

Report of a Pilot Inspection  
Craft Training Ltd

February 2024



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Craft Training Ltd (Craft) is a family-run training organisation established in 1994. It operates in the super output areas of Derry City and Strabane, and Fermanagh and Omagh, areas for which against the ranking results from across Northern Ireland, there is notable deprivation across a number of domains\*. Craft's head office is in Strabane, with branches located at five additional premises in Derry/Londonderry, Cookstown, Omagh, Sion Mills and Strabane.

*Throughout the report, where text is accompanied by an asterisk, this indicates that additional information can be found in Appendix 2: Notes.*

Craft is contracted by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver the Skills for Life and Work programme (the skills programme) and the ApprenticeshipsNI 2021 programme (the apprenticeships programme). It delivers these programmes at all of its branches and across Northern Ireland.

The organisation is led by a senior leadership team, comprising a chief executive, and five directors with responsibility for finance, operations, curriculum and quality, quality assurance and business development. Of the 21 teaching staff, a number are currently undertaking the Internal Quality Assurance award, and a small number are scheduled to undertake the Certificate in Teaching. There is also a team of ten administrators. When required, disability support services are availed of from Clanrye Group Ltd and Disability Action\*.

At the time of the pilot inspection in February 2024, 88 trainees were registered at level one on the skills programme. Forty-nine were in year one, 35 in year two and the remainder in year three. Of the 88 trainees, 79 were registered across the professional and technical (P&T) areas of animal care (25), bricklaying (9), childcare (6), health and social care (6), joinery (16), painting (11), and retail (6); the remaining were registered across the P&T areas of information technology (IT) user, hospitality, and plastering. Most (77, 87%) of the trainees were aged 17 to 19 years, and the remaining were aged 20 to 22 years.

Three hundred and ninety-five apprentices were registered on the apprenticeships programme; nearly half of them (188; 48%) were aged 16 to 24 years, with the remainder (207; 52%) aged over 25 years. They were registered across a range of P&T areas: administration (11), bakery (22), bricklaying (7); childcare (23), food and drink (97), hospitality (7), IT user (10), joinery (55), management (16), meat and poultry (43), painting (12), plastering (9), professional cookery (6), retail (46), and warehousing (10). The remainder were registered across the P&T areas of animal care, drylining, floorcovering, furniture, health and social care, and logistics. Fifty-five percent of them (216) were registered at level two, with the remainder (179; 45%) registered at level three. A small number of them have disclosed barriers or challenges to learning.

Forty-eight (12%) of the apprentices do not have English as their first language; a small number of these apprentices have been identified as requiring priority support for literacy.

*All data used for the inspection and presented in this report has been supplied and verified by Craft at the time of the pilot inspection.*

## **B. VIEWS OF APPRENTICES, TRAINEES, PARENTS AND STAFF**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to trainees, apprentices and staff in advance of the pilot inspection.

Overall, 16% (78 of 486) of the learners\* responded to the questionnaire. Seventy-one of these responses were from the trainees (71 of the 88 trainees; 81%); the remainder of the responses were from the apprentices. Almost all of these trainees and most of these apprentices indicated that their programme is interesting, challenging and well-managed.

Inspectors also met and spoke with a sample of the learners. The trainees spoke positively about the induction arrangements, the opportunity to gain qualifications and the benefits of coming together for particular social events. They shared their reasons for joining Craft, which include: the positive experiences of family members who had previously attended; learning about the organisation through social media; and meeting the organisation's staff at careers events or when they came into their post-primary school. They also spoke about preferring to learn at Craft to previous learning experiences at school. The apprentices spoke positively about their induction and the regular visits from staff.

A number of the trainees' parents spoke with an inspector, and they were wholly positive. They spoke about their children being happy to attend. As a result, they see them growing in confidence, developing skills and achieving success. Some of them spoke about their children now being re-engaged successfully with education. They spoke about the staff "being there every step of the way", showing understanding and providing support; for some of them, the support was not only for their children but also for themselves as parents and, where needed, the wider family.

Seventy-three percent of the staff (27 of 37) responded to the questionnaire. Overall, they are all happy with their experiences working in the organisation. They indicated that there are good channels of communication, and they are given regular feedback on how to improve their work. Inspectors also met and spoke with a number of staff. They spoke about their roles and responsibilities, and being well supported, including through opportunities to engage in relevant professional learning.

## C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

During the pilot inspection and informed by Craft's quality improvement planning and underpinning self-evaluation processes, the ETI inspectors worked alongside the organisation to consider how well it:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

The skills programme and the apprenticeships programme, the P&T areas of construction and food and drink\*, the provision for essential skills and the arrangements for child and adult protection were evaluated.

## 2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Aligned to the organisational mission, there is a strategic focus on delivering high quality and sustainable provision, well-informed by the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. A rigorous quality cycle and quality assurance processes are in place. The priorities for development identified are appropriate.
- The vision is realised well, with barriers to learning identified, understood and addressed sensitively and respectfully. A strong focus on equity has been demonstrated by the tailored provision for the trainees, which includes practical support. Disadvantage is minimised through the learners' achievement of skills and notably, learners are provided with the opportunity to achieve above the targeted level in the essential skills.
- Investment in large-scale project-based learning opportunities has not only benefitted the continued development and sustainability of the organisation, but has also supported well the learners in the application of their training and skills, along with development of their creativity and entrepreneurship. Across the branches, the very significant investment in accommodation and resources has resulted in inclusive, welcoming and well-resourced learning environments.
- Overall, the curriculum is meeting well the needs of the learners and is well-matched to the apprentices' job roles. Staff working across the P&T areas have relevant industrial experience which is of great value to the employers with which Craft works, such as for example in the areas of bakery, meat and poultry, painting and decorating, and plastering. The staff benefit from a good range of professional learning.



- Almost all of the learning and teaching observed was effective, with respectful, professional working relationships fostered by the tutors. Sessions were well-planned, structured and learning was contextualised. Most of the learners are developing good or better standards of occupational skills.
- The bank of resources on the virtual learning environment is appropriately being reviewed and developed further, in order to improve accessibility and meet better the needs of all of the learners. The approaches through which the learners provide feedback and engage with the organisation are being developed also. The development of e-portfolios is necessary to promote greater independence and ownership by the apprentices at level 3 in the progression of their learning.
- High-profile events celebrate the successes of the learners. There has also been well-considered development of the organisation's social media, which is not only promoting and extending the reach of the organisation, but also provides a medium to showcase well the skills of the learners and the tutors across the P&T areas.
- The provision for the skills programme and the apprenticeships programme is effective, as is the provision for the essential skills and the sampled P&T areas of construction and food and drink. Actions are being taken to address recruitment levels, and retention and progression rates in the particular P&T areas identified appropriately by the organisation.
- A small number of post-primary pupils are attending Craft, having been referred from their schools; they join the trainees in their classes. Craft provides monthly progress updates to the schools.
- At the time of the pilot inspection, the evidence provided by the organisation demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align with current guidance.

#### Areas for further action:

- Continue to take action to address recruitment levels, and retention and progression rates in the particular P&T areas identified appropriately by the organisation.
- Continue to review and develop further the bank of resources on the virtual learning environment, in order to improve accessibility and meet better the needs of all of the learners.
- Develop e-portfolios to promote greater independence and ownership by the apprentices at level 3 in the progression of their learning.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

Craft's mission statement is '*To equip learners with the skills and knowledge for a better tomorrow*' and its vision is to '*embody an ethos of care and understanding and provide bespoke learning opportunities which shape the future one learning experience at a time; regardless of barriers to learning, age/gender, location or skill set.*' There is a strategic focus on realising this mission and vision through the delivery of high quality and sustainable provision, which is well-informed by the organisation's self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. Ownership for these well-embedded processes is the responsibility of all staff.

The priorities for development identified are appropriate. The monitoring, evaluation and review measures are rigorous and robust. For example, all staff provide work schedules for review each week, detailing actual, planned and revised activities and all branches come together each quarter. There are quality assurance processes for lesson plans, schemes of work, along with portfolio checks and randomised calls to employers. These measures not only support well the senior leadership's focus on delivering a sustainable provision, but also the oversight of all staff in monitoring closely the quality of provision and the progression of the learners.

With the clarification of roles and responsibilities, and the development of the organisational structures, the organisation is well-placed to continue to realise its mission and vision. For example, a scheduling co-ordinator role was created with dedicated administrative responsibilities for the P&T area of food and drink, to allow more time for tutors and team leads to focus on delivering the learning, teaching and training. Due to the success of this approach, recruitment is underway for two additional scheduling co-ordinators, one for emerging P&T areas and the other for the essential skills.

The inspection team's evaluation of the provision, along with responses to the ETI questionnaires, the inspectors' discussions with trainees, apprentices, parents, staff, and employers affirm the commitment of Craft to the continuing realisation of its mission and vision.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

The delivery models for the programmes are responsive and flexible and overall, the curriculum is meeting well the needs of the learners. The skills programme provides opportunities for small group working, contextualised learning experiences, and inputs from the community and a range of outside agencies to support the trainees' holistic development. Technology enhanced learning is being used well to develop the trainees' transversal skills\*. The trainees benefit from enrichment opportunities, such as driving lessons funded by Craft. The units undertaken by the apprentices are selected in agreement with employers and matched appropriately to their job roles, with delivery responsive to the needs of the employers. The apprentices and the employers value the skills and knowledge that they are developing through the

qualifications. In the P&T areas sampled, employers report that the operating environment is pressurised and the retention of apprentices is challenging; the food and drink employers spoke about the importance of the all age apprenticeships to their industry. A flexible delivery model for the essential skills allows for bespoke learning opportunities which meet the needs of the learners and employers; where appropriate, there is fast track provision.

A transversal skills pilot is underway across all of the P&T areas, with a calendar of events focused on these skills as part of the quality cycle. Staff ambassadors have been identified to promote citizenship, digital literacy, problem solving and decision-making, self management, work professionalism, and working with others. The opportunities for the acquisition and development of these skills are being highlighted within schemes of work and learning plans. The impact of this pilot will need to be monitored closely.

There is a dedicated point of contact for learners about new job posts and central information hubs provide trainees with information about job and placement opportunities. There are opportunities for the learners to develop interview skills; support is provided where needed for transport to and clothes for work interviews. The learners should be encouraged to update their curriculum vitae regularly to reflect the skills and competences developed through their training, work placements and/or employment. Careers advice should be strengthened regarding progression opportunities beyond level 3 of the apprenticeships programme.

Almost all of the learning and teaching observed was effective in meeting the needs of the learners. Respectful, professional working relationships have been fostered by the tutors with the learners. Overall, sessions observed across the programmes and the essential skills provision were well-planned, structured and the learning was contextualised. The sessions for the trainees were differentiated to meet their needs and they were supported well by staff. Their engagement in, and enthusiasm for, project-based learning opportunities are having a positive impact on their learning, the management and understanding of their emotional wellbeing, and development of their life skills. In the apprenticeship sessions, the apprentices linked well their classroom learning to the skills, practice and experience from the workplace. Most of the learners engaged well in the essential skills sessions and the standards of written work are mostly good. The trainees would benefit from more opportunities to improve their oral skills. The team teaching approach for the trainees in the essential skills allows meaningful connections to be made across the P&T areas, and increases levels of engagement.

The use of digital technologies is prioritised, with the virtual learning environment and the virtual management system being developed further. A Quick Response (QR) coded policy board for child and adult protection and safeguarding is in use in the Derry/Londonderry and Omagh premises, as well as in the Strabane head office; this is an effective way to share information, and report concerns or seek support. The effectiveness of the student council is being reviewed and the approaches through which the learners provide feedback are being developed further also, for example with the use of QR codes for learner surveys.



Across the branches, the very significant investment in accommodation and resources has resulted in inclusive, welcoming and well-resourced learning environments. In every branch, there is a 'grab and go' station from which all learners can avail of food and drinks throughout the day. Foodbank vouchers are made available as required, and there are also 'sign up and stay' and attendance at work placement incentives provided.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

Almost all of the trainees (81; 91%) have a range of barriers and challenges to learning, of which three-fifths (53; 60%) have registered special educational needs or disabilities. Across all of the branches, there are notable differences in the barriers and challenges with which they present. The staff are responsive and clearly empathetic to their varying needs, including those arising as a result of adverse childhood experiences\*. Significant pastoral care is provided sensitively and respectfully, while ensuring the dignity of the individuals; a member of staff maintains oversight and acts as a touchpoint across the branches. Craft is involved in multi-disciplinary case conferences for young people where required.

Close attention is paid to the attendance of trainees for both morning and afternoon sessions, with weekly reviews to track authorised, sickness and unauthorised absences. Where necessary, there are enhanced timetabled arrangements to support the trainees. Many of the trainees and their families benefit from the support not only of Craft, but also a range of external agencies. The trainees are well supported to become work ready and a majority of them are successfully undertaking work placements; where a work placement has broken down for a particular reason, the trainees have been supported well to engage in another placement when ready.

Almost all of the apprentices from one of the food and drink employers are newcomers. They report that they welcome the opportunity to gain the P&T qualification, the essential skills and the potential for progression in their work roles. Completion of the programme, including achieving the essential skills, results in a financial reward for them. The employer welcomes the apprenticeships programme as a positive addition to the mandatory/compliance training delivered internally. The placing of employees on level 2 or level 3 of the apprenticeships programme is informed by discussions with the individual and the employee. It is important that those who do not have English as their first language and require language support are able to access the curriculum. The bank of resources on the virtual learning environment is appropriately being reviewed and developed further, in order to improve accessibility and meet better the needs of all of the learners. Additionally, those individuals who need more initial support to develop their English are signposted to the ESOL\* provision available at the local further education college.

### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

Investment in large-scale project-based learning opportunities has not only benefitted the continued development and sustainability of the organisation, but has also supported well the learners in the application of their training and skills, along with development of their creativity and entrepreneurship. The current 'big project'

initiative has a sustainability focus and at the time of the inspection, this 'Allotment Project' was in the early stages of delivery. Previously there has been a cabling project and a local community project. In particular, these opportunities have supported well the trainees to become work-ready.

High-profile events celebrate the successes of the learners, including an annual awards ceremony attended by the learners, their families and employers, as well as the DfE, and school and political representatives. There has been well-considered development of the organisation's social media which is used strategically to showcase the skills of the learners and tutors across the P&T areas; social insights in respect of the reach of the organisation are tracked closely. There are also regular team building events and benefits for staff, including themed celebration evenings, additional paid holidays and recruitment incentives.

Retention has been identified appropriately as an issue in the quality improvement plan, as has recruitment to the IT user programmes. Reasons for learners leaving are well documented. Consequently, a policy has been introduced that a potential apprentice has to be with their employer for three months or more before starting on the apprenticeships programme. Retention on the apprenticeships programme at level 2 should continue to be monitored overall; retention on the P&T area of retail at this level needs to improve. In other areas, low retention is usually as a result of low recruitment numbers, where one or two leavers impacts adversely on the statistics. Outcomes on the IT user apprenticeship need to be improved, although the numbers enrolled are low. The development of e-portfolios is necessary to promote greater independence and ownership in the progression of learning by the apprentices at level 3.

In the period 2021/22 to 2022/23, a majority of trainees (69%) were retained; there were 35 early leavers. Almost all of the trainees (36/37; 97%) who have completed their programme to date have achieved the full qualification at level 1. In 2023/24, most of the trainees (82%) have been retained to date. In the same period, a majority of the apprentices (73%) at level 2 were retained; there were 114 early leavers. Most of the apprentices (81%) at level 3 were retained, with 75 early leavers. Of the apprentices who have completed the programme to date, almost all at level 2 (31/32; 98%) and all at level 3 (93) have achieved the full qualification. In 2023/24, almost all of the apprentices at level 2 (91%) and at level 3 (95%) have been retained to date.

For the learners who have been retained and who are required to complete the essential skills, the outcomes are consistently high in the period 2021/22 to 2022/23. To date, almost all of these learners have successfully completed the essential skills at the targeted level in literacy (155/169, 92%) and numeracy (266/286, 93%). Most of these learners have successfully completed the essential skill of ICT at the targeted level (387/436, 89%). It is notable that the organisation, in line with its vision, also supports learners to achieve at a level higher than that required by their framework.

## **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

Through its training provision, Craft has a geographical reach across Northern Ireland. There is a clear focus on maintaining existing and developing new partnerships with employers and stakeholders. For example, the organisation is part of a Derry Strabane Labour Market Partnership initiative, and a Women's Hospitality Academy which provides training for women living in sheltered accommodation. The organisation is contracted to provide the essential skills for learners at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise. It is also a testing centre for the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.

Key members of staff are well-known in the localities within which they work, and they have well-established links with a large number of agencies and local community groups. These include addiction services, the Careers Service, the DfE Peer Support Network, and the Youth Justice Agency. The staff report that the well-established links with the Strabane Jobs and Benefits office are particularly useful when trainees are coming to the end of their programme.

Craft provides interview skills, taster session and work placement opportunities for local schools. A small number of post-primary pupils are attending Craft, having been referred from their schools; they join the trainees in their classes. Craft provides monthly progress updates to the schools.

Staff have benefitted from a range of mandatory training, including for first aid, manual handling and safeguarding. Additionally, there has been continuing professional development provided for such as suicide awareness, diversity and special educational needs. Since the 2021/22 academic year, there has been a focus on formalising the process for continuing professional development. This has resulted in a well-planned induction programme for new staff, with operational guidelines, completion of an induction portfolio and beneficial job shadowing across all of the P&T areas, beyond their own area of expertise. Master classes have been introduced very recently, whereby a member of staff provides a demonstration of their skills, and the intent is to continue to implement this approach, to share good practice and support further the development of effective pedagogy.

## **F. CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION**

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

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

Craft is realising well its mission statement "*To equip learners with the skills and knowledge for a better tomorrow*" and its vision to "*embody an ethos of care and understanding and provide bespoke learning opportunities which shape the future one learning experience at a time; regardless of barriers to learning, age/gender, location or skill set.*" There are high expectations for the trainees and apprentices. In particular, due to the emphasis on their holistic development and the support provided to the young people and their families, the trainees make significant progress and achieve well from their various starting points.

Continued action is required to address recruitment levels, and retention and progression rates in the particular P&T areas identified. E-portfolios need to be developed to promote greater independence and ownership by the apprentices at level 3 in the progression of their learning. Appropriately, there is continuing review and development of the bank of resources on the virtual learning environment.

The aspect of effective practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the benefit of large-scale project-based learning opportunities in providing real-life, contextualised opportunities for the application of training and skills by learners.

ETI will continue to work with Craft which is well placed to take forward the areas for further action detailed above and in the body of this report.

## 5. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: 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%



## APPENDIX 2: NOTES

### Page 1

#### **a number of domains \***

For example, where 1 is most deprived, within the [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 \(NIMDM2017\)](#) super output area results, Derry City and Strabane ranked 1 in the multiple deprivation measure rank and Fermanagh and Omagh ranked 1 for the proportion of the population aged 15 and under living in households whose equivalised income is below 60% of the Northern Ireland median. Derry City and Strabane, and Fermanagh and Omagh ranked 1 and 2 respectively for access to services.

#### **Clanrye Group Ltd and Disability Action\***

Clanrye Group Ltd and Disability Action are two of three organisations in Northern Ireland contracted by DfE to provide specialised support for young people, aged 16 to 22 years, on the skills programme and the apprenticeships programme across the region as part of DfE's disability support service. The other organisation is Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL).

### Page 2

#### **the learners\***

In this report, learners refers to trainees and apprentices.

### Page 3

#### **food and drink\***

During this pilot inspection, the P&T area of food and drink focused on food and drink, hospitality and professional chef.

### Page 5

#### **transversal skills\***

UNESCO defines transversal skills as: "Skills that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (for example, organisational skills)".

### Page 7

#### **adverse childhood experiences\***

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful experiences occurring during childhood that directly harm a child or affect the environment in which they live. Further information can be found at: [Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland](#).

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#### **ESOL\***

English for speakers of other languages.

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