

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

Nithcree Training Services Limited

A report by HM Inspectors

20/06/2023

CEO/Principal	Jo Edkins
External review date	17th May 2023
Provider type	Independent Training Provider
Lead HMI	Dr John Laird
Apprentice numbers	125

1. Background

External reviews of Modern Apprenticeship providers are planned collaboratively between the provider and HM Inspectors. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provide information regarding provider performance including key data to support this process.

During the review, a team of HM Inspectors evaluated the quality of training provision and the experiences of apprentices and key stakeholders such as employers. During the visit, the team met with staff, learners and other stakeholders and explored the quality of training delivery, how well the needs of apprentices are met, and approaches to improving quality of provision.

This report summarises the findings from the visit, award grades for the three elements and highlights areas of positive practice, areas for development, and any associated main points for action. The report will be shared with the provider, Scottish Government, and SDS. For colleges, the report will be shared with the College Principals and Board or Regional Strategic Body, and SFC. An accompanying short report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

2. The provider and its context

Nithcree Training are a specialist private training provider supporting the road haulage industry. Their main premises are located in Dumfries. They offer a range of training programmes, specialising in driver training, with focus on HGV training. They also deliver training related to forklift and crane operation. They have been established within the haulage training industry for over 20 years, offering a range of entry-level and professional learning programmes. They currently deliver the MA in Freight Operations.

3. Outcomes of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Quality Culture	Good
Service Delivery	Very Good
Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices	Very Good

4. Summary of review findings

A summary of the findings of HM Inspectors are set out below.

4.1 Leadership and Quality Culture - Grade: Good

4.1.1 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- The provider conducts an effective initial assessment of each candidate's suitability for the programme, including identification and recognition of prior learning and experience. This enables apprentices to be assessed against the knowledge, skills, and behaviour requirements of the apprenticeship framework.
- Assessors make good use of informal discussions held with apprentices to identify challenges and good practice approaches. Quarterly verification meetings, involving assessors, are used constructively to share this feedback, resulting in helpful steps in improving provision.
- Assessors conduct regular review meetings on employer premises with each apprentice to discuss their progress. This ensures the employer and apprentice have a shared understanding of progress made against the apprenticeship framework.
- Almost all employers value the support and communications from the provider. The provider is regularly in contact, and employers confirm that any operational matters or information requests raised with the provider are dealt with promptly and helpfully.
- Apprentices and employers have the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation of their MA programme through informal conversations, such as meetings with their assessor, and through a survey of their experiences. All major employers respond well to surveys received; however, this mechanism is less effective for apprentices as response rates are low.
- There have been some significant and useful changes made to the overall programme, as a result of stakeholder feedback received. Examples include an improved induction programme, and the introduction of an employer incentive aimed at increasing the pace of apprenticeship completion.

Areas for development

- Formal feedback received from apprentices through surveys is of a relatively low response rate and needs to be more systematically collated with a clear recording of actions taken.
- Some staff do not yet collect and analyse apprentice feedback to support self-evaluation or to reflect on the impact of any improvement actions.

4.2 Service Delivery - Grade: Very Good

4.2.1 Delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Staff use an effective induction programme for apprentices that supplements the employer's own induction arrangements, and helpfully includes opportunities to identify individual learning needs. Where support needs, such as dyslexia, are identified, the provider responds well and meets these needs sensitively.
- Apprentices are supported well by their assessors with regular contact received via text messages and email, as well as site visits. Assessors help prepare apprentices for external testing, and work in a constructive and timely way to provide tailored support in any areas where the apprentice is less confident.
- Almost all apprentices confirm that the mock tests given by the provider lead to an exceptionally high pass rate on external tests, and they value the quality of support received.
- Apprentices are guided well to reflect on and learn from, their workplace experiences. There is active encouragement to learn independently through: employer support; reflection on performance; the use of apps; on-line resources; and the providers website.
- Staff deliver the apprentice programme in a sector with notable labour shortages. They use the MA well to upskill drivers, supporting them through HGV testing, and more broadly, give them a wider understanding of the freight industry. This helps prepare apprentices for career progression.
- Almost all apprentices describe positively the supportive and helpful working relationship they have with their assessors. There is clear communication about progress being made and helpful guidance where further work is needed. Assessors work flexibly to fit in with the work patterns of apprentices, which is helpful to both apprentices and employers.
- Employers confirm high levels of satisfaction with Nithcree Training staff, highlighting good communication and support received. A few employers have transferred to Nithcree Training from other providers, because of their reputation for high levels of support and successful outcomes.

Areas for development

- None identified.

4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- Internal verification processes are in place, are used well by staff, and meet awarding body quality assurance standards well. Standardisation meetings are scheduled regularly. These meetings ensure assessors apply qualification standards appropriately. External verification reports received have been positive, requiring no remedial action.
- Apprentices have some influence over their continuing training needs. In addition, employers provide support for additional training or qualifications for specialist areas of work.
- All apprentices receive additional training in fuel efficient driving, building on feedback, to fit with the needs of employers and upskill the apprentices.
- Assessors undertake industry related professional learning. This ensures assessors remain occupationally competent and are aware of emerging industry standards and adhere to the requirements of regulatory organisations.
- All major employers respond to the three surveys per year and provide useful feedback for improvement. This has helped, for example, in updating and informing the revised induction process.

Areas for development

- Arrangements for quality enhancement are relatively informal, and the recording of all issues and actions is not systematically in place. This limits the ability to track progress clearly.

4.3 Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices - Grade: Very Good

4.3.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices confirm their MA programme has enabled them to grow in confidence within their job role. Apprentices acknowledge that the training received has equipped them with the knowledge and skills required for their work roles.
- Nithcree Training staff provide regular updates to employers about the progress of their apprentices. This ensures employers have an awareness of the assessment process and associated success criteria. This helps employers to take an active role in developing the knowledge, skills, and behaviours the apprentice would benefit from for their on-the-job training.
- Where apprentices leave an employer, the provider is active in encouraging these individuals to complete their studies. This has resulted in a number of apprentices remaining who may otherwise have dropped out of their programme.
- Nithcree Training's successful completer/leaver ratio for the last three years is consistent with the SDS target and is above the sector average for this particular framework.

- Assessors provide supportive and constructive feedback to apprentices. This feedback is used effectively to inform apprentices about their progress and signpost opportunities for developing their skills further. The extensive use of video recording supports apprentices to reflect and improve.
- Nithcree Training offers additional tuition and support to apprentices if there are any particular areas of concern about their progress. This often means integrating them into other specialised learning programmes providing helpful in-depth learning.
- Staff keep clear and useful records of individual apprentice progression. They helpfully prompt apprentices in areas such as planned assessments or meetings, and remind employers about their commitments to elements such as medical appointments or booking external testing.

Areas for development

- A few apprentices are unclear about the aims and content of their MA programme.

4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance

Areas of positive progress

- Apprentices and employers are briefed clearly about the steps to be taken to ensure compliance with general health and safety requirements and are well supported to conform in a highly regulated industry. They understand the process used to raise any concerns in terms of safety or wellbeing.
- The provider works sensitively to identify and help apprentices who have identified learning support needs. Where there may be issues such as literacy challenges or dyslexia, appropriate support is provided, and suitable assessment adjustments are made.
- Assessors understand the requirements of equality and diversity procedures and policies and are proactive in ensuring that these are promoted to apprentices and employers.
- All employers complete a site selection checklist which ensures the working environment is safe and appropriate for assessing the award. This confirms adherence to health and safety, legal and insurance requirements.
- Nithcree Training celebrates apprentice success through use of social media. They have a particular focus on promoting freight industry careers for women and underrepresented groups.

Areas for development

- By leaving apprentice recruitment fully in the hands of employers, Nithcree Training has limited opportunity to influence the recruitment of under-represented groups in the industry. The levels of representation of apprentices who are care-experienced, from ethnic minorities or have a disability are low compared to the national profile.

4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Programmes are accessible, and in line with the legal lower age restrictions and medical requirements for the industry sector. Nithcree Training staff constructively support apprentices with a wide range of backgrounds and individual needs.
- Programmes are highly flexible, with learning and assessment approaches contextualised well by staff to the workplace. Assessors are flexible in their work approaches and will visit at times and locations to meet the needs of the employers and apprentices.
- Apprentices are engaged well in the development of core skills in their Scottish Vocational Qualification assessments. These skills are contextualised well and are appropriate for the industry need.
- Staff responded well to periods of closure due to the pandemic and social distancing requirements. They converted their own training vehicle to a safe learning environment to support employers and apprentices.
- The overall rate of apprentice completion declined as a result of DVLA reduced access to testing and changes to the testing requirements for class C, E and BE licences. This meant that some apprentices no longer needed the qualification and withdrew from their programme. Others also left their programme early because of the significant delays experienced in receiving test results from this change.
- Almost all employers value the support and the qualifications on offer through the MA programme. It supports new entrants and assists experienced workers to progress to a higher level of work. This is a helpful contribution to the economy in a sector with notable labour shortages.
- Nithcree Training staff attend Developing the Young Workforce and publicity events to promote the MA programme to young people. Participation in these activities helps promote awareness of career opportunities within the haulage industry.

Areas for development

- Information on progression to employment or further learning is not routinely collected or used to inform improvements to the provision.

5. Main points for action

- None identified.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

- None identified.

7. What happens next?

Overall, HM Inspectors are confident that the provider has the capacity to continue to improve and will make no further visit as a result of this inspection.

Dr John Laird
HM Inspector

Appendix 1 Grades used in reporting

A common grading scale is used in making judgements for provider reviews:

- Grade 1 EXCELLENT – Outstanding and sector leading
- Grade 2 VERY GOOD – Major strengths
- Grade 3 GOOD – Important strengths with some areas for improvement
- Grade 4 SATISFACTORY - Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- Grade 5 WEAK – Important weaknesses
- Grade 6 UNSATISFACTORY – Major weaknesses

Summary

- An evaluation of **excellent** applies to training which is of a very high quality. An evaluation of *excellent* represents an outstanding standard of training which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the current provision. It implies that very high-levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.
- An evaluation of **very good** applies to training characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish apprentices' experiences. While an evaluation of *very good* represents a high standard of training, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to provide training without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the provider will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.
- An evaluation of **good** applies to training characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of *good* represents a standard of training in which the strengths have a significant positive impact. However, the quality of apprentices' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the provider should seek to improve further the areas of important strength but take action to address the areas for improvement.
- An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to training characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of *satisfactory* indicates that apprentices' have access to a basic level of training. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on apprentices' experiences. However, while the weaknesses will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of apprentices' experiences. It implies that the provider should take action to address areas of weakness while building on its strengths.
- An evaluation of **weak** applies to training which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of *weak* may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish apprentices' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the provider.
- An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major weaknesses in training, requiring immediate remedial action. The training experience for apprentices is at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for training evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the immediate support given by the provider.

Appendix 2 Evaluative Terms

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.