External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

Dumfries and Galloway College

A report by HM Inspectors

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Apprentice numbers	165

1. Background

External reviews of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) 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. The team met with staff, apprentices and other stakeholders. Discussions focussed on the quality of training delivery, how well the needs of apprentices are met and the approaches to improving the quality of provision.

This review includes the evaluation of the quality of the provision where the provider also sub-contracts delivery of certain elements of the apprentice programme to other external providers. The review was undertaken over two phases. Phase 1 included visits to the providers contracted to deliver elements of the programme, and phase 2 comprised a visit to the provider, and included consideration of the findings from the first phase. This report summarises the findings from the visits, awards 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 college, Scottish Government, and SDS. The report will also be published online by Education Scotland.

2. The provider and its context

Dumfries and Galloway College is a regional college with campuses in Dumfries and Stranraer. The college provides education and training across the south of Scotland, offering programmes from Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 2 to 8.

As a key provider of MAs in the region, the college currently supports 165 apprentices across various programmes. Around 70% of these apprentices are enrolled in engineering and health and social care sectors, which are key employment areas within the region. Apprenticeship delivery is managed by a skills development manager, supported by two coordinators and team leaders, with teaching and assessment supported by lecturers and assessors. The college delivers apprenticeship training across a geographically dispersed region, working closely with employers to address workforce development needs and support regional economic priorities.

Dumfries and Galloway college subcontracts two MA frameworks to external training providers. Automotive training is delivered through GTG Training Limited, and Construction: Building training is subcontracted to Competence Matters.

3. Outcome of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Quality Culture	**Very 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: Very Good

4.1.1 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training.

Areas of positive progress

- The college has introduced a new management structure in the work-based learning skills area to strengthen oversight, enhance coordination, and improve the overall quality of apprenticeship delivery. This is driving significant improvements in the delivery of the MA programmes and has resulted in increased apprentice success rates across almost all frameworks.

- Senior leaders, staff, and employers collaborate effectively to enhance apprenticeship learning through the college's self-evaluation and portfolio review process. This structured approach ensures all stakeholders contribute meaningfully to continuous improvement and training delivery.

- Useful employer reference groups, established within each curriculum area, assist curriculum teams and programme managers in identifying career and skills gaps. These groups help determine programme requirements to best meet industry standards.

- Business Development team members visit employers every six months to conduct helpful post induction review discussions. The outcomes from these meetings have resulted in revisions to onboarding arrangements and more effective and efficient induction arrangements.

- Refinements to the college onboarding process have significantly improved retention and performance across most frameworks. Effective use of eligibility and suitability tests helps ensure apprentices are placed on programmes that best match their qualifications and skill levels, maximising their potential to succeed.

- Subcontractor staff use the college's online quality assurance arrangements to follow a clear and consistent approach to planning, delivering, and assessing programmes. This helps ensure a standardised approach that aligns well with the college's quality standards.

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Areas for development

- A few employers report that the emphasis by the skills delivery team on meeting individual apprentice's target milestones can detract from supporting their broader learning and professional growth.

4.2 Service Delivery – Grade: Very Good

4.2.1 Delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Assessors provide effective guidance to apprentices, helping them cross-reference evidence and integrate meta skills across different units. Assessors and employers work well with apprentices to help them identify key skills using a meta skills wheel. This resource helps apprentices recognise, track, and apply relevant skills to their job roles.

- Assessors use project-based learning and real-world assessments effectively, enabling apprentices to apply their knowledge in practical settings while strengthening problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Assessment methods have been strengthened to better align with industry standards and apprentice needs. The introduction of more workplace-based assessments, supported by employer feedback, ensures apprentices demonstrate competence in real-world settings. This is enhancing their readiness for employment.

- Most assessors integrate assessment activities successfully into workplace schedules. This flexible approach ensures apprentices can balance training with job responsibilities effectively.

- Most assessors provide clear feedback on evidence generation, using effective questioning, fostering meta skills development, and explaining relevant theories. This approach deepens apprentices' understanding and enhances their ability to apply learning in the workplace.

- All apprentices have access to learning resources which are hosted on the college online learning management platforms. These digital resources promote independent learning, enhance digital skills, and support remote engagement between apprentices and assessors.

- Team leaders and assessors work effectively to monitor apprentices' progress and identify areas for improvement using a *RAG* system. Action plans are agreed during monthly review meetings to help apprentices stay on track. Employers attend these meetings, ensuring all stakeholders are fully informed of the progress apprentices are making.

- Apprentices report consistently that their training is directly applicable to their workplace roles. This supports them to link their learning to what they are doing with their employer.

- Most employers confirm good levels of satisfaction with programme delivery and are content with the quality of the training provided.

Areas for development

- None identified.

4.2.2 Staff reflection on training

- Work based learning and curriculum teams conduct effective annual reviews and programme planning, as part of the college's *Stop, Evaluate, Enhance* (DGSEE) initiative. These arrangements enable teams to reflect on programme performance and quality of provision. This supports continuous improvement well.

- Assessors from subcontractor participate in college standardisation meetings. These sessions ensure consistency, drive continuous improvement, and help maintain high-quality standards by facilitating the sharing of best practice approaches.

- Assessors and curriculum teams meet regularly to discuss teaching strategies, assessment methods, and techniques that support apprentice success. These meetings provide a useful platform for sharing best practice, exchanging ideas, and collaborating on ways to enhance apprentices' learning experiences.

- Staff use a range of innovative approaches to engage apprentices in their learning. Examples include interactive digital portfolios, which enable apprentices to track progress and receive real-time feedback, and virtual assessment tools that support remote evaluations and improve flexibility. Lecturers in the construction department have also designed an app linked to the college learning platform, providing apprentices with access to resources, assessments, and progress tracking for a more integrated and accessible learning experience.

- Assessors from subcontractors report that feedback from the college's internal verifiers is detailed and constructive. It highlights strengths, identifies areas for improvement, and ensures assessments align closely with industry and qualification standards.

- All assessors and internal verifiers participate in annual peer-to-peer observations. These help assessors enhance their professional knowledge, refine their skills, and drive continuous improvement. They also provide a forum for assessors to learn from each other and share best practices.

- Some curriculum areas offer apprentices opportunities to obtain additional industry recognised certifications. These enhance apprentices' skills, improve career prospects, and align well with industry needs and workforce development priorities.

- Most assessors participate actively in industry sector events and quality group meetings. They keep informed about industry developments, emerging skills, and best practice approaches. This continuous professional learning strengthens their expertise and ensures training delivery remains aligned with current workplace expectations.

Areas for development

- In some areas, assessors are overly reliant on reflective accounts as the primary evidence source. This limits apprentices' ability to showcase their skills through a range of assessment approaches.

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

- Assessors conduct formal review meetings every 12 weeks to discuss apprentice progress. This approach ensures employers and apprentices have a shared understanding of the milestones being achieved against the apprenticeship framework.

- Apprentices benefit from a wide range of helpful resources to support their attendance throughout the programme including food banks and free breakfast and lunch provision. Youth workers provide useful on-campus sessions on gender-based violence, use of social media, money management and gambling addiction. Spectrum Life offers a 24/7 service to support wellbeing needs and provides self-harm kits.

- Staff attend a diverse range of professional learning opportunities to support them in their roles, including suicide awareness, gender-based violence training through the Emily Test, and mental health first aid awareness. These initiatives help ensure a responsive, supportive environment for apprentices.

- Support staff and assessors work sensitively to identify and help apprentices who have learning support needs. Where there are support requirements such as literacy challenges or dyslexia, appropriate support is provided promptly, and suitable assessment adjustments are made.

Areas for development

- None Identified.

4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance

Areas of positive progress

- The safeguarding team meet monthly to review any safeguarding referrals and track the impact of support provision. These meetings ensure close monitoring of support arrangements, introduce adjustments where appropriate, and help apprentices make good progress.

- Staff implement health and safety policies and procedures effectively. Apprentices understand their role in relation to health and safety. These arrangements are explained at induction and are reinforced by assessors during one-to-one sessions and progress review meetings.

- Assessors understand the importance of equality and diversity policies and procedures and are proactive in ensuring these are promoted well to apprentices and employers.

- The college safeguarding lead and relevant managers have attained appropriate safeguarding qualifications. This helps ensure work-based learning staff and apprentices are guided and supported appropriately in safeguarding requirements.

- Almost all staff have undertaken mandatory safeguarding training. This equips staff with the knowledge and skills required to support apprentices' needs.

Areas for development

- Not all employers are sufficiently aware of the college's safeguarding policy and as a result, they are not fully aware of their responsibilities in safeguarding apprentices.

4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- The overall success rate for MA frameworks has significantly increased over the last four years. The frameworks in Business and Administration, Social Services (Children and Young People), Technical Apprenticeship, and Facilities Services is above the SDS benchmark.

- The number of apprentices from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and those declaring a disability is steadily increasing. This growth reflects Dumfries and Galloway College's commitment to widening participation and promoting an inclusive learning environment.

- All employers value the apprenticeship programme, acknowledging that it meets their business needs and contributes to workforce development through relevant skills training.

- Individual training plans are developed collaboratively, ensuring apprentices, employers, and assessors set clear goals. Additional support needs are identified timeously, with assessors providing tailored assistance throughout the programme.

Areas for development

- Overall rates of successful completion for a number of apprenticeship frameworks are below the SDS framework achievement rate. These include Social Services, Children and Young People, Automotive, and Engineering.

- The gender balance across most apprenticeship frameworks remains below the national average.

Main points for action

The following main points for action are required:

- The college should improve apprentice successful completion rates for those MA frameworks where they are low.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

None identified.

7. What happens next?

HM Inspectors are confident that the provider has the capacity to continue to improve and HM Inspectors will make no further visits to the provider during this cycle as a result of this review.

HM Inspector
Jacqueline McLellan

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.