	Number of learners enrolled
Total Enrolments (Further Education)	27,676
Further Education	Full time: 3,721 Part-time: 23,046
Entitlement Framework (14 – 19)	952
Work-based Learning (Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI)	951
ApprenticeshipsNI:	Level 2: 225 Level 3: 420
Training for Success:	Programme-Led Apprenticeships: 250 Skills for Work: 38 Skills for Your Life: 18

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[5] Source: The Department for Employment and Learning 2013 Issue 1 Health Check

2.   **Scope and method of the inspection**

2.1   In April 2013, the Inspectorate carried out an inspection of the College's further education and work-based learning provision. The further education provision covered a representative sample of professional and technical courses up to and including level 3 on the NQF. In work-based learning, the inspection focused on the College's provision under the ApprenticeshipsNI and Training for Success programmes.

2.2   The inspection focused on leadership and management, including the College's processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement, the provision for learning, and achievements and standards. The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation are available in the Inspectorate's publication '*Improving Quality: Raising Standards'* which can be found on the Inspectorate's web site at http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards.htm.

2.3   A team of inspectors observed 280 lessons and directed training sessions. Discussions were held with the Principal and Chief Executive, members of the Executive Leadership Team and the Senior Leadership Team, representatives from the Governing Body, heads of school, curriculum area managers, course team co-ordinators, lecturers, support and administrative staff across the College, and a sample of employers. The inspection team also examined samples of the learners' work, progress reviews, personal training plans, minutes of team meetings, course planning and development documentation, self-evaluation reports and quality improvement plans, and other relevant documentation, policies, and reports.

2.4   The inspection also focused on the provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance. The arrangements for care, guidance and support and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups were also inspected.

2.5   The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the learners to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Learners	1,000	868	87	342

In addition, inspectors carried out focus group meetings with a wide range of learners in the College. The Inspectorate reported to the Principal and representatives of the Governing Body the main findings emerging from the questionnaires and, where appropriate, these have been commented on within this report.

3.   **Overall findings of the inspection**

3.1   Further Education[6] and Work-Based Learning Provision in the College

In the areas inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its education, training and pastoral provision.

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[6] Further Education refers to provision up to and including level 3

3.2   Further Education Provision

In the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is good. The College has important strengths in most of its education, training and pastoral provision.

3.3   Work-Based Learning Provision

The quality of training provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management, the provision for learning, and achievements and standards which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively.

4.   **Table of performance levels**

Overall Effectiveness	Further Education and Work-Based Learning Provision	Further Education	Work-Based Learning
	Good	Good	Satisfactory

Contributory Performance Levels:	Further Education and Work-Based Learning Provision	Further Education	Work-Based Learning
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory	Good	Satisfactory
Quality of Provision for Learning	Good	Good	Satisfactory
Achievements and Standards	Good	Good	Satisfactory
Professional and Technical Areas (Further Education and Work-Based Learning)			
Computing , Information Technology and Digital Media	Very Good		
Essential Skills	Satisfactory		
Hospitality and Catering	Good		
Plumbing (Mechanical Engineering Services)	Good		
Students With Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities	Very Good		
Transport Operations and Maintenance (Motor Vehicle)	Inadequate		
Wood Occupations	Satisfactory		
Professional and Technical Areas (Further Education)			
Advanced Level Provision	Satisfactory		
Applied Science	Satisfactory		
Art and Design	Good		
Childcare (Early Years)	Very Good		
Music	Very Good		
Sport and Leisure	Very Good		
Professional and Technical Areas (Work-based Learning)			
Electrotechnical Services(Electrical Installation)	Satisfactory		
Performing Engineering Operations	Satisfactory		

5. Summary of main findings

5.1 The strategic planning of the curriculum is effective; the curriculum strategy is well-informed and provides high levels of coherence to curriculum planning for each academic school, and in the strategic planning for estates, IT, learner services, people, and stakeholder engagement.

5.2 Self-evaluation and quality improvement planning in further education and in work-based learning is satisfactory; the recently implemented quality processes have still to be embedded effectively across the College. The use of management information to aid quality improvement planning is at an early stage of development and there is a need to ensure self-evaluation reports at all levels make more use of evidence-based judgements, particularly on the quality of teaching and learning.

5.3 In work-based learning, there is a need to strengthen the arrangements to monitor the quality of the provision that is sub-contracted to other training providers, particularly the quality of training and learning and standards and achievements.

5.4 The community education provision in the College is well-managed; the head of school and the curriculum area manager are highly motivated and provide good strategic leadership. There are effective links with the College's Business Development Team, which has resulted in the development of good partnership work with community organisations across the City and beyond.

5.5 The College gives a high strategic priority to economic engagement; there is a close alignment between the College's business and employer engagement activities and its curriculum strategy, its stakeholder engagement strategy and key Government initiatives. The Business Development Team is well-led and managed. The directed and structured work of these teams has resulted in an extensive range of key strategic links with local and international employers, including several multi-national organisations. There are good or better links with industry across nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected.

5.6 The provision of courses to post-primary schools under the Entitlement Framework has declined significantly over the past four years, the range of courses delivered is too narrow and there is insufficient provision at level 3. A much improved curricular offer, with an appropriate focus on science, engineering, technology, and mathematics (STEM) provision, has been developed recently and made available to the schools.

5.7 The quality of the accommodation and specialist resources for learners is good. Over the last two years, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of the College's estate following the £60 million capital investment in the Titanic Quarter campus and the e3 building on the Springvale campus. There are however, shortfalls in the quality and range of the specialist accommodation and resources in a number of professional and technical areas, particularly in hospitality and catering, and in transport operations and maintenance.

5.8 Nearly all of the lecturers across the professional and technical areas inspected are well-qualified and experienced in their work. Staff development is well-resourced and lecturers have good opportunities to enhance their professional and technical skills. While the part-time lecturers can avail of a wide range of staff development activities, more work is needed to ensure they receive effective support to enhance their pedagogic skills.

5.9   The quality of the arrangements for the care, guidance, and support for learners is good in further education and in work-based learning. On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the College has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding.

5.10   The College has implemented a comprehensive review of its admissions and recruitment procedures, as part of the whole-College strategy to improve levels of retention and achievement. This has been well-managed; each stage of the application and recruitment process has been evaluated and amended, including a range of rigorous contingency planning measures to support learners at all stages during the recruitment process.

5.11   The quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance is good. It is very well-led by the highly committed team within the department of learner services. There is a need, however, to ensure that the College's planning for careers gives sufficient coverage for those learners registered on work-based learning programmes.

5.12   In further education, the College provides a very good range of full-time and part-time courses across most of the professional and technical areas inspected; the curriculum provision in computing, IT and digital media, hospitality and catering, and in sport and leisure is extensive.

5.13   In work-based learning, the learners have access to a broad and balanced curriculum offer that includes traditional areas such as building and engineering services, construction, food manufacturing and professional services, as well as more innovative programmes including IT services and development, and creative services.

5.14   The quality of teaching and learning is good or better in a majority (73%) of the lessons and directed training sessions observed, with 37% of them being very good or better. The quality of teaching, training and learning in the essential skills is mostly satisfactory.

5.15   Across nearly all of the professional and technical areas, the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching, learning and assessment is underdeveloped.

5.16   In work-based learning, most of the learners have appropriate workplace training and are supported well by their employers to develop their occupational skills. Effective strategies have been implemented to increase the quantity of relevant work placements for learners registered on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand, which is good at 72% across the professional and technical areas inspected.

5.17   In the essential skills, the standards of work in the adult and community provision are mostly good or very good. In further education, while a minority of learners develop a good range of independent and collaborative working skills which supports their professional and technical work, too few achieve consistently high standards of work. In work-based learning, there is 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.

5.18   Over the period 2009/10 to 2011/12, overall outcomes for further education courses have improved. While there has been a significant improvement in the outcomes for level 1 and level 2 courses, they are approximately 10% below the average for the sector. Sustained improvements in retention and achievement rates have resulted in significantly better outcomes for level 3 courses which have improved from a low base of 34% to 69%, and are now in line with the average for the sector.

5.19   Over the last four years, the average retention on the Training for Success programme is good at 62%, and has improved. The average achievement rate, however, is inadequate at 53%. While the average retention and achievement rates on the Skills for Work strand are very good at 77% and 85% respectively, the outcomes on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand are poor.

5.20   Over the last four years, the average retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI level 2 programme is inadequate at 59% and the average achievement rate is good at 87%. On the ApprenticeshipsNI level 3 programme, the average retention rate is very good at 80% and the achievement rate is good at 88%. The overall outcomes on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme have improved, mostly due to improved retention rates.

5.21   **What does the Belfast Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?**

The College needs to:

- implement a coherent strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the College, that is underpinned by rigorous monitoring and evaluation, and a widespread continual professional development programme with a strong focus on developing effective pedagogy;

- strengthen quality management across the College, particularly the effective use of data and rigorous self-evaluation that is supported with more timely intervention strategies to address underperformance;

- clarify more explicitly the roles of the curriculum managers in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision;

- take urgent action to improve the inadequate quality of the provision in transport operations and maintenance, particularly assessment tracking and recording, collegial working and the process for self-evaluation; and

- strengthen the quality of leadership and management of the work-based learning provision, in particular the monitoring and tracking of the progress of trainees and apprentices, and self-evaluation procedures including the work of sub-contracted training providers.

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

6. **Leadership and management**

6.1   Overall, the quality of the leadership and management of the curriculum is satisfactory; it is good in further education and satisfactory in work-based learning.

6.2   Since September 2011, the Principal and the Executive Leadership Team has undertaken effectively a complex change management programme. This included the significant realignment and streamlining of curriculum management at all levels in the College, and the implementation of an extensive voluntary redundancy programme. Under the leadership of the Principal and the Director of the Curriculum, the College now has a clear vision and strategic direction for the development of the curriculum to meet the needs of learners and the wider community.

6.3   The strategic planning of the curriculum is effective. The College's curriculum strategy ('Skills Matter') is well-matched to emerging opportunities in the business environment as well as the key Government priorities for economic development. The strategy appropriately sets demanding targets to develop a relevant curriculum that will meet the needs of learners, particularly in opening up progression routes, as well as meeting the needs of industry in the Greater Belfast area and in the wider economy. Due cognisance is given to the capacity of the College to meet these targets, specifically the relevance of the current curriculum offer and existing levels of staff expertise. The curriculum strategy provides high levels of coherence to the curriculum planning for each of the academic schools and learner services, as well as providing the overarching strategy for the development of the College's estates, IT infrastructure, people (human resources) and stakeholder engagement strategies. A key omission, however, in the curriculum planning process is that there is no complementary strategy to develop, support and sustain high quality teaching and learning to match the wider strategic goals of the curriculum strategy.

6.4   The curriculum performance review process provides high levels of scrutiny to the heads of school and curriculum area managers in the management of their respective areas, particularly in the development of school-based curriculum plans to support the whole-College curriculum strategy. While challenging, the Senior Leadership Team has implemented this process sensitively, and it has provided appropriate support to the middle management group to strategically review their curriculum offer. It is also a useful process to identify and implement appropriate support strategies for those courses that are underperforming.

6.5   In spite of their challenging and complex management roles, the majority of the heads of school and curriculum area managers undertake their work effectively. Leadership and management of the curriculum is good or better in 54% of the professional and technical areas inspected. It is outstanding in computing, IT and digital media, and is very good in child development, music, and sport and leisure. The key features of good or better leadership and management include a strong vision for learning, a commitment to continuous improvement, well-developed links with industry, effective communication and teamwork, and clearly defined roles for course co-ordinators. The quality of leadership and management, however, is inadequate in performing engineering operations and transport operations and maintenance. In the less effective practice, recurring weaknesses include inadequate quality of co-ordination and course planning, underdeveloped systems to track the progress of learners, and weaknesses in the deployment of staff to meet the needs of

the learners. These issues are compounded where there have been recent changes in the deployment of middle managers, and where they do not have the relevant expertise in their professional and technical areas. Overall, there is a need to develop further the role of curriculum managers in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision, especially teaching and learning.

6.6   The quality of the leadership and management of the essential skills provision is satisfactory. The team has established effective links with key external stakeholders including a wide range of community groups, and the two local Health and Social Care Trusts. The head of school provides strong leadership and expertise to support the curriculum manager, the co-ordinators, internal quality managers and the link lecturers who are assigned to each academic school in the College. There is a need, however, for more rigorous self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes for the provision. In addition, more needs to be done to improve timetabling arrangements and attendance rates, particularly in the further education and ApprenticeshipsNI provision.

6.7   The Governors expressed high levels of support for the Executive Leadership Team, particularly the progress made in setting an appropriate curriculum strategy for the College. The Governing Body has an appropriate remit in its challenge and accountability functions to the Executive Leadership Team for the strategic management of the curriculum.

6.8   In further education and work-based learning, the quality of self-evaluation and quality improvement planning is satisfactory. Although quality management is well-resourced in the College, the recently implemented quality processes have still to be embedded effectively across the work of the College. There is a need for greater clarity in determining the respective roles and responsibilities of the Standards Improvement Unit and the Curriculum Quality Assurance and Performance Development Unit, particularly to ensure that appropriate and timely intervention strategies are implemented to address identified weaknesses in the quality of some the provision.

6.9   Overall, the use of management information to aid quality improvement planning is at an early stage of development and there is a need to ensure self-evaluation reports at all levels make more evidence-based judgements, particularly on the quality of teaching and learning. Further work is needed to strengthen the quality of the improvement plans; across nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected, for example, they do not identify planned targets for improvement clearly enough.

6.10   In work-based learning, the systems and procedures in place to monitor the quality of the provision that is sub-contracted to other training providers are not sufficiently robust. The current arrangements are mostly procedural, and do not evaluate sufficiently the quality of training and learning, and overall standards and achievements.

6.11   Nearly all of the lecturers across the professional and technical areas inspected are well-qualified and experienced in their work. Staff development is well-resourced and lecturers have good opportunities to enhance their professional and technical skills. Training needs analysis is used effectively to identify staff development needs. The College has also implemented a range of initiatives for staff and managers to learn from best practice in the UK and further afield. The College, for example, has established good, collaborative curriculum links with similar colleges in several European countries. In a minority of the professional and technical areas, the College relies on a substantial pool of part-time lecturers. While they can avail of a wide range of staff development activities, more action is needed to ensure they receive effective support to enhance their pedagogic skills.

6.12   The recent staff consultative survey shows that academic and support staff have responded positively to the implementation of the change management process and that relationships in the College are generally good. However, some concerns were raised by staff on clarifying their roles and responsibilities as well as on work pressures. The College has recognised that these areas require further work.

6.13   The quality of the leadership and management of the College's engagement with key external stakeholders, including community groups, industry and local schools is very good.

6.14   The community education provision in the College is well-managed; the head of school and the curriculum area manager with specific responsibility for this area are highly motivated and provide good strategic leadership.   The provision is aligned well to the College's curriculum strategy and the stakeholder engagement strategy.   This provides a coherence and structure to the curriculum offer which is effectively monitored and reviewed. There are effective links with the College's Business Development Team, which has resulted in the development of good partnership work with community organisations across the City and beyond, focusing on a range of project-based initiatives, including those funded by the European Social Fund, which supports very well the various organisations' particular education and training needs.   The College provides community-based education and training to approximately 100 community and voluntary organisations across the Belfast Metropolitan area and beyond. It is of particular note that the College has been successful in establishing effective collaborative partnerships with voluntary and community organisations in key parts of the City where in the past it was underrepresented. Some of these organisations, for example, access and utilise very effectively the outstanding media training facilities in the College's e3 building, and are well-supported by the highly dedicated and qualified College staff.

6.15   At a strategic level, the College is very highly committed to the economic development of the Greater Belfast area and beyond. There is close alignment between the College's business and employer engagement activities and its curriculum strategy, its stakeholder engagement strategy and key Government initiatives, including the economic strategy for Northern Ireland.

6.16   The College's Business Development Team is well-led and managed.   The innovation manager and the team of curriculum business leads, and the employer support team are highly motivated, well-qualified and bring a wide range of industrial and commercial experience to their posts. The directed and structured work of these teams has resulted in an extensive range of key strategic links with local and international employers, including several multi-national organisations. These include, for example, the development and delivery of bespoke training solutions to employers in the emerging and priority skills sectors such as renewable and advanced engineering technologies, including composites, information and communication technology (ICT), and life and health sciences. The College is actively involved in all of the strands of the Employer Support Programme (ESP) and is the lead college for the life and health sciences strand of this programme. A wide range of private and public-sector employers, including those in the ICT and health and social care sectors, report that the College consistently provides good quality, flexible provision to meet their specific training and education needs.

6.17   Across the College's professional and technical areas, including childcare, computing, IT and digital media, electrotechnical services, hospitality and catering, fashion, management and finance, music, and sport the good links with industry demonstrably improve the learning experiences for learners through work placements, site visits, industry-based competitions, expert visiting speakers, and learning pathways which align to current and contemporary business and industry needs. In addition, these very effective links have provided good opportunities for lecturers to sustain and improve their pedagogic skills, and enhance their industrial experience.

6.18   The College's provision for post-primary schools under the Entitlement Framework has declined significantly over the past four years. At the time of the inspection, the College was providing courses for 32 schools and was a member of four Area Learning Communities (ALCs). The range of courses delivered is too narrow and over-focused on occupational studies for pupils at Key Stage 4; there is insufficient provision at level 3 and too few collaborative links with the grammar schools. The current cohort of partnerships schools report that relationships with the College are positive and that they value the learning and progression benefits that the links provide for their pupils. The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed is mostly good or better, characterised by well-planned lessons, good progress in the pupils' learning, promotion of independent learning skills and good tracking and reporting of the pupils' progress in their learning. The leadership and management of the Entitlement Framework is good overall, although the processes for the self-evaluation of the provision need to be strengthened. The outcomes achieved by the pupils are improving and are mostly good, although just below the sector average for this type of provision. The College recognises the need to strengthen its strategic role within the ALCs and has begun to address this. A much improved curricular offer, with an appropriate focus on STEM provision, has been developed recently and made available to the schools. In addition, the College has done much to promote STEM career pathways to pupils in primary and post-primary schools through a range of programmes. These include its provision of the 'Coder dojo' programme to children aged six to 16, and its recent STEM Matters careers workshop.

6.19   The quality of the accommodation and specialist resources for learners is good. Over the last two years, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of the College's estate following the £60 million capital investment in the Titanic Quarter campus, and the e3 building on the Springvale campus. The College's 'state of the art' facilities at the e3 building to support economic and employer engagement both with industry and within the College curriculum offer are outstanding. It has developed plans to upgrade further the quality of its estate that is appropriately well-aligned to the curriculum strategy. Although most of the remaining campuses are dated, they are well-maintained and presented. The inspection identified, however, shortfalls in the quality and range of the specialist accommodation, equipment and resources in a number of professional and technical areas, particularly in hospitality and catering, and in transport operations and maintenance.

6.20   The College is at an advanced stage in the completion of its IT Strategy, including the recent upgrade of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and the planned outsourcing of data management to replace the existing servers in the College. In the implementation of the strategy, there is a need to ensure that appropriate support is provided to lecturers to develop their pedagogic skills to make the best use of the new learning technologies to meet the needs of learners, including an increase in the provision of blended learning courses.

6.21   The College has developed an effective sustainability policy which is well-embedded in its processes and practices. The various initiatives within it have been recognised both regionally and nationally through success in relevant sustainability and environmental competitions. For example, it is the first college in Northern Ireland to develop and launch a sustainable travel plan, with a focus on a staff and learner cycle scheme, and the promotion of green travel through links with the key public transport providers in the Greater Belfast area.

7.   **Quality of provision for learning**

7.1   Overall, the quality of the provision for learning is good; it is good in further education and satisfactory in work-based learning.

7.2   The quality of the arrangements for the care, guidance, and support for learners is good. The staff in the newly restructured department of learner services pay very good attention to the health and welfare of the learners and are led effectively. They provide clear information, guidance and support to learners on a wide range of personal, social, financial and educational issues. Very good links have been established with a range of key external support agencies who provide good quality advice and guidance to the staff in the College as well as direct support, where required, for individual learners. Good individual support is also provided to most of those learners who require additional help with their learning, including the provision of specialist equipment, sign language and scribe services. In work-based learning, there are inconsistencies in the levels of support provided by lecturers and training support officers to learners across the professional and technical areas. It is inappropriate that there are gaps in the number of visits to the workplace to monitor the progress of the learners in electrotechnical services, performing engineering operations, plumbing and transport operations and maintenance.

7.3   Most of the learners' responses to the Inspectorate's pastoral care questionnaires, and during focus group meetings, provided positive evaluations on the quality of their educational experiences in the College. These include the good support provided by the lecturers, that they enjoy their courses, the good quality of most of the campus buildings, and that they are encouraged to learn and develop new skills. A minority of the learners, however, reported concerns about the high cost of car parking in the Titanic Quarter campus, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning, inadequate communications from staff regarding timetable changes, as well as issues regarding the stability of the College IT infrastructure, including access to printing facilities to support their work.

7.4   The College has implemented a comprehensive review of its admissions and recruitment procedures, as part of the whole-College strategy to improve levels of retention and achievement. This has been well-managed; each stage of the application and recruitment process has been evaluated and amended, including a range of rigorous contingency planning measures to support learners at all stages during the recruitment process. An important feature has been the introduction of compulsory Pre-entry Advice and Guidance Sessions (PEAGS) which are appropriately provided by professional and technical specialist staff to ensure that all applicants make well-informed decisions regarding their chosen pathways in the College. These arrangements have been implemented effectively across nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected. In work-based learning, for example, it has led to a significant reduction in the number of learners accessing the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand of the Training for Success programme, resulting in a better match between enrolments and the availability of work placements in each

professional and technical area. As a result, retention and attendance have improved significantly for the current cohort of learners. In applied science, however, the entry policy is not sufficiently effective to ensure that the learners have the necessary skills and capabilities to meet the demanding requirements of the courses. In electrotechnical services, there is a need to strengthen the pre-entry guidance and admissions process in the Millfield campus to ensure that learners are placed on the most appropriate strand and level of provision.

7.5   The quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance is good. It is very well-led by the highly committed team within the department of learner services. The head of department has managed effectively a rigorous review of the College systems and procedures for careers. The current arrangements now place an appropriately strong emphasis on strengthening the links between careers and employability, and prioritise widening participation through a well-developed outreach advice and guidance service for those with barriers to learning. The recently appointed members of the careers and employability team are well-qualified and have the expertise to provide an integrated service of careers, financial advice, and support in sourcing work placements. There is a need, however, to ensure that the College's planning for careers gives sufficient coverage for learners registered on work-based learning programmes.

7.6   The careers provision is appropriately integrated into the learners' programmes across most of the professional and technical areas inspected, and is well-supplemented by good opportunities for the learners to develop their employability skills and gain additional accredited qualifications, such as level 2 courses in personal effectiveness and in work skills. However, the relevance of these courses to the learner's main programme of study is inconsistent; lecturers need more support in the planning, delivery and better integration of these courses.

7.7   In further education, the College provides a very good range of full-time and part-time courses across most of the professional and technical areas inspected. It offers good progression pathways from its entry level provision through to level 7 of the National Qualifications Framework. The inspection identified very few gaps in the curriculum offer. The curriculum provision in computing, IT and digital media, hospitality and catering, and in sport and leisure is extensive.

7.8   In work-based learning, the learners have access to a broad and balanced curriculum offer that includes traditional areas such as building and engineering services, construction, food manufacturing and professional services. In addition, innovative programmes have been introduced recently involving IT services and development and creative services. Further appropriate programmes are planned in business development, financial services and health and life sciences. In addition, a good start has been made to realign the work-based learning curriculum to the priority areas identified in the College's curriculum strategy. The numbers of learners registered in performing engineering operations, however, is too small. Effective action has been taken to provide parallel pathways for learners to progress to employment or higher education, through further education and work-based learning programmes, with options to move between the pathways as their circumstances and needs change. The recently introduced programme of curriculum enhancement for learners registered on the Programme-led Apprenticeship strand without a work placement provides most of them with good opportunities to develop skills in other related professional and technical areas. However, the programme is not well enough matched to the needs of those learners registered in transport operations and maintenance and requires further refinement.

7.9   Most of the learners in work-based learning have appropriate workplace training, and are supported well by their employers to develop further their specialist skills and apply their knowledge in a commercial setting. Effective strategies have been implemented to increase the quantity of relevant work placements for learners registered on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand, which is good at 72% across the professional and technical areas inspected.

7.10   Most of the lecturers, across the further education provision inspected, provide good support and guidance to the learners. However, the effective use of the electronic individual student learning agreement in supporting the personal tutorial process is too variable. There were too few effective examples where it is used in the identification of personal targets with individual learners in order to maximise progress in their learning.

7.11   In work-based learning, the quality of the learners' personal training plans is satisfactory; their use to set targets and to track the learners' progress is not sufficiently robust. Across many of the professional and technical areas, there are gaps in the learners' personal review records, with too few details of work-based visits from lecturers and training support officers. In addition, employers are not involved sufficiently in the review process.

7.12   The quality of teaching and learning is good or better in a majority (73%) of the lessons and directed training sessions observed, with 37% of them being very good or better. The high quality of teaching, training and learning is a feature of the provision in art and design, childcare, music, and sport and leisure, and in the discrete provision for those learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. The main features of the most effective lessons include well-planned learner-led activities, practical work to embed theoretical learning, the effective combination of whole-class and small group activities, and skilful questioning to develop the learners' thinking. In the remaining lessons, the recurring weaknesses include the use of a limited range of teaching approaches, insufficient stretch and challenge, particularly in verbal communication, the over use of worksheets, and an inadequate match of the learning activities to current practice in industry.

7.13   The overall quality of the provision in essential skills is satisfactory. A majority of the lessons are good or better, but it is a concern that in a high proportion (49%) of the lessons observed, it is not good enough. Although, the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good in the College's adult and community provision, overall there are too many satisfactory or inadequate lessons in the College's provision for the essential skills in full-time further education courses and in its work-based learning provision.

7.14   Across nearly all of the professional and technical areas, the use of ILT in teaching and learning and assessment is underdeveloped. The lecturers make insufficient use of ILT to enhance and extend the range and quality of the learning experiences, particularly the use of the College VLE, but also the interactive approaches to engage and challenge learners in their learning. In computing IT and digital media, the operating system is dated and does not meet adequately current standards in industry. Also, the embedding of blended learning is at an early stage across the College's curriculum offer.

7.15   Across nearly all of the professional and technical areas inspected, the quality of assessment is good or better. Typically, marking is thorough and lecturers provide learners with detailed and sensitive feedback on how they can improve their work. The assessment arrangements, however, in transport operations and maintenance are inadequate. There is insufficient planning, tracking and quality assurance of the learners' assessment activities; many of them are not assessed regularly enough nor provided with sufficient feedback on their progress. In plumbing, the College should review the arrangements for the assessment of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) to ensure that opportunities to assess the learners during their first year are not missed.

7.16   On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the College has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding vulnerable groups.

8.   **Achievements and standards**

8.1   Overall, achievements and standards are good; they are good in further education and satisfactory in work-based learning.

8.2   In further education, the standards of the learners' work are good or better in most of the professional and technical areas inspected. In these areas, the learners are well-motivated, work independently and demonstrate very good creative practical skills that reflect adequately modern industry standards. In most instances, they demonstrate good or better communication skills, and can work effectively in teams or independently.

8.3   In work-based learning, the curriculum and directed training is matched well to the needs of most of the learners. Most of them achieve good occupational standards in the workplace and in their practical work. The standards of work are consistently good for those learners registered on the IT services and development programme. Across the professional and technical areas, most of the learners are progressing well in their learning, training and assessment. In some areas, however, particularly the electrotechnical services provision in Millfield, performing engineering operations, and in transport operations and maintenance, the learners are making overly slow progress in their professional and technical units.

8.4   In the essential skills, the standards of work in the adult and community provision are mostly good or very good. The majority of adult learners make good progress in their learning and demonstrate the capacity to transfer their new learning to a range of contexts, including the workplace and the home setting. They are well-motivated and enthusiastic, develop a good range of individual and collaborative working skills and demonstrate clear enjoyment in learning. In further education, a minority of learners develop a good range of independent and collaborative working skills which supports their professional and technical work. 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. In work-based learning, there is 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 activities.

8.5   Over the period 2009/10 to 2011/12, the outcomes in the College's further education provision have increased. Retention rates on level 1courses are outstanding at 89%. The achievement rates on these courses are now satisfactory and have increased from 51% to 67%. Although the overall outcomes on level 1 courses have increased from 43% to 59%, they are well below the sector average of 71%. Retention rates on level 2 courses have increased from 81% to 91% and are now outstanding. The achievement rates on these courses have increased significantly from 50% to 71% and are now satisfactory. Overall outcomes have improved from a low base of 41% to 65% but are below the sector average of 74%. Retention rates on level 3 courses are outstanding and have increased from 84% to 92%. The achievement rates have increased significantly from 40% to 75% and are now satisfactory. Consequently, overall outcomes on level 3 courses have increased significantly from a low base of 34% to 69% and are now in line with the sector average.

8.6   Over the last four years, the average retention on the Training for Success programme is good at 62%, and has improved. The average achievement rate, however, is inadequate at 53%. There is a significant variation in outcomes across the professional and technical areas. The average retention and achievement rates on the Skills for Work strand of Training for Success are very good at 77% and 85% respectively. The outcomes on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand are poor; over the same period, only 18% of the 471 learners who commenced training achieved the full framework. A range of strategies have been implemented by the College to improve outcomes on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship strand, including more effective pre-entry advice and guidance to prospective learners. As a consequence, there are indicators of improvement in attendance, retention and work placement rates.

8.7   Over the last four years, the average retention rate on the ApprenticeshipsNI level 2 programme is inadequate at 59% and the average achievement rate is good at 87%. On the ApprenticeshipsNI level 3 programme, the average retention rate is very good at 80% and the achievement rate is good at 88%. The overall outcomes on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme have improved over this period, mostly due to improved retention rates.

8.8   In the essential skills, while the achievements are slightly below the sector averages, they have improved over the last three years. Over the period 2009/10 to 2011/12, the achievement rate in literacy has risen from 75% to 89%. In numeracy, the achievement rate has risen from 63% to 83%, and in ICT it has risen from 57% to 88%.

PART THREE: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREA REPORTS