
ETI: Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all Learners



Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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1. Introduction

The Department for Employment and Learning¹ (Department) requested the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to carry out an evaluation of the arrangements across the six colleges of further education to support the development of Youth Training pilot programmes at level 2, as part of the implementation of the Department's Youth Training Strategy, 'Generating our Success - The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training'. The evaluation was carried out in two phases, in November 2015 and March 2016, and feedback was given to the Department and the individual colleges during each phase. The following is a written summary of the overall main findings across the Northern Ireland further education sector.

2. Context

The Department asked the six colleges of further education to submit proposals for pilot Youth Training programmes in June 2015. Sixteen pilot programmes were accepted by the Department in the professional and technical areas listed below and were developed by the colleges during July and August 2015. The pilot programmes were delivered in the colleges from September 2015.

College	Youth Training pilot programmes at level 2	Duration (years)
Belfast Metropolitan College	Engineering	2
	Hairdressing	2
	Health and Social Care	1
South Eastern Regional College	Horticulture	2
	Professional Cookery	2
	Mechanical Engineering	2
	Motor Vehicle	2
Southern Regional College	Business Studies	1
	Built Environment	1
	Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD)	1
	Information Technology	1
Northern Regional College	Business Administration	2
	Travel and Tourism	1
North West Regional College	Hairdressing	1
	Health and Social Care	1
South West College	Hairdressing	1

3. Summary of overall main findings

- Management and staff across the six colleges of further education are highly committed to piloting innovative programmes that will inform the full implementation of the Department's Youth Training Strategy.
- Good levels of collaboration and effective working relationships have been established between the colleges, to support the development and implementation of the pilot programmes, all of which are closely aligned to their original proposal specification.

¹ The functions and services delivered by DEL transferred to the Department for the Economy on 9 May 2016.

- A range of models have been used effectively across the colleges to support the development and delivery of the pilot programmes, which has allowed them to trial various elements of the Youth Training Strategy and identify potential issues to inform future planning.
- While the range of pilot programmes across the colleges is currently narrow, the Department has put in place processes to support the development of further pilot programmes across a wider range of professional and technical areas². The colleges, however, need to maintain effective communication with the cross-college curriculum working group³ to ensure their planning for future programmes is informed by the ongoing work of the group to support the development of the Youth Training Strategy. Consideration should be given to the nomination of a senior management representative in each college to act as a link with the group to support this process.
- The pilot programmes developed across the colleges provide students with a curriculum offer which is equivalent to five General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications at grades A* to C including English and mathematics qualifications at level 2, and reflect all of the required elements outlined in the Department's Youth Training Strategy. All of the colleges provide the students with the opportunity to achieve essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy, while a minority also provide opportunities to achieve GCSE English and mathematics as part of their pilot programme.
- More economically relevant curricula should be developed across the colleges with greater involvement of employers in the design of the programmes and the related assessment process.

Example of effective practice in curriculum planning - The well-balanced curriculum and planning for learning, in one college, incorporates effective use of the College's industry standard training workshops and specialist equipment in motor vehicle and mechanical engineering, to develop the student's practical skills, confidence and work-readiness.

- Across the colleges, appropriate self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes have been put in place to monitor and improve the quality of the pilot programmes.
- The quality of learning, teaching and training observed on the pilot programmes across the colleges is mostly good or better. Where the learning experience was of the highest quality, the tutors provided well-planned opportunities for the students to engage in active learning. The lessons placed a strong emphasis on innovative engagement, with an appropriate focus on the development of the students' personal and employability skills to further support their learning. Research and group activities were used effectively to support the students' development of communication skills and team work.

² Sector curriculum groups will focus on developing learning outcomes, assessment and teaching strategies for ten professional and technical areas initially in phase 1 (March 2016) and a further six in phase 2 (April 2016).

³ The group is chaired by the South Eastern Regional College which is the college co-ordinating the pilot programmes across the further education sector.

- There is evidence in a majority of the colleges of the effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) across the two phases of the evaluation, including the use of mobile devices and blended learning, though this continues to be an area for ongoing development.

Example of effective practice in the use of ILT- *In one pilot programme, the effective use of blended learning and a well-developed electronic assessment portfolio engages the students, and encourages them to take more responsibility for their own progress and development.*

- Relevant work-experience opportunities have been provided for most of the students across the pilot programmes through a range of different models including placements of one or more days each week, block placements of one week several times across the year, volunteering, and work inspiration activities. The colleges should continue to review and evaluate work-experience activities to ensure they meet the needs of all students, particularly those who may display language difficulties, disabilities, or confidence issues, and to ensure the various types of work-experience models reflect the demands of the different professional and technical areas.

Example of effective practice in employer engagement - *In one pilot programme, there has been particularly effective employer engagement. This has included the innovative planning and development of work-experience opportunities to facilitate sampling by students of a range of different business job roles in the workplace, including administration, customer service and retail. The students have valued this breadth of experience which has helped to inform their progression decisions and career pathways.*

- Most of the colleges have implemented effective processes to ensure that workplace buddies are in place for those students on work-experience placements. There is variation, however, in the understanding of the role of the buddy and what is expected from them.
- An appropriate start has been made to support the development and implementation of project-based learning in the pilot programmes, however, across the colleges, there is variation in the definition and understanding of what exactly project-based learning is, and in the range and quality of the projects being developed.
- In the majority of colleges, there are limited opportunities for the students to achieve GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics. In addition, the colleges need to consider more strategically how a GCSE qualification can be delivered effectively over the course of a one-year or two-year programme. In the best practice observed, there is strategic whole-college planning, including associated continuing professional development for staff, to develop clear progression pathways for all students, where possible, to target GCSEs in English and/or mathematics.

Example of effective practice in developing literacy and numeracy - In one pilot programme there is good development of the students literacy and communication in the professional and technical elements of the course through the effective use of technical language and a variety of well planned activities that include posters, research and presentation on relevant subjects, seasonal discussion topics, and the development of a social media site which facilitates feedback from followers.

- The arrangements for the pre-entry guidance, recruitment, initial assessment and induction processes need to be further developed, across the colleges, to take account of the varied entry profiles of the students, including their individual learning and progression needs and barriers to learning, to ensure they are well prepared for and able to access a relevant level 2 programme.
- The students, across the colleges, have access to high levels of pastoral care and are supported well in their learning, though more work is needed to plan for and measure effectively the development of their personal, social and work-readiness skills and their independent learning capabilities, in order to support their progression to further training or employment.

Example of effective practice in personal development - In a number of colleges there is good use of local, national and international competitions, in hospitality and catering and in hairdressing, to support the development of the students' employability skills, their personal and social capabilities, and professional and technical skills and competences.

- The quality of the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance is mostly good or better across the colleges. Most of the students interviewed were aware of possible progression routes to further education, training or employment, including self-employment.
- There is a need for the youth training strategy to be promoted more effectively to pupils and parents in post-primary schools and for schools and colleges to work more collaboratively to actively inform the pupils about the range of career and progression opportunities available to them through the programmes offered.
- The standards of work demonstrated by the students on the pilot programmes, across the colleges, are mostly good or better; the students are well-motivated and, to date, are progressing well on their professional and technical programmes. In addition, retention rates are mostly good or better across the pilot programmes.

4. Key priorities for development

As the pilot programmes develop further, it will be important that the colleges:

- further improve their communication with the cross-college curriculum working group to ensure the ongoing work to support the development of the Youth Training Strategy effectively informs related college planning;

- continue to review and evaluate work-experience activities to ensure they meet the needs of all students, and exploit fully the learning from the placements by further refining the project-based learning approach; and
- further develop models of delivery that enable students to progress toward achieving a GCSE qualification in English and mathematics at grade C or above, where appropriate, including the associated need for the professional development of staff.

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