

# **External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by**

**Training Solutions (Scotland) Limited**

**A report by HM Inspectors**

17/09/2024

<b>CEO/Principal</b>	<b>Tanya Small</b>
<b>External review date</b>	<b>17 July 2024</b>
<b>Provider type</b>	<b>Independent Training Provider</b>
<b>Lead HMI</b>	<b>Karen Stevenson</b>
<b>Apprentice numbers</b>	<b>75</b>

## 1. Background

External reviews of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) 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

Training Solutions (Scotland) Limited (TSSL) was formed and incorporated as a limited company in Scotland in 2007 and began trading in June 2008. TSSL obtained centre accreditation from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in 2008.

TSSL is based in Dundee but currently delivers awards throughout Scotland with assessors based locally to meet employer demand.

TSSL delivers MA programmes in Social Services (Children & Young People) at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Levels 6, 7 and 9. The apprenticeship programme is delivered to employees based within childcare establishments. This allows them to gain a qualification recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and become fully qualified early years practitioners.

### 3. Outcome of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Quality Culture	<b>Satisfactory</b>
Service Delivery	<b>Good</b>
Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices	<b>Satisfactory</b>

### 4. Summary of review findings

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

#### 4.1 Leadership and Quality Culture - Grade: Satisfactory

##### 4.1.1 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

###### Areas of positive progress

- Managers and assessors maintain regular communication with both employers and apprentices. These productive discussions help to ensure ongoing improvement in the apprenticeship programme.
- Managers hold regular meetings with assessors to share best practice approaches, resolve any issues, and plan improvements to programme delivery.
- Managers use data well and identify factors affecting apprentice achievement outcomes. For example, analysis has identified that candidates over 20 years of age are at a higher risk of not achieving their apprenticeship qualification. Managers now provide targeted support to help candidates in this age group to complete successfully.
- Assessors engage in informal discussions where they identify challenges and share best practice approaches. Regular verification meetings are utilised effectively to exchange feedback, resulting in valuable insights and useful enhancements to the apprenticeship programme.

###### Areas for development

- Apprentice leaver rates are higher than the national average. Staff are not sufficiently aware of the reasons for candidate withdrawal from their programme or the actions required to address the issue.
- Pre-induction periods for apprentices are inconsistent, ranging from three months to one year. This impacts on the motivation of apprentices and lack of clarity on formal start dates of the apprenticeship programme.
- Professional development opportunities are limited and do not contribute to planning and development of the MA provision.

## 4.2 Service Delivery - Grade: Good

### 4.2.1 Delivery of training

#### Areas of positive progress

- Assessors make good use of Microsoft Teams (MST) as the preferred platform for delivery of training provision. Apprentices comment that MST is easy to use and provides useful links to a range of learning resources.
- Almost all apprentices have positive training experiences with their assessors. They describe their working relationship as supportive and helpful.
- The majority of apprentices report significant improvements in their self-confidence as a result of commencing their MA programme. Apprentices confirm that their training is of a good standard and equips them with the essential knowledge and skills to develop a career as an early years practitioner.
- Assessors work well with apprentices to tailor learning experiences. Most apprentices receive support in exploring optional unit choices, that can enhance their professional growth. This approach ensures that employer requirements are met whilst aligning closely to individual apprentice's career objectives.

#### Areas for development

- Apprentice feedback is mostly gathered informally. As a result, there is no clear or systematic approach to evaluation of the impact on apprentices of changes introduced, or enhancements made to the apprenticeship programme.
- Apprentices do not have sufficient autonomy in building their own portfolio. This hinders their ability take responsibility for monitoring progress and tracking their own learning.
- Assessors use reflective accounts as the main source of evidence. This limits the opportunity for apprentices to use a wider range of evidence sources to demonstrate their achievements.

### 4.2.2 Staff reflection on provision to improve training

#### Areas of positive progress

- TSSL staff acknowledge and celebrate apprentice achievements upon successful completion of their awards. This recognition is appreciated by apprentices and helps motivate them to succeed.
- Assessors participate efficiently in standardisation and internal verification activities. This ensures assessors apply consistent assessment standards in line with awarding body requirements. This practice also supports the identification of quality concerns and improvement planning.
- Staff have established long-standing, positive working relationships with employers. Employers value these relationships and indicate that they support better understanding of the needs of their establishment.

- Assessors and managers work collaboratively together and meet regularly to review training delivery and apprenticeship achievements to inform improvements.

### **Areas for development**

- There is no formal approach to self-evaluation or sharing of good practice to support action-planning for improvement.

## **4.3 Safeguarding and Meeting the needs of apprentices - Grade: Satisfactory**

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

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

- When apprentices leave their employment early, they are actively encouraged by staff to continue working towards achieving their apprenticeship qualification. This has resulted in a few apprentices continuing with their studies who may otherwise have withdrawn from their programme.
- All employers complete an SQA site selection checklist to help ensure the apprentice working environment is safe and appropriate for assessing the award.
- All apprentices undertake learning in relation to health and safety requirements as part of their apprenticeship programme. This helps improve their understanding of the regulations and legislative requirements for a safe and secure workplace.

#### **Areas for development**

- The overall successful achievement rate for apprentices in 2023-24 is 65.8% which is 10.2% lower than the national achievement rate of 76%.
- The overall successful achievement rate for apprentices over the last three years has been significantly below the national achievement rate.
- The successful achievement rate for apprentices aged 20 and above in 2023-24 is at 60.5% which is 18.6% below the national achievement rate.
- The recruitment of male apprentices and apprentices from ethnic minority backgrounds is lower than the national Skills Development Scotland (SDS) benchmark.

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

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

- Appropriate quality assurance arrangements and internal verification procedures are in place and meet awarding body requirements.
- All assessors are members of the Protecting Vulnerable Group (PVG) scheme. All staff have completed relevant safeguarding training and are confident in their roles.

## Areas for development

- The current policy on safeguarding and PREVENT does not establish clear roles and responsibilities for all parties involved, to ensure the safety of apprentices.
- Staff do not actively promote or provide information about how to access external wellbeing and support services to apprentices.
- Apprentices do not have formal access to a nominated safeguarding staff member throughout their working week.

### 4.3.3 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

#### Areas of positive progress

- Assessors provide apprentices with helpful research support resources and access to a newly devised MST forum, where assessors provide support through live chat. Staff also encourage online peer learning amongst apprentices.
- Managers and assessors have introduced arrangements to identify and track apprentice development and achievement of meta skills. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this approach.

#### Areas for development

- Apprentices are not always fully aware of the progress they are making and the skills they are attaining. This prevents them from leading their own learning and identifying any areas for development.
- The development and monitoring of meta skills are not promoted or embedded within the programme.

## 5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required:

- Managers should formalise a safeguarding policy on raising concerns and ensure all apprentices have formal access to a nominated safeguarding staff member throughout their working hours. These arrangements should be shared with staff, apprentices and employers.
- Managers and assessors should make use of a tracking system which helps apprentices to identify the progress they are making and areas to be completed.
- Managers should develop consistent and comprehensive induction arrangements to ensure all apprentices are prepared well to begin their apprenticeship journey.
- Managers and assessors should work to improve apprentice achievement rates.

## 6. Examples of highly effective practice

None identified.

## 7. What happens next?

HM Inspectors recognise that the provider has demonstrated strengths in aspects of apprenticeship delivery, however improvement is required in a number of areas. HM Inspectors will ask for a progress report on the agreed areas for improvement to be provided to the lead HM Inspector within agreed timescales. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the provider is required.

**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.