

External inspection of Modern Apprenticeship delivery by Sports Academy (Scotland).

A report by HM Inspectors

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CEO/Principal	Eric Dawes
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Provider type	Independent Training Provider
Lead HMI	Stephen McGregor
Apprentice numbers	25

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 such as employers. During the visit, the team met with staff, learners, employers and other stakeholders and explored the quality of training delivery, how well the needs of apprentices are met, and the 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 Scottish Funding Council. An accompanying report will be published on Education Scotland's website.

2. The provider and its context

Sports Academy (Scotland) is an independent training provider. It was established in 2010 as part of Dawes Training Consultancy Ltd. which was incorporated in 2001.

Sports Academy (Scotland) currently supports 25 MAs across 7 employers. Sports Academy (Scotland) delivers programmes across Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 7 and 8. Current provision includes Achieving Excellence in Sports Performance (SCQF L8) in partnership with Glasgow Warriors and Edinburgh Rugby, and Youth Work (SCQF L7) through local authorities, sport's governing bodies and sports clubs.

3. Outcome of external inspection

The grades for each of the three elements are:

Leadership and Management	Excellent
Delivery of training	Excellent
Progress and Outcomes	Excellent

4. Summary of inspection findings

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

Element 1: Leadership and Management – Excellent

QI 9.1 Influential vision, values and aims

Areas of positive progress

- The provider promotes a clear vision to provide ‘Professional Training for Training Professionals’ through delivery of high-quality, industry-relevant, personalised training for the sports performance and youth work sectors. This ensures that apprentices are prepared well for their respective sectors.
- Sports Academy (Scotland) responds effectively to meet local and national needs and government policy priorities. This includes the now well-established Achieving Excellence in Sports Performance SCQF L8 programme, introducing a Youth Work SCQF L7 qualification to address the gap created by the withdrawal of the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in Leisure Management SCQF L7, and promoting and extending apprenticeships to support the development of female senior academy rugby.
- The provider is highly committed to meeting the needs of apprentices and supporting them to achieve relevant and recognised qualifications in sport performance and youth work. Through a ‘youth work first’ approach, apprentices have excellent access to assessors through face-to-face meetings, effective guidance and mentoring. This approach engages apprentices effectively in the development of knowledge and skills that contribute productively to the workplace.
- The provider supports young people well to sustain their engagement in education and training through placing a strong focus on coaching and life skills support. This is of particular benefit to apprentices who experience barriers and obstacles to learning.

Areas for development

- None identified.

QI 9.4 Leadership for innovation and change

Areas of positive progress

- The provider works productively with a wide range of stakeholders to inform and respond to regional and national policy and priorities. This is ensuring that MA provision is aligned well to current and projected needs of sport performance and youth work sectors.
- Sports Academy (Scotland) communicates effectively with partners, employers and apprentices to ensure a clear and shared understanding of programme content and the benefits of high-quality on-the-job training for apprentices.
- The provider has established very positive and effective partnerships with employers and draws productively on on-going collaboration to ensure training is aligned to accommodate changes to workplace requirements.

Areas for development

- Self-evaluation arrangements do not formally record the impact of improvement actions.

QI 9.5 Securing improvement of quality and impact of training

Areas of positive progress

- The provider demonstrates effective leadership and management. Quality enhancement is the key focus that drives improvement and decision making with regular meetings providing good opportunities to share effective practice, ensure consistency in programme delivery, and monitor the progress of apprentices.
- Arrangements for quality improvement and quality assurance are highly effective. All assessors comply with awarding body quality assurance standards and verification requirements. Assessment decisions are valid and fair and applied consistently which contributes to the high levels of confidence expressed by employers and apprentices.
- Sports Academy (Scotland) draws productively on findings from continuous engagement with employers and detailed understanding of apprentices' needs, to inform reflective practice and support continuous improvement. This is evidenced through positive external scrutiny from awarding bodies, including Qualifications Scotland and SDS, which consistently report high levels of confidence and identify no significant areas for improvement.

Area for development

- The use of digital technology to gather and collate employer and apprentice feedback is underdeveloped and does not yet inform and support quality enhancement.

Element 2 Delivery of training – Excellent

QI 5.1 Design and delivery of training

Areas of positive progress

- Prior to recruitment, the provider provides potential employers and apprentices with valuable advice and information. Employers receive a useful Sports Academy (Scotland) produced 'ladybird guide' to MAs, and a workplace visit is used productively to explain the MA process and assess the most suitable pathway for the employer and apprentice.
- All assessors work well with employers and apprentices to identify specific needs and ensure training is practical and relevant to workplace priorities. Apprentices undertaking the Youth Work MA programme are supported well to select units that are aligned to career aspirations and employer objectives.
- All assessors have appropriate levels of qualifications and significant professional experience in their area of expertise. As a result, they are well respected by apprentices and employers. Apprentices benefit from assessors' first-hand knowledge of the industry to gain insight into the world of work and access valuable guidance to develop their skills for learning, life and work.
- All assessors plan bespoke assessment activities well and demonstrate a strong awareness of apprentices' progress. They take good account of competencies that have been achieved and those that have still to be evidenced.
- All assessors use a holistic approach effectively to coordinate and gather evidence to support assessment. They take good account of where and when workplace activities contribute to competencies and learning outcomes across individual units to minimise duplication and avoid assessment burden.
- All assessors encourage apprentices effectively to take responsibility for their own learning and progress at a pace appropriate to their role and capabilities. They tailor approaches to take account of the individual circumstances of apprentices and as a result almost all apprentices engage positively and productively in their programmes and make steady progress.
- All apprentices report that they are supported very well throughout their programme and describe assessors as accessible and responsive. They value the regular feedback

and guidance they receive from assessors to reflect on their performance, gauge how well they are progressing, and plan ways to achieve their individual goals.

- All apprentices report that the e-portfolio and Secure Assessment Application is highly engaging, promotes achievement, and helps them to monitor and track progression effectively. They state the e-portfolio helps them develop confidence and competence across the full range of professional, core, and meta skills.
- Assessors meet regularly with employers to confirm apprentice progress, discuss challenges, set actions and plan for progression into employment, further learning or training. All employers confirm apprenticeship programmes are highly flexible which helps apprentices to balance their work commitments and learning requirements effectively. A minority of apprentices benefit from being able to complete their programme early which enables them to progress quickly in their workplace and take advantage of new employment or educational opportunities.
- All employers report that the MA programme meets their needs effectively and adds value to their organisation. They consistently describe their experience of working with the Sports Academy (Scotland) as excellent and state that they would highly recommend the apprenticeship programme. They particularly highlighted the professionalism and commitment of the assessor.

Areas for development

- Employers would benefit from training on use of the e-portfolio to access real time monitoring of their apprentices.

QI 5.4 Effectiveness of training

Areas of positive progress

- Continuous and effective collaboration between Sports Academy (Scotland), employers and their apprentices, is ensuring that MA programmes produce a competent workforce that meets industry needs.
- Assessors use their expertise well to deliver high-quality learning and training. They ensure resources and assessments are highly engaging and aligned to current industry standards. This is helping apprentices to develop skills, knowledge and behaviours required to contribute effectively and constructively within the workplace.
- All assessors are skilled in adapting assessment approaches to meet individual apprentice needs. They use a broad range of evidence-gathering methods well to ensure a comprehensive approach to assessment. For example, they adjust the e-portfolio to enable apprentices to complete individual or multiple units in ways that take account of their learning preferences and workplace activities.

- All apprentices and assessors make effective use of e-portfolios to monitor and track progress towards achieving the MA award. This enables apprentices to monitor and review their development and achievements independently and supports them well to plan and manage their learning effectively.
- All assessors ensure assessments are planned effectively and utilise industry standard resources to ensure apprentices develop relevant vocational knowledge and technical skills. Almost all apprentices report that this helps them to gain confidence in applying their skills in the workplace.
- All assessors visit apprentices regularly in the workplace and set appropriate milestones, targets and tasks to complete in advance of their progress review. Prior to progress reviews, they produce useful 'gaps analysis' that provide a clear overview of work and assessments that have been completed and evidence that is still to be produced. They use this information constructively with employers to ensure a shared understanding of progress made towards achieving the apprenticeship qualification.
- All assessors collaborate effectively with workplace mentors to ensure apprentices receive appropriate levels of support and training to prepare for assessment.
- All workplace mentors have a strong commitment to provide apprentices with high quality training opportunities in the workplace. They apply their professional knowledge and skills well to support apprentices to become more competent in their work role.
- All employers provided positive feedback on the effectiveness of the MA programme and plan to continue to use Sports Academy (Scotland) as their preferred provider of MA delivery.

Areas for development

- Apprentices highlight that feedback methods could be more varied, for example through the use of voice recordings of feedback on their assessments.

QI 8.1 Reflection on provision to improve training

Areas of positive progress

- The provider has a high level of commitment to self-assessment and quality assurance. Feedback from apprentices and employers' and insights from SDS and Qualifications Scotland (QS) Quality, and External Verification (EV) reports, are used continuously and productively to help drive improvements in delivery and outcomes.
- All apprentices and employers report high levels of satisfaction with the comprehensive, two-way induction programme for apprentices. Employers attend

part of the apprentice's induction to ensure a shared understanding of the content and structure of the MA programme.

- Assessors contribute effectively to the induction programme to introduce the e-portfolio to apprentices and explain the content of units, programme activities, and assessment arrangements. They create a safe environment that encourages apprentices to identify any additional support needs they may have. This helps to ensure that apprentices feel fully prepared to commence their MA programme.
- All employers report high levels of satisfaction with the quality and consistency of assessor feedback. They confirm that assessor feedback is highly supportive and promotes a positive learning environment.
- The provider uses performance measures, outcome indicators and stakeholder feedback effectively to review programme performance and inform improvements. Regular team meetings are used well to ensure standardisation and to carry out informal analysis of strengths and areas for development.
- Throughout the MA programme and during 13-week progress review meetings, assessors engage employer mentors in monitoring and discussing apprentice development. This collaboration is supporting effective tracking of progress and early identification of emerging support needs.

Areas for development

- The provider would benefit from receiving earlier information from employers on the support needs of newly recruited individual apprentices to plan and coordinate support interventions prior to the start of the MA programme.

Element 3 Progress and Outcomes – Excellent

Q1 1.1 Achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery

Areas of positive progress

- All apprentices are progressing well towards their individual goals and pathways and are developing and achieving relevant competencies and meta skills.
- The overall apprentice achievement rates for all apprentices in 2024 and 2025, were at 85.2% and 100% respectively. These are significantly above the SDS target achievement rates.
- The overall rate of apprenticeship achievement for 16- to-19-year-olds in 2024 and 2025, were at 88.0% and 100.0% respectively. These are significantly above the SDS target achievement rate of 70%. The national achievement rates for this age group were 71.2% in 2024 and 75.9% in 2025.

- Overall rates of apprenticeship achievement in 2024 and 2025 for Achieving Excellence in Sports Performance and Active Leisure, Learning and Wellbeing were very high.
- Overall rates of apprenticeship achievement in Youth Work in 2025 were very high.
- Recruitment of apprentices with a disability in Youth Work has been significantly higher than the national average for the last two years.
- All apprentice competency achievement is evidenced effectively through the e-portfolio. This provides valuable real-time tracking of performance and identifies where evidence is required to be submitted. This is helping apprentices to plan and manage their learning and submit evidence on time.

Areas for development

- Meta skills are not embedded consistently across all workplaces.

QI 2.1 Apprentice progress and achievement of individual outcomes

Areas of positive progress

- Almost all apprentices are well informed about the range of progression pathways available to them on successful completion of their apprenticeship. This encourages apprentices to take responsibility for exploring and planning future learning to achieve their individual career aspirations.
- Core, meta and career skills are signposted routinely and effectively by assessors during progress reviews. This helps apprentices to reflect and monitor their development and supports them well to plan and develop these skills effectively.
- Apprentices are progressing well and consistently meet expected performance targets. Regular and thorough support from assessors is ensuring almost all apprentices gain relevant skills and competencies that prepare them well for progression after their apprenticeship programme.
- The provider tracks apprentice progression well and almost all apprentices who attain their MA qualification continue their employment or progress to further learning opportunities.

Areas for development

- None identified.

5. Main points for action

- There are no main points for action.

6. Examples of highly effective practice

- Highly personalised candidate support and mentoring through a 'youth work first' approach, maintaining high quality delivery, securing strong outcomes and helping apprentices to become successful learners, responsible citizens, effective contributors and confident individuals.

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.

Stephen McGregor
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 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.