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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

A Report on the

Evaluation of the Second Year

of the Pilot Programme in

**The Essential Skill of
Information and Communication Technology**

2007-2008

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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

SUMMARY

1. BACKGROUND TO THE PILOT PROJECT

1.1 The commitment to introducing information and communication technology (ICT) as a third essential skill was contained within the Government's White Paper, 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential (July 2003). A similar commitment was contained within the Department for Employment and Learning's (the Department) Essential Skills for Living Strategy in October 2002. Significantly, the need for the general workforce to have well developed ICT skills was emphasised in the Sector Skills Agreement for Information Technology (IT): 2007-2010 Action Plan – Northern Ireland. It states that 'the vast majority of employees will need to be equipped with IT user skills, at a growing level of sophistication' and that the 'use of IT as an essential skill is as fundamental as literacy and numeracy; those who lack them will find their personal and professional lives limited in the same way that illiteracy impacts on lives today'.

1.2 In September 2006, the Department funded a pilot project for a new essential skill of ICT at levels 1 and 2, to include learners in full-time further education and training. During 2006-2007 an evaluation of the pilot project was carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) and a number of main priorities for development were identified. These included the:

- implementation of phase two of the pilot to include learners from other professional and technical areas and adult learners from the community and voluntary sector;
- increased collaboration and sharing of good practice across further education and training providers to strengthen the quality of teaching, training and learning for all learners;
- need for greater flexibility within the Jobskills provision to ensure that all learners are targeting an appropriate level of the ICT essential skill which meets their individual needs more effectively; and
- implementation of appropriate continuing professional development for participating tutors and the development of an appropriate tutor education policy.

1.3 An expanded phase two pilot project was offered during 2007-2008.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF PHASE TWO OF THE PILOT PROJECT

2.1 The main aims of phase two of the pilot project were to further develop and test a new assessment and accreditation regime at levels 1 and 2 for the introduction of ICT as a third essential skill, and to monitor and evaluate the findings of the pilot project to inform future policy for the roll-out of ICT as a third essential skill.

2.2 The main objectives were to:

- expand the pilot project to engage 1000 learners across a range of provision including part-time adult further education, community and voluntary organisations;
- test the appropriateness of the level 1 qualification for adults with no prior ICT skills;
- develop and implement an appropriate programme of tutor education which will ensure quality provision;
- develop an appropriate programme of training and continuing professional development to support tutors in implementing the ICT programme; and
- monitor the achievement of learners throughout the pilot in terms of retention and progression.

2.3 The pilot also aimed to identify examples of good practice to be shared with all the providers involved in and beyond the pilot.

2.4 The ICT essential skills standards are based on the ICT Skills for Life standards in Great Britain. Although the Skills for Life standards are available from entry level 1 up to level 2, phase one of the pilot in Northern Ireland focused on the provision of the ICT essential skills at levels 1 and 2 only, with a commitment to review the need for entry level provision at the end of the first year. Based on the outcomes of the phase one evaluation it was decided to continue to focus on level 1 and 2 provision only during phase two, and to continue to require learners to have achieved or be working towards level 1 in literacy and numeracy or equivalent as a necessary pre-requisite for participation in the pilot project.

2.5 Phase two of the pilot project was managed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) who, in collaboration with City and Guilds, organised a series of curriculum training events for participant tutors at regular intervals throughout the year.

3. PROVISION

3.1 A total of 20 organisations, some offering ICT essential skills provision across multiple campuses and out-centres, participated in the pilot programme (see Appendix 1). These included the six area-based further education colleges, twelve training providers and two providers of adult education. The ICT essential skills were offered to a range of learners including full-time and part-time further education learners, learners across most strands of the Training for Success (TfS) programme, learners on the Jobskills (JS) Traineeship and Modern Apprenticeship programmes, adult learners in both community and workplace settings and other adult learning provision. The ICT essential skills formed part of the framework requirements for the learners in the majority of the JS/TfS apprenticeship programmes visited as part of the evaluation.

3.2 Data made available by the organisations participating in phase two of the pilot at the time of the evaluation indicate that 515 learners were enrolled in total; 193 (37%) were on TfS programmes, 86 (17%) were on JS programmes, 100 (19%) were on full-time further education programmes, 26 (6%) were on part-time further education programmes, and 110 (21%) were on adult programmes.

3.3 Of the 515 learners, 400 (78%) targeted the level 1 ICT qualification, and the remaining 115 (22%) targeted level 2. On further education programmes 34 (7%) learners were working at level 1 with 92 (18%) at level 2. On the JS/TfS programmes 266 (52%) learners were working at level 1 with 13 (2%) at level 2. On the adult programmes 100 (19%) learners were working at level 1 with 10 (2%) at level 2.

4. THE EVALUATION

4.1 In May 2008, a team of four inspectors evaluated the work of almost all of the participating organisations. They visited 224 learners across the organisations and a range of provision including full-time and part-time further education courses, the JS programme, the TfS programme, work-based, community and other adult learning provision. Of the learners visited, 152 (68%) were working at level 1 and 72 (32%) at level 2.

4.2 The team observed 34 learning sessions across the organisations, sampled learners' work and held discussions with training managers, curriculum leaders, essential skills coordinators, learners, and ICT and professional and technical tutors. This report summarises the main findings from the evaluation.

5. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

5.1 The main strengths are the:

- management of the ICT essential skills provision;
- appropriately qualified staff and good use of resources across most of the organisations;
- good quality assurance arrangements across almost all of the organisations;
- good levels of motivation and the development of good standards of ICT skills by most of the learners;
- assessment tasks, most of which provide appropriate challenge and are set in a relevant technical and professional context, or are themed to suit the needs and interests of the learners;
- identification and good use, by most of the full-time further education and JS/TfS learners, of opportunities to transfer the skills and knowledge gained to their technical and professional areas of study;
- good quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed and the excellent support for the learners;

- satisfactory overall retention rate for current learners at 79%; and
- satisfactory overall success rate at 77%, for learners on phase one of the pilot.

5.2 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need for organisations to increase the overall number of learners;
- resources, accommodation and planning for the delivery of the essential skills qualifications, particularly within workplace settings, in a small number of organisations;
- slow progress towards achievement of the essential skills qualifications for a minority of learners, particularly within the training and adult provision;
- use of initial assessment to inform teaching, training and learning;
- use of innovative practices and new and emerging learning technologies, including the more effective use of Information and Learning Technology (ILT) to support teaching and learning;
- variation in the assessment practices across the organisations;
- tracking and monitoring of the learners' progress;
- need for pre-level 1 training for a majority of learners within the adult provision and a small number of other learners; and
- low progression rate (8%) of learners from level 1 to level 2 from phase one of the pilot.

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

6. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

6.1 The management and co-ordination of the ICT essential skills programmes across the centres is mostly good. Management have been supportive in releasing the tutors to attend training and support events organised by the awarding bodies, and have supported staff in their own continuous professional development. The essential skills qualifications are mostly well managed and co-ordinated. A small number of organisations, however, have not recruited any learners or have recruited learners late in the year which has had planning implications for the tutors, and created some timetabling issues. Overall, there is a need for organisations to increase the overall number of learners, in line with the Department's target.

6.2 Resources across the organisations are generally good and they are used appropriately by tutors and learners. In a small number of cases, however, there is little flexibility in the use of resources outside of timetabled classes, and a small number of learners do not have access to computers outside of classes or at home. In addition, access to software packages using moving images and sound is limited in some organisations, and in a small number of the organisations visited the resources, accommodation and planning for the delivery of the essential skills qualifications, particularly within workplace settings, are not adequate or appropriate for the needs of the learners or tutors.

6.3 Quality assurance arrangements are good across almost all of the organisations visited. In a small minority of organisations quality assurance procedures are weak, in terms of monitoring the overall quality of provision and the progression of learners and more rigorous procedures need to be developed.

6.4 Staff are appropriately qualified, at present, to deliver the ICT essential skills qualifications. There is a need, however, for tutors to undertake continuous professional development to keep up-to-date with the skills and knowledge necessary to use new and emerging technologies. In addition, a small number of tutors working across different campuses of the same area-based college feel that it would be beneficial for them to meet on a regular basis to develop common resources and discuss issues arising from the pilot project.

6.5 Most of the tutors visited comment positively on the technical support currently offered on the pilot programme by the Regional Support Centre for Northern Ireland (RSCni). There is also a need for tutors to recognise that learners with well-developed ICT skills are a valuable resource within the teaching group and they should be confident in their practice to allow those learners to demonstrate the use of new technologies and contribute more effectively to the learning experiences of others.

7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

7.1 Most of the learners are well motivated, engage well in their learning and value the ICT skills qualification. They enjoy their programmes and are gaining in confidence in their use and application of ICT. Within the JS/TfS programmes, however, there are issues arising with a small number of learners around behaviour, motivation and attendance.

7.2 Most of the learners are developing good standards of ICT skills and are progressing well in their learning. The summative assessment tasks provide appropriate challenge and are mostly set in a relevant technical and professional context, or are themed to suit the interests of the individual learners or groups of learners. In a small number of cases there is evidence that the learners, at both level 1 and 2, are encouraged to work beyond the requirements of their assessment task. In addition, there is evidence that a number of learners, who had previously developed a good range of ICT skills through informal learning and leisure activities, are availing of the opportunity to formalise those skills through an accredited qualification.

7.3 Most of the learners on full-time further education courses and on the JS/TfS programmes can identify and make good use of opportunities to transfer the skills and knowledge gained to their technical and professional areas of study. Examples include the improved presentation and layout of template tasks, effective use of internet search engines, the use of advanced software features to improve efficiency and the application of spreadsheets to solve problems and present information.

7.4 Progress to the achievement of the essential skills qualifications is variable across the programmes visited during the evaluation and is better within the full-time further education provision. Within the adult provision, in both the community and workplace settings, and in the JS/TfS programmes most of the learners are making good progress, however, a minority of the learners are struggling to complete the work within the defined timescales. This is due to a number of factors including; their knowledge and level of ICT skills at the beginning of their programme, access to computers outside formal teaching time, the demands of their technical and professional programme, the need for tutors to keep learners engaged and motivated, and attendance at ICT essential skills sessions.

7.5 There are some differences between, and a need for improved clarity in the demands of the awarding bodies, in terms of the expected standards of the final portfolio tasks to be submitted for certification. This includes the use of draft copies, annotation and e-portfolios.

7.6 Data made available by the organisations surveyed indicates that the overall retention rate, for the current learners, is satisfactory at 79%.

7.7 The same data indicates that the number of learners progressing from the level 1 to the level 2 qualification, from phase one of the pilot, is low at approximately 8%.

7.8 Data made available by the awarding bodies indicates that the overall success rate, for learners from phase one of the pilot, was satisfactory at 77%.

8. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

8.1 The tutors provide excellent support for the learners and good relationships exist between the learners and their tutors.

8.2 Although some examples of good practice exist, the use of initial assessment to inform teaching and learning is generally weak across the organisations. In most cases little use is made of the outcomes of initial assessment to place the learners into appropriate

programmes of learning, or to inform appropriate learning programmes. Across most of the TfS programmes learners are placed on a programme of learning that meets the framework requirements of their main technical and professional area, rather than matches their individual needs or prior experience.

8.3 The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good but few examples exist of the use of innovative practices and new and emerging learning technologies. In one college, there was good use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support teaching and learning, however, the use of ILT is generally under-developed. Where tutors have access to data projectors and interactive white boards these are used effectively to support teaching, training and learning. The potential for using more effectively the ICT essential skills area on the RSCni VLE as a communications channel and resource for sharing information and learning materials is not being sufficiently exploited by tutors and learners, it is used mainly as a repository for information. There is also a need for organisations to provide time for tutors to collaborate, share good practice and develop good on-line teaching, training and learning materials.

8.4 The formative assessment tasks and content of the final assignment templates are mostly developed in an appropriate context, or themed to suit the needs and interests of the learners. There is, however, a need for a small number of organisations to consider tailoring the final template tasks to suit the needs of individual groups of learners and provide more appropriate challenge to the more able learners.

8.5 There is variation in the assessment practices across the organisations. In the best practice, formative assessment takes place through a series of developmental tasks with good feedback to the learners and evidence of good progress in skills development. In a minority of organisations a small number of formative assessments are taking place, with little or no feedback to the learners prior to undertaking the summative assessment activity. In addition, organisations need to consider the use of more flexible models of delivery to develop the skills needs of learners, for example, the use of front-ended, or short block delivery to allow learners to develop appropriate skills before applying them effectively in a technical and professional context.

8.6 There is variation in the tracking and monitoring of the learners' progress across the organisations. In the best practice learners have individual tracking sheets which are updated by the tutor on a regular basis to indicate progress made. There are some instances, however, where tutors are not tracking progress or providing good enough feedback to learners. There is a need for both awarding bodies to highlight best practice and for organisations to introduce rigorous monitoring and tracking procedures.

8.7 From the lessons observed during the evaluation, it is evident that a majority of adult learners, in both community and workplace settings, and a small number of other learners would benefit from training at pre-level 1. This would provide these learners with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills before undertaking and progressing on to the essential skills qualifications at level 1 and beyond. In addition, in a small number of cases on the TfS programme, learners have been enrolled who do not meet the entry criteria. Whilst their ICT skills are good, they have not achieved or are working towards level 1 in literacy and numeracy, which is a necessary pre-requisite for organisations participating in the pilot project. More rigorous procedures need to be put in place, by both the awarding bodies and the participating organisations, to ensure that all learners satisfy the entry requirements.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Although the original target of 1000 learners has not been achieved, phase two of the pilot project for the essential skill of ICT has seen an increase in both the number of participating organisations and learners. There has been a significant increase in the number of adult learners, and learners within the training sector, however, the numbers in the further education sector have remained static. The evaluation of the pilot has identified important strengths in the education and training provision across the participating organisations. These include the good management and co-ordination of the programmes, the development of good standards of ICT skills, the quality of the assessment tasks, the transfer of skills and knowledge by the learners to their technical and professional areas, and the good quality of teaching and learning.

9.2 The evaluation has also identified a number of areas for improvement which need to be addressed if the needs of the learners and those of the community and the economy are to be fully met. These include the need to provide additional training at pre-level 1 for those learners who do not have the necessary skills to undertake training at level 1 and beyond, the improved use of initial assessment, the more effective use of innovative technologies and ILT, and the need to improve the resources, accommodation and planning in a small number of organisations.

9.3 The evaluation also highlights the good support provided for tutors delivering the ICT essential skills qualifications, and the need for an on-going programme of training and continuing professional development to remain in place, including the provision of opportunities to share good practice. In addition, there is a need for organisations to monitor more effectively the retention, success and progression rates of the learners.

10. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

10.1 The key priorities for development are the:

- need for organisations to increase the overall number of learners, in line with the Department's target;
- use of initial assessment to inform teaching, training and learning;
- use of innovative practices, and new and emerging learning technologies including the more effective use of ILT to support teaching, training and learning;
- need for pre-level 1 training for a majority of learners within the adult provision and a small number of other learners; and
- need to improve the resources, accommodation and planning in a small number of organisations, for the delivery of the essential skills qualifications, particularly within workplace settings, which do not meet adequately the needs of the learners or tutors.

DETAILS OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Belfast Metropolitan College
Customised Training Services
Dairy Farm Training
Derry Youth and Community Workshop
Hair Academy
HMIP Maghaberry
HMIP Magilligan
Impact Training
Northern Regional College
North City Training
North Down Training
North West Centre for Learning and Development
North West Regional College
Southern Regional College
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South West College
Springvale Learning
Wade Training
WEA
Workforce Training

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