ICT Modern Apprenticeships

A report on the external review by Education Scotland of training in ICT Modern Apprenticeships

18 May 2018

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Context

Education Scotland has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake external reviews of the off-the-job, and from June 2017, on-the-job training elements of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes within each of the industry sectors in Scotland. The strategic vision outlined by the Scottish Government in Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy[1] (YES) is for a post-16 education and training sector in which:

- all provision, regardless of provider, is focused on providing young people with the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary to support Scotland's economic growth and maximise their life chances;
- all providers and their key stakeholders work together regionally and nationally to ensure high quality provision that meets the needs of learners and employers; and
- the relevance and quality of this provision, the extent to which it supports economic growth and post-16 reform, and the outcomes learners achieve are evaluated through an appropriate blend of self-evaluation, external scrutiny and public reporting through a national quality assurance and quality improvement system.

In Scotland, the digital technology sector is forecasted to grow twice as fast as the Scottish economy overall, in the years to 2024. This continues the trend of the last few years, with the number of technology businesses in Scotland increasing by 53%, between 2010 and 2015, almost three times as fast as the overall economy[2].

Over 90,000 people were employed as technology professionals across all sectors, a ten per cent increase in employment from 2015 to 2016.

Whilst the employer base in the sector is dominated by micro businesses and small-and medium-sized enterprises, multi-nationals are of importance to the sector. However, a key concern among employers is being able to recruit employees with the right technical skills or experience[3].

The information and communications technology (ICT) review covers three Modern Apprenticeship frameworks: Digital Applications, Information and Telecommunications and Information Security.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) statistics, prepared in 2017 for this review, show that overall the number of starts in ICT MAs had increased from 425 in 2013-14 to 871 in 2015-16. The numbers in training during the same period were 411 in 2013-14 and 958 in 2015-16. The overall achievement rate for ICT apprentices during this period had increased from 52% to 68%, and was showing a further improvement to 74% by the time the review commenced in 2017. The annual SDS published statistics for 2016-17 reveal that the achievement rate for ICT is 74%, which is four percentage points lower than the overall MA programme achievement rate of 78%, across all of the frameworks.

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1   http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/12/7750
2   https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/43306/scotlands-digital-technologies-summary-report.pdf.
3   https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/35682/ict___digital_technologies_sector_skills_investment_plan.pdf

Grades

The overall grades, for each of the questions from the quality indicators, summarised from the providers visited, are shown below:

Outcomes and impact		Service delivery		Leadership and quality culture
How well are apprentices progressing and achieving relevant high-quality outcomes?	How well do we meet the needs of our apprentices and stakeholders?	How good is our delivery of training?	How good is our management of training delivery?	How good is our strategic leadership?
very good	very good	very good	very good	very good

An evaluation of **excellent** describes a provision of training in which apprentices' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. It represents an outstanding standard of provision 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** describes a provision of training characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement in this evaluation, 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 contracted provider will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to **excellent**.

An evaluation of **good** describes a provision of training which is 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 contracted provider should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.

An evaluation of **satisfactory** describes a provision of training which is characterised by strengths which just outweigh areas for development. An evaluation of **satisfactory** indicates that apprentices have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on apprentices' experiences. However, while the areas for development 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 for further development while building on its strengths.

For this external review of ICT training, Education Scotland evaluated the provision of on-the-job and off-the-job training in the following providers between September 2017 and December 2017: British Telecom (BT); City of Glasgow College; Dundee and Angus College; New College Lanarkshire; Pentland Assessment Centres Ltd; QA Ltd; and, YouTrain Ltd.

The table below shows the spread of the grades for each quality indicator in the seven providers that Education Scotland visited for this report.

	How well are apprentices progressing and achieving relevant high quality outcomes?	How well do we meet the needs of our apprentices and stakeholders?	How good is our delivery of training?	How good is our management of training delivery?	How good is our strategic leadership?
Centre	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent
Centre	very good	good	satisfactory	good	good
Centre	very good	very good	excellent	very good	very good
Centre	very good	good	very good	good	satisfactory
Centre	good	very good	very good	very good	good
Centre	very good	excellent	excellent	very good	excellent
Centre	very good	excellent	very good	excellent	very good
Overall	**very good**	**very good**	**very good**	**very good**	**very good**

Outcomes and impact

How well are apprentices progressing and achieving relevant high-quality outcomes?

GRADE – very good

How effective are training providers at achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery?

Areas of positive practice

- Almost all providers are making good progress in achieving their organisational priorities by meeting their SDS contract levels for their programme.
- All providers are performing above the SDS benchmark of 70%. Achievement rates for all providers are well above the national average for the sector of 73.8%, and in some cases are very high.
- Retention rates of apprentices in training are high and almost all apprentices are working well and achieving their training objectives and targets. All apprentices are making good progress within the timescales for completion of their programme.
- In a few colleges, apprentices undertake a related Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Award at Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) level. Most apprentices are progressing well and the award is offered as an enhancement to their MA achievement.
- Apprentices who successfully complete their programmes receive financial awards and permanent contracts. Combined with well-structured learning experiences, this helps to maintain apprentices' motivation levels and commitment to their programme.

Area for development

- None identified.

Creativity, innovation and impact

YouTrain Ltd, Progress Dashboard

Managers and assessors at YouTrain track apprentices' progress using the internally designed Progress Dashboard. The Progress Dashboard is a straightforward, single page monthly summary of all apprentice activity. The dashboard displays individual details and a photograph of each apprentice. It also displays targets for completion for individual units, progress against targets, milestone completion activity, review dates and a summary of progress with selected vendor qualifications.

The Progress Dashboard is updated each month and used effectively to inform apprentices, managers and employers about the progress of apprentices. It is used well by assessors and managers to identify quickly those apprentices whose progress is not proceeding at the appropriate rate.

Discussions, support and adjustments are arranged with apprentices and employers to ensure the apprentice completes their qualifications within the agreed timescale. The facility to provide a *Progress Dashboard* of information for apprentice progress each month is valued by employers and enriches discussions between employers, assessors and apprentices.

How well do providers adhere to statutory principles and guidance?

Areas of positive practice

- All providers actively engage in equality and diversity initiatives to attract a diverse range of applicants from all sectors of society. For example, these initiatives include targeted marketing campaigns to attract more females and the redesign of application forms to reduce potential bias.
- All staff have undertaken useful training in a range of equality and diversity matters. They welcome and support apprentices with different backgrounds, and actively embrace equalities in their interactions with learners.
- All staff place a high priority on health and safety arrangements. Policies and procedures are implemented effectively by staff ensuring that the workplaces and training providers are safe places to work and train. Staff provide useful training to apprentices on health and safety to enhance their learning and to encourage safe working practices.
- All apprentices understand the role of health and safety in the workplace and appreciate the importance in ensuring they have a safe place to train and work.
- All providers have in place comprehensive policies and procedures to support safeguarding and PREVENT. Staff explain these arrangements well to apprentices at all induction programmes. There are comprehensive policies in place to support staff and apprentices with these arrangements. For example, all apprentices know which key personnel to approach if any issues arise.
- In all cases, providers ensure that their MA programmes meet the required awarding body standards. They have well-established and effective qualification quality procedures in place. These support assessors and managers well in understanding the requirements for standardisation and provide a consistent standard of delivery.
- In almost all cases, external verification reports are very positive with significant strengths being identified in the majority of providers.

Area for development

- Initiatives to support higher levels of recruitment, from under-represented groups in society, have yet to demonstrate increased levels of apprenticeship starts, to ensure a more representative balance of apprentices.

Creativity, innovation and impact

QA Ltd, Tackling the Gender Gap together

QA Ltd staff have been invited to speak at a number of events aimed at tackling the gender gap in the technology sector. They share their insights into their success in attracting females into technology apprenticeships. These events are attended by a number of employers, training providers and local authorities, including schools.

The events are action focused and feature best practice with examples of what people could or should be doing to engage females in technology. They cover key segments such as: Engaging young females into technology, higher and further education courses and MAs and how employers can attract, recruit and retain more female apprentices.

At each of the sessions, a female technology apprentice from QA speaks about their experiences. QA staff believe that the female role model helps to encourage females into digital and ICT roles as they are the best people to relate their experiences.

Employers, training providers and local authorities have welcomed this sharing of best practice and have provided very positive feedback.

How well do we meet the needs of our apprentices and stakeholders?

GRADE – very good

How well do apprentices make progress and achieve individual outcomes?

Areas of positive practice

- All staff are very flexible in the design and delivery of their programmes to help meet the particular needs of employers. Staff tailor programmes well to help employers select specific units within each framework, to reflect the needs of their workplace.
- Most apprentices complete additional industry vendor qualifications, enhancing their skills and employability.
- All apprentices are very satisfied with their programme and are highly positive about their training experience. Apprentices value highly the support, advice and guidance they receive from staff delivering training.
- All providers communicate effectively with apprentices. In addition to the formal reviews they receive, most apprentices are visited around every six weeks by their tutor or assessors, which helps to identify future learning goals and milestones for apprentices.
- All apprentices have regular one-to-one meetings with their tutors or assessor to discuss progress reporting. In most cases, their comments are also shared with their employers, whose views are also routinely sought by training staff. For example, three providers are making particularly good use of electronic systems to aid tracking of apprentices' progress and enhance feedback to employers.
- All apprentices make good progress in the achievement of core skills. In most providers, core skills are fully embedded and contextualised in the training programme.
- Almost all employers consider that the MA programme is adding value in the workplace. The wider workforce benefits from apprentices contributing the knowledge they gain and the skills they develop during their training, to contribute to fresh ideas.
- A few apprentices have been successful in national apprenticeship awards and competitions. For example, BT has won numerous prestigious Scottish Apprenticeship Awards such as Employer of the Year.

Area for development

- In a few cases, employers feel that there is insufficient communication regarding the progress of apprentices. For example, some employers feel that they have little opportunity to influence the delivery or the evaluation of the programme.

Creativity, innovation and impact

YouTrain Ltd, Added value vendor qualifications

YouTrain Ltd is a Microsoft Learning Partner and Cisco Learning Partner. These accreditations support the delivery of industry recognised vendor qualifications alongside on-the-job training of apprentices.

Each apprenticeship programme offers free vendor training and certification, alongside work-based learning, which enhances the skills and knowledge of apprentices in their employer's work place.

Almost all employers value the combination of work-based learning and vendor qualifications, which provide apprentices with relevant professional skills and knowledge.

Apprentices are able to influence the overall design of their learning programme along with their employers, and add value to their training with a selection of these vendor qualifications.

Delivery of training

How good is our delivery of training?

GRADE – very good

How well does the design and delivery of training meet the needs of apprentices and employers?

Areas of positive practice

- In almost all cases, the programme is aligned well with employer requirements and with prospective employment opportunities available upon completion of the apprenticeship.
- Most providers work well with employers to ensure that optional units selected for the programme, reflect the needs of the apprentice and the employer.
- Most providers offer a range of programmes to meet local and national skills needs, for example, in Cyber Security. There are several examples of apprentices gaining additional in-house or vendor qualifications, which further enhances their training and employability opportunities.
- Services and resources for apprentices training are of a very high quality. All learning environments contained high standards of equipment and resources, meeting the needs of apprentices and employers well.
- Almost all apprentices are highly motivated and engaged in their work. They are achieving their objectives and are progressing well towards achieving their individual goals.
- Almost all staff plan activities well to accommodate employer and apprentice requirements. They actively adjust the delivery of units and assessments to meet the requirements of individual apprentices effectively.
- Staff support apprentices well through the identification of additional support needs. There are several examples of helpful one-to-one coaching and flexible attendance patterns and adjustments being made for apprentices with specific needs.

Areas for development

- A few apprentices and employers are not sufficiently clear about the balance of mandatory units and the range of optional units available to them within the programme.
- A few apprentices were not sufficiently engaged in their off-the-job training activities, which did not reflect their regular work-based environment and expectations.

How well is training delivered?

Areas of positive practice

- Training is very well planned and organised in almost all providers. Overall, staff work well with employers to plan delivery to support on-the-job and off-the job training effectively.
- During training activities, apprentices work well together to support each other. This impacts positively on their learning.
- All staff plan workplace visits well in advance, although assessors are very flexible in accommodating the changing work commitments of apprentices.

- All staff have good levels of professional knowledge and use constructive examples from industry well to consolidate learning activities throughout training sessions.
- Staff are highly experienced and demonstrate good levels of technical competence. They draw on this experience and knowledge to plan and deliver their theory and practical sessions effectively.
- Some college staff carry out the role of assessors in the workplace. Regularly liaising with employers enables them to keep their teaching practices up to date with current technological developments.
- Almost all staff encourage apprentices to have high levels of independence and help to build their confidence across a range of vocational, academic and core skills.
- Staff use formative assessment well to provide feedback to apprentices to enable them to consolidate learning and build their confidence in developing vocational and core skills. Assessors make good use of naturally occurring evidence for assessment.
- Almost all working relationships between staff, apprentices and employers are constructive and effective and help apprentices make connections between their learning and the workplace.
- In almost all teaching sessions, staff encourage apprentices to share their workplace experience through class discussions. There are several good examples of staff contextualising delivery to meet the specific needs of employers, making it highly relevant.
- The majority of providers carry out progress reviews between apprentices and tutors every five to six weeks. These reviews allow employers to provide feedback to staff on their apprentices' progress in the workplace and what is required in their future training experiences.
- Employers and apprentices are very satisfied with the delivery of the MA training programme and would recommend the programme to prospective applicants.

Areas for development

- Some apprentices do not recognise how they are developing their core skills, and they fail to appreciate the relevance of core skills within their overall MA programme.
- Where apprentices are completing Higher National (HN) programmes as part of their training, the choices for apprentices in their graded units are not always contextualised sufficiently to the workplace. In most cases, this results in opportunities being missed to make learning in these units relevant to the apprentices' workplace.
- A few managers are not sufficiently involved in the apprentice progress review discussions. This limits the benefits of the progress review discussions to the employer and the apprentice.

How well do staff reflect on provision to improve training?

Areas of positive practice

- Arrangements for quality assurance and improvement, in all providers, are comprehensive, systematic and effective. Staff meet regularly to reflect on and discuss their training experiences. They feel supported by centre managers in offering suggestions for future improvements to the delivery of the programme.
- There is a mixture of approaches to the review and reflection on service delivery to effect improvements across all providers. For example, in one provider, the manager visits workplaces to monitor the work of assessors on a regular basis. Assessors also have a

weekly update meeting with the internal verifier to reflect on and discuss best practice to inform improvements to the delivery of training.
- Almost all external verification reports are positive. Their outcomes are used well by staff to help address any quality related issues and to help share good practice to improve standards.
- Almost all staff engage well with formal and informal opportunities to share good practice and enhance the services for apprentices.
- The majority of employers contribute to the design of individual training plans for apprentices. This includes the sequencing and selection of units to align employer needs with the job roles of apprentices effectively.

Areas for development

- In a few providers, there is insufficient formal reflection by teaching staff on their learning and teaching activities to help lead to improvements.
- In almost all providers, although feedback is sought from apprentices, the apprentices themselves are not clear about how their feedback is used to plan improvements to their training. There is little evidence of actions being taken as a result of the feedback being gathered.

How good is our management of training delivery?

How well does the contracted provider work with partners to improve outcomes for apprentices?

GRADE: very good

Areas of positive practice

- All providers have strong and productive strategic links with a range of partners including Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) groups and Community Planning Partnerships (CPP). These links ensure that apprenticeship provision is highly responsive to the changing requirements of the sector and meets the needs of employers well. For example, the majority of providers work effectively with schools to promote apprenticeships to young people in the senior phase. A few have developed productive links with universities to deliver degree level programmes.
- Almost all providers collaborate effectively with a range of external agencies to support apprentices. For example, a few providers have productive links with support organisations such as Concept Northern and The National Autistic Society, to provide learning support for apprentices.
- In addition to the MA programme, the majority of providers deliver additional training and certification, specific to employer's needs, and adds value to apprenticeships. This additional training further enhances the learning and career path options for apprentices.
- The majority of providers offer a service to employers to provide assistance in the recruitment of apprentices. This service is valued highly by those employers who utilise it.
- Almost all providers work proactively with partners and stakeholders to plan provision for apprenticeships. For example, one provider adapted the computer language it uses to meet the needs of its employers. Another is working with a local university to develop Graduate Level Apprenticeships in ICT. This will broaden the range of opportunities within the MAs family for apprentices who progress.

Area for development

- A few employers state that the information regarding the progress of apprentices communicated to them by the provider, is insufficiently detailed and it is therefore difficult to gauge apprentices' progress.

Leadership and quality culture

How good is our strategic leadership?

GRADE: very good

How appropriate and influential are the contracted provider's vision, values and aims?

Areas of positive practice

- Almost all providers have well-developed visions, values and aims. These are communicated clearly throughout the organisations by managers and staff. For example, one provider has a clear ambition to be 'The UK's leading provider of new entrant recruitment and training for the IT and business services sectors'.
- Almost all providers take good account of local and national policy strategic drivers when developing their business plans. They are responding well to Scottish Government priorities for DYW, are aware of government targets and are supporting training for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
- Providers align the planning and delivery of the programmes well to meet the needs of employers that they engage with.
- Almost all staff are highly motivated, engaged and committed to the delivery of a high-quality training experience for apprentices and to meet employer needs. They engage well in a range of quality assurance and sharing good practice processes.

Area for development

- Most providers in their strategic plans have identified the high levels of growth in the digital sector over the next decade. However, in a few providers, the projected expansion plans for the numbers of apprentices on programmes, did not match the high levels of employment growth anticipated in the sector.

How effective is leadership for partnership working and delivery of training?

Areas of positive practice

- Most providers have developed key strategic targets to support the delivery of their programmes and services. They meet the priorities of the Scottish Government and their contractual obligations effectively. Most providers have comprehensive policies and procedures in place to plan for improvement and enhancement of the services they offer.
- All providers demonstrate strong team leadership and managers are well regarded by employers and apprentices. Staff work very well together to provide high-quality training and support to ensure that apprentices have the best possible learning experience.
- Almost all staff are highly motivated and provide effective training programmes for apprentices.

Area for development

- Two of the college providers do not have a sufficiently proactive approach to further develop links with employers to enhance and sustain the number of apprentices on the programme.

How well do leaders secure improvements in the quality and impact of training?

Areas of positive practice

- Almost all providers utilise comprehensive and robust self-evaluation procedures well, to effect actions for improvement.
- Most apprentices, employers and staff have sufficient opportunities to contribute to the evaluation of the MA programme to consider improvements to the learning experience for apprentices.
- Most staff use self-evaluation procedures well to inform actions for improvements to the learning experience of apprentices. There are several examples of improvements being made timeously as a result of feedback being received from employers and apprentices during regular progress reviews.
- Almost all apprentices are confident in discussing areas of concern in their programmes with staff. They are satisfied that staff appreciate these concerns and improvements are made as a result of these conversations.

Area for development

- In a few providers, staff do not analyse and utilise sufficiently well the evidence gathered from performance data, equality monitoring and feedback from apprentices and employers, to inform clear targets for improvement actions. This leads to improvement plans being insufficiently focussed and there are examples of recurring themes not being addressed.

Creativity, innovation and impact

BT Openreach, CPD Pathway

Effective communications are in place between the apprenticeship team and the learning and development team. This helps in reviews to redesign or introduce new programmes. Apprentices provide immediate feedback on each training session, which is measured against a high benchmark. For trainers falling below this benchmark, it triggers a discussion with the training manager about teaching practice or an intervention by the training manager.

Openreach trainers are able to work with trainees beyond their initial training, when they are working in their full-time roles. Trainers in Scotland participate in mandatory twice-yearly visits to former trainees to gauge the impact of their training, reflect on improvements and suggest changes to training courses to the internal design teams. There are also strong peer-to-peer support arrangements for trainers.

Trainers select previous learners to spend the day with during their on-the-job activities, a minimum of two times per year, with a focus on:

- the impact of their instructor led training (ILT) course they delivered;
- refreshing their own skills and knowledge to ensure they are up-to-date and relevant;
- a review of the ILT course content and what needs to change; and
- reflection on their delivery and what they need to do differently, including delivery style and key focus areas which will improve future courses and learner impact.

Capacity to improve

How good is our capacity to improve?

- A number of excellent grades were awarded in the providers we visited. However, aggregating the grades from all providers reduced the summary grades to very good.
- Achievement and retention rates of apprentices in training are high and almost all apprentices are working well and achieving their training objectives and targets.
- All staff are very flexible in the design and delivery of their programmes to help meet the particular needs of employers. All apprentices are very satisfied with their programme and are highly positive about their training experience.
- All apprentices have regular one-to-one meetings with their tutors or assessor to discuss progress reporting. However, in a few cases, employers feel that there is insufficient communication regarding the progress of apprentices.
- Almost all employers consider that the MA programme is adding value in the workplace.
- Most providers offer a range of programmes to meet local and national skills needs. They work well with employers to ensure that optional units selected reflect the needs of the apprentice and the employer. However, a few apprentices and employers are not sufficiently clear about the balance of mandatory units and the range of optional units available to them within the programme.
- Services and resources for apprentices' training are of a very high-quality, meeting the needs of apprentices and employers.
- Almost all apprentices are highly motivated and engaged in their work. However, a few apprentices were not sufficiently engaged in their off-the-job training activities.
- Training is very well planned and organised in almost all providers. However, more than a few apprentices do not recognise how they are developing core skills and fail to appreciate their relevance in the workplace. Where apprentices are completing HN programmes as part of their training, the choices in their graded units are not contextualised sufficiently to the workplace.
- Most providers, in their strategic plans, have identified the high levels of growth in the digital sector over the next decade. However, in a few providers, the projected expansion plans for the numbers of apprentices did not match the high levels of employment growth anticipated in the sector.
- Strategies for engaging with schools, to promote apprenticeships through DYW initiatives, are underdeveloped or have yet to demonstrate impact. Two of the college providers do not have a sufficiently proactive approach to enhance and sustain the number of apprentices on the programme.
- Arrangements for quality assurance and improvement, in all providers, are comprehensive, systematic and effective. However, in a few providers, there is insufficient formal reflection by teaching staff on their learning and teaching activities to help lead to improvements. Apprentices are not clear about their contribution to planning improvements to their training.
- In a few providers, improvement plans are insufficiently focussed and there are examples of recurring themes not being addressed.

Recommendations

Providers should:
- work with college HM Inspectors and SDS Skills Investment Advisers to promote the practices in those centres with excellent grades, across all providers;
- take action to contextualise and highlight the relevance of core skills within programmes and ensure apprentices recognise fully how they are developing their core skills;
- improve formal communication with employers to ensure their understanding of the programme, the role they have in supporting apprentices with their training, and the progress of apprentices;
- further develop strategies to encourage applicants from under-represented groups to apply for apprenticeships and help to ensure a more representative balance of candidates; and
- establish formal mechanisms for apprentices to demonstrate the impact of their contribution to planning improvements to their training.

Education Scotland should:
- continue to monitor and review the quality of ICT apprenticeships in colleges through annual ongoing engagement and review activities and how well colleges are achieving the recommendations in this report;
- ensure that colleges have credible apprenticeship programme expansion plans to meet the needs of the Scottish economy;
- work with colleges, schools and local authorities to ensure that DYW initiatives are fully developed and implemented; and
- continue to work with colleges and other post-16 providers to identify and respond to changing needs within the ICT sector through partnership with employers, sector skills councils and awarding bodies.

SDS should:
- continue to work with providers to support employers, awarding bodies and other stakeholders to respond to the changing needs within the ICT sector;
- continue to support providers, local authorities and schools to implement fully the DYW strategies; and
- monitor and review the progress of independent training providers on achieving the recommendations within this report.

Appendix 1 – External review methodology

Education Scotland's external review of the on-the-job and off-the-job training element of MAs builds upon and complements SDS current quality assurance arrangements. These arrangements require all non-college training providers to demonstrate they are meeting SDS quality standards as set out in the SDS Quality Assurance Framework. SDS takes assurance of MA programme delivery from Education Scotland's external review of colleges, which focus on the contribution made by training providers and the quality of the training they deliver.

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland and Associate Assessors (AAs), from SDS, colleges and Independent Training Providers (ITP) conduct external reviews. Associate Assessor input ensures that each review team has the expert knowledge and industry-related experience to ensure a full and well-informed review process. The review team evaluated the work undertaken by a sample of colleges and ITPs, referred to collectively as 'providers' in this report.

External review approaches incorporate:
- observation of training activities;
- discussions held with centre managers and staff; and
- discussions held with employers and apprentices.

Upon conclusion of the external review, a written report is provided to each centre by Education Scotland. This includes the grades awarded for each of the five high-level questions posed during the review. These reports are shared with SDS but are not published externally, although providers may choose to share their individual reports after the main report is published. The findings from each of the visits are brought together to generate a national report, which is published by Education Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government. National reports are designed to inform Ministers about the quality of the on-the-job and off-the-job training element within specific MA programmes. The report will also assist providers in preparing and implementing their quality improvement and enhancement agendas, and include examples of excellent practice where identified.

The report uses the following terms to describe numbers and proportions.

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

Appendix 2 – Grade exemplification

The grades which will be awarded to each of the elements are:
- excellent - outstanding and sector leading.
- very good - major strengths
- good - important strengths with some areas for improvement
- satisfactory - strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- weak - important weaknesses
- unsatisfactory - major weaknesses

Grade illustrations

- An evaluation of **excellent** applies to provision in which apprentices' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision, 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 provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for development and any that do exist do not significantly diminish apprentices' experiences. While an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the centre will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.

- An evaluation of **good** applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for development. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significant positive impact on apprentices. However, the quality of apprentices' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which development is required. It implies that the centre should seek to improve further the areas of important strengths, but take action to address the areas for development.

- An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh areas for development. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that apprentices have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on apprentices' experiences. However, while the areas for development will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of apprentices' experiences. It implies that the centre should take action to address areas for further development while building on its strengths.

- An evaluation of **weak** applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important areas for development. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important areas for development 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 centre. Where a grading of weak is given, it will lead to follow-up activity from SDS compliance managers.

- An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major areas for development in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Apprentices' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision 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 centre. Where a grading of weak is given, it will lead to a follow-up review by staff from SDS and Education Scotland within a year.

Education Scotland
Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T   **+44 (0)**131 244 4330
E   **enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk**

https://education.gov.scot/