

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

The Croft Nurseries Limited

A report by HM Inspectors

CEO/Principal	Linda Pirrie
External review date	23 July 2024
Provider type	Employer
Lead HMI	Jacqueline McLellan
Apprentice number	26

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, awards grades for the three elements and highlights areas of positive practice, areas for development, and any associated main points for action. The report will be shared with the provider, Scottish Government, and SDS. For colleges, the report will be shared with the College Principals and Board or Regional Strategic Body, and Scottish Funding Council (SFC). An accompanying short report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

2. The provider and its context

The Croft Nurseries Limited, established in 1992, is an Aberdeen-based independent training provider operating in the early learning and childcare (ELC) sector.

The company delivers modern apprenticeship (MA) programmes in Social Services Children and Young People at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 7 and 9. The apprenticeship programme equips apprentices with the necessary skills and knowledge for employment in the ELC sector. There are currently 26 apprentices enrolled on the MA training programme, supported by two assessors who are also qualified internal verifiers.

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

- The management team use systematic feedback from apprentices and nursery managers to drive enhancement to the management of programmes. Almost all nursery managers are encouraged to make recommendations for improvement.
- All apprentices are involved actively in enhancing their training experience and outcomes through regular meetings with their assessor, employer, and line manager.
- The senior leadership team keeps comprehensive apprentice training records. These help identify areas where additional training or resources can further enhance apprentices' professional development.
- Senior managers offer a wide range of professional development opportunities to apprentices, including access to online modules. Apprentices have flexibility in choosing which modules to complete based on their individual learning needs and career goals.

Areas for development

- None Identified.

4.2 Service Delivery - Grade: Very Good

4.2.1 Delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Apprentices use online platforms well to share resources, ask questions and receive feedback from their peers and assessors. This significantly enhances the overall apprenticeship experience by promoting engagement and knowledge sharing more widely.

- Almost all apprentices speak positively of supportive and helpful working relationships with their assessors. They comment that there is clear communication about progress being made and helpful guidance where further work is required.
- Assessors use a range of appropriate assessment methods to support apprentices. This practice helps assessors personalise assessment arrangements to better meet apprentices' individual needs and learning preferences.
- All apprentices receive a comprehensive induction. This includes health and safety training and guidance on company policies and procedures. The induction programme signposts the range of support and resources apprentices can access during their training.
- Apprentices have flexibility in their working patterns to progress through the programme, within a timeframe that aligns with their individual requirements. This supports apprentices to balance their work and study commitments.
- Almost all apprentices report significant improvement in their self-confidence as a result of undertaking the MA programme. Apprentices confirm that their training has equipped them with essential workplace knowledge and skills, resulting in a higher level of job satisfaction.
- Apprentices have autonomy to build their own portfolio. This enables them to track their development, set goals, and make better informed decisions about their professional growth and effectively demonstrate their capabilities.
- Assessors observe apprentices' practice a minimum of six times during the apprenticeship programme. This approach ensures that assessors are confident apprentices are attaining the awarding body assessment criteria.

Areas for development

- None Identified.

4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training.

Areas of positive progress

- Croft Nurseries staff maintain well-established links with local secondary schools to provide meaningful work placements for senior phase pupils. These experiences offer young people valuable insight into the childcare industry, and as a result, a few pupils have gained employment within the organisation.
- Staff acknowledge and celebrate apprentice achievements in the company newsletter and through social media. Apprentices are encouraged and motivated by this approach, and this demonstrates the company's commitment to investing in apprentice development.
- Assessors ensure training materials are engaging and relevant. They regularly update and adapt resources, based on feedback received and changes to industry standards. This approach ensures apprentices have access to relevant, current materials to help them lead their own learning.

- Croft Nurseries staff offer support to apprentices who are unable to complete their award within the specified timeframe set by SDS. Some apprentices encounter personal challenges that prevent them from achieving within set timescales. Assessors work closely with these apprentices, to develop individualised plans which enable them to successfully complete their award.

Areas for development

- None Identified.

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

- The recruitment of apprentices with a declared disability or who are care experienced exceeds the national SDS benchmark. This is good practice and demonstrates a commitment to offering apprenticeship opportunities to individuals from underrepresented groups.
- Assessors actively support apprentices to take ownership of their own learning. This approach effectively and consistently supports apprentices in setting achievable learning goals to help them enhance their skills, knowledge and understanding of their learning.
- Assessors communicate regularly and openly with nursery managers about their apprentices' progress. This frequent and constructive communication supports apprentices' progression and helps identify areas where extra support would be beneficial, or improvement is required.
- Almost all apprentices who complete their apprenticeship programme gain employment.

Areas for development

- The development and monitoring of apprentice meta skills are not yet fully embedded within the delivery of the MA programme.

4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance

Areas of positive progress

- Croft Nurseries have a comprehensive safeguarding and prevention policy in place which establishes clear roles and responsibilities, ensuring the safety of apprentices.
- Staff promote helpful information about externally provided wellbeing and support service provision to apprentices.
- Senior managers promote a positive and caring workplace culture amongst all staff. This provides a supportive environment for staff who are responsive to the needs of their colleagues.
- All apprentices understand sufficiently, their role in relation to safeguarding and health and safety responsibilities. Associated policies and procedural arrangements are

explained well by staff during induction and are reinforced by assessors during apprentice progress reviews.

- Quality assurance arrangements and internal verification procedures are robust and meet the awarding body's requirements. Arrangements are in place to ensure assessments are valid, reliable, and consistent across all assessors. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of assessment practices are conducted regularly to identify areas for improvement and ensure compliance with regulatory standards.
- All assessors and apprentices are members of the Protecting Vulnerable Group (PVG) scheme. All apprentices complete relevant safeguarding training, and they are confident in their roles.

Areas for development

- None Identified.

4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Managers have responded well to apprentice feedback to offer apprentices the opportunity to work across a range of working patterns, including condensed hours. This flexibility greatly benefits apprentices, leading to an improved work-life balance.
- Croft Nurseries staff offer appropriate support for apprentices with additional support needs. This includes making reasonable adjustments and ensuring all apprentices have equal access to learning opportunities.
- Assessors conduct a workplace review meeting with each apprentice and nursery manager every thirteen weeks to discuss the apprentice's progress. This collaborative approach works well and allows for any necessary adjustments to be made to the training plan.
- Progression pathways are signposted clearly. Apprentices are aware that the qualification they attain is nationally recognised and supports them in planning for progression to employment or further study.
- Apprentices engage constructively in industry-relevant training in addition to their MA programme. Apprentices gain valuable certified qualifications in food hygiene and first aid. These learning opportunities help build apprentices' confidence and competence.

Areas for development

- The recruitment of male apprentices and apprentices from ethnic minority backgrounds is lower than the national SDS benchmark.
- Overall successful completion rates over the past three years have been consistently low, with an average successful achievement rate of 27.3%, which is 48.7% below the national achievement rate.
- During 2023-24, overall successful completion rates for apprentices aged between 16 to 19 is at 25% which is 46.2% below the national achievement rate.

- During 2023 -24, overall successful completion rates for apprentices aged 20 and above is at 75% which is 4.1% below the national achievement rate.

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required:

- Managers should work to improve apprentice attainment rates.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

None identified.

7. What happens next?

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

**HM Inspector
Jacqueline McLellan**

Appendix 1 Grades used in reporting

A common grading scale is used in making judgements for provider reviews:

- Grade 1 EXCELLENT – Outstanding and sector leading
- Grade 2 VERY GOOD – Major strengths
- Grade 3 GOOD – Important strengths with some areas for improvement
- Grade 4 SATISFACTORY - Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- Grade 5 WEAK – Important weaknesses
- Grade 6 UNSATISFACTORY – Major weaknesses

Summary

- An evaluation of **excellent** applies to training which is of a very high quality. An evaluation of *excellent* represents an outstanding standard of training which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the current provision. It implies that very high-levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.
- An evaluation of **very good** applies to training characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish apprentices' experiences. While an evaluation of *very good* represents a high standard of training, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to provide training without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the provider will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.
- An evaluation of **good** applies to training characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of *good* represents a standard of training in which the strengths have a significant positive impact. However, the quality of apprentices' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the provider should seek to improve further the areas of important strength but take action to address the areas for improvement.
- An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to training characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of *satisfactory* indicates that apprentices' have access to a basic level of training. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on apprentices' experiences. However, while the weaknesses will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of apprentices' experiences. It implies that the provider should take action to address areas of weakness while building on its strengths.
- An evaluation of **weak** applies to training which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of *weak* may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish apprentices' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the provider.
- An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major weaknesses in training, requiring immediate remedial action. The training experience for apprentices is at risk in

significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for training evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the immediate support given by the provider.

Appendix 2 Evaluative Terms

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.