

External review of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by New College Lanarkshire

A report by HM Inspectors

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CEO/Principal	Professor Christopher Moore
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Provider type	College of Further and Higher Education
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Apprentice numbers	474

1. Background

External inspections 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 inspection, a team of HM Inspectors evaluated the quality of training provision and the experiences of apprentices and key stakeholders, including employers. During the visit, the team met with staff, apprentices, employers and other stakeholders and explored the quality of training delivery; how well the needs of apprentices are being met; and approaches to improve the quality of provision.

This report summarises the findings from the inspection, highlighting areas of positive practice and areas for development. The provider receives grades for three elements: leadership and management; quality of delivery, and progress and outcomes. The report also contains any main points for action identified by HM Inspectors.

The report will be shared with the provider, Scottish Government and SDS. For colleges, the report will also be shared with the Scottish Funding Council and the college Board of Management. A final summary report will be published on HMIE's website.

2. The provider and its context

New College Lanarkshire (NCL) is a multi-campus institution with sites in Motherwell, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, Broadwood and Kirkintilloch. The college serves learners and employers primarily across Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire.

The college delivers programmes across Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 1–8. Provision includes the NCL Diploma and degree-level pathways delivered through the Undergraduate School, alongside a range of apprenticeships and employer-focused programmes.

The college works with employers across a variety of sectors to deliver apprenticeships, workforce development and bespoke training aligned to identified regional skills needs. Within the college's SDS contract, approximately 33% of apprentices are undertaking an MA programme within the Engineering sector, around 28% in Automotive and 25% in Electronic Security Systems. Smaller

numbers undertake apprenticeships in Dental Nursing (approximately 7%) and Business and Administration (around 5%), while social services accounts for under 2% of the overall apprenticeship delivery.

3. Outcome of external review

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Management	Satisfactory
Delivery of Training	Good
Progress and Outcomes	Weak

4. Summary of review findings

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

Element 1: Leadership and Management – Satisfactory

QI 9.1 Influential vision, values and aims

Areas of positive progress

- The senior leadership team has a clear vision for apprenticeship provision that aligns closely with skills reform, economic growth and health priorities. This ensures programmes remain relevant to workforce demand and regional skills needs. The college has a sustained focus on delivering its strategic ambitions, including the growth of provision in sectors of economic importance to the region.
- The Board of Management supports a long-term approach to the college's apprenticeship portfolio. Growth is targeted in apprenticeship provision in response to regional skills shortages. This helps strengthen the contribution made by apprenticeships to the local economy.
- Senior leaders work collaboratively with national employers and public sector bodies to develop and deliver apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship pathways. These partnerships enhance progression opportunities and support sustained employment outcomes.
- Senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to learner wellbeing and inclusion through initiatives such as the Wellbeing Academy, the Institute of Apprenticeships and alumni engagement. This supports apprentices' resilience and engagement.

Areas for development

- Most strategic initiatives have been recently introduced or are still at an early stage of development. As a result, they are not yet impacting positively on apprenticeship delivery.
- The college's strategic vision 2030 is not yet embedded consistently across all areas of apprenticeship provision. The majority of staff have a limited understanding of how apprenticeships contribute to this vision and are unable to clearly explain their role in delivering it.

QI 9.4 Leadership for innovation

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all teaching and assessor staff engage well with local employers and help them understand and engage with new qualification standards. College staff have good awareness of regional skill shortages, and the workforce needs of employers.
- The Business Development Team engages effectively with the Lanarkshire Business Hub. They discuss relevant local and national initiatives, and devise actions to respond to the changing needs of the economy, society and employers.
- Assessors participate actively in community of practice events which enhance approaches to learning and assessment. Recent sessions on virtual reality and quick response (QR) codes support digital innovation and help strengthen assessor confidence and promote collaborative practice effectively.

Areas for development

- Most middle managers do not yet have a full understanding of the new college-wide initiatives. This limits both strategic and operational leadership within apprenticeship programmes and reduces the capacity to implement innovative approaches that would strengthen programme effectiveness and impact.

QI 9.5 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- Most academic leaders support assessors to engage in continuing professional learning to maintain occupational competence. This helps ensure assessment practice remains current and aligns closely with sector expectations.
- All assessors participate effectively in standardisation meetings where they review verification activities, share effective practice, and identify actions for improvement. This arrangement helps to ensure compliance with awarding body standards.
- Apprentices retain alumni status with the college for up to three years after completion of their programme and have access to a range of useful resources including workshops,

webinars and professional development opportunities. This can support their continued professional development, enabling them to maintain and enhance their skills beyond apprenticeship completion.

- Most employers are satisfied that the apprenticeship programme is delivered well and meets their business needs. Almost all employers report positive and regular communication with college staff, and that they are kept informed of the progress being made by their apprentices.
- In some subject areas, online delivery and assessment help to meet different learning preferences and increase apprentice engagement. For example, in Business and Administration, tutors use creative ways to collect evidence and build portfolios to keep learners more involved and allow for more flexible assessment methods.

Areas for development

- Self-evaluation and action-planning arrangements are not applied consistently or rigorously across apprenticeship provision. As a result, improvement actions are not always clearly prioritised, tracked or evaluated for their impact.
- Employer engagement in self-evaluation and strategic planning is limited. Managers do not routinely involve employers in shaping improvement priorities. This results in action plans that do not fully reflect sector or workforce needs.

Element 2 Delivery of training - Good

QI 5.1 Design and delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices receive a helpful induction to their MA programme, which helps them to understand the demands of their programme and what is expected of them.
- There are positive relationships between apprentices and staff. Almost all apprentices comment that they are supported well during their apprenticeship. Apprentices know who to contact with any concerns, and staff refer them promptly to support services.
- Almost all off-the-job learning and teaching is of good quality. Where delivery is of a particularly high standard, staff ensure sessions are planned well, structured effectively, and are supported by appropriate resources and services. This helps apprentices develop relevant vocational knowledge and technical skills. Apprentices articulate clearly how these skills support them in their work.
- Assessors use a broad range of assessment methods, including direct observation, professional discussion, questioning, witness testimony, and systematic recording of photographic and documentary evidence. This is good practice and supports robust and varied evidence gathering.

- In a few MA programmes, assessors support apprentices who wish to accelerate their learning. As a result, these apprentices often complete their programme ahead of framework timescales.
- In a few programmes, unit selection is completed in consultation with apprentices and employers, ensuring close adherence to individuals' job roles and workplace needs. This supports meaningful learning and employer satisfaction.
- Almost all employers report that MA programmes deliver effectively their needs and provide added value to their business through support for skills development.

Areas for development

- Meta skills are at an early stage of development in the college and are not embedded consistently within MA programmes. Tracking is not yet effective, and most apprentices are unclear about how their meta skills are being developed.
- The arrangements for evaluating and improving MA provision are underdeveloped. Most staff do not understand performance indicator (PI) data fully, limiting their ability to use it to inform targeted improvement.

QI 5.4 Effectiveness of training

Areas of positive progress

- Teaching and assessor staff have appropriate vocational and teaching qualifications. They have relevant industrial experience which is valued by their apprentices. They make good use of their knowledge to reinforce industry best practice approaches and to provide practical support.
- Almost all assessors plan learning and assessment activities well. They are fully aware of the progress apprentices make, including the competencies achieved and those still to be evidenced.
- Almost all assessors use a broad range of appropriate, and at times, innovative approaches to learning and assessment, to gather evidence of apprentice competence. These approaches engage apprentices well and help them clearly demonstrate their skills and knowledge.
- Almost all assessors encourage apprentices to take responsibility for their own learning and provide useful opportunities for them to demonstrate occupational competence in the workplace. This supports the development of self-confidence, independence, and vocational skills.
- In the majority of curriculum areas there is good access to high quality resources and equipment. This is helpful in ensuring apprentices attain industry standard experience. The wide range of resources is particularly helpful for apprentices in areas such as Automotive

where employers may not have access to the full range of equipment to undertake certain tasks deemed necessary for completion of the award.

Areas for development

- Ongoing staff absence and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff have disrupted the delivery of training provision for a few apprentices. In some cases, employers are not informed in advance of class cancellations resulting in unnecessary travel for apprentices and loss of productive work time for the employer.
- A few apprentices have not received a planned site visit from an assessor, limiting the effectiveness of engagement, monitoring and support.
- Most teaching and assessor staff are not sufficiently engaged in self-evaluation and curriculum review arrangements and cannot clearly articulate improvement priorities.
- Staff do not analyse non-completion data to identify the reasons for apprentice withdrawal from programmes and have only limited awareness of common themes in employer feedback.

QI 8.1 Reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- In a few areas, apprentices benefit from a recently introduced screening test to help to identify individuals who may experience challenges in completing their training or have learning support needs.
- *Ready, Set, Apprentice* is a helpful initiative which promotes the support services available to apprentices during induction. The delivery of this enhanced induction provision provides useful information which apprentices can access regardless of their overall attendance pattern.
- The college Institute for Apprenticeships coordinates support for apprentices for the *Ready Set Apprentice* programme, Apprenticeship Awards, the Alumni Association, and the Cheerful Chats. These initiatives aim to improve retention, attainment and support progression. However, the full impact of these developments is yet to be fully evaluated.
- The majority of employers have a positive relationship with teaching and assessor staff, who regularly share helpful information that enhances training delivery to support apprentice progress.
- Professional Development and Discussion (PDD) arrangements are valued by staff. Discussions support the identification of individualised training support which enhances staff confidence and skills.

Areas for development

- MA provision is not sufficiently distinguished within curriculum evaluation and improvement arrangements. As a result, specific issues relating to MA delivery and outcomes are not being clearly identified or addressed.
- Managers and staff do not monitor the career paths of apprentices once they complete their programmes. As a result, they lack the feedback needed to improve the MA experience and to better support apprentices' future career progression.

Element 3 Progress and Outcomes – Weak

QI 1.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- Targeted recruitment has resulted in improved representation for apprentices with protected characteristics. Recruitment rates for female apprentices and those from an ethnic minority background have increased, and the numbers of apprentices who are care-experienced remains above the national average.
- The majority of assessors maintain effective and positive communication with apprentices and employers. They conduct periodic reviews with apprentices to discuss agreed milestones. These reviews provide valuable feedback on apprentice progress and identify areas for improvement.
- In a few frameworks, apprenticeship achievement rates have performed above SDS target of 70% for aged 16-to-19 years and 75% for those aged 20 and over, including business and administration and dental nursing. In social services, apprentices aged 20 and over have also performed well.

Areas for development

- The college has no formal arrangement in place to follow-up with apprentices who leave their programmes early. This hinders improvement planning and the provision of support for former apprentices to find new employment or progress onto alternative pathways.
- Managers do not systematically track those apprentices who gain employment after attaining their MA qualification. This limits their ability to measure the long-term impact of the programme on employment outcomes.

QI 2.1 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices confirm that their MA programme improves their self-confidence, and that their training provides them with the knowledge and skills required for their job roles.

- In the majority of MA frameworks, apprentices have a good understanding of their learning pathways and progression opportunities to higher levels of study linked to their employment. This helps inform their career planning and longer-term development.
- A few apprentices benefit from additional training and professional awards provided by their employers. This supports their progression in industry and long-term career goals.

Areas for development

- The overall rate of achievement for apprentices aged 16–19 years is low. The overall apprenticeship achievement rate for 16- to 19-year-olds was 44.9% in 2024 and 57.3% in 2025. Despite having improved, achievement remains significantly below both Skills Development Scotland's target of 70% and national achievement rates for this age group of 71.2% in 2024 and 75.9% in 2025.
- The overall rate of achievement for apprentices aged over 20 years was 63.5% and 69.2% in 2024 and 2025 respectively. This is below both the Skills Development Scotland's 75% target and national achievement the rate for this age group of 79.1% in 2024 and 82.2% in 2025.
- There has been sustained underperformance over time in several larger frameworks, including automotive and engineering, across all age groups, and in electronic systems for apprentices aged 16 to 19 years. This is impacting significantly overall achievement outcomes

5. Main points for action

The following main points for action are identified:

- College managers should take steps to understand better the underlying reasons for low rates of apprenticeship achievement. They should work with staff to improve overall rates of apprenticeship achievement and for those frameworks with consistently poor outcomes.
- College managers should ensure that the views of employers are captured and used during self-evaluation and action-planning for improvement.
- College managers should strengthen the analysis and use of performance data, including tracking early leavers and sustained destinations to inform timely and effective improvement actions.
- Monitoring and tracking of apprentices' meta skills requires strengthening to ensure consistent recording, reflection and evaluation of transferable skills development.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

- The community of practice events for assessors and the effective sharing of innovative approaches to learning and assessment.
- The *Ready, Set, Apprentice* programme and the enhanced induction arrangements that provide apprentices with accessible and structured early support.

7. What happens next?

Whilst a number of strengths were identified, HM Inspectors found a number of aspects that require improvement in the delivery of apprenticeship training. HM Inspectors will return for a further visit to review progress made in addressing these aspects for improvement within 12 months of this inspection.

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 HMIE 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.