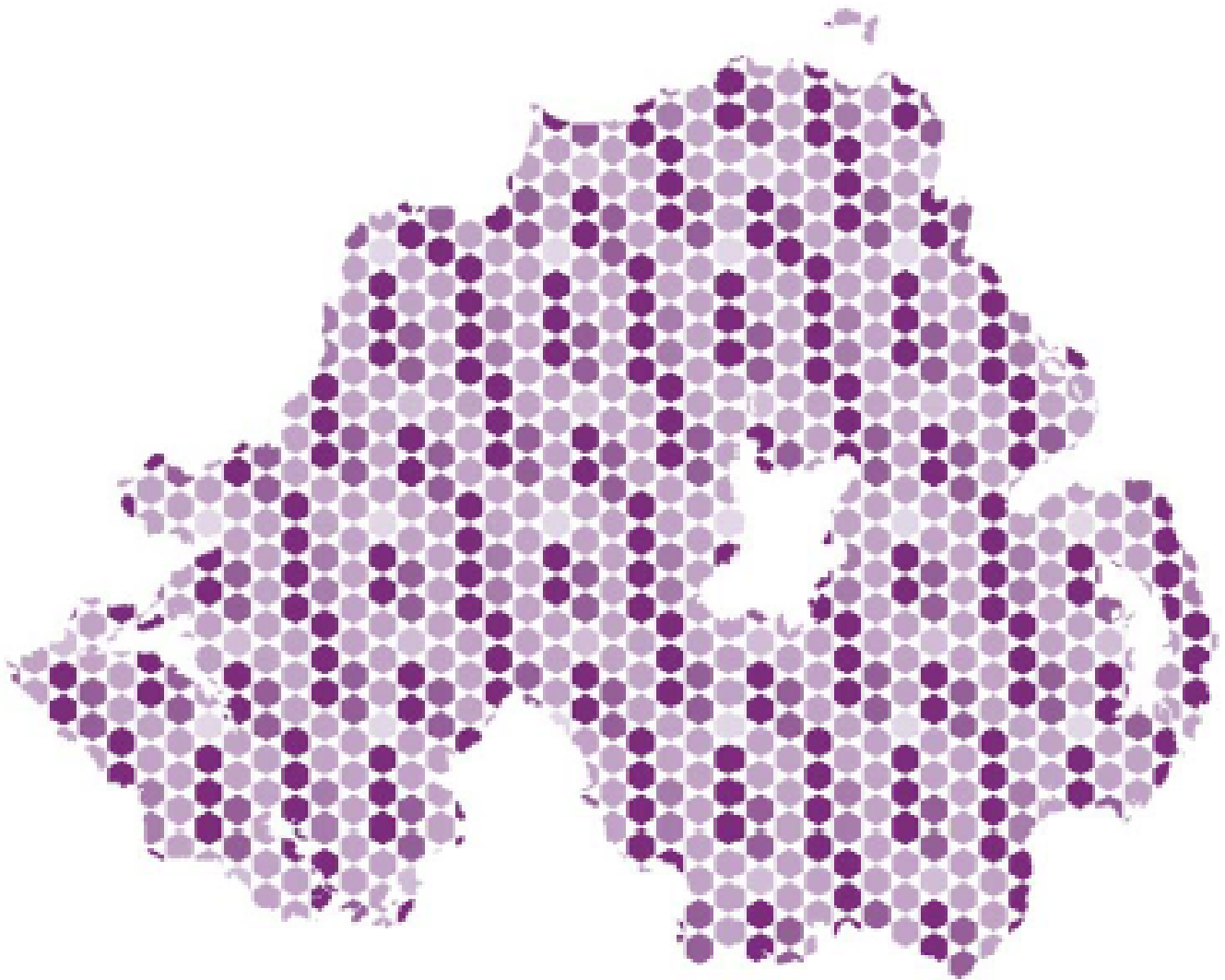


FURTHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Provision for the Priority Skills
Areas at Level 2 Northern
Regional College

Report of an Inspection
in May 2009



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



QUALITY STANDARD ASSURED

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	- almost/nearly all
75%-90%	- most
50%-74%	- a majority
30%-49%	- a significant minority
10%-29%	- a minority
Less than 10%	- very few/a small minority

PART ONE: SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Northern Regional College was formed in August 2007, following the merger of the former Causeway Institute of Further and Higher Education, the East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education and the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education. The college has nine campuses spread over a large geographical area, and across seven local government districts. It has two campuses located in both Ballymena and Newtownabbey, and one in Antrim, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne and Magherafelt. The significant distances between the campuses has provided executive and senior management with major challenges in a number of key areas, including staff travelling times, timetabling, the scheduling of team meetings and in the development of a corporate identity for the college.

1.2 Recent figures from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry's monthly Labour Market Report (May 2009) indicate that the claimant counts in Antrim (3.4%), Ballymena (3.3%), Larne (4.0%), Magherafelt (3.8%) and Newtownabbey (3.5%) are just below the Northern Ireland average of 4.3%, with Ballymoney and Coleraine just above at 4.5%. The employment rates in Ballymoney (68%) and Magherafelt (64.8%) are below the Northern Ireland average of 70.3%. In all of the other district council areas the employment rate is above the Northern Ireland average: Antrim at 76.7%, Ballymena at 75.5%, Coleraine at 76.1%, Larne at 75.5% and Newtownabbey at 78.3%. The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure ranks Antrim at 16th, Ballymena at 20th, Ballymoney at 12th, Coleraine at 18th, Larne at 14th, Magherafelt at 17th and Newtownabbey at 23rd in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland.

1.3 The inspection focused on the college's full-time and part-time provision in the priority skill areas at level 2 on the national qualifications framework, which is equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grade C or above. The main areas inspected were computing and information and communication technology (ICT), construction, engineering (electrical, electronic and manufacturing), tourism and hospitality and the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. The college's provision of priority skills training funded by the Department's Jobskills (residual), Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes, were not inspected. Prior to the inspection, students were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire to ascertain their views of their experiences at the college. During the inspection the inspectors interviewed groups of students, held discussions with members of the executive management team, heads of faculty, heads of school, course team leaders, managers with cross-college responsibilities and employers. They also reviewed self-evaluation reports of the priority skill areas, minutes of course team meetings, strategic and quality assurance documentation and a sample of student coursework across the areas inspected. A total of 47 lessons were observed.

1.4 'Circular FE 11/08', required the six colleges of further education in Northern Ireland, to submit to the Department, a self-evaluation report for the provision of priority skill areas at level 2, and a Whole College Quality Improvement Plan, along with their College Development Plan for 2008-11. They were also required to include in their submission statistical information on student enrolments and levels of achievement for each priority skill area at level 2. This information was used by the inspection team to compare the performance of the Northern Regional College in each priority skill area, against the average for all colleges in Northern Ireland.

1.5 The Northern Regional College has satisfactory provision of level 2 technician and craft courses in most of the priority skill areas inspected. All of the college's provision in construction at level 2 is concentrated in Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI. The college also delivers effectively an on-line GCSE in construction in 13 local post-primary schools. The college provides full-time courses in each of the other curriculum areas inspected including the Edexcel First Diploma courses in engineering, in information technology (IT) practitioners, and travel and tourism. It also provides a good range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at level 1 and 2 in hospitality, at the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Newtownabbey campuses. In tourism and hospitality, the students also have good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications. Most of the students enrolled on the priority skills area level 2 programmes have mainly low entry qualifications, with a majority not having achieved grade C or equivalent in English or mathematics. In addition, a small number of students have been identified as having additional learning support needs. The college offers good opportunities in further education and training for students in each priority skills area, from level 2 to further and/or higher education and employment.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of the education and training provided by the college is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management, achievements and standards and the quality of provision for learning, which need to be addressed if the needs of all of the students are to be met effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the college's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

2.2 The main strengths are the:

- good arrangements to support individual course teams in the self evaluation process, and the good start made in the development of an appropriate quality assurance and quality improvement planning process;
- good participation by most staff in a range of internal and external professional development opportunities;
- strong links with post-primary schools through the college's good collaborative working arrangements with ten area learning communities;
- good or better standards of students' work in almost all of the courses inspected;
- overall average achievement rate for priority skills areas at level 2, at 68%, which is 7% above the Northern Ireland average;
- excellent progression rates at 90% to further education, training or employment for students in the level 2 priority skills areas of computing and ICT, engineering, and hospitality and tourism;

- good quality of the provision in engineering and hospitality and tourism; and
- good or better quality of the teaching and learning in almost all (85%) of the lessons observed.

2.3 The main areas for improvement are:

- the need for leadership and management of the priority skills areas at level 2 to address the limited opportunities for curriculum teams to share good practice, and to plan and develop the curriculum on a whole college basis;
- the poor level of support provided by a small number of staff members for some students;
- the wide variation in the quality and maintenance of the accommodation and learning resources across the college, including access to specialist resources;
- the poor success rates in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy;
- insufficient focus on employability skills and links with industry across most of the priority skills areas provision at level 2;
- inadequate impact of the college's pastoral care policies on a minority of students
- poor use of information and learning technologies (ILT) to enhance teaching and learning and to support the development of students' independent learning skills through the use of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE);
- lack of a further education curriculum offer at level 2 in the priority skill area of construction; and
- lack of clearly defined careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in all curriculum areas, including the focused use of electronic-Individual Student Learner Agreements (e-ISLA) to engage students more effectively in their own learning and inform them about their progress.

PART TWO: OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 Since the formation of the Northern Regional College in 2007, the priority for the Director and the Governing Body has been the development of the college's management and organisational structure. It is planned that the structure will be completed, with senior lecturers in post by June 2009, and remaining support staff in post by September 2009. Currently, the executive management team comprises five senior management posts: the Chief Executive, three deputy directors, and a Director of Finance. The three deputy directors are responsible for curriculum, support and development, and planning and resources. The senior management team comprises 13 members who have responsibility for specific curricular areas, and quality related or cross-college functions. In addition, eleven members of staff make up the wider college management team, nine of whom have direct responsibility for curriculum clusters, one with responsibility for information learning technology and a further individual responsible for curriculum partnerships.

3.2 The work of the Quality Improvement Unit has been instrumental in establishing common quality assurance systems across the Northern Regional College. Responsibility for quality assurance is clearly defined in all of the job specifications for management and staff. The high priority afforded to continuous quality improvement demonstrated by the Chief Executive and the executive and senior management team requires staff at all levels to review the effectiveness of their work, and to plan and implement improvement. While progress has been made in establishing good working practices through well planned, professional development opportunities, the understanding by most staff of self-evaluation, and their role in informing college development planning processes, is at an early stage of development. In addition, curriculum teams have not had sufficient opportunities to share good practice, and to plan and develop the curriculum on a whole college basis.

3.3 The quality of all programmes and cross-college management functions and major areas of responsibility are reviewed annually as an integral part of the quality improvement cycle. Priorities for improvement identified through the review process, form the basis of the respective action plans, progress of the implementation of all action plans is monitored systematically and is reported formally upon in the quality improvement cycle of the following year. The outcomes of the quality improvement cycle are used effectively to inform the development planning process of the college. Across the priority skill areas the quality of the self-evaluation reports is satisfactory and course teams have been provided with good support by the Quality Improvement Unit to begin the self evaluation process. However the reports tend to be descriptive and the action plans emanating from the reports are not sufficiently focused on specific measurable targets which will help to promote improvement. This has been identified by the college and appropriate staff development activities have been planned.

3.4 The quality of curriculum leadership and management at local level is good. All of the courses are well managed and co-ordinated although there is little evidence at this stage of effective collaboration and co-ordination in curriculum areas across all of the college campuses. In the areas inspected, there are good relationships among staff and between staff, and the senior management team. While a good start has been made, self-evaluation has to date been carried out on an individual team basis and needs to be extended to encompass curriculum areas. Regular team meetings are not held as yet and course teams do not have

sufficient opportunities to meet to share good practice, and to plan and to co-ordinate their provision in curriculum areas. Course teams from across the college, at present, do not have sufficient opportunities to come together to evaluate the quality of their programmes, and to amend course design when necessary.

3.5 The general quality of accommodation and specialist resources across the college campuses, with the exception of most of the provision for engineering and construction, ranges from poor to adequate. The general level of maintenance in most of the college buildings is poor and they have become shabby and run down in appearance. Some classrooms are unclean and in others broken equipment has been left in the room. It was particularly noticeable that there were several health and safety issues identified in relation to the Newtownabbey campus (Appendix 1).

3.6 The lecturers are well qualified and experienced across most of the priority skills areas. There are extensive opportunities for staff development from which most staff have benefited. A majority of staff have recent and relevant industrial experience with a particularly high uptake of the Lecturers into Industry scheme. However, a small number of lecturers in hospitality and catering could benefit from updating their experience and knowledge of current industrial practices and standards. A staff mentoring scheme which is integral to the college's quality assurance system, is well developed. The scheme is designed to support individual lecturers to develop professionally through a well considered system : providing support for lecturers undertaking the Post-Graduate Certificate in Further and Higher Education and ongoing support and mentoring within the school structure. The mentoring scheme places an important and appropriate emphasis on continuous professional development across the college.

3.7 The college has strong links with post-primary schools and is proactive in promoting effective collaborative working arrangements with the ten area learning communities within its geographical area, in order to support the delivery of the imminent Entitlement Framework. At the time of the inspection there were 1,385 pupils enrolled under the schools' partnership programme of which 41% are undertaking occupational studies; many of the modules undertaken are deemed to be in priority skills areas. One of the main areas of provision at level 2 is the applied GCSE in construction. The college's provision under the Entitlement Framework Support Programme is well-managed by the principal lecturer for curriculum partnerships. He has developed effective links with participating schools, particularly in implementing quality assurance arrangements and making good use of ICT to meet the needs of students for more flexible and responsive approaches to training and learning. A feature of good practice is the planned joint staff development sessions for school teachers and college lecturers.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

4.1 The standard of work achieved by the students on the level 2 priority skills area programmes is mostly good. Almost all of the students are well- motivated, well-behaved and are willing to learn. In hospitality and tourism, the students develop and demonstrate their professional and interpersonal skills through working in the college's restaurants, and through very good links with industry, work placements, industrial visits and engagement with guest speakers. Most students in computing and ICT develop an appropriate range of skills and competences in using industry standard software and hardware. Almost all engineering students are developing good occupational skills.

4.2 The standard of the students' written work ranges from satisfactory to good. They are consistently good for students in computing and ICT, engineering and in tourism and hospitality. The majority of students can apply effectively the knowledge of their professional and technical area and use appropriate technical language in their written work. Almost all of the students have good standards of oral communication with most being able to discuss clearly tasks being undertaken in their classes.

4.3 With the exception of construction, the Northern Regional College has provided quantitative data regarding retention and achievement in all of the priority skills areas inspected, for the last three years. The overall three year average rate of achievement for the areas inspected is 68%, which is above the average (61%) for all Northern Ireland colleges. The average achievement rate for computing and ICT is 61% which is above the average (56%) for all colleges. The achievement rate for engineering at 71% is at the Northern Ireland average (71%). The figures for tourism and hospitality are at 62 %, which is below the average for Northern Ireland colleges at 64%.

4.4 The overall retention rates in the areas inspected range from satisfactory to excellent: it is satisfactory at 73% in hospitality and catering; good in computing and ICT and engineering at 81% and 80% respectively; and excellent in travel and tourism at 91%.

4.5 The three year average success rates for those students who complete their courses range from satisfactory to good: for computing and ICT it is satisfactory at 77%; and good in engineering, hospitality and catering, and travel and tourism at 89%, 84% and 89% respectively.

4.6 The levels of success in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are poor in the priority skills levels inspected; in 2007-2008 the success rates across the level 2 priority skills provision are poor at 56% and 58% respectively. For the same period, the overall retention rates are satisfactory for both literacy and numeracy at 78% and 74% respectively.

4.7 The attendance of students is generally good although there is some variation in attendance at the essential skills classes. During the week of the inspection, attendance ranged from 22% to 100%, but was modest at 65%. There is an underdeveloped essential skills attendance policy which needs to be implemented in conjunction with all curriculum tutors and areas.

5. QUALITY OF THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1 The quality of teaching and learning is a strength of the provision inspected. In 81% of the lessons observed the quality was good or better, of which just under one-third were very good. The quality of teaching and learning is particularly strong in tourism and hospitality, engineering and essential skills where most of the lessons observed were either good or very good. In most courses a good range of teaching approaches is used effectively to engage and stimulate the students' interest in their work, including well organised demonstrations, practical tasks, group activities, and one-to-one guidance and support. In a minority of lessons, there are examples of less effective teaching. In a small number of

classes observed, for example, students were exposed to over-directed expositions without time to discuss or develop their practical skills. In addition, the planning for differentiated teaching and learning in assignment work and practical tasks is inadequate to raise the standards and achievements for a significant minority of students who are potentially high achieving and require more challenge in their work.

5.2 The development and use of ILT to enhance the educational provision, continues to be a high strategic priority for the college, the executive management team has already identified important areas for improvement and is implementing a range of strategies to ensure the dissemination of existing good practice. In all of the priority skills level 2 programmes inspected the use of ILT and in particular use of the VLE, is not sufficiently well developed to promote more innovative use of ILT in classroom practice, to stimulate and enhance the development of a wider range of more innovative and creative teaching and learning approaches, or help students develop their own independent learning skills. Access to ICT is generally poor for students on hospitality and tourism courses. Inspection evidence relating to the use of electronic individual student learning agreements (e-ISLA) indicates that they are not being used effectively in tutorial sessions, and their use is not contributing to improvement in communication among staff and between staff and students. At present their use is not presenting any benefits in the area of careers planning or in the referral and tracking of student support.

5.3 In all of the areas inspected the quality of assessment is good; it is well-planned and set at an appropriate level. Almost all of the students understand the criteria used to assess their work, and they receive constructive feedback from their lecturers which promotes high levels of motivation, and progression in their learning. However, consistent approaches to assessment are not yet standardised across curriculum areas and college campuses, and good practice has not been shared. For most essential skills students progress in the achievement of their assessments are slow.

5.4 The provision of CEIAG across most of the priority skills areas at level 2 is inadequate. Students on hospitality and tourism courses receive good specialist careers advice and guidance from their tutors and visiting speakers, complemented by industrial visits and work experience placements. However all students require a more structured and well-informed programme of information, advice and guidance, to enhance their career planning and understanding of relevant learning pathways.

5.5 Learning support is a key area of the college's provision. The Deputy Director responsible for student services provides clear strategic direction and promotes a holistic and integrated student services model which seeks to integrate all aspects of student support, for example, finance, counselling, CEIAG, and health and well-being. Support staff that will carry out education support, and careers roles, are currently being appointed. A learning support policy is in place which outlines clearly the college's commitment to providing comprehensive student support services. The roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly defined and effective procedures have been established for the identification, referral and provision of student support requirements. A significant minority of the students on priority skills area level 2 programmes have been identified as requiring additional support with their learning. While appropriate levels of support are provided for most of these students, a small number have refused to accept learning support. This disadvantages them in their learning, and the college's procedures to ensure those students identified with learning support needs feel able to accept the support being offered are inadequate.

5.6 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection include the opportunity for students to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection as well as meetings with groups of learners across curriculum areas. Five hundred questionnaires were issued to learners, 70% were returned to the Inspectorate and 123 contained additional written comments. Staff in the college were committed to ensuring that as many students as possible were able to provide their views of the college to the Inspection team and facilitated effectively the distribution of the questionnaires resulting in the high level of returns. Three focus group meetings were held with students in three of the campuses and inspectors interviewed students across the areas being inspected. In both the responses to the questionnaires and in the focus group meetings most students talked positively about their learning experiences in the college. A significant minority of students did, however, express concern about the poor maintenance of the buildings, inequities in access to computer resources across curriculum areas, a lack of social areas across the college campuses, and a small number of staff members who appear to be unhelpful and unsupportive. The issues emerging from the questionnaires and meetings have been reported to the executive management team.

5.7 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the college is satisfactory. The main features of the college's pastoral care include:

- the commitment of senior management and the student services team to provide an integrated, seamless provision of learning and pastoral support; and
- student access to a very good range of professional support services.

At present there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the impact of pastoral care policies in the classroom to address the poor relationships which appear to exist between a small number of staff members and students, and which are obviously having a detrimental effect on the quality of the education for the students.

5.8 The Northern Regional College has good arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department.

PART THREE: REPORTS ON CURRICULUM AREAS

6. CURRICULUM AREA: COMPUTING AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Northern Regional College offers a limited range of full-time and part-time programmes in computing and ICT at level 2, across its main campuses in Coleraine, Ballymena, Magherafelt and Newtownabbey. The full-time provision consists of the Edexcel First Diploma for ICT practitioners. Students on full-time courses also have the opportunity to undertake essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. There are no opportunities for full-time students to undertake other enhancement programmes. The part-time provision consists of the CISCO Essentials programme which is offered at the college's Farm Lodge campus in Ballymena. Appropriate progression opportunities, to a range of further and higher education programmes, exist for students.

Students enrolled on the full-time first diploma courses have low entry qualifications, with most of them having been identified as having essential skill needs in literacy and numeracy. In addition, a small number of the students have also been identified as having additional learning support needs.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are:

- the good standards of work produced by most of the students, who are making appropriate progress in their learning;
- the good overall retention rate and excellent progression rate to further education, training or employment; and
- the good support provided for students, including the provision for additional learning support.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the overall management and co-ordination of computing and ICT programmes at level 2, including a lack of coherence or sharing of good practice in curriculum provision;
- the satisfactory overall success rate; and
- the provision for CEIAG and the use of industry links to support the students' learning.

6.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The full-time level 2 programmes in computing and ICT are delivered and co-ordinated discretely by staff across the four main college campuses. The co-ordinators manage their individual courses effectively, however, although the head of school and course co-ordinators have met, the meetings are infrequent and the procedures currently used to manage the overall level 2 provision, or share good practice across the college are not effective. As a result, there is a lack of coherence and standardisation across the provision in a number of key areas including timetabling, course structure, the development of teaching and learning resources, and the effective deployment of staff. Staff are well qualified and experienced in the delivery of computing and ICT programmes and have good opportunities to undertake further staff development. The quality of computing and ICT resources are good, however, a number of computing rooms across the campuses need to be refurbished in order to provide a more conducive learning environment.

6.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most of the students present with essential skills needs, learning difficulties or have been identified as having additional support needs. They are responsive to their lecturers, are well-motivated and are producing good standards of work commensurate with their abilities. Most of the students are competent in their use of ICT, however, a minority of them do not make use of the college VLE and are not aware of their ability to access the learning materials remotely. While most of the students are making good progress in their learning on their main ICT programme, opportunities by staff to integrate the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are not being effectively managed and students are not making effective progress in the achievement of their essential skills. Over the past three years, the overall retention rate for the level 2 programmes is good at 81%; the success rate is satisfactory at 77%. The overall progression rate to further education, training or employment is excellent at 90%.

6.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning is good in most of the lessons observed. The lecturers are well prepared and make appropriate use of ILT to support their teaching and learning. Although they provide good learning support for the students in the classroom, both on a one-to-one basis and through a whole group approach, the e-ISLA which has been developed to identify on-going support for students and to review and monitor their progress, is not completed effectively by staff or students. The provision for CEIAG is currently under-developed and should be formalised. At present, a minority of the students interviewed in the lessons observed are unsure about continuing their studies in ICT or what alternative progression paths they can take. In addition, although a structured tutorial programme has been developed, its use by staff across the campuses is variable. The assessments used are at an appropriate level and good feedback is provided to the students. Staff should, however, consider the inclusion of more contemporary scenarios based on the industrial links that they have developed to make the programmes more relevant for the students. The use of industrial visits and guest speakers is also under-developed across the campuses.

6.6 CONCLUSION

In computing and ICT, the quality of education and training provided by the college is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the college's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

7. CURRICULUM AREA: ENGINEERING (ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC, AND MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Northern Regional College holds centre of excellence status for the priority skills area of manufacturing engineering. Enrolments for the level 2 engineering provision have grown substantially over the past three years; from a total of 28 enrolments across two full-time courses in 2005/2006, to 123 enrolments across six full-time and part-time courses in 2008/2009.

There is a good range of both full-time and part-time courses across the main campuses. The full-time provision consists of the Edexcel First Diploma in engineering on the Coleraine, Farm Lodge and Magherafelt campuses and is designed to offer an appropriate balance of mechanical and electrical units. The part-time provision comprises evening courses in fabrication and welding and AutoCAD on the Felden and Newtownabbey campuses. There is also a very good range of short specialised non-accredited engineering courses to support industry and a senior lecturer is in post to manage and develop this provision. Another senior lecturer is seconded to the Connected project, which provides a consultancy service to local industry.

Most of the students have a weak academic profile on entry to the full time programmes: 19% hold no qualifications on entry and only a minority (17%) hold a GCSE grade C or above in English and in mathematics (19%).

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are:

- the good range of level 2 engineering courses offered across the main campuses;
- the very good opportunities provided for the full-time First Diploma students to develop an appropriate range of craft skills that prepares them well for progression to further education, training and employment;
- the good retention, success and progression rates;

- the good standards of practical work and technical knowledge demonstrated by most students; and
- the good or better quality of the teaching and learning across most of the provision.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the limited capacity, at an operational level, to plan, develop and manage the curriculum coherently and effectively across the college;
- the wide variation in the quality of the accommodation and learning resources provided, for the students across the college, including access to specialist equipment; and
- the inconsistent approach in the provision of CEIAG and tutorial support to meet effectively the individual needs of the students to ensure good progression in their learning, particularly for those on the Coleraine campus.

7.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the leadership and management is good. Most of the programmes are well co-ordinated locally on each campus. There are, however, few opportunities for the lecturers to meet and to share good practice across the college. At the time of the inspection, key senior lecturer appointments had not been made and this is having a negative impact on both operational and strategic planning. As a result, there is wide variation in the quality and maintenance of the physical learning resources across the college, and there is a lack of coherence in the planning of the level 2 engineering curriculum across the college. The quality of specialist learning resources ranges from excellent on the Farm Lodge campus for manufacturing, to satisfactory, across other areas of the college, for electrical and electronic engineering. There is a wide range of progression routes available to students, including further study at the college in manufacturing or electrical/electronic engineering. The quality improvement planning across the provision is satisfactory only, with most self-evaluations being too descriptive rather than evaluative, and action plans not sufficiently focused with measurable and prioritised action points. The school has established very good links with industry and provides extensive non-accredited specialised engineering training. The use of these industrial links to contribute to, support and develop the mainstream level 2 provision is not fully developed.

7.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most of the students demonstrate good practical skills and understand appropriate key principles of engineering, including the ability to interpret drawings accurately, recognise and select components or materials, and to mark out and manufacture components to a specification. Most of the students demonstrate good standards of written and oral communication, including the effective use of appropriate technical language. They are enthusiastic and are committed to the achievement of their award and to progress to further education at a higher level. The three year average retention across the whole provision is good at 80%; the average success rate is good at 89%. Over this period, 140 students from a

total of 195 students enrolled achieved their qualifications, which is an achievement rate of 72% and is just above the average (71%) for all colleges in Northern Ireland. Progression rates across the provision are excellent with almost all of the students progressing to further education, training or employment. Attendance at the time of the inspection was variable across the provision and was mainly modest.

7.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning across the provision is good. Most lessons are well-planned with an appropriate range of teaching and learning strategies employed including demonstration, practical work, one-to-one and group work. The full-time programmes are well designed and include very good opportunities for the students to develop appropriate practical skills and technical knowledge in both electrical/electronic and mechanical engineering; this prepares them well for progression to further education, training and employment. A good feature of the full-time provision on the Farm lodge and Magherafelt campuses is the opportunity for alternative pathways for those students identified as at risk of not completing the full First Diploma qualification. These students have the option to transfer to the First Certificate qualification, or the Princes Trust programme. On the Coleraine campus, there is inadequate planning to provide coherent and effective learning support for those students with weaknesses in mathematics and numeracy. Professional and technical assessments are appropriate; they meet National standards, and in most cases the students are provided with constructive and timely feedback. Although the students have access to the college's e-ISLA and CEIAG resources, the use of these resources in tutorial sessions to help the students plan more effectively for their learning, is underdeveloped. Most of the students make regular use of ILT resources, which include specialist engineering design and simulation software. The effective use of the college's VLE to support and enhance the teaching and learning is, however, limited across the college.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In engineering, the quality of education provided by the college is good. The area has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the college has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

8. CURRICULUM AREA: ESSENTIAL SKILLS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Nearly all full-time and part-time students on a level 2 priority skills area course have appropriate opportunities, to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, and obtain an essential skills qualification where required. However the travel and tourism students in the Coleraine and Farm Lodge campuses have not had the opportunity to complete the essential skill of numeracy. The essential skill provision in the college is led by the head of school who was appointed in June 2008, and is supported by two senior lecturers.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are:

- the good or better quality of teaching and learning in most of the sessions visited; and
- the good relationships between the tutors and learners and the good support provided by the tutors.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the leadership and management for literacy and numeracy across the college including the more effective timetabling of essential skills classes; and
- the variable attendance at most essential skills classes, and the poor success rates.

8.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Essential Skills School is one of three schools managed by the head of faculty. The head of school who has been in post since June 2008, also carries out the senior lecturer role in the Coleraine and Ballmoney campuses. She is supported by two senior lecturers who have ten hours class contact time and have responsibility for essential skills provision on their allocated campuses. At present the two senior lecturers have no cross-college responsibilities and there is no-one clearly identified to provide curriculum leadership for literacy and numeracy across the college. There is no consistent cross-college policy on attendance at essential skills classes and the support provided, where there are attendance issues, varies between courses. Attendance at the essential skills classes visited varied between 22% and 100% with the average attendance being poor at 65%.

8.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

The standard of most of the learners' work was satisfactory or good as evidenced in their written work and their participation in discussions and answering questions during class. A significant minority of the learners are making slow progress in their essential skills due to poor attendance. In 2007/2008, the achievement rate for essential skills in all the college's level two priority skills provision is poor at 43%. The achievement rate in literacy is 44% which has fallen from 51% over the last three years. The achievement rate in numeracy is 43% which has risen from 27% over the last three years. For the same period, the overall retention rates are satisfactory for both literacy and numeracy at 78% and 74% respectively.

8.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The provision for learning ranged from satisfactory to very good, the majority being good or better. Where the quality of provision for learning is good the sessions were characterised by the lecturers' using active teaching strategies, including the good use of relevant and interesting learning materials, to engage the students. There was good use of differentiated learning tasks in the majority of classes. In the other sessions the students were not fully

engaged in the activities and there were little opportunities for them to discuss their work as the teaching was over-directed. There is limited use being made of the virtual learning environment and insufficient co-ordination of planning for effective delivery of the programmes.

8.6 CONCLUSION

In the essential skills, the quality of education provided by the college is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, quality of provision for learning and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the college's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

9. CURRICULUM AREA: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY (HOSPITALITY AND CATERING, AND TRAVEL AND TOURISM)

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The college provides a good range of full-time and part-time programmes in tourism and hospitality at level 2 across its main campuses in Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine and Newtownabbey. The provision consists of the Edexcel First Diploma in travel and tourism, and the NVQ level 2 in professional cookery, and food service. Students on full-time courses also have good opportunities to undertake additional qualifications such as the Certificate in Airline and Airport Customer Care and the Certificate in Airline and Airport Cabin Crew Operations, as well as short programmes in customer care, food hygiene, health and safety, and nutrition. The programmes provide good progression routes to employment and further education. Over the past three years, the numbers recruited to full-time programmes in this curriculum area have almost doubled from 18 during 2005/2006 to 32 during the 2008/2009 period.

9.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The main strengths are:

- the good management and co-ordination of the tourism and hospitality programmes;
- the good standards of work demonstrated by most of the students;
- the excellent retention and good success rates on the travel and tourism programme, and the good success rates across the hospitality provision; and
- the good or better quality of almost all of the teaching and learning.

The main areas for improvement are:

- the inadequate provision of a CEIAG programme across the curriculum area;
- the satisfactory retention rates across the catering programmes; and
- improved access to ICT resources across the provision.

9.3 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the level 2 programmes in tourism and hospitality are good and the programmes are co-ordinated effectively. Most of the lecturers are well-qualified and are deployed appropriately; a minority, however, lack recent industrial experience and would benefit from a period of professional development. Although some staff in this curriculum area have had opportunities to meet and to communicate informally, the planning of the provision and the sharing of good practice is under-developed. Industrial links are well-established; a good range of industrial visits or visits by guest speakers are used to good effect to inform and motivate the students. The CEIAG programme is inadequate across this curriculum area; the majority of the students interviewed have a poor knowledge of the progression and career opportunities which are available to them.

9.4 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

Most students demonstrate good practical skills which are well matched to the level they are working towards. Overall, the quality and presentation of dishes prepared by the students in hospitality and catering are good and mirror well the standards in industry. In travel and tourism, a range of realistic practical activities have been designed which enthuse, and challenge the students, including the planning and costing of holiday itineraries. There is a strong emphasis, across the provision, on developing the students' personal and transferable skills. Most students can apply effectively their knowledge of tourism and hospitality principles in their practical work and demonstrate good standards of written and oral communication. There are insufficient opportunities, however, for students to develop their ICT skills across the curriculum area. The average retention rates over the last three years in tourism, and hospitality and catering have been excellent at 91% and satisfactory at 73% respectively; the average success rates are good at 89% and 84% respectively. This is an achievement rate of 81% in travel and tourism which is well above the Northern Ireland average. The achievement rate in hospitality and catering matches the average (61%) for all colleges in Northern Ireland. Over the last three years, the average progression rate to further education and training is satisfactory at 77% on the tourism programmes. It is excellent at 100% and poor at 54% across the full-time and part-time programmes respectively in hospitality and catering. Attendance by the students, during the inspection, was good.

9.5 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

In tourism and hospitality the learning programmes are well-designed and provide the students with a broad and balanced curriculum. There are good opportunities for the students to develop both their practical occupational skills and technical knowledge. The quality of the teaching and learning is good or better in almost all of the lessons observed. The lessons are consistently well-planned, and include a broad range of teaching approaches including, demonstration, group work, discussion and one-to-one sessions which challenge and

motivate the students. The learning is enhanced and supported well with the deployment of chefs, cabin crew representatives and tourist advisors on course teams. The use of ILT to support teaching and learning, however, is underdeveloped, particularly the use of the college VLE across the provision. The quality of assessment is good, it is at an appropriate level and the lecturers provide good feedback and support to promote improvement. Good pastoral care arrangements are in place with most learners reporting that they are enjoying their learning experience and that they are well cared for and supported by the lecturers.

9.6 CONCLUSION

In tourism and hospitality, the quality of education provided by the college is good. This curriculum area has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the college has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the college's progress on the areas for improvement.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION AND KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education and training provided by the college is satisfactory: the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The college provides a satisfactory range of full and part-time courses in most of the priority skills areas. The inspection has identified key strengths in the quality of teaching and learning, the standards of the students' work and the good start that has been made in procedures for quality assurance. The inspection has, however, identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, the quality of provision for learning, and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the students are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the college's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

11. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

11.1 There is a need for the Northern Regional College's executive and senior management, and staff with key curricular responsibilities to:

- fully embed the quality improvement processes, including the involvement of staff at all levels in the rigorous self-evaluation development planning process;
- provide well maintained, high quality accommodation and learning resources for all students across the college, including access to appropriate specialist resources;
- review the curriculum planning for the level 2 priority skills areas to improve the provision for essential skills, industrial links and to incorporate a stronger focus on employability skills;
- provide scheduled opportunities for curriculum teams to meet, to share good practice, and to plan and develop course provision on a whole college basis;
- provide a formal CEIAG programme for all students enrolled on priority skills area programmes; and
- further develop and use ILT, including the VLE and e-ISLA, to support teaching and learning.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and Safety issues identified across the Northern Regional College, during the inspection, includes:

- the poor maintenance of some rooms; and
- the broken chairs in IT room and laboratories.

There is a need to ensure that workshops meet current legislative requirements for the extraction of solder fumes.

Health and Safety issues identified in the Newtownabbey campus, during the inspection, includes:

- two loose handrails near the learning resource centre;
- doors to cleared classrooms ready for demolition left open, room accessible to students with a risk of injuries from debris; and
- an open service shaft.

DEFICIENCIES IN EQUIPMENT

Deficiencies in equipment identified across the Northern Regional College, during the inspection, includes:

- low specification computers in some rooms;
- broken A3 printers; and
- a 30 day license for AutoCAD.

Deficiencies in equipment identified in the Coleraine campus, during the inspection, includes:

- the slow login connections to the network.

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