

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

James Johnston & Co. of Elgin Limited

A report by HM Inspectors

18/07/2023

CEO/Principal	Chris Gaffney
External review date	7th June 2023
Provider type	Independent Training Provider
Lead HMI	Barbara Nelson
Apprentice numbers	34

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

Johnstons of Elgin is a Scottish luxury textile manufacturer specialising in cashmere and fine woollen products. The company was founded in 1797 and is based in Elgin, Scotland.

The company offers apprenticeship programmes that provide hands-on training and mentorship opportunities for individuals interested in pursuing a career in textile manufacturing.

There are two sites where apprenticeships are offered, in Elgin and Hawick. The programmes cover a wide variety of skills, including weaving, knitting, dyeing, and finishing.

3. Outcomes of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Quality Culture	Good
Service Delivery	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 - Good

4.1.1 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- Johnstons of Elgin has a clear mission to expand their workforce and provide opportunities for employee advancement. Its MA programme supports well the development of employee competencies in supervision and management across the organisation.
- Most assessors and internal verifiers (IVs) attend standardisation meetings, depending on working patterns and availability, where they discuss improvements to units and programme delivery. This approach supports staff understanding of delivery requirements and provides a platform to identify actions for improvement.
- Most apprentices recognise the value of their training in developing their craft. They engage well during meetings held with their assessor and line manager.
- Most IVs support assessors well and identify appropriate assessment opportunities, including personal development requirements that help support assessment decisions.

Areas for development

- There is no formal feedback process in place to support apprentices to communicate their experience of the programme to staff. As a result, staff do not routinely collect or analyse apprentice feedback to support self-evaluation and action planning for improvement.
- Approaches used by staff to assessment and verification vary between the two delivery sites. This can lead to inconsistencies in the overall quality of delivery.

4.2 Service Delivery - Good

4.2.1 Delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Managers support succession planning and craft skill development through the MA framework and apprenticeships. They understand the importance of equipping future team members with the required occupational skills.
- Most assessors and IVs are occupationally experienced and deliver the award with commitment and enthusiasm. Newly appointed assessors are supported to achieve their assessor or IV qualification.
- All apprentices, assessors, and IVs complete and sign a comprehensive candidate agreement which clarifies roles and responsibilities, including health and safety requirements. It also identifies future learning requirements and contains a useful induction checklist.
- Most apprentices engage in induction activities which prepare them effectively for their MA programme. These apprentices understand what is involved in their programme and the activities they will be undertaking. This facilitates programme transition and increases apprentice confidence.
- Almost all apprentices report that their assessors are supportive and helpful.
- Managers offer appropriate support and make tailored adjustments for apprentices with additional support needs. This has enabled these apprentices to progress with their award.
- Managers make good use of the MA programme to revive and strengthen traditional textile manufacturing skills that might otherwise be lost. Handcraft skills are preserved alongside new technology and techniques.

Areas for development

- Most apprentices do not set goals and objectives that enable them to evaluate their progress and plan effectively for future learning.
- Only a few apprentices provide formal feedback on their programme experiences through submission of surveys. As a consequence, improvement actions do not accurately reflect the broader views of all apprentices.
- A few assessors prioritise the development of craft skills. This limits the ability of apprentices to interpret the broader framework.
- A few assessors and IVs are not yet confident or sufficiently competent in their roles. They do not understand sufficiently the requirements and responsibilities of their job to ensure fair and accurate assessments.

4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- Most assessors participate productively in standardisation and internal verification activities. This ensures awarding body assessment criteria are closely followed and quality concerns and improvement plans are developed where required.
- Centre-devised logbooks help assessors and apprentices to reflect on progress made, track their achievements, and identify areas for improvement. Through regular logbook usage, apprentices develop their skills and make good progress.
- Apprentices are active participants in the design of their programmes. Staff encourage apprentices to choose appropriate optional units from the apprenticeship framework. These are closely matched to employer needs and align well with apprentice career aspirations. This approach empowers apprentices to take responsibility for their own development and feel valued as a team member.
- Johnston of Elgin's apprentice induction process is comprehensive and involves contributions from both the apprentice and the assessor. During induction, core skill prior achievement is identified through evidence generated from SQA Connect. This ensures apprentices do not repeat assessments for qualifications they have already achieved.
- Most assessors and apprentices work the same shift pattern. This practice supports daily interaction and dynamic observations of hands-on practice. This helps ensure both apprentice and shift team members continually focus on occupational competency development.

Areas for development

- Quality enhancement arrangements are not sufficiently systematic and do not routinely capture issues and actions taken. As a result, there are inconsistent approaches in tracking progress and measuring improvements.
- Reflective practice by assessors, verifiers and apprentices happens both informally and formally. However, there is no cohesive approach to capturing the outcomes of this reflection to ensure that best practice or actions for improvement are disseminated.
- Most apprentices are reliant on their assessors to provide them with access to their logbooks. This impedes apprentice ability to lead their own learning.

4.3 Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices - Good

4.3.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- Achievement rates have exceeded the SDS 75% target over the last three years.
- Numbers of female apprentices, apprentices with a disability and care experienced apprentices are above the norm.

- Assessors conduct formal progress review meetings every 12 weeks where they discuss apprentice progress. This approach ensures employers and apprentices have a shared understanding of progress made against the apprenticeship framework.

Areas for development

- The approach to delivery and achievement of the MA award is not consistent across the two delivery sites. This affects assessor' capacity to plan learning and the ability of apprentices to meet milestone requirements.

4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance

Areas of positive progress

- Managers host career-focused engagement activities with a wide range of young people, including pupils from local primary schools. This helps raise awareness of the diverse range of careers and progression opportunities available within the knitwear sector.
- All apprentices undertake a health and safety unit as part of their apprenticeship. This enhances their understanding of the regulations and legislative requirements for a safe and secure workplace.
- Appropriate risk assessment arrangements are in place for those apprentices aged under 18 years old who are enrolled on either the MA or career-ready programmes.
- A core of seven staff all completed relevant safeguarding training and are confident in their roles.
- Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, and these promote a culture of health and wellbeing where apprentices can highlight areas of concern, including bullying or mental health issues.

Areas for development

- Apprentices and employers have low levels of awareness of equality related themes as these are not highlighted or promoted effectively by staff.
- The safeguarding policy does include sufficient detail of arrangements for individuals who are under the age of 18.

4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Programmes are accessible and provide appropriate flexibility for apprentices and assessors. Most apprentices succeed and attain their apprenticeship qualification.
- Assessors discuss the relevance and range of unit options with apprentices. These conversations ensure units align with employer job specification requirements and apprentices experience learning that matches their career aspirations and job role very well.
- Apprentices are satisfied with the training provided and the progress they are making in enhancing their core skills. This supports them well in achieving their award.

- Most apprentices are aware of career progression opportunities and understand how to advance their skills and knowledge to achieve their career goals.

Areas for development

- Staff and apprentices have limited understanding of broader skills development, including both meta and essential skills.

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action were identified:

- The provider should ensure that all apprentices have access to their logbooks to allow them to take ownership of their learning track their progress, set goals, and reflect on their achievements.
- The provider should ensure that safeguarding arrangements are revised to include any requirements for individuals under the age of 18.
- The provider should ensure assessors and IVs are appropriately qualified and occupationally competent to deliver all award elements, including core skills.
- The provider should implement systematic self-evaluation arrangements that support action-planning for improvement.
- The provider should introduce appropriate professional learning opportunities to support assessors to deliver consistently the knowledge and understanding elements of the award.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

Example of career-focused engagement activities delivered to school pupils from primary school upwards which help raise awareness about the diverse range of careers and progression opportunities available within the sector.

7. What happens next?

HM Inspectors found a number of strengths in the work of the provider. However, there a number of where improvement is required. We will ask for a report on progress on these areas for improvement to be provided to the HM Inspector within agreed timescales. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the provider may be required.

Barbara Nelson
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.