Summarised review findings

Modern Apprenticeship Reviews, 2015-2020

October 2020

Contents

1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings of the external review of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) provision by HM Inspectors between 2015 and 2020. The report outlines key areas of positive practice in the delivery of MAs, and identifies aspects of MA provision where further improvement is required. The purpose of this report is to promote what is working well, and to help to secure improvement in the quality of the learning experience for apprentices.

1.1 Context

In 2014 the Wood Commission report, [Education working for all: developing Scotland's young workforce](#) made 39 recommendations intended to ensure that Scotland made good progress in producing better qualified, work-ready and motivated young people, with skills relevant to modern employment opportunities. The commission identified a disparity between the scrutiny of further education and vocational training and that of MA programmes. In response, Education Scotland was commissioned by Scottish Government to undertake external scrutiny of the 'off-the-job' training elements of MA programmes.

> "Education Scotland's remit should be extended to include inspection and quality improvement for the delivery of Modern Apprenticeships." The Scottish Government, (2014:31).

1.2 The framework for Modern Apprenticeship reviews

The framework for the external review of MAs is based on the quality elements within the National Quality System, in collaboration with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Scottish Government and industry partners. In 2014, working closely with SDS, Education Scotland developed an external review methodology for MAs which takes full account of the SDS Quality Assurance Framework. The review methodology is based on self-evaluation, external scrutiny and public reporting. The first three MA sector reviews focused on 'off-the-job' training as requested by the Scottish Government. Following careful consideration of how well these reviews contributed to improving MA provision, the review methodology was extended to include 'on-the-job' training in May 2018. An overview of the quality framework, methodology, quality indicators and themes is available [here.](#)

1.3 Delivery of Modern Apprenticeships

Across Scotland, MAs are delivered by employers, further education colleges and independent training providers (ITPs). The majority of the funding for MA provision delivered by colleges is provided on a contract basis by SDS with some funding from the Scottish Funding Council. Funding for MA provision delivered by ITPs is solely on a contract basis with SDS. Within these contracts, irrespective of provider type, all MA programmes must meet the quality standards set out in the SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework. SDS seeks assurance that ITPs are meeting the required quality standards through its own internal quality assurance arrangements.

1.4 The review process

A team of HM Inspectors, supported by Associate Assessors (AAs) from SDS, colleges and ITPs, carry out the reviews of MA programmes. Each review team benefits from the expert knowledge and industry-related experience of AAs. The scope of external review for each occupational sector is agreed in collaboration with SDS, and includes visits to a sample of training providers. Review activities include the observation of apprentices' training and assessment, together with professional dialogue with MA programme managers, staff, employers and apprentices and site visits to providers and employer premises.

A report is prepared for each training provider in the sample, which includes grades, highlighting the strengths and areas for development of their training provision. The findings from all training provider reports inform the production of a national report for individual occupational sectors, which is published by Education Scotland. The national reports contain recommendations for Education Scotland, training providers, employers and SDS. These national reports inform Scottish Ministers about the quality of MA training, assist training providers to plan for and secure improvement, and include examples of highly effective practice across occupational sectors.

2. Summary of review findings

Education Scotland published six national MA occupational sector review reports between 2015 and 2020. Evidence for these national reports was drawn from over 80 visits to employers, colleges and ITPs.

The first of the national reports was used to assess the effectiveness of the newly devised quality arrangements. Two further 'off-the-job' reports were published by May 2018, after which all reports included a review of MA training for both 'on-the-job' and 'off-the-job' elements. Two bespoke MA reviews were also conducted at the request of Scottish Ministers.

2.1 Published MA reports from 2015 to 2020

The table below provides a list of all the MA reports published by Education Scotland between 2015 and 2020. Each of these is available on the Education Scotland website.

Occupational Sector	Publication Date	Type
Engineering (pathfinder report)	2015	off-the-job
Hairdressing	2016	off-the-job
Automotive Engineering	2017	off-the-job
learndirect review	2018	At the request of Scottish Ministers
Information and Communications Technology	2018	On-and off-the-job
Hospitality	2019	On-and off-the-job
PeoplePlus (formerly learndirect) follow-up review	2019	At the request of Scottish Ministers

Social Services (Children and Young People)	2019	On-and off-the-job

2.2 Grades awarded for occupational sectors

The table below shows the grades awarded within the six published national reports for all MA occupational sectors:

Key Principles	Outcomes and Impact		Service Delivery		Leadership and Quality Culture	
High-level questions	Apprentice Progress and Outcomes	Meeting Needs of Stakeholders	Delivery of Training	Management of Training	Strategic Leadership	Capacity to Improve
Engineering	excellent	very good	very good	excellent	very good	very good
Hairdressing	good	good	good	good	good	good
Automotive Engineering	very good	very good	very good	very good	very good	n/a
ICT	very good	very good	very good	very good	very good	n/a
Hospitality	very good	very good	very good	very good	very good	n/a
Social Services (Children and Young People)	very good	good	very good	very good	good	n/a

Overall, most grade profiles are strong. Engineering achieved the highest grades of the six occupational sectors, with Automotive Engineering, ICT and Hospitality also demonstrating a strong performance. However, the Social Services (Children and Young People) review produced a mixed grade profile. Hairdressing performed less well overall in comparison with the other sectors.

The grade profile above illustrates that almost all occupational sectors provide a high standard of service delivery. Learning and teaching, subject expertise of teaching staff and the management of training delivery demonstrate strong grade profiles in almost all sectors, apart from hairdressing.

2.3 Highly effective practice

HM Inspectors identified a number of examples of highly effective practice from both large and small training providers across the six MA occupational sectors. For example, in the automotive sector a bespoke outward bound week is used effectively to contextualise core skills for apprentices. By the end of the week, those apprentices that complete the tasks achieve most of the core skills required for their level of study, in addition to gaining confidence and leadership skills. In the ICT sector, industry recognised vendor qualifications are delivered alongside on-the-job training of apprentices. Employers value this combined delivery model which provides apprentices with up-to-date professional skills and knowledge. For young people who face significant barriers to training and accessing employment opportunities in the hospitality sector, one training provider works closely with community groups. The delivery of training is paced appropriately and tailored to individual needs, with an emphasis on developing apprentices' confidence and independence.

2.4 Attainment

In some training providers, particularly ITPs, rates of attainment are very high and quality arrangements are effective. In these organisations, there is strong leadership for quality and a culture of continuous improvement. However, around half of the national reports identify areas for development in training providers for levels of attainment by apprentices. The grade profiles indicate that the performance of training providers in the key principles of outcomes and impact, and leadership and quality culture varies across occupational sectors and individual providers. In those providers that do not secure high apprentice attainment rates, the strategic leadership and quality culture grades are often not strong. Less effective strategic leadership is characterised most often by areas for improvement in goal setting for apprentices, partnership working, employer involvement, and employer feedback.

3. Summary of recommendations from MA reviews

The table below provides a summary of the recommendations from all national MA sector reports, consolidating the areas for improvement suggested by HM Inspectors according to how frequently they appear in the national sector reports.

Consolidated recommendations

• **Improve engagement and formal communication with employers**
    – Providers should involve employers fully in discussions regarding the choice of optional units in the MA programme.
    – Employers should be involved in discussions about programme design and the progress of their apprentices.
    – Employers should understand fully the role they have in supporting apprentices with their training.
 	
• **Contextualise core skills units with industry relevant examples**
    – Providers should ensure that apprentices do not repeat previously achieved core skills units as part of their MA programme.
    – Core skills training should challenge apprentices to improve these skills within their job role, be specific and be contextualised to the job role.
    – Training staff should also ensure that apprentices recognise fully how they are developing their core skills.

- **Recruitment from priority groups**
  - Providers should develop more effective strategies to encourage applicants from under-represented groups to apply for apprenticeships.
  - Recruitment processes should include collaboration with employers to ensure a more representative balance of applicants with protected characteristics to meet or exceed SDS national benchmarks.

- **Systematic gathering of feedback**
  - Providers should improve formal mechanisms to gather feedback from apprentices and employers.
  - Regular and systematic gathering of feedback from staff, apprentices and employers should be used more effectively to inform the planning of improvements to MA programmes.

- **Self-evaluation**
  - Providers should ensure that self-evaluation arrangements are more systematic and link effectively to action planning for the improvement of MA programmes.
  - Action plans should include Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound targets to enable the monitoring of continuous improvement.

- **Promoting excellent practice**
  - The promotion and development of practices from those centres with excellent grades for their MA programmes should be shared more widely across all providers.

- **Attainment rates**
  - Providers should ensure that attainment rates for all apprentices improve and meet or exceed the national benchmark rate for each occupational sector.

- **Information and communications technology (ICT)**
  - Providers should ensure that apprentice progress is not hampered by poor internet connectivity or unreliable ICT equipment.
  - Staff knowledge of Virtual Learning Environment resources should be developed further and access to industry software should be improved.

- **Progress of apprentices**
  - Providers should ensure that all apprentices are given regular opportunities to discuss their training needs jointly with assessors and their employers.
  - There should be a stronger focus on matching individual apprentice training with their job role to support them in making good progress.

- **Involvement of apprentices**
  - Apprentices and employers should be more involved in the setting of targets and progress monitoring.
  - Apprentices and employer should be more involved in the planning of learning and assessments.

4. What is working well?

The following table provides a summary of the aspects of MA provision where areas of positive practice have been identified consistently. They relate to the quality of programme delivery, intelligence gathering, staffing, meeting external requirements and supporting apprentices.

Areas of positive practice from training providers in all national sector reports:

• **Quality assurance of delivery arrangements**
    – Curriculum teams have effective arrangements for assuring the quality of delivery of individual MA programmes.
• **Staff**
    – Teaching staff are experienced in the occupational sector of the MA programmes they deliver. They apply their professional knowledge and use resources well.
• **Staff development**
    – Career Long Professional Learning has a positive impact on the professional practice of staff.
• **Awarding body and industry body requirements**
    – Training providers meet the requirements of industry and awarding bodies well. They review regularly their arrangements to meet these requirements.

Areas of positive practice from training providers in almost all national sector reports:

• **Initial assessment and induction**
    – Almost all training providers offer accessible and flexible MA programmes. They have effective arrangements in place to assess the needs of apprentices and employers.
• **Management of sub-contractors**
    – Those training providers that sub-contract some or all elements of their MA programme delivery, manage these contracts well.
• **Use of Labour Market Intelligence to inform programme delivery**
    – Almost all training providers make effective use of local labour market data to inform the planning and delivery of their MA provision.
• **Strategic engagement**
    – Almost all training providers have effective strategic and collaborative arrangements with partners to provide extra support for apprentices.

5. What needs to improve?

Over time, published MA review reports have identified important areas for development, common to all occupational sectors. It is intended that senior managers within training providers take forward the findings from national reports to help secure improvement to MA provision. However, the recurring nature of these areas for development indicates that these issues have not yet been addressed fully.

Based on the consolidated recommendations outlined previously, the most significant themes for the improvement of MA programmes are:

Leadership and management of MA programmes

1. the need to improve engagement with employers;
2. more focus on increasing the numbers of apprentices from under-represented groups;
3. improvements in approaches to gathering of feedback are systematic; and
4. the need to improve self-evaluation arrangements.

Delivery of MA programmes:

5. the need to improve core skills delivery and contextualisation;
6. the need to address the variability in attainment rates among providers and frameworks;
7. increased involvement of apprentices and employers in target-setting and progress monitoring; and
8. the need to involve apprentices and employers in the planning of learning and assessments.

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