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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI Programmes

Southern Regional College

Inspected: April 2009

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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

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by Southern Regional College.

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has a 6-point grading scale as set out below.

GRADE	DESCRIPTOR
1	Outstanding
2	Very good
3	Good. Areas for improvement which organisation has the capacity to address.
4	Satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed.
5	Inadequate
6	Unsatisfactory

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Southern Regional College supplies Training for Success, ApprenticeshipsNI and residual Jobskills programmes for the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) in three contract areas, Armagh, Newry and Mourne and Portadown. Southern Regional College was formed in August 2007 following the merger of the former Armagh College of Further Education, Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education and the Upper Bann Institute. The college has five main campuses located at Newry, Armagh, Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge, and an additional six sites located in Newry, Kilkeel and Armagh. The Southern Regional College training organisation is the result of a merger between the training organisations of each of the three colleges. The primary sites for the delivery of Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes are the main college sites in Armagh and Portadown and the Greenbank campus in Newry.

1.2 Southern Regional College provides professional and technical training for young people and adults from a wide geographical area which stretches from South Armagh to Lurgan, and includes four local government districts. According to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure, one-quarter of the Newry and Mourne population live in the third most deprived Super Output areas in Northern Ireland. The Income Scale shows that there are 57,797 people living in the Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Newry and Mourne local government districts experiencing income deprivation, while the Employment Scale shows that a total of 24,793 people in the Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Newry and Mourne local government districts experience employment deprivation (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency).

1.3 In September 2007, the Department replaced the Jobskills training programme with Training for Success. In September 2008, the Department further revised the programme and restructured it into two separate programmes, Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI. The revised Training for Success programme provides training for learners who have not yet found full-time employment, while the ApprenticeshipsNI programme provides employees in paid employment an opportunity to work towards the achievement of an industry-approved Apprenticeship Framework.

1.4 Training for Success is designed to enable participants to progress to higher level training, further education, or employment by providing training to address personal and social development needs, develop occupational skills and employability skills and, where necessary, Essential Skills training. It is delivered through three components: Skills for Your Life (formerly Personal Development) aims to address the personal and development needs of young people who have disengaged from learning and/or have significant obstacles. Skills for Work focuses on enabling young people to gain skills and a Professional and Technically Related Qualification at Level 1 to help them gain employment, or progress to Pre-Apprenticeship or Apprenticeship provision, or to further education. The third component, the Pre-Apprenticeship programme aims to help those who have been assessed as being capable of achieving a Professional and Technically Related Qualification at Level 2, but who have not yet secured employment, to prepare for future progression to employment as an apprentice. For young people with a disability, where appropriate, the duration of all three components of Training for Success can be extended from 52 weeks to a maximum of 156 weeks.

1.5 The Southern Regional College training organisation has undergone considerable transformation since September 2008. The training managers of each of the former training organisations retired in June 2008 and the three training organisations have since been merged. The restructuring which has taken place within the college has also had major implications for the staffing arrangements within the training organisation, with a number of relatively recent appointments at middle management level. In addition, the implementation of the Training for Success 2008 and ApprenticeshipsNI programme has posed challenges for staff. Traditionally, each of the three former training organisations had focused primarily on professional and technical training in the traditional craft areas of construction and engineering. Only one of them had made specific provision for trainees with additional learning needs, under the former Jobskills Access programme. Southern Regional College has established a partnership with Clanrye Training to make provision for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with significant personal, motivational and behavioural problems, which often include Essential Skills needs and poor records of attendance and achievement in school.

2. PROVISION

2.1 Recruitment to the training organisation has remained relatively stable over the past three years. At the time of the inspection, 1,069 trainees and apprentices were registered with Southern Regional College: 484 on Training for Success; 373 on ApprenticeshipsNI and 212 on residual Jobskills. Of the residual Jobskills cohort, six were on Access programmes, eleven on Traineeship programmes, and 195 on Modern Apprenticeship programmes. Of the trainees on the Training for Success programme, 16 were registered on Personal Development or Skills for Your Life, 168 on Skills for Work, 300 on Pre-Apprenticeship. There were 373 apprentices on the ApprenticeshipsNI programmes; most are on construction or engineering programmes. There are 61 apprentices registered on health and social care programmes and a small number in child care, customer service and hospitality and catering.

2.2 A noticeable trend during 2008/2009 is the reduced number of people going into Training for Success construction areas. The current economic downturn in the construction sector has resulted in a reduction in trainee numbers across a number of these programmes, particularly trowel occupations. In contrast, the numbers recruited onto motor vehicle programmes have increased significantly over the past year. Recruitment to fabrication and welding, horticulture and land based service engineering is low. Most of the directed training for the Training for Success programmes and ApprenticeshipsNI is delivered on one of the five main Southern Regional College sites. Provision of Training for Success programmes includes a wide range of construction and engineering programmes.

2.3 Most (98%) of the trainees on the Training for Success programme and most (71%) of the apprentices on ApprenticeshipsNI are male. A significant minority (42%) of the trainees on the Skills for Your Life programme and the majority of the apprentices following the childcare, health and social care and hospitality frameworks are female. Trainees and apprentices enter the programmes with variable levels of achievement. Most of the trainees on the Training for Success programme are 16 year old school leavers, ranging in ability from those with good results in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in at least four subjects to those with no evidence of achievement. GCSE results range from grade A to grade G with the majority of grades ranging from grades D to F. Of the 2008 Training for Success cohort, 17% of the trainees held either or both GCSE English or GCSE mathematics, at grade C or above.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 On the basis of information available to the Department, including a range of inspection reports, Southern Regional College was designated, prior to the inspection, as a provider of high quality training, with the capacity for sustained self-improvement. The training organisation was therefore inspected on a proportionate basis, as a low-risk provider. In recognition of the changes that had taken place both within the college structure and in the Training for Success 2008 and ApprenticeshipsNI programme, a proportionate and longitudinal model of inspection was undertaken.

3.2 In September 2008 and April 2009, a team of inspectors carried out evaluations of the effectiveness of the organisation's leadership and management across the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes Southern Regional College provides for the Department. In particular, the inspection focused on the efficacy of the organisation's key processes including; strategic and operational planning; design, delivery, and evaluation of teaching, training and learning; provision of care, support and guidance, and the implementation of self-evaluation and improvement planning.

3.3 The inspection teams held extensive discussions with the Chief Executive and with members of the senior management teams of both Southern Regional College and Clanrye Training. In addition, interviews were held with professional and technical and essential skills tutors, co-ordinators, monitoring, support and development officers and employers. The inspectors scrutinised Southern Regional College and Clanrye Training's self-evaluation and quality improvement plans, sampled professional and technical and Essential Skills portfolios, internal and external verifier reports and other relevant documentation. They also visited Training for Success trainees and apprentices in the workplace, and met with groups of trainees and apprentices.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of training provided by Southern Regional College is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address any remaining areas for improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- commitment of managers and staff at all levels to the development of a culture which supports improvement;
- very good quality of the training provided for young people with multiple barriers to learning on the Skills for Your Life programme;
- very good standards of practical skills demonstrated by most of the trainees and apprentices across the professional and technical areas;
- good support provided to the trainees and apprentices by the tutors, monitoring officers, and support staff;

- strong relationships which have been developed with local schools, and with a wide range of relevant statutory and voluntary agencies, including the Department’s Careers Service, and staff from the Health and Social Care Trust; and
- well-designed procedures for the collation of data on key performance indicators, including retention, success and progression.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- expansion of the Skills for Your Life and extended Skills for Work programmes, to make appropriate and suitable provision available throughout the region for trainees with major barriers to employment, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities; and
- further design and implementation of robust quality assurance and improvement processes for the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes.

4.4 Grades

	Grade
Overall Grade	3
Contributory grades:	
Leadership and Management	3
Achievements and Standards	3
Quality of Training and Learning	3

Grades continued

Area	Grade
Preparation for Life and Work	3
Careers education, information advice and guidance	3
Preparation for Employment	3
Trainee Support	2
Assessment of trainees' needs and abilities	
Guidance and counselling	3
Essential Skills Communications	3
Essential Skills Application of Number	3
Essential Skills Information and Communication Technology	3

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of the leadership and management of Southern Regional College is good at all levels of the organisation. The Chief Executive and the senior managers, including the Assistant Director for Skills Training provide strong strategic direction. The recently appointed Head of School of Apprenticeship Training and the three deputy Heads of School provide good leadership for course teams in construction and engineering. They are developing a clear understanding of the requirements of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes and are working hard to standardise the curriculum and assure the quality of the provision across the campuses. The course co-ordinators value the opportunity to meet together to share practice within and across their professional and technical areas. There are good opportunities for staff to engage in continuous professional development. An extensive programme of relevant staff development has been put in place to address issues identified during the first phase of the inspection, including sessions on initial assessment and personal development planning, which have resulted in noticeable improvements in provision.

5.2 The retention, success and progression rates on the Skills for Your Life programmes for the 2007-2008 cohort were excellent at 92%. Overall, however, since the introduction of Training for Success in 2007, the retention rate across the training programmes has decreased. Of the 581 Training for Success trainees recruited in September 2007, 187 left the programme early, leading to a modest retention rate of 68%. Southern Regional College has

implemented a retention strategy to address this issue; as a result, retention rates across the programmes have improved this year. In April 2009, the average retention rate on Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes increased to 84%, which is good. The average retention rate for Essential Skills is excellent at 92%, and the success rate is good at 80%.

5.3 In the Jobskills programmes across the period 2004-2007, average retention rates on the Access programme were modest at 68%; they were satisfactory on the Traineeship programme at 73% and good on the Modern Apprenticeship programme at 82%.

5.4 Management information data is collated and evaluated regularly, and is increasingly being used effectively to identify and address areas in which improvement is required. Good systems for the production of relevant data on key performance indicators have been instrumental in supporting the drive to raise standards, enabling work to commence on internal benchmarking. In addition, the implementation of electronic registers has enabled managers and course tutors to collate data on attendance patterns and monitor retention rates across the programmes.

5.5 The numbers of trainees on Skills for Your Life and extended Skills for Work programmes are low. Currently, provision for trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities is inequitable across the main college sites. Since 2007, the college has been involved in a partnership with Clanrye Training who delivers the Skills for Your Life programme for a small number of trainees on the Slieve Gullion site in Newry. The collaborative arrangements between Southern Regional College and Clanrye Training are effective in promoting the interests of the learners; they serve to maximise the considerable expertise of both organisations, and add considerable quality and value to the Training for Success programme.

5.6 The provision for the design, delivery, and evaluation of teaching, training and learning and arrangements for care, support and guidance are good, and are mostly effective in promoting well-planned and coherent training experiences across the provision. The quality of the teaching, training and learning in Southern Regional College is mostly good or better. Of the 44 lessons observed during the inspection 20 (45%) were very good, 13 (30%) were good, 10 (23%) were satisfactory and 1 (2%) was inadequate. The quality of the provision on the Skills for Your Life programme is very good.

5.7 Staff in Southern Regional College are working to identify a clear and coherent curriculum offer for trainees on all of the programmes they offer, including each of the strands of Training for Success. The procedures for tracking, monitoring and evaluating trainee progress across the organisations are systematic and rigorous. The development of refined selection criteria and enhanced initial assessment have been identified by Southern Regional College as key priorities in the drive to improve retention, and considerable work has been undertaken to develop procedures which will ensure that trainees are placed on the programme that matches best their individual needs, interests and aptitudes. To this end, the vocational tutors from Southern Regional College have had the opportunity to attend a staff development session to learn from the good practice in initial assessment observed in Clanrye Training during the first phase of the inspection.

5.8 The quality of the careers education, information, advice and guidance is good and impartial and informed guidance and support is an integral part of the provision for trainees and apprentices. The college has dedicated careers staff and monitoring officers who work hard to support the good work undertaken by the vocational tutors. Appropriate policies and procedures in relation to the protection of Young People and Vulnerable Adults are in place.

5.9 The procedures for self-evaluation and improvement planning are not currently sufficiently well developed in Southern Regional College to ensure that rigorous quality improvement arrangements are in place across all of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes. The use of information and learning technology to support teaching, training and learning needs to be extended, to further improve the quality of the provision.

5.10 The Chief Executive and the senior managers of both Southern Regional College and Clanrye Training represent their organisations on a range of key strategic groups, including the Workforce Development Forum, where local and regional labour needs are discussed. In addition, the college has also undertaken a study of the education and training needs and barriers to participation in the five local neighbourhood renewal areas, and this contributes significantly to labour market intelligence to inform planning.

5.11 Good relationships have been developed with a wide range of organisations from the statutory and voluntary sectors, including the Southern Region Transition Officers, relevant staff from the Education and Library Board, the Department's Careers Service, the Probation Service and organisations which specialise in addressing drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues; these links are highly effective in providing appropriate levels of support for trainees and apprentices. In addition, the College, in collaboration with staff from another College and from the local Health and Social Care Trusts, has recently implemented an innovative 'Health Promoting College' pilot project.

6. CONCLUSION

Southern Regional College is a significant provider of Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in the Southern region, particularly in the priority skills areas. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address any remaining areas for improvement.

KEY PRIORITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

The implementation of the actions identified in the self-evaluation and quality improvement plan, to further develop and co-ordinate provision in a wider range of technical and professional areas.

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