

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by

Bell Group

A report by HM Inspectors

24/09/2024

CEO/Principal	Julie Lawrenson
External review date	13 August 2024
Provider type	Employer
Lead HMI	Karen Stevenson
Apprentice numbers	42

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

Bell Group is currently one of the largest property services contractors in the United Kingdom (UK). Its Head Office is in Airdrie and there are 35 regional branches across the UK. Bell Group currently has 1,926 employees, of which 267 are apprentices. Bell Group supports candidates from underrepresented groups and work with many third sector organisations including Barnardo's and Action for Children. They have attained the Carers Covenant, Gold Armed Forces Covenant and are a Platinum Member of the 5% Club, a movement of employer-members working to create shared prosperity across the UK. The organisation provides services for a diverse range of clients including the Ministry of Defence, Network Rail, the Royal Household, local authorities, social housing enterprises, hospitality, and education providers. The modern apprenticeship (MA) programme is delivered from the company's training centre in Airdrie.

3. Outcome of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Quality Culture	Very Good
Service Delivery	Very Good
Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices	Very Good

4. Summary of review findings

A summary of the findings of HM Inspectors are set out below.

4.1 Leadership and Quality Culture – Grade: Very Good

4.1.1 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training.

Areas of positive progress

- Bell Group prioritises the ongoing development of its staff including a well-resourced and delivered MA programme.
- Senior managers provide clear strategic direction, ensuring apprentices are valued by staff and that they have a positive learning experience.
- Managers and assessors attend weekly team meetings where they discuss actions arising from quarterly standardisation meetings. They review the effectiveness of the MA programme, including assessment instruments and methods of delivery. Areas for improvement raised during these meetings are taken forward in agreement with the centre teaching and assessment team.
- Employers participate actively during apprentice assessment/induction arrangements. They fully understand their responsibilities and support all apprentices to complete the programme successfully.
- Bell Group are in the fourth year of delivering the MA in Painting and Decorating at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 6. In academic year 2024-25, 12 apprentices from the initial cohort are expected to complete the programme. Retention and intermediate success rates indicate that the attainment will exceed the SDS benchmark of 75%.
- Managers have a strong understanding of the needs of the employment market and aim to offer all apprentices a permanent role within the company when they complete their apprenticeship programme.
- Managers encourage apprentices to participate in national events and competitions. This helps boost their confidence and enhances professional development.
- Managers encourage young people to enter a career in the construction industry. They work with a wide range of partners to support events aimed at young people to encourage a better understanding of job opportunities in the sector.

Areas for development

- Mentors do not receive initial training before taking up their mentoring responsibilities. This limits the support available to apprentices.

4.2 Service Delivery – Grade: Very Good

4.2.1 Delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- The provider arranges a mandatory one-week outward bound experience for all apprentices in year three of the apprenticeship programme. Staff work closely with the training team at the outward bound centre, to develop a programme which allows them to complete a certificated programme in working with others as part of their experience. Apprentices value this experience which builds trust, independence and enhances their life skills.
- Staff are supported well through a programme of helpful professional learning. Training delivered via the Bell Learning Platform, SDS and external providers enhances staff skills and knowledge and teaching practice.
- All apprentices are required to attend a three-monthly review meeting. This allows staff to monitor progress and respond to any individual learning needs. All apprentices are fully aware of the progress they are making and what they still need to do to complete their programme.
- Staff implement robust recruitment practices which help ensure each candidate's suitability for the programme. This includes the completion of a one-week work experience and an initial skills assessment. Apprentices are assessed against the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour requirements of the MA programme.
- Learning activities are planned well by trainers. They provide apprentices with a variety of teaching approaches that meet the learning needs of individual apprentices effectively. Apprentices who complete a unit ahead of target are provided with the opportunity to further enhance their skills, to ensure they make best use of their time at the training centre.
- The provider ensures sufficient shadowing opportunities for newly appointed trainers/assessors to support them in their role. In addition, trainers/assessors receive helpful, ongoing support from their line manager.

Areas for development

- None identified.

4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- Apprentice feedback is gathered via an annual survey. Employer representatives are asked to evaluate the recruitment process and induction arrangements. Staff use this feedback to make changes to programme delivery. This feedback has informed improvement in induction arrangements.

- Following successful completion of each unit, apprentices meet with their assessor to discuss their progress and gather their feedback. These helpful discussions support apprentices to identify what they need to do to achieve and set target dates for completion of their programme.
- All staff evaluate regularly the delivery of the MA programme to plan for improvement. They work well together and share information effectively. This collaborative approach helps improve the quality of training for all apprentices.
- Senior managers are building on good progress made to ensure that apprentice recruitment is more inclusive. Through their partnership with the School Outreach Programme, they send a range of newsletters to local schools over the course of the academic year and have collaborated well with other partners such as South Lanarkshire Council to help promote awareness of career opportunities within the construction industry.

Areas for development

- Current arrangements do not capture the outcomes of ongoing reflective practice by trainers and assessors. This limits the sharing of best practice approaches or actions for improvement.

4.3 Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices – Grade: Very Good

4.3.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- Provider staff have clear safeguarding arrangements in place. Concerns can immediately be brought to the attention of centre staff, who undertake a professional recognised award in safeguarding. Apprentices are made aware of the safeguarding policy at the commencement of their programme and a copy of the associated procedures is accessible in the training centre.
- All staff are trained in mental health first aid and apprentices are further supported through an employee assistance programme. All apprentices have access to a mobile health app which provides readily available wellbeing and mental health support. Feedback from the service provider confirms that there is good uptake of this service.
- During induction, staff make good use of resources which helps determine candidate learning preferences, and these are recorded in apprentice portfolios. Where relevant, additional support needs are identified and reviewed as part of the learner progression discussions. Apprentices believe these review arrangements provide valuable time with managers to discuss progress and areas for improvement.
- Mentors participate in the outward bound programme. This helps staff to develop good working relationships with their apprentices and provide further support to build on their personal development and transferrable skills.
- Assessors maintain open and frequent communication with employers regarding their apprentice's progress. This supports apprentice progression and helps identify where extra support is needed or improvement is required.

- There are positive working relationships between apprentices, assessors, and employers. All apprentices report that they are supported well during their apprenticeship. They know who to contact should they have issues to raise or personal concerns.
- Apprentices understand fully, their role in relation to health and safety, are aware of employer's mental health initiatives and have access to helpful external support services.
- Apprentices comment that pastoral support is strong, and employers confirm that the review and updating of content is prompt and effective.

Areas for development

- None identified.

4.3.2 Adherence to statutory principles and guidance

Areas of positive progress

- Senior managers cultivate a positive and caring culture amongst all staff. This ensures a supportive working environment for both staff and apprentices.
- Bell Group is meeting well the assessment requirements of the awarding body, successfully achieving high confidence during external verification visits.
- Staff promote useful information about external wellbeing and support services to apprentices to assist them during their apprenticeship programme.

Areas for development

- Policies regarding safeguarding and PREVENT are not sufficiently clear about the co-ordination of roles and operational arrangements.

4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Final year apprentices are supported well through their personalised career pathways. The training and assessment team provide candidates with future learning options which enhance their skills and support job applications.
- In addition to the main training centre, the provider delivers training at two other sites: Airdrie Football Club and Fernhill and Cathkin Church of Scotland. These venues support community-based projects where apprentices develop and enhance their personal and practical skills and are encouraged to consider leadership roles. Apprentices enjoy this experience which helps develop their interpersonal and employability skills.
- The provider offers a range of progression pathways, reflective of individual apprentices' skill set and career aspirations. The *Aspiring Leaders* programme offers a fast-track route for apprentices who wish to nominate themselves to work towards completion of the occupational work supervision qualification. Technical pathways are available for those who wish to explore a surveying career pathway.
- All apprentices confirm that the MA programme has helped them grow in confidence and that their training has provided them with the knowledge and skills required for their job role.

- The provider recognises well the need for apprentices to acquire a wider set of vocational and interpersonal skills. They have developed a suite of online modules and *toolbox talks*, that enhances apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Apprentices value the prompt and helpful feedback received from their assessors in supporting them to achieve their MA qualification.
- Managers and staff are aware of the reasons for leaving of the few apprentices who do not complete their programme. They work hard to make improvements to retention for future implementation where practical.
- Managers are proactive in the successful recruitment of females and underrepresented groups onto the MA programme.

Areas for development

- None identified.

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required:

- None identified.

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 during this cycle as a result of this review.

**HM Inspector
Karen Stevenson**

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.