

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

Dundee and Angus College

A report by HM Inspectors

20/06/2023

CEO/Principal	Simon Hewitt
External review date	3rd May 2023
Provider type	College
Lead HMI	Dr John Laird
Apprentice numbers	376

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

Dundee and Angus College is a large, multi-campus college operating from campuses in Dundee and Arbroath. The college delivers a range of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) programmes at levels 2 to 10 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), including degree level qualifications. The college employs around 1,000 staff.

The college has a large number of employer links and is the skills partner for a series of major economic recovery projects within the region which are of national significance. These include: the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc (MSIP); the Northern Lights e-Sports Arena development; the Eden Project Scotland; Dundee Waterfront; the Montrose Port development; and Angus Drone Project.

The college is active within the Tay Cities Deal and leads a project on the development of precision engineering. The college has regional partnerships with Angus Council and Dundee City Council, NHS Tayside, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, the Chamber of Commerce, SDS, various community and employer organisations, the local universities, and other colleges. The college delivers a significant volume level of work-based learning and Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and is a main contractor.

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	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

- Staff make good use of feedback from apprentices, development officers and employers to support improvement. Almost all employers feel engaged in self-evaluation arrangements and are able to offer suggestions for improvement. There are a number of examples of improvements made as a result of these engagements, for example, enhancements to the induction process.
- Staff and development officers communicate regularly to monitor the progress that apprentices are making. This is helping the early identification of support requirements for individual apprentices who may need it.
- Managers and staff engage well in the college Work Based Learning Forum to discuss common issues and identify improvements to practice, including an improved and more uniform approach to mental health support.
- Staff include enhanced learning opportunities within some MA programmes to help apprentices prepare for future skills developments. For example, a focus on electric and hydrogen vehicles is included in the automotive programme.
- Staff collaborate well with employers individually and through regional employer forums to ensure that the content of programmes is appropriate to their needs and the needs of the apprentices and the regional economy.

Area for development

- In some programme areas, approaches to self-evaluation and planning for improvement have not yet resulted in improvements to successful completion rates.

4.2 Service Delivery - Grade: Very Good

4.2.1 Delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- College staff ensure that lessons are well planned, clearly structured and supported by useful and appropriate resources.
- Access to industry standard resources in college ensures that apprentices are well equipped to deal with evolving and emerging technologies. For example, digital technology is used well by staff for communications and to support apprentices to access useful learning resources.
- All teaching staff have relevant and up to date professional knowledge and use this well to develop and enhance the skills of apprentices.
- Apprentices value the skills and qualifications they gain and can identify and confidently discuss how these help in their job role.
- All apprentices reflect on their learning with development officers through review discussions and the use of reflective logs. This is helping apprentices to develop skills for independent learning.
- MA programmes are delivered flexibly by staff who allow employers to co-design delivery within framework parameters. This helps college-based learning activities to compliment the needs of employers.
- The college is well represented on industry advisory groups and work well with awarding bodies. This helps the staff to stay up to date with industry developments, identify future skills gaps and to secure strong relationships with employers.
- Almost all employers are satisfied with college MA provision. The college has increased levels of employer engagement and included bespoke training packages and employer guest lectures to support apprentices to develop appropriate skills and achieve.
- Teaching staff work well with awarding bodies to include simulated work activities to support apprentices whose employer may not be able to offer the work experience required for them to demonstrate competency.

Area for development

- None identified.

4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- The monitoring and verification of the delivery by staff works well, and staff use apprentice and employer feedback effectively to identify issues and aspects for improvement.

- All apprentices receive appropriate support prior to commencing their qualification. Prior learning, including core skills, and any additional support needs are appropriately identified to ensure that existing skills are recognised and that support needs are met.

Areas for development

- A few employers have limited communication with staff and do not feel sufficiently engaged with staff regarding the needs of their business and the progress of their apprentices.
- The college does not routinely collect information on apprentice progression to employment or further learning on successful completion.

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

4.3.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- Staff ensure that a strong industry focus within MA programmes meets the needs of employers and supports apprentices to make progress in their learning.
- The range of apprenticeship programmes available fits well with regional economic needs in areas such as care and engineering.
- Almost all employers consider that apprenticeship programmes add value to their business and meet their needs well. They report apprentices are more committed to their role than those entering employment with them through other progression routes.
- In the majority of MA programs, apprentices are encouraged to provide relevant examples from the workplace to support their learning during lessons which ensures that college learning is closely linked to their workplace experiences.
- College managers and staff work well with employers to identify and adopt current industry practice and ensure it is used in delivering apprenticeship programmes.
- College development officers monitor progress well at quarterly meetings and set goals for apprentices which are easily understood by the apprentices and employers. This allows apprentices to progress at their own pace through their programme.
- Almost all employers and apprentices are happy with the quality of learning and teaching at the college.

Area for development

- None identified.

4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance

Areas of positive progress

- College staff ensure apprentices are aware of requirements regarding safeguarding and health and safety. These areas are explained well during apprentice induction and reinforced by development officers during progress reviews.

- Development officers understand college equality and diversity arrangements and policies well and are proactive in ensuring that they are promoted to apprentices and employers.
- Development officers are appropriately qualified and experienced in their roles and maintain professional learning in line with the requirements for regulatory organisations.
- Quality assurance arrangements and internal verification procedures are in place to meet awarding body requirements. These processes and systems ensure MA programmes meet the required awarding body standards.
- All apprentices are supported well on their programme by college staff and know who to contact should they have any wellbeing issues. College staff are quick to help apprentices with issues or signpost specialist support if needed.

Area for development

- None identified.

4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- In 2021/22, overall rates of successful completion were higher than industry sector-specific averages in half of the frameworks delivered.
- MA programmes are accessible and provide an appropriate degree of flexibility for both apprentices and employers. The college supports apprentices well where absence or work priorities may affect their college attendance.
- Development officers discuss the range of optional units available with apprentices and employers. This collaboration ensures units align with the employer job specification requirements and that apprentices experience learning that is applicable to their career aspirations and job role.
- Apprentices take an active role in setting goals and objectives to ensure they are taking ownership of their progress. This provides opportunities for apprentices to reflect on their progress and plan effectively for the next steps in their learning.
- Almost all employers are positive about their relationships with the college. They are satisfied with the training provided and the progress apprentices are making in enhancing their meta-skills, which prepares apprentices well for their future careers.

Areas for development

- Overall, the proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their programme relative to the number of new starts has declined over the last three years. The total successful apprenticeship completer/leaver ratio for the last three years has declined and is significantly below the national SDS benchmark.
- Apprentices on two sector frameworks are performing significantly below the SDS framework completer or leaver ratio. For example, Engineering is 30% below and Social Services and Healthcare is 40% below levels of sector framework performance

5. Main points for action

The following main point for action was identified.

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

6. Examples of highly effective practice

There was one example of highly effective practice identified in relation to the work of the Students' Association in engaging with and supporting apprentices.

7. What happens next?

Overall, HM Inspectors are confident that the provider has the capacity to continue to improve. However, progress is required in improving the rates of successful completion for apprentices. HM Inspectors will review progress towards the main point for action through engagement with the college link HM Inspector.

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.