

# External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

Borders College

A report by HM Inspectors

18/07/2023

<b>CEO/Principal</b>	<b>Pete Smith</b>
<b>External review date</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup> May 2023</b>
<b>Provider type</b>	<b>College</b>
<b>Lead HMI</b>	<b>Ian Beach</b>
<b>Apprentice numbers</b>	<b>380</b>

## 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

Borders College operates in single college region in the Scottish Borders across four campuses: Netherdale campus in Galashiels; the Hawick campus, which houses the Department of Enterprise and Business Innovation; a land-based campus at Newtown St. Boswells; and a construction hub in Tweedbank.

The college delivers a range of further and higher education programmes from level 1 to level 11 at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), including Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships. The college also provides industry-based training courses for businesses throughout Scotland and has developed partnerships with several Scottish universities to provide learners with progression to degree level programmes.

Borders College is the largest training provider in the Borders region and has a range of employer links for training which include Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders, and City of Edinburgh Council. Most businesses in the region are small to medium-sized enterprises and almost all of these have less than ten employees.

### 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

- Almost all apprentices participate actively in enhancing their training experience and outcomes through regular meetings held with their assessors, employers, and line managers.
- The college has established several employer forums, including Construction, Health and Social Care, Childcare, Hospitality, and Council Apprentices. These forums provide useful opportunities to discuss the content of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) frameworks, Continuous Lifelong Professional Learning (CLPL), regional employment trends and emerging challenges. Senior managers use the outputs from these forums well for self-evaluation and curriculum planning.
- Assessors attend regular face-to-face meetings with their line manager and focus groups with colleagues where they discuss improvements required to MA programme delivery and unit content. This approach helps ensure programmes meet the needs of apprentices and employers and provides a platform for sharing best practice.
- The senior team has developed arrangements for comprehensive data gathering and analysis for all MA frameworks using a commercial software programme. All candidates, assessors, and managers, have access to personalised, real-time data about the progress made by apprentices. For managers, this detailed information about candidate and framework performance informs well action planning for improvement.
- College managers undertake quarterly reviews of all MA frameworks to assess their performance and identify improvements required. This involves collaborative discussions between employers, assessors, and apprentices. College managers use outcomes from these reviews effectively, together with key performance and survey data, to make appropriate adjustments to improve apprentice outcomes.
- College managers make effective use of Regional Skills Assessments, Labour Market Information (LMI) data, and their local knowledge of employment opportunities, to plan and

adjust the MA curriculum offer. This helps ensure MA programme delivery meets the needs of apprentices, and employers and remains relevant to the regional economy.

### **Areas for development**

- None identified.

## **4.2 Service Delivery - Grade: Very Good**

### **4.2.1 Delivery of training**

#### **Areas of positive progress**

- All apprentices receive a high quality, comprehensive induction to their MA programme and this helps them settle into their programme well. Assessors work collaboratively with new apprentices to ensure that they select vocational units that fit best with their job role.
- There are good quality relationships between apprentices, assessors, and employers. Almost all apprentices report that they are supported well during their apprenticeship. They know who to contact should anything of concern arise, and staff refer them quickly to specialist support services, helping them to continue with their apprenticeship.
- Assessors recognise the workload pressures on apprentices and adjust their training plans and timescales to prevent overload. Assessors, wherever possible, integrate units and assignments, and this helps reduce the assessment burden.
- College-based lessons are planned well, are structured clearly in partnership with employers, and are supported by appropriate teaching resources. Teaching staff collaborate well with employers and external agencies to promote a positive, high-quality experience for apprentices.
- All assessors use technology effectively to support apprentices while they are in the workplace. For example, the college virtual learning environment, e-portfolio systems, and a commercial software dashboard. This technology supports apprentices to progress with their studies remotely when working away from college.
- All staff have relevant and up-to-date professional knowledge, and this is used well during teaching sessions to enhance the skills of apprentices. Apprentices value the skills they acquire and the qualifications they gain. They outline very well how these skills support them in their job roles.
- Meta skills development opportunities are identified clearly in college-based lessons and apprentices refer to these during professional discussions held with employers. This approach helps enhance and develop further the career skills of apprentices.
- The college has implemented robust recruitment practices which help ensure assessors match each apprentice and their employer with the best framework for their individual job role. Some employers have adapted their interview arrangements further to help build the confidence of potential candidates during the recruitment process.
- College managers have improved the participation of employers in the bi-annual satisfaction survey of college MA provision through regular dialogue. Most employers now complete this survey and satisfaction levels are improving annually. Where an employer

identifies an area for improvement, senior managers act quickly to understand and implement positive change.

- Almost all employers agree that college MA programmes support effective workforce planning, meet their needs well and add value to their business.

### **Areas for development**

- Most apprentices are not yet confident in using the commercial software programme to access their training plans and monitor their progress. In more than a few instances, apprentices have experienced accessibility and technical issues which have adversely affected their recording of progress.

## **4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training**

### **Areas of positive progress**

- New assessors are supported well in their roles. College managers provide newly appointed assessors with a mentor for a six-month period. In addition, assessors receive helpful, ongoing support from their line manager and from internal verification peers.
- Well attended college-based events and employer forums promote the sharing and adoption of effective teaching and assessment practice. These settings also provide useful opportunities for relevant industry sector updates, which are valued by vocational assessors.
- Assessors have dedicated professional learning time to reflect on and improve their assessment approaches and enhance their practice. All assessors use allocated training time effectively to improve their skills and enhance their industry knowledge. This ensures they remain occupationally competent, are kept updated of emerging industry standards and adhere closely to the requirements of regulatory organisations.
- Training Coordinators make good use of a risk rating approach to develop bespoke training plans based on the individual needs of each assessor. Managers support all appropriate assessor training requests, and this promotes a positive culture for improvement.
- Assessors undertake regular peer observations to improve their skills in delivering vocational provision and supporting apprentice progression. Assessors and delivery staff also participate in the cross-college learning and teaching audit conducted by the Quality Team, and this helps them develop and improve their assessment practice and teaching approaches.

### **Areas for development**

- None identified.

## **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**

- Curriculum teams engage well with local employers to plan and improve the portfolio of MA frameworks offered to its rural communities.

- College managers build positive relationships with new employers. They make good use of resources such as the *apprenticeships.scot* website to inform employers about recruitment practice and their responsibilities in supporting apprentices in the workplace.
- All apprentices attend regular progress review meetings with their line manager and assessor, and this helps them understand the skills they are acquiring and the progress they are making. In between these meetings, assessors make regular contact with apprentices to offer further support and ongoing advice.
- College managers send monthly reports to employers about the progress being made by apprentices on their MA programme. Through this regular communication channel employers are appropriately informed and can take an active role in developing the knowledge, skills, and behaviours for their on-the-job training.
- Employers have welcomed the lifting of age restriction for enrolment onto MA programmes. The college has publicised and promoted opportunities for mature apprenticeship careers very well, and there are good examples of these apprentices being successful in the workplace.
- College managers recognise the importance of celebrating apprenticeship success. They host an annual graduation award ceremony and invite apprentices and their family members to attend. This approach helps affirm apprentice achievement and helps publicise the value of apprenticeships more widely.

### **Areas for development**

- A few employers do not feel sufficiently engaged in formal evaluative activities to influence the delivery and design of the MA programme.

### **4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance**

#### **Areas of positive progress**

- All staff have a good understanding of health and safety policies and procedures. They ensure these are complied with and adopt safe working practices. Most apprentices understand their role in relation to health and safety practice and this is reinforced well by assessors during one-to-one sessions and progress reviews.
- The college has clear and appropriate procedures to support effective implementation of the principles outlined within safeguarding and PREVENT initiatives. Staff explain these well to apprentices during induction activities and apprentices are aware of key personnel to approach if an issue of concern arises.
- All staff complete mandatory safeguarding training as part of their induction, and this is refreshed regularly. They understand well the requirements of equality and diversity procedures and policies and are proactive in ensuring equality and diversity themes are promoted positively as part of the MA programme.
- The Awarding Body consistently rates the college highly during verification visits. Assessors contribute actively, through robust standardisation and internal verification activities, to maintain high standards in the assessment and verification process.

- The college participates successfully in equality and diversity initiatives to attract a diverse range of applicants from all sectors of society. For example, a *Women into Construction* event, hosted in collaboration with South of Scotland Enterprise, Construction Industries Training Board, Heriot Watt University, Department for Work and Pensions and SDS, resulted in an increase in female enrolments.
- A few apprentices visit local schools to share their apprenticeship experience with pupils, guidance staff and parents. This promotes the apprenticeship family well to the wider population.

### **Areas for development**

- None identified.

### **4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes**

#### **Areas of positive progress**

- College managers have increased recruitment to MA programmes year-on-year, including throughout the pandemic period.
- The college has exceeded the SDS national performance target of 75% successful completer to leaver achievement ratio for most of the past five years.
- In 2021-2022, the number of female apprentice enrolments, the number of apprentices from an ethnic minority background and the number of care-experienced apprentices were all above national performance levels.
- Curriculum teams have made improvements to MA programmes that have produced a trend of high success rates compared with SDS targets.
- Almost all apprentices who complete their MA programme progress onto employment. College managers actively track the destination of all apprentices alongside recruitment, retention, and attainment data. Managers analyse and use this valuable information effectively to enhance MA programme delivery.
- Core skills are embedded and contextualised within MA programmes, which makes them meaningful and relevant to apprentices.
- All apprentices make good progress with the development of their core skills.
- All apprentices take an active role in setting personal goals and identifying relevant objectives. This approach helps ensure they are taking ownership for their learning and progression. Setting of these targets provides opportunities for apprentices to reflect on their progress and plan effectively for the next steps in their learning.

#### **Areas for development**

- In 2021-2022, the number of male apprentice enrolments and the number of apprentices who disclosed a disability were below national performance levels.

## 5. Main points for action

There are no main points for action.

## 6. Examples of highly effective practice

There were two examples of highly effective practice identified in relation to apprentices visiting schools to promote MAs and the comprehensive tracking of MA destination data.

## 7. What happens next?

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

**Ian Beach**  
**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.