

# External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

Scottish Water Skills Academy

A report by HM Inspectors

19/09/2023

<b>CEO/Principal</b>	<b>Peter Farrer</b>
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<b>Provider type</b>	<b>Independent Training Provider</b>
<b>Lead HMI</b>	<b>Peter Connelly</b>
<b>Apprentice numbers</b>	<b>104</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

Scottish Water provides water and waste water services to 2.62 million households and 159,219 business customers in Scotland. Established in 2016, the Scottish Water Skills Academy supports the delivery of water industry and business administration apprenticeships.

There are currently 104 apprentices in training, with another 40 joining in August 2023. The Skills Academy operates from a training centre near Glasgow, where a growing number of apprentices participate in a range of learning activities related to water distribution. Apprentices also undertake training at Scottish Water sites located throughout Scotland. Apprentices also undertake a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Water Treatment at Glasgow Clyde College.

### 3. Outcomes

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	Excellent

### 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

- Senior managers provide clear strategic direction, ensuring apprenticeship numbers are increasing and meeting their business needs. The company is addressing demographic challenges within the workforce by ensuring that valuable skills and knowledge are passed on to new apprentices.
- Assessors conduct apprentice regular review meetings at various sites at least every six weeks and are very flexible in accommodating apprentice work patterns and shift requirements. Apprentices recognise the value of their quarterly review meetings held with assessors who meet regularly with each apprentice's line manager to develop a shared understanding of the progress each candidate is making.
- Scottish Water is taking positive steps to ensure diversity within its workforce. Managers have revitalised the recruitment process to improve candidate diversity and recruit apprentices with protected characteristics. This change of focus has resulted in a significant increase in the recruitment of female apprentices.
- Staff and apprentices regularly promote apprenticeships in the water industry. They visit primary and secondary schools, careers fairs and other events. Staff recognise that apprentice involvement in these activities makes apprenticeships in the water industry more appealing to school leavers.
- Skills Academy staff have an inclusive approach to apprentice involvement in their learning and progress. They involve apprentices and their team leaders at all stages to support induction, attendance at training courses, coaching visits, and progress reviews. For example, apprentices attend a four-day residential training event where trainers, assessors, line managers and senior managers come together to support apprentice learning and develop a strong corporate identity.
- Scottish Water provides apprentices with a comprehensive range of on-line modules for all elements of essential apprenticeship training. This programme (Cornerstone) supports apprentices in their roles and the further development of their vocational skills.

## Areas for development

- While there has been a positive progress in improving the diversity of the workforce, aspects of the physical infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, have not kept pace with requirements. For example, there are insufficient female toilet facilities in some locations.

## 4.2 Service Delivery – Grade: Very Good

### 4.2.1 Delivery of training

#### Areas of positive progress

- The MA programme is aligned well with the succession planning needs of Scottish Water. Staff mentors who are approaching retirement assist apprentices, providing feedback on every aspect of the apprentice experience and helping to develop their skills. This ensures that valuable knowledge is retained within the industry.
- Comprehensive induction arrangements for both staff and apprentices provide a good overview of the MA framework requirements and the behaviours required to succeed within the industry. Through regular progression meetings held with candidates, assessors encourage apprentices to reach agreed improvement targets.
- Almost all of the training is delivered on-site, and candidates develop skills relevant to their roles. Glasgow Clyde College ensure that apprentices are well-supported throughout their study towards the required HNC in Water Management.
- All assessors in the Skills Academy team have significant experience in their roles, gained over many years. They are highly professional and knowledgeable and are experienced in operations and in the qualifications they assess. They support apprentices well to gain relevant knowledge and skills.
- The Skills Academy team and apprentices are involved in co-creation of the framework delivery plan. Optional units are selected to meet business needs. In addition, assessors are very familiar with the requirements of individual apprentices and their work roles and take care to ensure that the programme meets their needs.
- The introduction of the City & Guilds Learning Assistant online platform has increased the accessibility and visibility of apprentice learning plans. This allows apprentices to identify and address learning gaps quickly and easily and develop their skills using a range of useful content.
- Apprenticeship training plans are robust and have a high degree of flexibility. Staff place a strong emphasis on the quality of evidence and the range of work apprentices engage in to support their attainment and achievement.
- Assessors provide useful advice and guidance to candidates on the progress they are making, helping them to reflect on their work and understand how to improve their performance.

## Areas for development

- Although the development of meta skills is identified as a priority in the apprenticeship programme and within the HNC course, only a few apprentices can articulate their development of these skills with confidence.

### 4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training

#### Areas of positive progress

- Staff hold regular standardisation meetings and share news articles and examples of good practice. Team members, including former apprentices, have a strong work ethic and sense of purpose.
- The level of team leader input to apprentice quarterly reviews has increased significantly in the last year, providing an insight into how management would like apprentices' to improve their skills.
- Apprentices have regular opportunities to influence their training. Assessors use discussions with apprentices effectively to identify challenges within the delivery of the framework and use outcomes from these discussions to generate improvements.

#### Areas for development

- On occasion, the quality of reporting by line managers on apprentice performance is inconsistent.

## 4.3 Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices - Grade: Excellent

### 4.3.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

#### Areas of positive progress

- Scottish Water regularly involves apprentices in problem-solving exercises to tackle issues and drive improvement. These opportunities enhance and extend the learning available to apprentices and have resulted in impressive solutions to real world challenges.
- Senior managers encourage experienced staff who work with apprentices on a day-to-day basis, to volunteer and act as mentors in conjunction with staff from Glasgow Clyde College. This programme develops staff skills in providing feedback and instruction to apprentices. This is supporting Scottish Water's "Wisdom and Youth" approach to skills development.
- All apprentices are very satisfied with their training and confirm the apprenticeship programme has enabled them to grow in confidence within their job role. All apprentices acknowledge that their training has equipped them well with the underpinning knowledge and skills required to succeed. They are aware of how these skills enable them to take advantage of opportunities to develop in different career pathways upon completion of their programme.
- Apprentices benefit from frequent contact and support from with Scottish Water staff at all levels. Alongside planned meetings and engagement, staff are available at other times to engage in additional discussions by phone or online. Other senior colleagues work with

apprentices daily to provide training as part of a programme of work agreed and evaluated with their assessor.

- All apprentices supply high quality and detailed responses in both written submissions and during verbal questioning from assessors. They confidently demonstrate a good understanding of the topics under discussion.
- Apprentices complete additional training and non-mandatory units within the Cornerstone programme. This enhances and deepens their learning skills development.

#### **Areas for development**

- None identified.

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

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

- Scottish Water has a strong culture of supporting the health and wellbeing of apprentices. The company is committed to high quality development and delivery of training plans. Apprentices are fully aware of, and are regularly updated on, safeguarding and health and safety requirements. These are explained comprehensively during apprentice induction sessions and are reinforced consistently by assessors during progress reviews.
- The company has a weekly health and wellbeing survey for every employee which enables apprentices to highlight any concerns. In addition, weekly team calls enable apprentices located in rural settings to engage with assessors out with regular monthly sessions.
- All apprentices show strong awareness of health and safety matters and can confidently deliver health and safety briefings to visitors to their work setting. They clearly indicate where hazards can be found and what to do in case of an emergency.
- All assessors ensure statutory and regulatory knowledge is developed to a very high standard within the mandatory units of the framework and through the apprentices' experiences. The apprentices understanding and implementation of risk assessments and health and safety regulations are evaluated thoroughly by assessors and discussed during assessment visits.
- Apprentices use risk assessment arrangements supported by the Scottish Water *Take 5* app very well to develop their understanding of where hazards in operations might lie. These arrangements are highly effective in helping apprentices think clearly about all task stages before performing it to keep them safe, particularly when they are working alone.

#### **Areas for development**

- None identified.

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

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

- The ratio of successful completion for Scottish Water apprentices for the last three years, is significantly higher the SDS target of 75%, and the sector average. In-year results indicate

a further increase in completion rates.

- All apprentices who completed their programme in the last year have successfully progressed to employment having secured permanent roles with Scottish Water.
- All apprentices confirm the MA programme has enabled them to grow in confidence within their job role and acknowledge that their training has equipped them very well with the knowledge and skills required for their position and how to progress further.
- Managers and staff acknowledge and celebrate the awards and achievement of apprentices widely. All apprentices indicate that they are proud of the progress they have made, the qualifications they have attained, and the skills they have developed.

### **Areas for development**

- None identified.

## **5. Main points for action**

The following main points for action are required:

- There are no main points for action.

## **6. Examples of highly effective practice**

- The use by Scottish Water of current, real-life problem-solving exercises for apprentices. These have resulted in impressive solutions, devised by apprentices, one of which has been deployed on a company-wide subsea pipeline project. This approach engages apprentices in devising solutions to realistic work-based challenges and in devising solutions.
- The development of a very strong culture regarding health and safety and safeguarding in Scottish Water. Staff use digital resources to plan their work within tight health and safety and safeguarding procedures. For example, in their daily duties, apprentices are offered support to learn to drive and use appropriate technology and arrangements to ensure their workplace vehicle meets the requisite safety standards before they embark on any journey.

## **7. What happens next?**

HM Inspectors are confident that Scottish Water has the capacity to continue to improve and will make no further visits as a result of this inspection.

**Peter B Connelly**  
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.